Cal, Eleven Years Old

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Summary

Waking up without any memories and with an alakazam staring you down is a stressful way to begin your pokemon journey. 0/10 would not recommend.

I need to figure out who and where I am and how to get home again. I don't want to go it alone though. Maybe I should just stick with this kid and his rowdy pikachu. At least I'll have some company. He's got a pretty big dream and it's going to take him all over. Maybe somewhere along the way I'll figure out how I got here.

Notes

Woot, new story! I built up a buffer so I hopefully won't lose inspiration on this one.
The Question

You know how sometimes you wake up and you’re just *so* comfortable and *so* warm that you never want to get out of bed? That’s how I felt right now. Just warm and comfortable. I could feel the sun shining down on me and I could hear the wind rustling through the trees. I was smiling as I breathed in the fresh outdoorsy smell of a new day.

It was actually a little weird. I didn’t think my sense of smell was strong enough to pick up morning dew from an open window. And now that I was paying attention my bed didn’t feel all that comfortable.

So much for waking up feeling good and refreshed. I opened my eyes slowly so the sun wouldn’t burn them. For a second the view didn’t quite process. I stared for a minute or two waiting for my brain to boot up.

That was grass, two inches from my nose. And dirt. And over there were some trees. Lots of trees actually. And there was a pokemon staring back at me.

That put a little wind in my sails. Moving slowly so I wouldn’t startle it, I sat up. I really was outside. I was in a forest with no sign of civilization anywhere. I wasn’t even on a path!

The pokemon had tensed up when I moved.

“Uh, hey there?” I tried to sound completely non-threatening.

The last thing I needed was to make Alakazam think I was dangerous.

“Easy, big guy, I don’t mean any harm.” It should be able to read my intentions. Maybe it could even tell me how I’d ended up here. Did I even live near a forest?

It stared at me for several seconds. Finally, it sighed, sounding kinda sad about something. Then it teleported away before my very eyes.

“Oh, okay then.” I let my guard down. Time to figure out where I am.

“Where to start, where to start?” I muttered, standing up and turning a full circle to try to find a landmark. Nothing looked familiar.

How did I get out here? Shouldn’t I be at home?

I should, shouldn’t I?

Okay, no reason to panic. I’m lost in the woods, alone, with pokemon like Alakazam wandering around.

“Someone’s probably looking for me.” I reasoned. When you’re lost you’re supposed to stay in one place, right?

My stomach groaned. I was always hungry first thing in the morning. Did I have any food on me?

I had a backpack which was a little confusing. Actually, I was fully dressed for a hike. I had on my camo-pants and my black tank and the thin green cloth jacket to keep my arms covered. I had my ball shoes on and I had a trainer belt on me.
A trainer belt? Am I a trainer?

I meant to sit down but it was more like a collapse. My head felt cottony.

“Don’t panic. Don’t—Don’t. Panic.” I gulped. Fear is the mind killer. I just had to get this shaking under control.

“Think, think, think.” I commanded myself. “My name is…It’s….”

I didn’t know.

I didn’t know.

“Oh Arceus!” I moaned.

The Alakazam, did it do something to me? Did it erase my memories?

Name, age, home, family, friends, I couldn’t remember anything. It was getting a little hard to breathe and even though my head didn’t hurt I was still clutching it like I could squeeze the answers out. I pulled my knees up to my chin and gave myself a few minutes to just…be. Just exist. One breath after the other.

When I looked up, the forest was still around me. The wind blowing through the trees, the sounds of pokemon nearby. Some kind of bird-pokemon, it seemed.

I opened the bag I had, hoping it held some kind of ID. There was food, camping supplies, two-first aid kits (one for humans and one for pokemon), and a red pokedex.

“Yes!” I grinned, flipping it open. That would have my information in it! It turned on automatically when I flipped it open.

The first thing that came up was a picture of me. Well, I sure hope its me. The girl in the picture was wearing the same clothes as me, but she might as well have been a stranger.

Name: Cal _______

Age: 11

Home Region: ________

Hometown: __________

Starter Pokemon: _________

It was a whole lot of nothing. My first name and my age. That was it. That was the sum total of my identity. The rest had been erased.

“But…why?” Alakazam couldn’t erase things from a pokedex. At least, I didn’t think they could.

I had nothing. I didn’t even have any cash. I was lost, alone, without even my full name. I had no idea what had happened to me!

Panic didn’t grip me. I simply started to cry. The forest didn’t seem so warm anymore. I just held onto the only things I had in the world and tried my best not to wet my pants.

Needless to say, my first day could’ve gone better.
The pokedex has a journal function, so trainers can record their journeys. When I checked it out, I found only one entry. No date stamp, it said *Beware Teams of Pokemon Thieves. Alakazam will watch over you.*

Which implies that I put myself in this situation somehow. That is, if *I* was the one who wrote that entry in the first place. The Alakazam probably did erase my memories, but did it do so because I told it to? And why?

I’ll try to write as much as I can. For now though, I’ve decided to head east and hope I find signs of civilization. If I head in one direction long enough I should find *something*. There was a compass in the camping supplies, but no map. It’ll have to do.

*I will* figure out what happened and *I will* find my home, wherever it is. I don’t care what it takes.

It took three days to reach Pallet town. It was a small farming community, except for the pokemon lab that took up half of it. Granted, most of that was the ranch. I grabbed a newspaper and learned the date and region I was now in, which helped me form the beginnings of a plan.

I had the fortuitous timing of arriving mid-morning on Starter Pokemon day. The day when a Pokemon Professor would give away three starter pokemon to three prospective trainers for free. The free part was important because, again, I had no money.

I got through the crowd at the door easily and found myself standing in the lab’s main room with two other trainers. One of them was a nondescript boy with dark brown hair and droopy eyes. The other was a more arrogant boy with auburn hair surrounded by a gaggle of cheerleaders.

I couldn’t help staring. There was an actual group of cheerleaders chanting his name. Who was this Gary kid?

“Like what you see? You know, there’s always room for one more on the squad.” He noticed me.

“Oh, so we have a third trainer?” We both turned to see an older gentleman in a lab coat enter the room, pushing a trolley with three pokeballs sitting on it. Each one had a little sticker on it, fire, grass, and water.

The man himself?

Professor Samuel Oak.

*How* did I know his name? I can’t remember mine but I knew a complete stranger on sight?

“Hello, dear, what’s your name?” He smiled at me.

“Cal Memo, sir.” I’d come up with the fake name when I’d seen the lab. I’d doubted they’d give a pokemon to a girl who couldn’t even remember her full name.

“Hmm, Cal Memo.” Did he believe me? He didn’t say anything to imply he did not. He didn’t call me out on it though. “What town are you from?”

“Viridian city, sir.” Chosen because it was the first city named in the newspaper I’d found.

“Alright then.” He smiled reassuringly. “You’re a last minute addition, so you’ll have to choose last. I hope that’s okay.”
“It’s fine, I don’t mind.” Any pokemon would be fine. I was actually looking forward to seeing what they were.

“Heh, guess Ashy-boy’s out of luck til next year.” Gary snickered, immediately stepping forward and claiming the water-type pokemon. “Squirtle, you’re mine!”

“Oh, it’s so cute!” I clapped as the little pokemon appeared. It seemed plenty happy with the attention.

“Alright Nick, now you.” The professor urged the other boy forward. After a minute of deliberation he chose the grass-type and released a Bulbasaur. Also cute and just as appreciative of praise.

“Guess that leaves Charmander for you.” Gary smirked.

“Right,” I picked up the pokeball and released the pokemon inside. Charmander looked up at me nervously, holding their tail like a security blanket.

“Hey there, guess we’re partners now.” I crouched down to seem less intimidating. “I hope we get along.”

“Char, char charmander.” It nodded shyly.

“Alright!” Professor Oak clapped his hands, startling Charmander into jumping into my arms. That was roughly twenty pounds of unexpected weight. Plus flaming tail that came perilously close to my hair. “Gary, Nick, you’re both set up and ready to go! Cal, if you’ll wait just a moment we’ll get you fitted with a trainer ID in no time!”

I was a little confused that a pokedex wasn’t being handed out. For some reason I felt like that’s what should’ve happened. I knew better than to question it though. Gary offered to admit me into his cheerleading squad one more time and then he and the other boy left.

“Alright, give me your full name and age please.” Professor Oak sat down at a computer. It looked kind of big and clunky, but it looked new. I was a little surprised they still made these.

“Cal Memo, and I’m eleven.” I gave him the date from when I first woke up as my birthday. After a quick picture, he printed out a plastic card that had all my information on it and passed it to me.

“Alright, it seems you’re all set!” He stated proudly. “Here’s a few pokeballs to get you started too.”

“Oh, thanks!” I returned Charmander and put the other pokeballs in my pocket. Charmander’s pokeball, as my only pokemon, went on my belt.

“Professor! Professor Oak!” The doors banged open and a boy in green pajamas came crashing in.

“Ash, so you showed up after all.” I looked between the two of them.

“Oh no, all the pokemon are gone!” Ash groaned, falling to his knees in front of the pushcart.

“O-Oh, did I,” I swallowed around my nerves. “Did I take your spot? Sorry, didn’t mean to.”

“Ugh, no, it’s fine.” He moaned despondently. “It’s my own fault for sleeping in on today of all days.”

“Well Ash, you may have missed the traditional starters, but there is one pokemon left if you’re still interested.” Professor Oak offered.
“There is?” It was amazing how quickly he recovered. He was on his feet and face to face with the professor before I could even blink. “What is it? A Squirtle? A Bulbasaur? A Charmander? I’ll take anything!”

“Actually, it’s none of those.” Professor chuckled. “But I warn you, this pokemon is a bit of a handful, particularly for a new trainer.”

“I can handle it! I promise!” He started begging.

“Alright, alright,” Professor Oak reached into his pocket and pulled out another pokeball. This one had a little electric sticker on it. “Here you are, your first pokemon!”

“Oh, wow! I can’t wait to see what it is!” He almost snatched the pokeball out of the professor’s hands. I actually yelped as he waved the pokeball in my direction. He nearly released it on top of me!

It was a little pikachu. Adorable red cheeks and zig-zag tail and all.

“Piika? Pikachu?” It blinked at Ash. From the little static charge coming off its cheeks I didn’t think it liked what it saw.

“A pikachu? Wow, it’s so cute!” Unlike the last three starters, this pokemon didn’t seem to enjoy the praise. Ash picked it up, probably intending to hug it, but that was when Pikachu struck with a Thunder Shock that would’ve made it’s mother proud.

“Wow, so glad that’s not me right now.” I felt a little bad about taking this kid’s place, but I would not enjoy being on the receiving end of that.

I walked outside, hoping to make a little distance from the electric mouse and the excitable boy, and found a much smaller but more personal crowd waiting outside. They had a handmade banner with Good Luck, Ash! Written on it.

“Mom?” Ash came out behind me, staring in shock at the woman at the front of the crowd.

“You left in such a rush you forgot your bag.” She was smiling with tears in her eyes.

This was his mom. These people knew him, liked him. He’d probably grown up here.

What about my mom? I was dressed and packed like I’d left on a journey, but I had no pokemon and no identification. No memories. Did my mom, wherever she was, know what had happened to me?

Hopefully I’ll find her soon.

While I’d been lost in thought, Ash’s mother had shown him everything she’d packed for him, including rubber gloves and a clothesline. Ash’s mom also shared the same love of pokemon too, because when she finished going over everything with him she’d tried to pick up Pikachu to give it a hug.

Unfortunately, I was standing too close to the crowd to avoid the electric shock.

“O-Ow,” I groaned, picking myself up.

It was like touching an electric fence, except with my whole body. I wonder why I know what touching an electric fence is. Maybe I was more of a dare-taker before I lost my memories.
I meant to walk ahead of Ash, make some distance, get some privacy.

But he was literally dragging his pokemon behind him on the clothesline and wearing rubber gloves. It was both sad and hilarious.

And, if I hadn’t shown up, he could’ve had Charmander. It was kind of my fault that he got stuck with a difficult pokemon like Pikachu.

“Uh, you could try negotiating? You know, compromise?” I suggested shyly.

“Compromise?” Ash looked up. I think in his struggle to pull Pikachu along he’d completely forgotten I was there, three steps ahead of him.

“Well, maybe Pikachu would be willing to be more obedient if you met it halfway?” I shrugged.

“Hmm,” He thought about it for a minute. Finally, he gave some slack on the clothesline and pulled out his pokedex.

I didn’t even listen to what it had to say about Pikachu. I was just shocked by how different it looked from mine. It didn’t have a touchscreen. The screen was a lot smaller to make room for a small keyboard. It was a little bigger too, just an inch too big to fit comfortably in Ash’s hand.

Maybe they’re different models.

“You don’t like being confined?” I forced myself to pay attention. Ash looked like he’d struck across the solution. “No problem! Here, let’s get rid of this.” He started untying Pikachu and even went so far as to remove his gloves.

I took two big steps back.

“Alright, my name is Ash Ketchum from Pallet Town, and I aim to become a Pokemon Master!” He introduced himself. “So whattaya say? Partners?” He held out his hand, friendly and eager.

And, unfortunately, the perfect target for another Thunder Shock.

“It didn’t work.” Ash groaned as he picked himself up. Pikachu, meanwhile, had climbed up a tree and was looking down at us with a smug expression.

“Sorry it didn’t work out.” I apologized.

“It’s okay, it’s not your fault.” He glared up at the tree. “Fine, who needs ya! I’ll get a way better pokemon, just you wait and see!”

He immediately scrambled up and began searching the grass for a pokemon, leaving his bag by the tree. I had no idea how he expected to catch one without a pokemon to weaken it first. Then again, I had a pokemon.

“Um, Ash,” I spoke up to offer Charmander’s services, but I was a little too slow. He’d already found a pidgey in the grass and thrown a pokeball at it. I had to admit I was a little surprised. Hadn’t anyone told this kid that you had to weaken a pokemon first? Still, it was a harmless enough mistake to make with a pidgey. It just broke free and scared him off with a weak Sand Attack.

I was going to step forward and reassure him, make my offer, but a rustle by my feet caught my eye. A little rattata was nosing around Ash’s bag.
“Hey now, shoo!” I scolded it. It jumped in surprise. “You can find plenty of food elsewhere without stealing it from someone. Now shoo, off you go.”

“Oh hey! A rattata!” Ash exclaimed. The little pokemon squeaked in surprise and sprinted off, disappearing from sight in mere seconds. “Aw, it got away!”

“You’re lucky it didn’t take any food.” I grabbed his bag and handed it over to him. “You shouldn’t leave your bag unguarded like that.”

“Oh man, it would’ve been a disaster to lose the food Mom packed for me!” He gaped, wide-eyed. “Thank you so much for saving it!”

“Really, it was no trouble.” I laughed. He might’ve been a beginner, but he was a likeable guy. “And, if you want, Charmander and I can help you catch a pokemon.”

“No way!” He denied me almost instantly.

“I’m going to catch my own pokemon, on my own! A Pokemon Master doesn’t have someone _else_ catch their pokemon!” He explained passionately.

“Oookay,” I rolled my eyes. “But you’re not a master yet, and Pikachu doesn’t seem interested in helping you.”

“That doesn’t matter! I’ll figure out a way to do it!” He declared, stooping down to pick up a rock. I looked where he was aiming. I thought it was another pidgey, all I could see was that it had wings. Ash’s aim was good.

Unfortunately for us all, it was not a pidgey.

“Uh-oh!” He gasped as the spearow took flight, darting between us before we could even move. I fell down and watched it graze Ash again, squawking indigently.

“Unlike pidgey, spearow have a more confrontational attitude and will often attack other pokemon and people.” His pokedex informed us.

But the spearow didn’t attack _us_ next. It attacked Pikachu.

“Hey, Pikachu didn’t throw that rock! Leave it alone!” Ash waved his bag, trying to get the flying-type’s attention.

“Spearow are often known to be jealous of human-trained pokemon and will go out of their way to attack them.”

“Oh now you tell me!” Ash glared at it.

“Charmander, go! Use Flamethrower!” I scrambled to my feet.

“Char char, CHAR!” It breathed a burst of flame, singing the spearow’s wings.

“CHUU!” At the same time as Pikachu let loose another Thunder Shock.

The spearow fell to the ground. I readied a pokeball as it struggled to its feet. It wasn’t quite defeated, but it was a lot weaker than before. I pulled back my arm and threw.

“You got it!” Ash whooped excitedly.
“Not yet.” I corrected him, watching the pokeball wave back and forth. For a second I really thought the spearow would break free, but it finally sealed shut.

“Wow, I caught it.” I stooped down to pick it up. “Look, Charmander, we caught it!”

“Char char?” Charmander leaned forward and sniffed it.

“Aw, man! I want to—…” Whatever Ash was going to say was lost as a thunderclap of wings took flight. The field we were in was dotted with trees and from every single one spearow were taking flight. Dozens of spearow. A flock of spearow.

“Uh, think we should run?” He asked.

“Pika!” Pikachu was the first to move.

“Charmander, return!” There was no way we’d be able to beat a whole flock of spearow. I put both pokeballs on my belt and took off after Ash and Pikachu.

“Pikachu, don’t run ahead!” Ash was yelling. “Stay close so I can protect you!”

“It’s not listening!” I panted for air. Pikachu had pulled ahead of us, but that just made it a tempting target for the spearow to dive bomb. They were raking Pikachu’s back with their talons.

“Hey, get off him!” Ash leapt forward, snarling at the attacking pokemon. He used his own arms to bat the spearow off, then gathered Pikachu in his arms before clambering to his feet again.

“We have to get away from them!” He told me.

“No duh, but how?” There was a lot of open field for us to be chased in.

“This way!” He grabbed my hand and pulled me off the path. I didn’t have any choice but to trust him. Now and then spearow would dive at us, giving us cuts and scratches with their talons. We were lucky none of the spearow were using actual moves on us.

I was running out of steam and out of faith. I was about ready to release Charmander again and draw a line in the sand when I saw what Ash had us running towards.

“That’s a cliff!” I screamed. I would’ve stopped running if a spearow hadn’t come close to taking my ear off.

“Trust me!”

And can you believe it? I actually did.

Which means that if my mom, whoever she is, ever asks me “If all your friends were jumping off a cliff, would you do it too?” I’d have to say, yes.

It was way too early in the season to be swimming. The cold stole my air and it was only Ash’s grip on my wrist that kept me from panicking and losing track of the surface. A magikarp swam directly in front of my face and I swear I caught a glimpse of a gyrados before we surfaced.

“My God, Ash Ketchum!” I coughed and spluttered. “I have known you for one hour and already you almost get me killed! One. Hour!”

“You were the one who caught the spearow!” He argued.
“After you threw a rock at it!” I scowled darkly at him.

“Oh my gosh, are you alright?” We both looked up to see a girl with red hair kneeling in front of Ash.

“Uh, yeah, I’m fine. Thanks for asking.” He cocked his head curiously.

“Not you!” The girl glared at him. “Your *pokemon!* The poor thing looks beat up!”

“You should get it to a Pokemon Center as soon as possible.” She told him.

“A Pokemon Center? Do you know where one is?” He asked desperately. “Which way?”

“That way.” She seemed startled by his energy, but she pointed the way. She seemed to wrestle with herself for a minute and opened her mouth to say something else, but her eyes caught something behind us.

I turned to look.

“Ash, the spearow!” I cried.

“They found us!” He turned and started climbing up the embankment. I followed after him with the girl, but we both stopped when we saw him put Pikachu in the girl’s bike basket.

“Hey, that’s *my* bike!” She screeched.

“Sorry, I’ll pay you back!” He promised, already pedaling as hard as he could.

“Ah, the flock!” They were getting close now.

“Quick, hide!” The girl shoved me behind some rocks. We waited anxiously as the flock passed overhead. When the last spearow passed us, we sighed in relief.

“Hey!” I flinched away from her. “Your stupid brother stole my bike!”

“He’s not my brother!” I denied automatically.

“Your boyfriend then, whatever! That was my bike!” She fumed.

“Yeah, I know.” I winced. “Sorry about that. But I’m sure if we go to the Pokemon Center you mentioned we could retrieve your bike?” I suggested with a nervous smile.

“He’d better not do anything to wreck it.” She warned me. “Now get up, we’re following him!”

Well, we couldn’t follow him all that far at first. The clouds that had been hanging overhead all day finally let loose, forcing us under shelter. Luckily the girl, Misty, had a rain tarp that she spread over top of us.

“So you both started your *pokemon* journeys today, but he’s not your brother or your boyfriend?” She questioned me while we waited for the rain to stop.

“I only met him earlier today.” I nodded. “His name is Ash Ketchum and I’ve gotta say, he seems pretty nice.”

As overexcited as a lillipup, but nice.
“And he went and got you both attacked by a whole flock of spearow.” She narrowed her eyes.

“Well, to be honest I’m not sure which ticked them off more, him throwing a rock at one or me catching it.” I admitted. Me catching it probably hadn’t helped. “I hope they’re alright.”

“He can put the Pikachu in its pokeball, can’t he? So the Pikachu at least will be fine.” She tried to assure me.

“Except that this Pikachu really doesn’t like pokeballs.” I frowned. “It kept refusing to go inside.”

“Hey, my name is Misty, what’s yours?” She nudged me.

“My name’s Cal. All things considered, it’s nice to meet you.” We shared an awkward handshake under the cover of the tarp.

It took three or four hours before the storm died out. We were both frozen stiff and damp. Misty’s good mood had long since flown the coop. She packed away her tarp with more violence than was strictly necessary.

“Come on!” She barked at me. “We’re tracking that boy down and getting my bike back!”

“Coming!” I wriggled my toes in my shoes, trying to get a little more feeling in them. “I hope he made it to the Pokemon Center alright. Those spearow didn’t look the type to give up easily.”

“I’m not the type to give up easily either!” Misty marched down the road.

We found the bike.

Well, the remains of the bike.

“My bike!” Misty fell to her knees. “Oh, my poor bike! What has he done to you?”

“I didn’t think Pikachu’s Thunder Shock was so powerful. It must’ve been the rain.” I concluded. There were signs of a battle strewn all about. The road was torn up and singed feathers were mixed in with the mud.

“Wait until I get my hands on him!” Misty heaved her bike onto her shoulders. “Let’s go!”

“Aa, wait for me!” I ran after her.

The town wasn’t far. My fake hometown, Viridian City, appeared on the horizon after about thirty minutes. I have to say I was impressed by Misty’s strength. Lugging a broken bike on her back like that without slowing down for anything.

We actually did see Ash at the police station on the edge of town, but he was riding sidecar with an Officer Jenny. We missed him by seconds.

It did not improve Misty’s mood.

When we finally reached the Pokemon Center I was truly beginning to fear for Ash’s life. She was laughing maniacally as we approached the front door.

I liked Ash but not enough to go to bat against a girl pushed to the edge for him. He could deal with the consequences of his actions by himself.

Misty practically lunged for him as soon as she saw him across the waiting room. All without
dropping the bike.

“Ha! I’ve got you now! You’re going to pay for what you’ve done!” She declared.

“P-Pay? Pay for…?” His voice trailed off as he recognized the bike. “Oh, that.”

“Yeah, that. How do you expect to pay me back for this?” She seethed.

“I’m really sorry, but I needed to help my Pikachu!” He bowed in apology.

“Ash, where is Pikachu?” I stepped forward, eyeing the sealed doors of the operating room. His glum silence was answer enough.

“It was that badly hurt?” Misty gasped. “Is it going to be okay?”

“I don’t know.” He balled his hands up, shaking. “They haven’t come out yet.”

“Pokemon Centers always have the best equipment and trained nurses, I’m sure Pikachu will be just fine.” I reassured him. “Plus a pokemon’s natural healing ability is nothing to scoff at either.”

“Natural healing ability?” He repeated.

“That’s why even after serious injuries a pokemon only needs a day or two, a week tops, in order to be back at a hundred percent.” I explained for him.

“Geez, you’re a trainer and you don’t even know that much?” Misty scoffed.

“He’s a new trainer, who’s barely had a pokemon for a day, so up until now the most he got was seeing them at a distance or watching battles on tv.” I frowned. How did I know these things? I felt confident they were true, but I couldn’t remember learning them.

“What about you, Cal? You’ve only been a trainer for a day but you know lots of stuff.” He pointed out.

“Oh, well,” I didn’t know what to say. Luckily I didn’t have to come up with anything. The light above the operating room door shut off, neatly distracting them from me. Nurse Joy and a Chancey wheeled Pikachu out on a gurney.

The headband and lightbulb was a little weird. I could understand the purpose was to recharge Pikachu but weren’t there more efficient ways to go about it?

“Your pokemon is going to be just fine.” Nurse Joy informed Ash.

“Really? That’s great!” He bent down by the gurney. Pikachu even seemed a little happy to see him. I would’ve thought getting attacked by a flock of spearow would make Pikachu even more ornery.

Maybe they reached some kind of agreement. Maybe risking their lives together helped them form a bond. It was a far cry from this morning, that’s for sure.

I wish I could stop here at this happy reunion. But we barely got a chance to relax when disaster struck.

“Attention Viridian City, an unknown aircraft has been sighted. The occupants are thought to be Pokemon Thieves. Be on the look out and stay indoors.”
The skylight broke first. We saw two pokeballs hit the floor where they burst open. An Ekans and a Koffing.

“Oh no, not them!” Nurse Joy cried, hugging her Chancey close. “It’s Team Rocket!”

“Team…Rocket?” Teams of Pokemon Thieves.

“To protect the world from devastation,” We saw a silhouette through the smoke.

“To unite all peoples within our nation,” A second one joined the first.

“To denounce the evils of truth and love,” The first became clearer, revealing a red haired woman with big hair.

“To extend our reach to the stars above.” The second was a man with blue hair, holding a rose.

“Jessie!” The woman proclaimed.

“James!” The man followed.

“Team Rocket, blast off at the speed of light!” Jessie laughed.

“Surrender now or prepare to fight!” James smirked.

“Meowth, that’s right!” The Meowth spoke.

“Did that pokemon just talk or…?” I blinked.

“Be careful, those two are pokemon thieves!” Nurse Joy warned us.

“Well they’re not getting my Pikachu!” Ash growled threateningly.

“Oh please,” Jessie scoffed. “Why would we waste our time with an electric rat like that? We only go after rare and powerful pokemon.”

“This is a Center for weak and injured pokemon!” Nurse Joy argued.

“That may be so,” Jessie allowed. “But I don’t doubt that we’ll find a few pearls among the swine. And on that note, Ekans! Attack!”

“Run for it!” Misty screamed. Nurse Joy led the way and Ash pushed the gurney. We darted into the operation room, then through another set of doors to a hallway. Nurse Joy opened a door on the left and we barely got the door shut and locked when we heard the ekans and koffing come after us.

“What are we going to do?” Misty leaned against the door. She was shaking as badly as I was. “The power’s gone out!”

“Emergency protocols, the first thing we have to do is ensure the safety of the patients.” Nurse Joy stepped up. “To do that, I’ll get the emergency generator up and running.”

“Can I trust you kids to build up a barricade in front of the door?” She asked us.

“You’ve got it, Nurse Joy.” Ash promised.

While we started moving pokeballs off the shelves and onto a small conveyor belt she pointed out
Nurse Joy walked into a sealed off part of the room and released a dozen more pikachu from their pokeballs. They started running on a little treadmill, generating electricity to get the lights back on and have the computer reboot.

“This is the Viridian City Pokemon Center, following emergency evacuation protocols. Please respond.” Nurse Joy tried to reach another Center while we continued piling up our barricade.

“This is the Pewter City Pokemon Center, we’ve received your distress call and stand ready to accept pokemon.” A voice on the other line announced.

“Beginning teleportation.” The big machine I hadn’t noticed suddenly went active. The conveyor belt we’d been putting the pokeballs on started moving.

“That’s…a teleporter?” It took up half the room. The reason I hadn’t taken notice of it is because it was so big I was convinced it had to be a piece of old tech, kept around for emergencies.

For some reason, every time I see a piece of technology I feel a little strange. I keep expecting them to be different, or have more functions, or at least be smaller.

More advanced?

“Whoa, it’s amazing! Look, the pokeballs are disappearing!” Ash leaned in to take a better look.

We didn’t have a lot of time to marvel. Our barricade shook as something pounded against the door. The three of us rushed to reinforce it.

“It’s no good! We can’t hold them back!” Misty grunted as another slam knocked us back before we could react.

“Line in the sand, people!” I snapped, freeing up one hand to call out Charmander. “If they want to steal my pokemon they’ll be prying them out of my cold, dead hands!”

“Charmander, first pokemon you see when this door opens, Flamethrower.” I ordered.

“Char!” It nodded, tail flame flaring at the mention of thieves. As for myself, I picked up a small pipe that had come loose from the shelves we’d moved. It had probably been used to support one of the shelves so it wasn’t made to be strong, but it was still a metal stick and I was willing to bet it would hurt to get whacked with it.

Why wasn’t I scared? I should’ve been terrified. Dangerous thieves willing to attack a Pokemon Center with injured pokemon behind me. Something about this felt familiar.

I didn’t understand it then and I don’t understand it now, even hours later. Maybe I’ll never understand it until I get my memories back.

The koffing broke through the barricade first. Charmander might be timid, but it had no problems with targeting a pokemon thief. The koffing’s smoke turned out to be highly combustible.

“There, that’s all the injured pokeballs transferred!” Nurse Joy reported.

“Koffing!” James, the koffing’s trainer I guessed, cried out. “You’ll pay for that!”

“Flamethrower again!” I shouted. “Everybody, move!”

This explosion was much smaller, but it was also closer. The smoke made it hard for us to breathe. The best plan was to get us all out of here safely now that the injured pokemon, save Pikachu, had
been safely evacuated.

We rushed the door. I made sure to whack the guy on the wrist as I passed him. Ash managed to bowl the woman over with Pikachu’s gurney.

“Ekans, don’t let them escape!” She shrieked.

“Pika pika pika pika! Pika pika pika! Pika pika pika! Pika pika pika!” I looked behind us to see a wave of yellow following.

“Hey, what are you doing?” Ash almost lost his footing when they began piling up on the gurney on top of his Pikachu.

“Hey now, that’s rude!” Nurse Joy scolded them.

“Scold later, pokemon thieves following us!” I reminded them, moving to help Ash push the extra weight. An individual pikachu might not weigh much, but fifteen of them was another matter.

Then of course we were both nearly electrocuted when all the pikachu lit up at once.

The flash blinded me. I only kept running because I was gripping the gurney’s handle and Ash was still pushing. If the gurney hadn’t been designed for electric types I would’ve been in trouble.

“Pikachu!” I couldn’t see which one was talking, but I felt it when the gurney turned and I lost my grip.

“Ow, ow, ow,” I clapped a hand over my eyes, unable to run with nothing to guide me.

“Charmander, where are you?”

“Char, char!” Charmander pulled on my belt, pulling me down behind a…a counter? Opening my eyes just showed a blur. Charmander stood in front of me, growling at the approaching Team Rocket.

“You’re not getting away that easily.” The woman taunted us.

“Pikapi, pika pika pikachu!” There was one little yellow ball on top of a whitish-gray blur. I had to assume that was Ash’s Pikachu. I didn’t know where all the others had gone.

“Pika pika? Pika power?” Ash gasped, grabbing something?

“Hey, what are you doing to my bike?” Misty demanded. I was sure I was hearing things by this point.

“Generating some pika power!” Ash laughed.

“Pi-ii-kaaa-CHUUUU!” I closed my eyes before the flash this time, but I was not prepared for the blast.

“Did…Did we survive?” I asked incredulously, too afraid to open my eyes to check.

“His Pikachu just…just blew the roof off the Pokemon Center.” Misty sounded like she was in shock. Tentatively, I opened my eyes. It was a little better than before but I was only able to identify people because of the color of their hair or clothes.

“Right…” Suddenly feeling exhausted, I picked up Charmander’s pokeball and returned it. “I’m ready for this day to be over now.”
Officer Jenny arrived a few seconds later and after we gave our statements she was glad to arrange for us to stay the night at a motel for free. We all basically collapsed into the beds provided and slept like the dead until morning.

Well, Ash and Misty were still asleep when I left the room. My eyes are still a little sensitive to light but I’m sure they’ll be fine if I just buy a pair of shades. That is, when I get some cash. I’d need to battle someone and win to earn some money first.

Charmander did well in her first battle. I decided to see if I could connect my pokeballs to my pokedex before I started dictating this entry. A female Charmander about one year old. Spearow is a male, though I haven’t actually taken him out of his pokeball since I caught him.

I also tried to see if I could learn who gave me the pokedex by searching through the settings and such. Officer Jenny confirmed for me that pokedexes are actually pretty rare. Only certain pokemon professors have them, and they only pass them out to certain trainers. Professor Oak must think highly of Ash to give him one. They aren’t mainstream yet.

My pokedex isn’t connected to any lab though. It’s got Professor Oak’s lab memorized on the Important Locations page, but that was only filled in when I went there yesterday. I should ask Ash if I could flip through his pokedex and see what information it has.

I’ve got a theory about where I come from now, but so far I have no way to confirm it.
I closed out the journal function with a tired sigh. The truth was that even after a good night’s sleep I was still exhausted. Part of me was also disheartened by the hundreds of questions I still had. And not a single answer in sight.

I had my bag and my pokemon. I could set off and start my journey now. The problem was that I didn’t know where to start. Team Rocket might be a potential lead, but that first entry in the journal specifically warned me about them.

“Alakazam might have the answers.” I considered. But I hadn’t seen him since I first woke up. Was he really watching over me as the message said?

“You’re up early.” I nearly jumped out of my skin when Misty came up behind me.

“Uh, you too.” I noticed. “Um, good morning.”

“Aw, what’s the matter? Yesterday you really took charge around those Team Rocket creeps!” She smirked. “I have to say, for a newbie trainer you put on a pretty good show.”

“Really?” I laughed nervously. “I guess it was because the stakes were so high. All those pokemon,”

“Yeah, you have to be absolute scum to try stealing sick and injured pokemon.” She agreed. She made a visible effort to shake them from her mind. “By the way, I’m planning on getting recompense from that boy so I’m going to be following him until he pays me back for my bike. I guess this makes us travel buddies!” She finished with a much friendlier tone.

“Travel buddies?” I repeated. It was true that I’d started out traveling with Ash. I didn’t exactly have any better ideas. “Yeah, I guess so. So, friends?”

“Friends!” We shook on it.

“So continuing from where we left off yesterday,” She sat down on the steps beside me. “I’m a water pokemon trainer. I left home to become a Master of water pokemon. What about you?”

“Me? Uh,” It became clear that I had not thought this through. I scrambled to think of something. “I want to be a Pokemon Professor!”

“Wow, a Professor?” Her eyes bugged out. “What do you want to study about pokemon?”

“I don’t really know yet.” Given I’d thought of it two seconds ago. “But pokemon really are fascinating and there’s so much no one knows about them yet!”

“Well if you ever want to research a water pokemon then you know who to call!” Misty elbowed me jokingly.

“Hmm, do you think I should call Ash?” I teased her. It did provoke her into tugging my hair, but she didn’t pull hard enough to hurt.

“Haha, that was so funny I forgot to laugh.” She stuck her tongue out at me.

I could’ve traveled alone but I was glad I didn’t have to.
Ash and Misty made interesting companions. Interesting the same way a pokemon battle is interesting. You just have to know who will win.

“Um, maybe we could talk about something else? Anything else?” I suggested after a record breaking twenty minute argument about the much lamented bike. The argument had brokered no new ground and in fact had gone backwards in progress.

I was about five seconds away from losing my mind.

“You can’t let guys like this think they can get one over you, Cal.” Misty kept her eyes narrowed at Ash. “They’ll walk away without giving you what they owe.”

“I already promised to pay for the bike!” Ash snapped. “And what do you mean guys like me?”

“I mean rookie trainers who don’t know the first thing about pokemon!” Misty sneered. “Cal told me about how you threw a rock at a spearow!”

“And Cal caught it!” He retorted.

“Well at least she caught something. All you have is that Pikachu!” She put her hands on her hips. “Not much of a trainer at all really.”

“Oh yeah? I’ll show you!” He started scouring the forest for some pokemon to catch.

“At least they’re arguing about something other than bikes now.” I muttered under my breath before speaking up. “Remember Ash, battle a pokemon to weaken it, then catch it.”

“Yeah, yeah, I heard you the first time!” Ash didn’t bother looking away from the bush he was inspecting.

“Hmph, you couldn’t catch a pokemon if one climbed up your leg.” Misty scoffed. “In fact I…I…”

“Misty?” We looked at her quizzically. She’d frozen in place, a statue in the middle of the forest. Her face rapidly lost all trace of color.

All this thanks to the caterpie crawling on her shoe.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!” Thoroughly deafened, I did my best to comfort Misty after picking the bug-type pokemon off her. “A buuuug! It touched me! WAAaaahhh!”

“There, there,” I rubbed her back.

“Oh wow, a caterpie!” Ash pulled out his pokedex.

“Caterpie, the Bug Pokemon. It is capable of devouring leaves twice its size and can emit a foul odor from its antennae when it feels threatened.” Dexter the Pokedex reported.

“Caterpie, you’re mine.” Ash swore, pulling out a pokeball. “Pikachu, it’s time to battle!”

“Pika!” Pikachu jumped to the ground, cheeks flaring with electricity.

“Pikachu, use your Thundershock attack!” He ordered.
“That might be overkill.” I muttered, watching lightning flash towards the little bug. The poor thing didn’t know what hit it, fainting after one blow.

“Yeah! Now that it’s weakened,” He threw the pokeball, once again exhibiting excellent aim. “I’ll catch it!”

Caterpie didn’t even put up a fight. The pokeball blinked once and was sealed.

“I did it! I caught a pokemon all by myself! Look at it! Look, Cal!” He ran up and shoved the pokeball under my nose.

“I’m looking. I’m looking.” I promised. “A Thundershock might’ve been a little harsh, but there’s no arguing it worked. And Caterpie might not be all that strong now, but bug-types evolve quickly.”

“They do?” He blinked at me in astonishment.

“Bug-types have the fastest rate of evolution of all known types of pokemon.” I recited, though I didn’t know where I was reciting it from. “Caterpie in particular evolve into metapod and then evolve into their final form, butterfree.”

“Whoa, really?” He pulled out his pokedex to check. Sure enough, just as I said, the evolutionary line of caterpie to butterfree was well documented.

“You’d better listen to Cal, Ash. She’s going to be a Pokemon Professor someday.” Misty warned him.

“A Professor? Like Professor Oak?” He checked. “Wow, you must know a lot about pokemon then. That explains how you know so much when you’re a beginner like me!”

“I guess it does.” I had to admit it made a good excuse.

“What other stuff do you know about pokemon?” He asked, full of excitement. If it kept them off the bike topic I was willing to talk about anything.

“Well, um, did you know bug-type pokemon are weak against flying-type pokemon?” I asked him. “Of course, that’s probably obvious considering flying-types tend to eat bug-types. Oh, but they’re strong against Dark, Grass, and Psychic types.”

“Dark-types? I’ve never heard of those.” He frowned, checking through his pokedex. “Dexter doesn’t know about them either.”

“I guess because they’re more often found in other regions.” I wasn’t even sure what region I was from so that might explain why I knew about them. “Your pokedex only lists pokemon found in Kanto, right?”

“Huh,” Misty looked over his shoulder to check. “Oh hey, it does. It says List of Kanto Pokemon. So what are Dark-types like, Cal?”

“Generally Dark-types are known to be highly intelligent, they are commonly nocturnal, and most known examples exhibit traits of ruthlessness in pursuit of their goals.” What textbook did I read that out of?

“Other regions,” Ash mumbled barely loud enough to hear. Whatever he was thinking about, he quickly shook it off in favor of his new pokemon. “If they’re strong against pokemon like that then
I can’t wait to battle with Caterpie!”

“W-Wait, you don’t mean—?” Misty gulped, unable to continue. Ash confirmed her suspicions by releasing Caterpie onto the ground. Misty squawked like a bird and dove behind me to get away.

“Misty, Caterpie won’t hurt you. Frankly, I’m not sure Caterpie can hurt you.” I tried to reassure her.

“Hey Cal, you should let your pokemon out too! You haven’t brought Spearow out since you caught it, right?” Ash asked.

“No, I haven’t.” And I did need to work with him and Charmander if I wanted them to get stronger. “Okay, I’ll let Spearow out for now and train Charmander later, when we’re not in a forest.” Full of flammable trees and weak bug pokemon.

“Spear! Row?” Spearow looked confused when he reappeared in front of me. His eyes locked on Caterpie first and I stepped between the two before it could become an issue.

“That one is off-limits.” I spoke sternly. “Unless you want to go back in your pokeball, you’ll have to behave.”

“Spear!” He squawked angrily at me, flapping his wings to make himself seem bigger. “Spear! Spear Row!”

“No arguments.” I crossed my arms. “I don’t mind letting you out to hunt, but I draw the line at you eating someone else’s pokemon.”

“What? It wants to eat Caterpie?” Ash swept his pokemon into his arms defensively.

“Weren’t you listening earlier?” Misty groaned. “Birds eat bugs!”

“Spearow,” I didn’t kneel down. Making myself look smaller wouldn’t help me with this pokemon. “I’m sure you’re upset about being captured, but I can assure you that I’ll treat you well and help you become as strong as possible. All I ask in return is your help in battles and that you don’t eat other people’s pokemon. Deal?”

“…Spearow spear spear row!” He took flight and lit his eyes up with a challenging Leer.

“You want another battle?” I guessed. “Let me guess, if you win you want me to release you?”

“Spear!” He nodded.

“Fair enough.” I released Charmander.

“Charmander, we need to earn Spearow’s respect. Keep your eyes on him and use Scratch when he gets close.” I ordered.

“Char!” She looked a little more confident today.

“Spearoooow!” He was coming in close to swipe with a Peck attack.

“Now!” I shouted, timing it so Char would catch Spearow’s outstretched wing. It was only a glancing blow but it sent him veering off course. “Keep your eyes on him! He has to come in close to attack! Next time I want you to use Scratch, then Flamethrower when he tries to recover!”

“Char Charmander!” She nodded, visibly psyching herself up for the next go around.
Here came Spearow pouring on the speed. Thankfully he didn’t think to use Leer on Charmander. Her more timid nature would make it super effective and weaken her defenses.

“Ready, and now!” I timed it again. Charmander reacted even faster this time, swiping with her right claw and then pivoting to fire a blast of flame at Spearow’s tail. He squawked furiously, crashing into the ground as his flight lost stability. “Finish with another Scratch attack!”

“CharMANDER!” This attack was even faster and stronger than both those before.

“Good job, Charmander!” With the battle over, I happily got on my knees to wrap her in a hug. “You were amazing! I think you’ve already gotten stronger.”

“Char char.” She wringed her tail in embarrassment. “Char Charmander.”

“As for you, Spearow.” He had climbed to his talons and was glaring balefully. But not, I noticed, Leering.

“I’m certainly not going to force a pokemon to fight when it doesn’t want to.” I never wanted to be that kind of person. “But if you want battles, then I hope you’ll let me help you become stronger. So, what do you say?”

“…Spearow.” He nodded.

“Great!” I clapped. “In that case, come here. I’ve got some potion in my bag. Then I’ll let you hunt for a bit, sound good?”

“Wow, it’s like she’s a totally different person.” I heard Ash comment.

“Totally confident when it comes to pokemon and battles, totally shy otherwise.” Misty agreed.

“I-I wasn’t…” I stopped, not sure how to defend myself. The stutter kinda took the wind out of my sails.

“Oops, now she’s back to shy again!” Misty laughed. “Ignore us, just keep treating your pokemon.”

“Mmm,” I pouted, turning back to spray the potion on Spearow’s injuries.

“Man, watching you battle got me so pumped up!” Ash cheered as we stopped for the night. It hadn’t taken Spearow long to find a weedle to eat. Ash had thoughtfully returned Caterpie until Spearow had finished eating, not wanting his pokemon to watch another bug get eaten. Caterpie was out again now, riding on his shoulder and happily munching on a leaf.

“I can’t wait until I can challenge a gym leader and win my first badge!” He grinned excitedly.

“I can’t wait for you to shut your big mouth so we can get some sleep.” Misty rolled her eyes. “And keep that bug away from me.”

“Caterpie just wants to be your friend, you don’t have to be so mean to him!” Ash fumed before rolling over in his sleeping bag.

“Good night, everyone.” I yawned.

I typed out this entry while everyone slept. Pikachu and Caterpie stayed up late talking to each other, but I’ve finally got everything down. I’m glad I decided to travel with Ash and Misty, I’d be pretty lonely otherwise. Even if they both like arguing too much.
“AAAAAAAAAAAIIIIIIIEEEEEEIEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!”

I nearly gave myself a concussion as I tried to roll out of my sleeping bag and grab my pokeballs at the same time. I ended up slamming my fist into my face. It’s not a good way to start your day.

“What? Whu? Huh?” Ash didn’t bother scrambling out of his bag, somehow able to leap to his feet while still bundled up.

“WHY IS YOUR BUG SLEEPING SO CLOSE TO ME?!?!” Misty screamed.

“What? Is that why you’re screaming?” He blinked tiredly at her. “Caterpie didn’t mean any harm by it.”

“It’s gross and slimy! Keep it away from me!” I finished extracting myself from my sleeping bag.

“Caterpie? Hey, Caterpie! Don’t listen to her!” I turned around to see what Ash was worrying about. Caterpie had crawled over to its pokeball and returned itself. Ash picked up the pokeball sadly before turning on Misty.

“Now see what you did? Pokemon have feelings too you know!” He snapped.

“I don’t care about the feelings of icky pokemon! And I’m not going to apologize!” She crossed her arms and huffed. “Now that that’s settled, let’s hurry up and—AAGH!” She flinched as a pidgeotto flew past and startled her.

“Hah, hah, I thought it was another bug pokemon, but it’s a pidgeotto.” Misty panted.

“Wow, that’s the evolved form of pidgey, right?” Ash pulled out his pokedex to check. “I’m gonna catch it!”

“Not with Caterpie, Ash!” I grabbed his hand before he could release Caterpie. “Bugs are weak to flying-types, remember? Pidgeotto eat bugs!”

“O-Oh yeah.” He muttered, sheepishly putting the pokeball on his belt. “In that case, Pikachu!”

“Pika?” Pikachu looked faintly startled to be called on.

“Use your Thundershock on it!” Ash ordered confidently. Pikachu looked like he had to think about this, but ultimately he must’ve decided to listen to Ash because his electrical pouches lit up.

“Piii-kaa-CHUU!” The pidgeotto shrieked when the attack hit.

“Now, go pokeball!” We all watched the pokeball hit its target. Pidgeotto wasn’t going down without a fight. The pokeball rocked back and forth for almost a minute before it sealed shut. 

“I did it! I did it! I caught another pokemon!” Ash cheered as he swept the pokeball back up.

“Haha, look, Cal!” He held it out to me.


“Ha! Did you hear that, Misty? Cal knows that I’m a great trainer!” He bragged.
“Cal also knows that you nearly sent a *worm* against a bird!” Misty retorted, letting some of the wind out of his sails. “How stupid could you be?”

“Hey! I was still half-asleep! Sorry not all of us wake right up after hearing someone screaming in their ear!” He argued.

“Can’t we all get along?” I moaned. The last thing I needed was for these two to argue all day again.

“Oh look, James, the twerps are having a tiff.” A woman’s voice chortled.

“Huh? Who’s there?” Ash asked. Standing up the path were the same pokemon thieves from before.

Team Rocket.

“To protect the world from devastation,"

“To unite all peoples within our nation,”

“To denounce the evils of truth and love,”

“To extend our reach to the stars above,”

“Jessie!”

“James!”

“Team Rocket, blasting off at the speed of light!”

“Surrender now or prepare to fight!”

“Meowth, that’s right!”

“What do you jerks want?” Ash grumbled. “Didn’t you get enough at the Pokemon Center?”

“Ha! If you think one little setback is going to throw Team Rocket off their game then you’ve got another thing coming!” Jessie sneered. “And this time we’re not going anywhere until we’ve got that Pikachu!”

“That Pikachu is far more powerful than others of its kind,” James commented. “It’s wasted on a kid like you!”

“So hand’s it over, now!” The Meowth stepped forward threateningly. Jessie and James followed up by releasing their Ekans and Koffing.

“There’s no way I’m giving you Pikachu!” Ash denied, Pikachu jumped to the ground and sparked angrily.

“Charmander, I need you!” I called out my own pokemon. “Remember these guys?”

“Chaaar.” She growled.

“Wait, Cal! You can’t attack when I’m attacking! We have go one at a time!” Ash stopped me.

“The League rules say only one trainer can battle at a time.” He stated.

“Ash! If you play by the rules you’re gonna lose your pokemon!” Misty yelled at him. “They’re bad guys, they’re not gonna play by the rules!”

“Indeed we’re not.” James chuckled. “In fact, Koffing, use your Sludge attack!” Koffing sucked in more air and blew it out in a concussive blast. Pikachu’s face was splattered with the sludge, leaving his eyes sealed shut.

“Chu! Chu!” Pikachu scrabbled at his face.

“Pikachu!” Ash grabbed him. “Misty, take him. Don’t let Team Rocket take him!”

“Pidgeotto, I choose you!” He summoned the bird. “Use Quick Attack on the Koffing!”

Pidgeotto did its best but the earlier battle had tired it out. It was barely staying ahead of Koffing and Ekans attacks and unlike Ash they had no problem attacking together.

“Ash, Pidgeotto needs help!” I reached for my pokeball. “I’m not going to sit by and watch! Go, Charmander! Use Scratch when Ekans comes out of the ground again!”

“Charman!” She readied her claws, waiting until the purple snake burst through a new hole. “Der!” Ekans hissed as it was batted aside. It wasn’t a full-contact blow but it did give Pidgeotto some room.

“Pidgeotto, return!” Ash recalled the exhausted bird. “Caterpie, I choose you!”

“Caterpie?! Are you nuts, Ash!” Misty screamed.

“Use String Shot!” He ignored her.

“Charmander, keep moving and use Scratch!” I hoped that would be enough to keep Ekans from using Wrap and strangling my pokemon. “You’re doing great! Keep it up!”

“FWEEE! FWEEE!” I checked to see how Caterpie was doing, worried that it might be hurt, but Caterpie didn’t need any help from me. It had already managed to wrap Koffing up like a Christmas present.

“Whoa, that’s one impressive String Shot.” I remarked.

“Good going, Caterpie! Now help tie down Ekans too!” Ash seemed to have gotten over his hold up with the rules. With Charmander keeping Ekans distracted it was easy for Caterpie to line up another shot.

“Well ya ain’t getting away from me!” The talking Meowth yowled.

“Charmander,” I leveled a dark look at the approaching pokemon. “Leer.”

Charmander wasn’t facing me so I wasn’t able to see how fierce she looked, but I could guess based on Meowth’s curled expression. He froze in place, eyes locked on my pokemon. Charmander only needed to take one threatening step forward to have him scurrying back to his teammates.

“Next time you twerps won’t be so lucky!” Jessie vowed. In a flash Team Rocket, and their pokemon, were gone.
“Charmander, good job.” I pet her head when she turned around. “Look at that, you’re winning battles all over the place!”

“Caterpie, you were amazing too!” Ash joined in to praise his pokemon.

“They really were amazing.” Misty smiled from where she was still holding Pikachu. Most of the gunk had been wiped out of his eyes but it was still staining his fur.

“That’s right,” Ash grinned mischievously, holding Caterpie out towards her. I could see Misty biting her lip to keep from screaming. “You should congratulate them, Misty. Go on, give Caterpie a pat on the head and say ‘good job’.”

“…Do I have to?” She whimpered.

“There are some very pretty bug pokemon out there, Misty. It would be a shame to be afraid of all of them.” I offered. “Take things slow and move at your own pace, but I promise Caterpie isn’t going to hurt you.”

“Okay, I can do this.” Misty took a deep breath. Carefully, she inched her hand forward.

I can’t help but feel more progress would have been made if Caterpie hadn’t chosen that exact moment to evolve.

That and the beedrill that went speeding by completely sucked every last ounce of willpower from Misty’s body.

At least travelling with these two will never be boring.

The rest of the day was quiet, for Misty and Ash anyway. I made a little progress in learning to tune out their arguments. Now we’ve stopped for the night. The others are asleep while I type all this down.

I can’t deny it anymore. My pokedex is far more advanced than Ash’s. And yet for some reason he and Misty believe they are rare, only given to trainers of special interest.

I don’t know Misty’s past exactly, but she clearly grew up with pokemon. How does she not know the Dark type? Why does every piece of technology I see seem outdated to me?

I have two theories now. The first is that I come from a place that is a lot more technologically advanced than Kanto. I don’t know the range of an alakazam’s teleportation, or whether or not I traveled for a while before my memories were erased. I’ll need to do a lot more research to figure it out.

The second theory is that I’ve somehow time traveled.

I know what year it is now, but the real question is when was my pokedex built? I’m not confident in my ability to take it apart and put it back together in working order. There aren’t any date stamps on any of the articles I’ve read so far. The lack of evidence is almost damning enough.

I wonder if it’s even possible to regain memories purposely erased by a pokemon. It’s not exactly your normal case of amnesia. Another thing to research I suppose.

Maybe after Ash’s gym battle I can check out the Pewter city library.

“I just want to be out of this forest already.” She obsessively checked to make sure she wouldn’t step or walk into a bug pokemon. “How much longer until we get out of here?”

“A day, maybe two.” I hedged my bets.

“It’s not like any of these pokemon are attacking us so there’s no reason to be scared.” I couldn’t see but I was sure Ash was rolling his eyes while he said that.

“Phobias aren’t logical, Ash. Everyone has something they’re afraid of.” I scolded him.

“Not me!” He boasted. “I’m going to be a Pokemon Master and a Pokemon Master isn’t scared of anything!”

“Not even your pokemon dying?” I was almost as shocked as Misty and Ash. I had not expected that to come out of my mouth. “I mean,” I ducked my head down.

“You were really afraid when Pikachu was hurt by the spearow, weren’t you? Just because you’re not afraid of bugs or heights or things like that, doesn’t mean there isn’t something that scares you.” I tried to explain.

“Well,” He looked at Pikachu. “Yeah, I was pretty scared then. But I’m not going to let that stop me!”

“And Misty isn’t letting her fear of bugs stop her, otherwise she wouldn’t even be able to walk in this forest.” I pointed out, glad I’d somehow navigated through that exchange.

I didn’t know anything about my past, so was it possible that somewhere along the way I’d lost someone?

Honestly, I’d write more about what happened next if I hadn’t been so distracted by my own thoughts. In summary, a boy in samurai gear challenged Ash to a battle to avenge his honor after being defeated by the previous two pallet-town trainers. He used bug-type pokemon exclusively, using first a pinsir, then a metapod, both against Ash’s Metapod.

I didn’t know it was possible for a Metapod to Harden enough to break Pinsir’s claws. You learn something new everyday I guess. The Metapod Vs. Metapod round was much less exciting. Harden against Harden.

The swarm of beedrill finally brought an end to that.

Thinking back, I panicked. It reminded me too much of the spearow flock so I ran without giving any thought to Ash’s poor Metapod. A beedrill scooped it up and flew off with it.

Knowing that beedrill only take food away when they want to feed their young, I didn’t have high hopes for Metapod’s survival. I didn’t really have any hopes at all.

I’m glad now that I held off on making this entry last night. It would’ve been dark and depressing and that’s not what a pokemon journey is supposed to be about. Ash sneaked off in the early
morning, he didn’t even take Pikachu with him.

We followed him in a net designed to keep the beedrill off us. We caught up and saw he’d actually managed to save Metapod! And Metapod evolved just in time to save him! Butterfree has some impressive sleep powder, I’ll tell you that much. Granted, all those beedrill were freshly evolved from kakuna, but that was still an impressive show.

We’re out of the forest now and we’ve made camp for the night. I think Misty’s glad she doesn’t have to worry about bugs so much anymore. I can see the constant stress has worn on her.

Ash mentioned that Team Rocket had attempted to accost him but that the swarm had gotten them first. He didn’t see what happened to them afterwards. Personally, I hope they got away okay. They might be pokemon thieves but I don’t think they deserve to be eaten by beedrill.

I’m glad everything’s turned out alright. We’re almost to Pewter city now. We can stop by the Pokemon Center and get all our pokemon checked out and then head to the gym there. Ash is excited about getting his first gym badge.

I wonder what kind of place Pewter city is. I wonder what sort of pokemon train at the gym. We’ll see soon enough. I’d better wrap this up quickly and get some rest. Big day tomorrow.

I think after Ash hits the gym, I’m going to hit the library. They’ll have a computer I can use and hopefully I can start getting some answers. I guess we’ll know more tomorrow.

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It had to be rock-types. Ash would’ve had a much easier time in a water gym. Bad luck right out of the gate.

We got up bright and early to continue our journey. I’ll be the first to admit I was stumbling around more like a zombie than a trainer. Between Ash’s first gym battle and getting a chance to visit a library, I was too excited to sleep properly.

But when we came over that hill and saw Pewter city for the first time we were all a little awed I think. It’s been a rough couple of weeks. For all of us!

We met Flint, a fellow who sells Pewter City souvenirs by the road. They’re rocks. Still, I found myself oddly tempted to buy one if not for two issues. One, I lacked a home to display it in. Two, since I lack a home, I am travelling, and I can’t spare space in my bag for souvenirs. Particularly not heavy rocks.

Particularly as I don’t have any money.

Ash has some thanks to battling that samurai kid. Misty undoubtedly has some, given she’s been training for longer. I feel kind of bad because I ended up mooching off of Ash for a hot meal. I’ll pay him back as soon as I find someone to battle against. Maybe there are other trainers in town?

Getting off topic. Flint showed us to the Pewter Pokemon Center. We left our pokemon with Nurse Joy while we ate so they could be looked over and refreshed. Misty mentioned the Pewter gym was a rock-type while we were eating, and she even offered up some of her pokemon to Ash.

Ash might have been rude about it, but he was right to refuse. A victory wouldn’t mean anything when he hadn’t raised the pokemon himself. That would only be Misty’s win.
Still, even with his lineup, I think he could’ve done a lot better. I tried talking to him about it after. The fact that Butterfree was fragile but his sleep powder was top notch and about how Pikachu’s electric attacks were worse than useless. I could tell some of it sunk in, but I think I need a different method to really help him understand. I wonder if anyone’s introduced him to Elemental Rock-Paper-Scissors?

It’s a good idea, now that I think about it. I’ll make some notes for it and give it a shot tonight. He went off with Flint after the battle so I’ll have to look for him later.

Right now, I’m in the Pewter Library, trying to find any information about me. I searched the Missing Persons reports first but I didn’t find any matches. I tried searching for girls with my name too, but so far it’s just a bunch of girls who just happen to share names with me. None of them even look like me. I’m trying to find birth records now, but it’s hard to search for the minor records.

I’ve had no trouble so far in using the computer except that I keep searching for functions the computer doesn’t have. Once again I’m running into the same feeling that all the technology around me is outdated.

A porygon would help a lot with this.

Actually, that gives me an idea.

Changing tabs, I looked up the inventor of the Porygon line. Professor Akihabara, a revolutionary scientist who invented the pokeball transfer system.

I found his page on the computer and all relevant articles about him, even a few papers he personally wrote. I couldn’t find any mention of Porygon though. I tried searching the pokemon directly but the only result I got was on my pokedex.

*Porygon, the Cyber Pokemon. This pokemon was originally a computer program designed by Professor Akihabara, to aid in the maintenance of the Pokeball Transfer System.*

*Porygon2, the Cyber Bird Pokemon. The evolved form of Porygon. It evolves from Porygon by being sent through the Trading System.*

*Porygonz, the Cyber Crash Pokemon. The evolved form of Porygon2. This pokemon evolves from Porygon2 after downloading a Dubious Disc.*

Heights, weights, descriptions, dispositions, I had everything on Porygon except for one thing.

The year in which they’d been developed.

That pretty much put the final nail in the Time Travel Theory coffin. I currently existed in a world before Porygon.

Meaning I probably existed in a world before I was even born.

That still didn’t tell me exactly *when* I came from, but it was a start. I’d definitely want to visit his lab if I ever made my way to Matcha city.

I cancelled my program and left the library in an even worse mood than when I entered it. There’s no point in dwelling on such things though. I need to keep moving forward.

Right now, that meant finding my friend. Hopefully Ash is doing alright.
I checked the Pokemon Center first.


“Hm, he was here earlier after his gym battle,” She thought back. “He left with a strange man, I think they said something about the old water mill.”

“Could you tell me where to find it, please?” The strange man was probably Flint.

It was getting late when I arrived, and I wasn’t the first one there. Misty had beat me.

“You know, instead of going through this I could just lend you some pokemon!” She offered again.

“No way!” Ash was…manually turning the water mill with his legs.

“Grr, fine! See if I care!” Misty fumed at being rejected a second time.

“I’m going to win with the pokemon I trained!” Ash declared.

“He’s got a point, you know.” I smiled nervously. “If he wins with someone else’s pokemon, then he didn’t really win at all.”

“…Even so, there’s no way he could win with the pokemon he has now!” She argued.

“He can.” I disagreed. “Ash just needs to keep in mind every pokemon’s individual strength. Butterfree, for instance, though fragile it has a very strong sleep powder and presumably a powerful stun powder as well. Onix can’t fight if its sleeping, then he could switch out for Pikachu and use Quick Attack.”

“But that’s strategy, and to use strategy Ash would need a brain.” She huffed.

While we were distracted by our debate, Ash and Pikachu had succeeded in whatever their aim was.

Presumably succeeded at any rate. I’m not sure they meant to blow up the water mill.

We all spent a restless night in the Pokemon Center, but bright early the next day we were once again stepping inside the Pewter City Gym.

“So, you’ve come for a rematch.” Brock stood on his side of the battlefield. “For your sake, I hope you’ve got some new pokemon.”

“Nope!” Ash proudly declared. “But we’re gonna win anyway!”

I wasn’t one for cheering loudly, but I did try to show my support. Hopefully he’d been listening when Misty and I talked by the water mill.

Hopefully this fight would go better.

“Geodude, center stage!” Brock’s first pokemon was called out. It was hard to judge with rock-type pokemon, but it looked very well cared for. His onix had been similarly impressive.

“Right, I choose you, Butterfree!” I leaned forward. Come on, Ash!

“Butterfree, keep out of its reach and use Sleep Powder!” Yes, he was using strategy! Okay, it was my strategy, not his, but we all have to start somewhere!
“Geodude, don’t breathe it in!” Brock warned. There was little his pokemon could do though. Rock pokemon could survive in places devoid of oxygen, but not for long without going into hibernation.

Geodude managed to hold its breath for a while, but Butterfree just kept producing more and more powder. Geodude started wavering back and forth as it was forced to inhale. Soon after, it collapsed to the ground.

“Good, now use Tackle!” I clenched my fists, resisting the urge to shout a correction. This was Ash’s battle. He had to win or lose on his own merits.

Butterfree rocked Geodude hard enough to fling him into the air. Another Tackle sent him slamming into the ground.

Geodude woke up, but Ash was ready.

“Sleep Powder again!” Butterfree did a quick fly-by. Geodude didn’t get a chance to hold its breath this time. “Now Tackle!”

“He’s doing it! He’s doing it!” I grinned. Butterfree knocked Geodude straight out of the battlefield.

“Geodude, return!” We all looked at Brock. Even though he’d lost, he was smiling. “You’re using your head more today, good. Let’s see if that strategy can work with my Onix!”

“Butterfree, Sleep Powder!” What Ash forgot, and what I hadn’t fully considered, was that all that Sleep Powder had to come from somewhere. Namely, Butterfree’s energy reserves. It was flying much slower this time as it struggled to produce an even larger quantity of Sleep Powder.

“Onix, Tackle attack!” And Onix’s reach was a lot longer than Geodude’s.

My vision was filled with nightmares. In an instant I saw Butterfree smashed into the ground, wings not so much torn as disintegrated beneath the force of Onix’s blow.

Guess that’s my inner pessimist. Thankfully reality was a little kinder. Onix’s blow was powerful and Butterfree suffered for it, but it wasn’t anywhere near fatal.

“Oh no! Butterfree, return!” Ash nearly fumbled his pokeball. He recovered quickly once Butterfree was safely inside. “You did a great job, we’re gonna win this thanks to you.”

“Pikachu, it’s up to us now!” Pikachu nodded as seriously as I’d ever seen him.

“He’s sending the electric-type against Onix again?” I blinked. A platoon of kids had joined Misty and me in the spectator’s box.

“He didn’t learn anything. Big bro’s Onix is gonna crush him.” The oldest looking boy scoffed.

“Pikachu, let’s show them how much we’ve improved!” Ash’s cocky grin seemed undeterred. “Thundershock!”

It was like night and day. Pikachu positively filled the air with lightning. And it was lightning Onix could feel. I couldn’t tell how much damage it was doing, but it was already miles above what he’d been capable of yesterday.

Pikachu might have been a little overenthusiastic actually. He clearly hadn’t had time to master his
aim. Lightning flashed so close to the spectator’s box that I was blinking away stars.

“Onix, use your Bind attack!” Brock cried, sounding much less sure of himself.

“Pikachu, use Thundershock again!” I covered my eyes this time, but the light seeped in between my fingers.

“Pikaa!” We gasped as we saw Onix wrapped its tail around Pikachu. This was the same move that had put Pikachu down yesterday.

And super-charged or not, Pikachu was a mouse up against an avalanche.

“Thundershock and get out of there!” Ash cried.

“CHUUU!” I winced. My hair was standing on end from the force of that attack. There was smoke in the air.

And as it turned out, the Pewter Gym had an up-to-date sprinkler system.

Onix let Pikachu loose in its shock. It flinched away from the water, but it was falling everywhere and there was nothing Onix could take shelter under unless it used Dig.

“No!” The kids bolted for the stairs, barreling towards Ash. Ash had lifted his arm to call for one last attack. Pikachu’s super-charge and all that water? Even Onix would be seeing stars.

But the kids got there first.

“Hey, what the—?” Ash was almost buried under no less than nine children between the ages of three and nine. It was amazing he even managed to remain standing.

“What are you kids doing?” Brock stammered. “This is an official match, you can’t interfere like this!”

They really couldn’t. The rules were very strict on their non-interference clauses. The penalties for breaking them started with dissolving the gym itself, followed by personal penalties for everyone involved. It was the sort of thing that could wreck a gym.

“But Brock, you love your pokemon! Onix will get hurt if it continues!” The oldest argued, not letting go of Ash’s arm.

“This is a match, and sometimes pokemon get hurt in matches.” Brock frowned. “Even mine.”

“Then I’ll quit for today.” I don’t think any of us expected to hear that from Ash’s mouth.

“Ash, are you crazy? One more attack and you’d win!” Misty was almost ready to pull her own hair out.

“Brock let Pikachu go before he could be badly hurt. So today I’ll do the same for him.” Ash bowed his head. “But only because the sprinklers broke so it wasn’t fair. Next time, we’ll win for sure!”


“I can’t believe you actually did that.” Misty was still stunned when we left the Pokemon Center. “You just gave up?”
“Just until tomorrow. We had him on the ropes, didn’t we, Pikachu?” Ash beamed, completely unfazed. “Next time we’re going to really let him have it!”

“Pika!” Pikachu nodded, cuddling further into Ash’s chest.

“Ash! Hey, Ash!” We all turned around to see Brock running up to us. “I tried to catch you at the Pokemon Center but you’d already left. You forgot something.”

“I did?” Ash patted himself down, coming up with his wallet and pokedex. “I didn’t think I dropped something.”

“No, you forgot this.” Brock held out a Boulder badge.


“But you would’ve won, and so you beat me at battling and at being kind to all pokemon.” Brock admitted bashfully. His expression became conflicted before he continued. “The truth is, I get more enjoyment from raising pokemon than I do from battling them. My dream is to become a great Pokemon Breeder.”

“But I could never leave Pewter City because I had to take care of my brothers and sisters.” He sighed. “That’s why I want you to accept this badge, keep going on your pokemon journey and make your dream come true, since I can’t fulfill mine.”

“Really?” He waited for Brock to nod. “Then, I’ll make sure to always be worthy of this badge!”

“Your first gym badge.” Pride warmed my chest. “How does it feel?”

“It feels great!” Ash whooped. “I’m one step closer to becoming a Pokemon Master!”

“Well, I hope you remember me on your journey.” Brock’s shoulders slumped. It was easy to see how much he longed to go with us.

“Brock, you should go.” From behind Brock came Flint. He slowly peeled off his fake beard and hat, revealing a startlingly familiar face.

“Dad.” Brock’s eyes hardened.

“I’m sorry, son, for all the trouble I caused you.” Flint bowed.

“Wait, you’re the pathetic father who left and never came back?” Ash gaped.

I have a feeling I may have missed something when I went to the library.

“I left on a pokemon journey to become a great trainer, but I didn’t have what it takes.” Flint, if that was even his real name, confessed. “Too embarrassed to return to my family in defeat, I lingered outside town. But it’s high time I take responsibility for my actions and be the father I’m supposed to be.”

“Brock, you’ve put off your own desires long enough. It’s time for you to go on your own journey.” He declared.

“First, I’ve got a few things I’d like to say to you.” My heart jumped at his tone. Cautiously, I edged back. I didn’t know what was going to be said but I knew it wouldn’t be pretty.

Brock fired off a fast-paced list of his siblings’ likes, dislikes, health issues, school problems,
hobbies, habits, friends, favorite cartoons, it was a very detailed dossier. I couldn’t keep more than one or two names straight, and poor Flint was scribbling it all down on some sticky notes as fast as he could.

“Hey Ash?” Brock paused in his debriefing to address us.

“Uh, yeah?” Ash said cautiously.

“What do you think of me traveling with you guys? I’ve just got to run home and grab a few things.” He scratched the back of his neck.

“Sure! The more the merrier, right guys?” Ash looked at us.

“Sounds like fun.” I agreed.

“Great! I’ll be right back!” Brock grabbed his father by the shoulder and began dragging him away, resuming the thorough debrief. From the way his voice raised just before they were out of earshot, I had a feeling Brock had started saying things not meant for children’s ears.

“Alright, I’m out and about for the first time ever!” Brock happily led the way out of the city. We could’ve stayed another night at the Pokemon Center, but the day wasn’t done yet and the adventure continued. “Oh!” He looked at Misty and me with a sheepish expression.

“Sorry, I never got your names.” He laughed.

“I’m Misty, and this wallflower is Cal.” I hunched in on myself a little at her description. Am I really that bad?

“Ash, Misty, and Cal, got it!” Brock assured us. Considering he kept his nine siblings straight I had no doubt.

Two days later we were coming up to the next big landmark on our journey. Mt. Moon. There wasn’t much information in my pokedex about it except that clefairy and clefable were sometimes found here. I had more than one daydream about catching one. They were cute, friendly, absurdly strong with some training. They even had mysterious origins, like me! We had so much in common!

“Mt. Moon,” Misty sighed. “Doesn’t a name like that sound so romantic?”

“I suppose,” I shrugged. My shoulders were sore from carrying my backpack all day.

“They say a meteor landed there during prehistoric times.” Brock informed us.

“That sounds pretty cool.” Ash perked up. “Think maybe we’ll see it?”

“I dunno.” Brock chuckled, resettling his bag. “I know it’s called the Moonstone but I don’t know anything else about it.”

“Moonstone?” I repeated. “Oh, like what fairy types use to evolve?” Those did come from meteors, didn’t they?

“Fairy types?” Ash looked over in interest.
Before I could begin to explain, as well as come up for an explanation for my explanation, a scream broke out ahead of us.

“What was that?” Ash jumped. A second later we were chasing after him, towards the source of the scream. As we got closer I could pick out the sounds of zubats screeching.

They were swarming in broad daylight, darting at a man huddled beneath them.

“Whoa,” Ash pulled out his pokedex.

“Zubat: Blind pokemon with supersonic powers. They live in dark caves and prefer to only come out at night.” Dexter reported.

“Not these zubats.” Ash muttered.

“This isn’t any time for joking, Ash!” Misty scolded him. “That guy needs our help!”

“Right! Pikachu,” Ash’s face hardened. “Use your Thundershock attack!”

“Pii-kaa-CHUU!” I flinched against the bright light. I really needed those sunglasses now.

Most of the zubat got away unhurt, flying back to their cave. I noticed Brock throwing a pokeball at a particularly unlucky zubat that had gotten stunned. He looked pretty pleased when the pokeball set properly.

“Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you!” The man we’d saved whirled on Ash and grabbed him in a tight squeeze. “That was the best rescue I’ve ever had! Two thumbs up! Way, way up!”

Pikachu was looking a little squished. I took two big steps back just before the flash.

“They say a man’s best friend is pokemon, and seeing you two I believe it!” He recovered quickly, wiping off his glasses with a grin. “Oh, a bond of friendship I never thought I’d see, when the zubat began attacking me! And then two heroes did arrive, thanks to whom I am alive!”

“Is he…rhyming?” I muttered to Misty.

“I think so.” She looked a little weirded out by it before putting on a brave face.

“So, why were those zubat attacking you, mister?” Ash asked once it seemed the stranger’s bout of poetic gratitude had ended.

“Don’t call me Mister!” He turned on us with a glare. “I am Seymour the Scientist! Knowledge, Research, I am Seymour the Scientist!”

“Okay, Seymour the Scientist, we get it.” Ash huffed. “So why were those zubat attacking you?”

“Well, you see,” He seemed to fumble for what to say. “Perhaps it would be better to show you. Right this way!” He turned on a heel and began walking into the cave the zubat had fled into.

“And now a cave.” I sighed, unfortunately stuck following everyone else inside.

The first few meters were dark and cool, as expected of a cave. Beyond that though there were lights strung up on both sides, eye watering in their intensity. The kind of lights you’d expect to see in construction zones.

“Yeesh, what are all of these for?” Ash grumbled, shading his eyes.
“That’s just the thing, I don’t know!” Seymour groaned. “But the pokemon that live here need the dark and these lights are confusing them. The paras are planting their mushrooms in the wrong season, the sandshrew are all drying out, the zubat are wandering in and out at all hours of the day! It’s madness I tell you, madness! And I intend to get to the bottom of this vicious scheme and find those responsible!”

“They’re after the Moonstone: I just know it.” He said grimly.


“Yes, the Moonstone.” Seymour began to smile. “The Moonstone is an awesome boulder, a million years old or even older! Deep in the caves it resides though no one has found the resting place, of this amazing rock from outer space! We’ve studied its fragments for hundreds of hours, and discovered it increases a pokemon’s power! That’s why these dastardly villains are here, to steal the Moonstone, or so I fear.”

“Wow, more poetry. How does he come up with this stuff?” Misty muttered in my ear. I could only shrug back in answer. I was too busy listening to his theories.

There were many theories on the Origin of Pokemon. What made humans different from them? What caused their evolutions? None, as far as I knew, had ever been confirmed.

Seymour’s theory was that they came to Earth from outer space and the Moonstone was actually some kind of spaceship.

“That’s certainly an original theory.” Misty grimaced. “What do you think, Cal?”

“Oh, well,” Why did she have to bring me into this? Seymour’s eyes were actually sparkling. On the one hand, I didn’t believe the Moonstone was a spaceship, although pokemon from space weren’t out of the question.

On the other hand… I didn’t want to say that and hurt his feelings.

“There’s not enough data to say one way or the other if all pokemon come from outer space or not.” I began, not looking directly at anyone. The walls of this cave sure were fascinating. Yep. “I do believe that some pokemon may have extraterrestrial origins, but pokemon as a whole are too diverse to all share the same ancestor. So while some may have come to earth, I believe that others evolved naturally here. Clefairy, for instance, are most closely associated with the Moonstone and meteor showers, and to my knowledge there are no genetic links between them and any other pokemon on Earth. Therefore, it is possible that the Clefairy evolutionary line originated in outer space.”

“Oh, wow!” His eyes twinkled. “You talk like a fellow scientist and you believe my theory! You’ve even proposed some interesting points I hadn’t considered!”

“Oh, what a glorious day to make a friend, a fellow scientist who studies the beginning, middle, and end! From the stars and from our home, we’ll someday study their natural biome!” He laughed.

“Yes, yes!” I held up my hands to forestall anymore rhyming. “Perhaps we ought to get a move on? Find the people who strung up these lights?”

“Clefairy! Clefairy! Clefairy!” We all looked up to see a Clefairy happily skipping through the cave, holding a glittering stone in hand. It pranced by us, still happily singing to itself.
“Hey, a Clefairy!” Ash grinned, pulling out his pokedex.

“Clefairy: This impish pokemon is friendly and peaceful. It is believed to reside in Mt. Moon, although few have ever been seen by humans.” Dexter reported.

“And it’s holding a Moonstone, huh.” I smiled, watching as it continued on its way.

“I’m gonna catch it!” Ash declared, already pulling a pokeball from his belt. Butterfree? Pidgeotto?

“Wait!” Seymour grabbed his hand before Ash could release his pokemon. “Don’t catch it!” He begged.

“Huh, but,” Ash looked conflicted, looking between Seymour and the rapidly disappearing Clefairy.

“Oh, alright.” He groaned, shrinking the pokeball back down.

“Maybe next time, Ash.” I offered to reassure him.

“CLEFAIRY!” We all jumped.

“Oh no, something happened to the Clefairy!” Brock gasped. We took off running in the same direction it had gone.

It hadn’t gotten very far. A few feet around the bend the Clefairy was huddled up against the cave wall. Overhead loomed the Team Rocket Meowth.

“What are you twerps doing here?” The Meowth gaped at us.

“Looking for troublemakers like you!” Ash growled. “And it looks like we found some!”

“What, did somebody mention trouble?” A feminine voice purred.

“Oh, great,” I scowled.

“To protect the world from devastation,”

“To unite all peoples within our nation,”

“To denounce the evils of truth and love,”

“To extend our reach to the stars above,”

“Jessie!”

“James!”

“Team Rocket, blasting off at the speed of light!”

“Surrender now or prepare to fight!”

“Meowth, that’s right!”

“Are they gonna do that every time we run into them?” I looked around.

“You’d think they’d get tired of saying the same thing all the time.” Ash snorted.
“You twerps are just jealous because we won’t let you join us.” Jessie scoffed.

“I’d join you when Moltres freezes!” I shot at them, grabbing Spearow’s pokeball. White hot rage burned inside me. The very idea of joining them made me sick!

“Misty, keep an eye on Seymour and Clefairy. Run when you get the chance.” Ash whispered too low for Team Rocket to hear. That was good. I’d be proud of him thinking ahead later. Right now, I just tossed my pokeball with Brock and Ash.

Ash chose Butterfree. Brock chose his new Zubat.

“Oh yeah, congrats on the capture earlier, Brock.” I blinked. I’d actually forgotten about that.

“What? Aw man, I should’ve caught one.” Ash slumped.

“Koffing, use Smog attack!” James launched his pokemon into battle.

“Butterfree, use Whirlwind!” Ash ordered.

“Zubat, Double Team!” Both pokemon began beating their wings, sending the smoke back to Team Rocket.

“Spearow, use Peck on Ekans!” I didn’t want to forget the snake. Spearow didn’t waste any time, launching at Ekans before the snake pokemon could attack Butterfree. Unfortunately, Koffing made it through to attack Zubat.

“Don’t let up!” Ash growled, twisting his hat backwards. “Butterfree, use Whirlwind and give it all you got! Blow them straight out of the cave!”

“FREE—EEE!” I watched as Team Rocket, pokemon and all, were blown back until they were out of sight. I don’t know if they made it all the way out of the cave, but they were definitely out of the fight.

“Good job, Spearow.” I offered my hand as a perch. His talons scratched me a little, but it didn’t feel like he was doing it on purpose. I should probably invest in some good gloves or gauntlets.

“Hmm, I kinda feel like something was missing there.” Ash frowned, putting his hands on his hips.

“Missing?” I cocked a brow at him.

He took a moment to think about it. All of a sudden his face went pale and he frantically looked all around the section we were in.

“Cal, did you see where Meowth went?” He asked me.

Seymour, Misty, and the Clefairy were all gone, taking their moment to get out of sight.

Meowth was gone too.

“We’d better find them, fast.” Brock hissed.

“Spearow, return.” I held up his pokeball and started running with the others. Team Rocket had been sent flying that way so hopefully Misty and the others had run this way instead.

We emerged through a different entrance. A stream was flowing nearby and there was a natural land bridge over it. Given Misty’s a water pokemon trainer, we decided to head in that direction.
“Misty! Are you alright?” Ash called as we came into view. Everyone looked okay. Wet, but fine.

“Of course we are!” Misty sniffed, sticking her chest out. “You really think that *Meowth* was any kind of challenge against *my* water pokemon?”

“I’m glad to see you’re alright.” I sighed with relief. Alright and proud, it seemed, after a successful battle.

“Man, what a wild ride.” Brock chuckled, running a hand through his hair. “I don’t know about you guys, but I could sure use a break. How about we stop and eat for a bit before we figure out what to do next?”

“Sure, I could eat!” Ash grinned from ear to ear.

Oh yeah, he could eat. And eat. And eat.

The lunch was thankfully peaceful. We talked a bit, explained to Brock who Team Rocket was and our previous encounters with them. Brock also unveiled his own brand of pokefood, which he’d spent the last couple days with us refining for each individualpokemon’s tastes. We all let our pokemon out to enjoy the meal. Seymour and Ash even decided to both give pokefood a try. Seymour seemed to like it. And it turned out there was something Ash wouldn’t eat after all when he spat his out.

“Ugh, geez,” Misty pulled a disgusted face at Ash’s manners.

“Maybe leave the pokemon food to the pokemon, huh guys?” I laughed nervously.

“Yeah,” Ash grimaced, reaching for his water bottle. He paused a moment to stare at Pikachu and the clefairy perched on the boulder behind us, happily chattering away to each other.

“Kinda makes you wish you could understand them, huh?” He smirked at me.

“Yeah,” A funny feeling washed over me. Something…sad and maybe a little lonely. Like I missed something?

I wish I could better explain it. I wish I could better understand it.

Well, after we’d all eaten and returned our pokemon, the clefairy stood and began climbing the mountain again. It stopped before it got too far, looking back and calling to us. Pikachu raced up after it and looked over its shoulder expectantly at us.

“I think they want us to follow them.” Ash grabbed his bag and climbed to his feet.

So we started following them. And let me tell you, climbing a mountain is *Hell* on your legs. It was later than we thought and grew dark as we kept on climbing. My thighs were basically screaming at me by the time we found another cave entrance.

“Clefairy led us inside to a wonderous sight.

“Whoa,” We all gasped, *oohing* and *awing* at the absolutely massive boulder in the center of the chamber. Open to the sky above was the core of the Moonstone. Clefairy skipped inside and gently laid its rock against the base of the Moonstone, where it and all the others began to shine around it.

From every nook and cranny in the cave poured cleffa, clefairy, and clefable.
“Just look at them all!” We all laughed, watching them form a ring around the Moonstone and begin to dance.

“They’re…worshipping it.” I breathed. The very air felt charged with peace and wonder. I was sure I’d never felt anything like it before.

“Well, if it’s worth worshipping then it’s worth stealing.” We all whirled around to see Team Rocket standing behind us.

“Ekans! Koffing!” We tensed, prepared for another battle.

Which would be better? Spearow again? Or Charmander?

Charmander, I decided. She deserved a chance to knock Team Rocket around today.

“Charmander!” “Pikachu!” “Onyx!”

Pikachu and Onyx were ready for battle. I sucked in a breath to order Charmander to fight, but…

The clefairy were behind me. They were scared and nervous.

Protecting them was more important than fighting Team Rocket. I’d only step in if it looked like the boys were having trouble.

“Charmander, we’ve got to protect the clefairy and the Moonstone.” I told my pokemon.

“Char!” She nodded seriously.

“Don’t worry,” I smiled down at the pokemon around me. “We’re not gonna let Team Rocket steal the Moonstone. Everything’s going to be okay.” One little cleffa started to wipe away tears as I reassured them.

“Koffing, Smoke Screen attack!” James sent his pokemon out first.

“Oh no,” Ash coughed, covering his mouth. “Pidgeotto, I choose you! Whirlwind this gas away!”

I didn’t let myself be distracted. I held my breath and wrapped one hand around Charmander’s claw, leading us backwards until we had our backs to the Moonstone while we waited for Pidgeotto to clear the air.

The ground beneath us gave way.

“AAAAAHHH!” I screamed. I barely managed to keep hold of Charmander and her pokeball. I hugged her against my body as we fell down.

We were lucky not to be hurt. It would’ve been so easy to be crushed by the Moonstone when we landed. As it was, the landing was in no way soft. Before I could get my bearings the ground lurched again, forward this time, and we began sliding.

Someone had set up a sled beneath the Moonstone and carved a new tunnel out of the mountain. This one had a downward slope.

“Oh man, oh man, oh man!” I shakily climbed to my feet. “Charmander, return!” She wasn’t much use in stopping this thing and if she fell off there was a good chance I’d loose track of her. That just sounded like a bad idea all around with Pokemon Thieves on the loose.
“Hey, we picked up a passenger!” Meowth’s shocked voice came from above. Team Rocket landed on top of the Moonstone and all around me.

“No stowaways!” James landed on my side. He pulled back a leg to kick me off.

“Not happening!” I launched myself at him first. He clearly wasn’t expecting that. He flinched away from my hands, reaching for his face. Everyone always wanted to protect the face.

We wrestled on that moving platform, even as we left the cave. Jessie was on the wrong side to help her partner and the pokemon would fall off if they tried to help.

I didn’t have a plan beyond make James fall and keep him from pushing me off. Actually, that probably was the sum total of my plan. Who knows what I would’ve done if Onyx hadn’t tunneled out of the ground ahead of us.

I was knocked free of James. My side was all one big bruise. I didn’t give myself time to recover, I had to get up, keep my guard up.

“Charmander, I choose you!” We’d stopped, so now it was time to battle. With Onyx as back up I was feeling pretty confident too. And I knew the others had to be coming up behind us.

“Char char!” She looked angrier than ever before, smoke pouring from between her fangs.

“Use Flamethrower and don’t hold back!” I pointed at Ekans first, knowing the snake was quick to burrow underground for sneak attacks.

“Cal! Are you okay?” I heard Ash yelling. Back up the mountain I saw the others running towards us at full speed. Seymour and the clefairy weren’t with them.

Were the clefairy okay? Had some of them fallen with me? Arceus, I prayed none of them had been crushed by the rocks.

“CHAAARRR!” Charmander roared, a brilliant plume of flame striking Ekans head on.

“Good going, get ready for Scratch!” I encouraged her.

“Onyx, take them out!” Brock was panting as he reached us.

“Koffing, Counter!” James screeched, sounding a little panicked. His face was bleeding where I’d managed to scratch him.

Koffing had a more powerful Counter than I would’ve expected. It actually threw Onyx for a loop and stunned him. It was a pyrrhic victory though, and Ash and I were more than willing to pick up the slack.

“Cle-faaaiirrryy!” The battle paused. Behind me, from the tunnel Onyx had dug, poured all the clef, clefairy, and clefable from the cave. Each of them took up positions, almost a grid pattern as they stared down Team Rocket.

They lifted their hands and began to sway.


“This is the Metronome attack,” Seymour popped his head up from the hole, also swaying side to side in time with the clefairy’s hands. “I didn’t know they could use Metronome.”
“It’s a common fairy type attack.” I murmured. I wasn’t sure if I’d said it loud enough to be heard. There was a tension in the air, like just before a storm. It was building and building and we were swaying and swaying.

And then…explosion.

I could focus again. And the first thing I did was check on Team Rocket. They’d been sent blasting off. There was a crater where they, and the Moonstone had been.

“It shattered!” I gasped, stricken. Sparkling pieces were still raining from the sky.

The clefairy didn’t seem too worried though. In fact they sounded…happy? They began running under the falling shards. Wherever a shard touched them, they evolved. Clefairy into clefable. The clefable welcomed their new brothers and sisters.

“Amazing.” Seymour pulled himself free. “What an astounding sight!”

“Yeah,” My eyes were a little watery. My heart rate had slowed down during the Metronome attack. I didn’t even feel the adrenaline crash I expected. We all just stood and watched the clefairy dance under the moonlight until all the Moonstones had fallen back to earth.

One fell near my feet. I knelt down and tenderly picked up the shard. The sides were a little sharp and it glowed under the moonlight. Glowed and sparkled like the night sky. A little cleffa waddled over as I continued to stare at it.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Did you want this?” I held it out to it, thinking the little cleffa wanted to evolve too. It smiled and shook its head, gently reaching out and closing my hand around the shard.

“Oh?” I cocked my head curiously. “Is it okay for me to keep it?” It nodded.

That could be useful. I thanked the cleffa politely and tucked the shard safely into my pocket.

“I’m glad things turned out okay,” Brock folded his arms.

“Yeah, me too.” Ash laughed, letting Pikachu climb onto his shoulders. The clefairy all began picking up shards and carrying them back up to the cave, so we stooped down to help.

“I’ve made a decision!” Seymour announced once all the shards had been piled up. “I’m going to stay here and live with the clefairy!”

“Huh?” We all blinked at him.

“Someday, I just know, the clefairy will return to the stars! And I intend to be with them when they do! First to the moon, then mars, then off to see the distant stars!” He declared.

“Heh, be sure to send us a postcard when you get there.” Brock scratched his head.

I didn’t get it but if that was what Seymour wanted to do with his life who was I to stop him?

“Cleffa, Clef!” The same cleffa from before tugged on my pants leg.

“Yeah?” I knelt down, smiling gently. Maybe they wanted the Moonstone shard back now?

The cleffa jumped up into my arms and made itself comfortable there. Bemused, I stood back up.

“Looks like you made a friend, Cal!” Misty smirked at me.
“Uh, you think?” I felt myself blushing. I looked down at the cleffa curled up in my hands. “What do you say, Cleffa? Want to come with me?”

“Cleffa!” She smiled happily.

She went into the pokeball easily. And just like that, I’d made another friend.
GUUUUUYYYSSSSS! I forgot to save ch 23 before going to bed and my computer reset in the middle of the night! And the autorecover? IT ONLY SAVED THE FIRST THOUSAND WORDS!!! I have to rewrite two thousand words! AND I DON”T WAAAAAAANNTTT TOOOOO~~!! WHYYYYYYYY~~!! Why do bad things happen to good people?

Well, here's a chapter anyway. Good thing I've got so much buffer. I tried all day yesterday to rewrite those words but every time I opened Word I'd just stare at the empty space where my beautiful chapter used to be and just....Click back out. Immediately. No conscious thought, just go look at tumblr or watch some pokemon instead. All the while, the phantom of my lost two thousand words hovered overhead, judging me.

Which makes me wonder if Cal's pokedex has an autosave function and, if so, how good it is. How would she react if she LOST TWO THOUSAND WORDS!?!?!?

I woke up a little later than usual. I’d stayed up late to write down everything that had happened on Mt. Moon. Brock and Misty looked like they’d already been awake for a while. Breakfast smelled good. Ash was just barely climbing out of his sleeping bag beside me.

“About time you two got up!” Brock teased us. “You were just about to miss breakfast!”

“Wha? Miss breakfast?” Ash yelped, struggling to tear himself free of his sleeping bag.

“Good morning,” I yawned, not in as much of a hurry as Ash. He acted like every meal would be his last. It was amazing he hadn’t eaten all of our supplies yet.

I noticed Misty studying the map as I walked over to some bushes. After I’d finished and washed up a little I came back to find her still sitting in the same spot, frowning at some point on the map.

“Misty, is something wrong?” I knelt down beside her. As far as I could tell we were on course for Cerulean city, the next stop on Ash’s journey. We’d probably get there around lunchtime if I was judging the distances right.

“Huh? Uh, no! No, nothing’s wrong!” Misty pasted a false smile, folding up the map and stuffing it away in her bag. “Is breakfast ready? We’d better grab something before Ash eats it all!”

“Uh, okay?” I blinked.

Okay, there was definitely something wrong. What it could be though, I had no idea. Maybe Misty had been here before? Lots of ocean, good for water pokemon. I’d bet anything the Cerulean gym is a water type gym.

“We’re going to reach Cerulean city today, I can feel it!” Ash proclaimed around a mouthful of food.
“Are you sure you wanna go there?” Misty nearly choked on her food. “I mean, there are better places.”

“Cerulean city is the nearest town with a gym, right?” Ash checked. Brock and I both nodded. “Then yep, I’m sure.”

“Urrhh,” She buried her face in her food. I wanted to ask if something was wrong but I’d already tried that and she’d refused. I doubted she’d be more open with other people around.

I wanted to cheer her up somehow. I thought about it the whole time we were breaking up camp. The easiest way to cheer Misty up was probably by using water pokemon. I didn’t have any and I hadn’t seen any in this area yet, so that left drawing her into a conversation about them.

Shouldn’t be that hard. Misty loves water pokemon.

“Uh, Misty?” I made my move as we started walking. Ash and Brock walked together ahead of us, leaving us girls to fall behind.

“Hm?” She still seemed a little distracted.

“I’ve been meaning to ask,” I gulped. “Uh, what kind of water pokemon do you have?”

“You want to know about my water pokemon?” Her eyes sparkled. It was a full one-eighty from her earlier attitude.

“Yes?” I answered, unsure what I’d gotten myself into.

“Well, first, there’s Starmie! It’s a beautiful violet color with a gold formation on the front with its core jewel. The jewel itself can glow seven different colors!” She began listing everything she knew about Starmie. Appearance, natural habitat, food sources, natural predators, myths and legends, it’s previous incarnation as staryu, which she also had one of. They evolved using Water Stones.

Like the Moonstone but a little more mainstream, if you’ll pardon the pun.

She finished talking about Starmie and segued neatly into talking about Staryu. And then her Goldeen. All three she’d personally caught and raised. But of course there were so many water pokemon that she hoped to meet on her journey.

“Beauty, grace, elegance, is there anything that embodies these traits more than water pokemon?” She sighed dreamily.

“Yeah, peace and quiet.” Ash snorted over his shoulder. “You’ve been going on for over an hour, Misty! Give it a rest.”

“Hmph!” Misty turned her nose up at him. “I’ll have you know that Cal asked and since she is aiming to be a Pokemon Professor, these are the kinds of things she needs to know!”

“A Professor?” Brock slowed down so he was walking on my right side. “That’s what you’re aiming for, Cal?”

“Um, yeah.” I nodded shyly.

“That’s pretty impressive.” He smiled warmly. “And hey, if you ever need any studying snacks, you know who to call.”
“Huh, snacks?” If Ash had pokemon ears they would’ve perked up.

“Geez, are you ever not hungry?” Misty huffed.

It looked like I’d managed to distract her. I felt well and truly accomplished.

Ash was about to retort with something but he saw something up ahead and decided to jog towards it instead. We jogged after him and found him scowling at a road sign.

“This way to Cerulean city.” Brock read. There was something scribbled in the lower corner. Graffiti? It was what Ash was scowling at. I leaned in for a closer look.

*Gary was here! Ash is a loser!*

It took me a moment to place the name. Gary was that arrogant boy with the cheerleading squad from the day I’d first met Ash.

“That…That…!” Ash fumed.

“Ah well, if you want to avoid that jerk we can always go this way instead.” Misty suggested, pointing down the other way. “This road leads to Vermillion city, ocean water with lots of cool water pokemon, lots of good stores, and there’s this park on top of a hill with the most gorgeous view of the sunset! Let’s go!”

“I’ll show him! I’m no loser!” Ash ignored her, already beginning the march down the road to Cerulean city.

My distraction hadn’t lasted very long.

Misty only got more and more anxious the closer we got. She began dragging her feet. I slowed my pace to match hers and pretty soon the guys had left us behind. Ash was so focused on catching up to Gary I doubt he noticed. Brock looked our way but I waved him ahead of us. Hopefully we could catch up at the Pokemon Center later.

“Misty, are you okay?” I placed my hand on her shoulder. She slumped beneath the gentle pressure.

“C’mon,” She groaned, leading me down a different road than the boys had taken. “I’ll show you why I didn’t want to come back here.”

We walked in silence. Misty knew her way around pretty well. We took side roads, short cuts, she even recognized a few people and waved to them. Before long we came to the Cerulean Gym. The building was much larger and more ornamental than the Pewter Gym had been. A huge seel acted as the Gym mascot.

I was expecting a stadium inside. Instead there was a giant indoor pool with high dives and a roaring crowd. Misty waved to the guy manning the ticket booth and we were both ushered in without paying. Misty led me up to a private box.

“Now introducing the Cerulean City’s Three Sensational Sisters!” The intercom blared. A spotlight illuminated one of the high dives where three young women waved to the crowd.

Synchronized swimming is…It was…
“Well, go ahead and say it.” Misty crossed her arms beside me.

“I’m…not sure what to say.” I admitted. “It…looks pretty, I guess? I can’t say I really see the appeal.”

She tensed up, shoulders nearly coming up to her ears in shock. She looked like I’d just declared Charmander as the world’s greatest swimmer. Did I say the wrong thing? Offend her?

“You don’t…You’re not going totally gaga over Daisy, Lily, and Violet?” Her jaw dropped.

“Um, is that their names?” I winced.

“Is that their…? They’re my sisters!” She cried.

“Oooh, I’m sorry!” This was even worse than I’d imagined. “I just…I’m not really big on the whole swimming thing! I can tell it takes a lot of hard work and practice and dedication! It’s just —!” I was cut off as she wrapped her arms around me.

“Finally! Someone who doesn’t go insane when they see my sisters in swimsuits!” She was practically crying tears of joy. “Cal, you have no idea how long I’ve waited for this day! To meet someone else who sees what a waste of time synchronized swimming is!”

“I’m glad you’re happy!” My voice was a little muffled with my head buried in her shoulder. It was a little hard to breathe too.

Misty explained that she was the youngest of the Waterflowers, the family that owned the gym. She and all her sisters were licensed Gym Trainers, but Misty had decided to leave on a pokemon journey to become a water pokemon master, rather than continue living in her sisters’ shadows. She’d sworn not to come back until she’d made that dream a reality.

“They’re supposed to be serious trainers, but just look at them down there!” She grunted. They were swimming in a circle, moving apart and together again in perfect harmony. “Ugh, and I hate to admit it but Ash could beat them with both hands tied behind his back!”

“Really?” I’m not afraid to admit I was a bit skeptical. Ash was uniquely talented, but he was still a very new trainer who made rookie mistakes. Considering he had Pikachu, who was already incredibly powerful for an electric type, I had no doubt he could win in a water style Gym, but so easily? And for Misty to be admitting that?

“Well, I’m not going to stand for it!” Misty said, standing. “I’ll battle him myself!”

“Uh, wha?” I had to scramble to follow after her. “Misty, wait up!”

Misty’s sisters really didn’t take their Gym duties seriously. We caught them just as they were trying to give Ash an unearned Cascade badge. Unlike Misty, who vaulted the stands in a dramatic fashion, I chose to use the stairs and reached the bottom just as Misty delivered her challenge.

Ash’s first pick, obviously, was Pikachu.

An electric type, especially one as strong as Pikachu, could sweep through most water pokemon with ease.

Unfortunately for Ash, Pikachu had bonded with Misty. Enough so that he didn’t want to fight her. It was…
Well, Pikachu was a rookie too, when you stopped to think about it. Maybe I should work with Ash in making sure our pokemon know that an official match is no time to be sentimental. Ash was likely to come across some friends during tournaments and he’d never win if his pokemon forfeit every time.

I wasn’t expecting him to choose Butterfree next. I didn’t expect Butterfree to be so effective either. Too bad the powder was so easily washed off.

I was cheering Ash on. I’d spent the whole day trying to cheer Misty up and here I was rooting for Ash. Maybe I could’ve excused it as knowing Ash longer but I’d met them barely an hour apart.

Butterfree was knocked into the water. Bug types didn’t swim well so it was a good thing Ash returned him so quickly. But that left him with just one more pokemon. One more loss and it was all over.

For today at least.

“Pidgeotto, I choose you! Use Whirlwind!” Ash looked fierce, confident. Like losing wasn’t even conceivable.

Pidgeotto beat Staryu and Starmie. That left Ash and Misty even again with one pokemon each. Misty looked grim as she called out her Goldeen.

How the battle could’ve ended, what might’ve happened next, I’m afraid I can’t say. They didn’t even have time to call out any moves before a tank burst through the walls.

“Prepare for trouble,” Oh no.

“And make it double!” Not them!

“To protect the world from devastation!” Not them again!

“To unite all peoples within our nation,”

“To denounce the evils of truth and love!”

“To extend our reach to the stars above!”

“Jessie!”

“James!”

“Team Rocket, blast off at the speed of light!”

“Surrender now or prepare to fight!”

“Meowth, that’s right!”

“What’s with the hair?” One of Misty’s sisters, the one with blue hair, asked.

“Yeah, like, who let these losers in here?” The one with pink hair frowned.

“They’re Pokemon Thieves!” I warned them. Unbidden, my hand came down to run over the pokeballs at my belt. One, two, three. My fingers twitched at the empty spaces.

“Indeed we are, and we’re about to catch the motherlode!” Jessie laughed, high and grating.
“The water goes in,” Meowth cheekily flipped a switch. A giant hose extended from the back of the tank and dipped into the pool, sucking up every last drop.

“And the water goes out!” He turned the hose on us. I barely had time to gasp before a torrent of water hit me dead on. I lost my footing instantly and got swept away. My leg hit the edge of the pool but I couldn’t make sense of anything. I couldn’t even tell up from down and water burned my lungs.

And then air. Sweet air. I hacked up half a lung in the brief moment my head was above water. My limbs felt like lead. How did Misty’s sisters manage to make this look graceful?

My head went under. I hadn’t had time to catch my breath and my chest burned. I tried to find the surface again but I had no idea which way was up. I couldn’t see, I could barely move!

My groping hand broke the surface. I forced my head above water and tried to get my bearings.

“Cal!” I heard Ash yell.

“Help!” I coughed. It wasn’t nearly as loud as I needed it to be.

“Oh my gosh, she can’t swim!” Was that Misty? My eyes were burning almost as much as my lungs.

Under again. My heart was scraping against my ribs with every beat. Up, I had to get up, I needed air!

Something hit me under the water. Something big and blubbery. A pokemon. There was a pokemon in the water with me.

No, no, nononononoNO! (Dark shapes beneath the waves.) I kicked, I lashed out, anything to get away from whatever was in the water with me. (Huge teeth, flashing scales.) Strong, blubbery arms wrapped around my waist and began pulling me. Up or down? Up or down? (Murky water, brown water, black water, red.)

Air. I needed help. I needed my friends. Which one? My hand drifted over my pokeballs. (one, two, three, fourfivesix?)

“Cal! Stop struggling!” Someone yelled. There was the shore, no, the pool edge! The current was pulling us away.

The pokemon in the water with me was the Seel.

Over my shoulder I saw the hose. It was sucking the water back in and us with it.

“Cal, deep breath!” Misty screamed.

I inhaled.

Underwater again, I hit the side of the hose. My body was pulled in before I could even think of grabbing it. Seel went with me, and now that I wasn’t panicking I could feel the way it twisted so it took the brunt of any impact. But we were underwater again and I couldn’t breathe and if we were being put in a tank there’d be no air!

Seel let go. Seel let go and it was all I could do to keep my last few bubbles of air. It was pitch black and the water stung my eyes. I couldn’t breathe. I couldn’t move. I was helpless!
There were vibrations through the water, like something breaking. The current carried me and I felt when Seel wrapped itself around me again.

And then we were in the air and falling!

“Ooouuuuuchhh!” I whined. The landing had been softer than I could have hoped for, but I’d gotten banged up all the same.

“Seel. Seel?” Seel poked me hard enough to make roll onto my side.

“OOOoowww!” I whined slightly louder. My lungs were on fire. My vision was all blurry.

“Seel!”

A feathery-soft touch filled my mind. Are you okay?

“Huh?” I craned my neck up. I had to blink a few times to clear up my vision but was that…?

Alakazam!

I blinked again and he was gone, along with his feathery-soft touch in my mind.

“AAAAAAAHHHHH!” I jumped half a mile as Team Rocket came shooting out of the hose. They blasted off into the sky, out of sight before I could even start to understand what was going on.

“…Ow.” I sniffed.

I laid my head down and waited for somebody to find me.

I hadn’t inhaled a lot of water, thankfully. The doctor cleared me quickly. I had some bruises but nothing to be too concerned about. He warned me to watch out for pneumonia and allowed me to sign out.

Hospitals were weird. Yes, there was the sense that the machines were outdated but there was something else too. Like this place was unfamiliar. Extra unfamiliar. Like I’d never been to one before.

“Cal! You’re okay!” Ash wrapped himself in a hug around me. I was in a spare set of Misty’s clothes, given all of mine had been thoroughly soaked.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Sorry to worry you.” I smiled, trying to shake the thoughts of my past out of my head.

“Are you sure you’re well enough to be leaving already?” Brock asked with concern.

“The doctor said I’m fine, just bruised up a bit.” I nodded shakily.

“Come on, you’re staying at my family’s place for the night.” Misty pulled Ash off of me and slung an arm over my shoulder. “I asked Daisy to put your clothes through the wash, and here!” She handed me my belt and Pokemon. “I figured you’d want this back.”

“Yeah, thanks!” My voice cracked a little. Chlorine had done me no favors. It was a relief to know Charmander, Spearow, and Cleffa were alright.

(One, two, three, fourfivesix?)
No, don’t think about it. Not yet.

“We don’t want you catching a chill so let’s hurry back.” Brock decided. “When we get there I’ll whip you up a batch of my famous Brock Stew, guaranteed to prevent any and all sniffles!”

“Sounds good.” We’d missed lunch during all this, as my stomach helpfully reminded everyone.

“Pika, pikapi!” Pikachu jumped from Ash’s shoulders to mine.

“Eh, Pikachu?” He ignored me, making himself comfortable by wrapping around my neck. It did help with the chill a little.

“Pikachu was worried too!” Ash laughed.

“We all were.” Misty nodded seriously, giving me a little more space. “And as soon as you’re fully recovered I am going to teach you how to swim. No excuses!”

“None here, promise.” I shook my head. Yeah, I really didn’t want to run the risk of drowning again. That was…

_Great Dialga and Palkia,_ I could have died back there.

If I’d swallowed more water. If I’d hit my head against the metal edges of the hose. If Seel hadn’t cushioned my fall.

And why was Alakazam there?

We went to Misty’s house and had a wonderful dinner. My clothes were washed and returned, which was relieving. Misty and I were the same size but I wasn’t used to having so much exposed skin. I got chilly easily.

Now I’m in her bedroom. We’re sharing the bed since neither of us could convince the other to take it instead. It’s warm and sorta comforting to sleep right beside someone. I have to keep the light of my pokedex dim to avoid waking her though.

Now that I’ve wrapped up the big events I feel like I can put down my thoughts from earlier. That weird sense-memory I had. Was that a flashback? Some sign of my memories returning?

I was in the water and something was in the water with me and I was afraid. No, terrified out of my mind.

My hands had run along my belt, counting pokeballs, and it felt like there were spaces missing. And for a moment I’d thought the water was…dirty or polluted. Bloody maybe.

No, wait. Go back. I’d felt like there were spaces missing.

When I woke up I was geared out like a trainer. Belt, pokeballs, pokefood, pokemedicine, survival supplies, the works. I’d wondered then if I was a trainer but I didn’t have any pokemon with me. None except for Alakazam, who’d vanished once he’d seen I was awake.

Who’d vanished again today after asking if I was alright.

Was he one of my pokemon? Did I have others? And, if so, where were they? _What_ were they?

Six. The optimum number of pokemon a trainer should carry is six, and six is the limit for any league active trainers. If I had pokemon then I must’ve had six of them.
One might’ve been Alakazam. That left five unaccounted for pokemon, assuming I really did use to have that many.

I’m frustrating myself now, repeating the same lines over and over. Still no closer to any real answers.

In the flashback the water had been murky, dirty, bloody. Blood in the water. Yikes. Maybe I’d had a bad experience falling into water before? It would explain why I can’t swim. My muscle memory has been pretty spot on so far so if I’d ever learned how to swim then I should’ve been able to earlier, right?

I’m already losing the recollection. It’s not as if I was really focused on my memories at the time. Trying to count six pokeballs, murky water, something in the water with me. That’s all I got out of this.

And that’s still more than I had this morning.

It seems a little weird to be happy about that, but I’ve been here for weeks with no answers and getting anything feels like progress.

The only clues I have to my identity are thus: My name is Cal. I’m eleven years old. I’ve got trainer gear, including a futuristic pokedex. I’m familiar enough with technology and pokemon to know that I come from some point in the future. I’m supposed to beware Teams of Pokemon Thieves. And now I know I can’t swim and may have had a bad experience with a water pokemon.

It’s progress.

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

With no sign of the sniffles, we set off for Vermillion City and Ash’s next gym battle. I think Misty would’ve liked to start my swimming lessons right away but her desire to be out from her three sisters’ shadows got the better of her. I didn’t mind. Learning to swim might be important but there’d be plenty of opportunities in the future.

“Okay, Pidgeotto, now use Gust!” Ash called.

Besides, there was another problem to contend with. Namely, Ash’s recently inflated head.

Ash is a good trainer. Still a rookie, still new, but he was creative and I found by watching his battles that he had a real talent for bringing out the best in his pokemon. I’m sure he can go far. Maybe even make it to that lauded Pokemon Master title someday.

But he hadn’t even been a trainer for two months and his ego had already quadrupled in size. It got a little grating, to be honest.

“Say, while your friend battles my brother, how about you and I battle?” I blinked, coming out of my musings to face the twin of the boy Ash was battling. What were their names? Sam and Dan? I had no clue which was which?

“Um, you’re talking to me?” I pointed at myself.

“Sure! You are a trainer, right?” He nodded enthusiastically. “C’mon, let’s battle!”
“Oh, okay then? Yeah, sounds fun.” I agreed. “Uh, how many do you have?”

“I’ve got two! So how does a two on two sound?” He suggested, holding up the pokeballs.

Well, I did need to get Cleffa a little experience. A harmless match in the middle of nowhere would be just right for that. And Charmander or Spearow could take over to bring me the win if Cleffa wasn’t up to the task.

“Alright then. I choose you, Cleffa!” I threw the ball in the air.

“Whoa, never seen that one before!” He gawked, wide eyed. “I choose you, Butterfree!”

A butterfree, huh? Well, I knew their strengths and weaknesses pretty well and I’d seen what Ash could do with his.

“Cleffa, use Charm!” I shouted. Cleffa was still a baby pokemon. I needed to bring the enemy’s attack down so she’d have a chance.

“Clef-FA!” She giggled, twirling in place and glowing pink. I could see little illusory hearts floating around her.

“Huh?” My opponent looked flummoxed. “Butterfree, use Sleep Powder!”

“Cleffa, jump up high and dodge!” I called. Cleffa were lightweight and their evolutions could hover slightly. Cleffa could reach heights far greater than her small size suggested and it was easy for her to get above the butterfree’s low flying assault.

“Good, now come down with Pound!” I praised.

“Butterfree, try to dodge! Above you!” The boy cried. Just in time for his butterfree to turn and avoid Cleffa’s strike.

“Don’t let up, Cleffa! Pound!” She went after him cheerfully, bouncing every time she hit the ground. Butterfree couldn’t get the space needed to start manufacturing its sleep powder that way.

“Turn and use Tackle, Butterfree!” I couldn’t help but smirk at his order. Charm was still in effect. Butterfree tried to obey, but it just couldn’t bring itself to seriously attack Cleffa.

“Pound!” But it did get in close enough that Cleffa could hit it.

“Oh no, Butterfree!” The bug type pokemon was laid out, eyes crossed.

“I think you’d better call it back. It can’t battle anymore.” I advised him.

“Yeah,” He solemnly returned his butterfree. “Well, I should’ve known the quiet ones are the most dangerous. Let’s see how well you handle my Rattata!”

His rattata was clearly a higher level than his butterfree. In fact, judging from the lightened color of its fur I’d bet anything this rattata was close to becoming a raticate! And those Dark moves could do some serious damage to Cleffa.

“Cleffa, you did well. Return!” I called her back before the match could begin.

For this, I think Charmander would be best.

“Charmander, you’re up!” She came on stage as confident as I’d ever seen her. I could tell she was
meeting rattata’s eyes and she wasn’t holding her tail.

“Whoa, you’ve got a Charmander too?” His jaw dropped. “Aw man, this isn’t gonna be an easy battle for me.”

“Nope!” I smirked. “Charmander here has plenty of fire in her, and we’ll show you now! Start building up that fire and close in for Scratch!”

“Rattata, use Quick Attack to dodge it!” The boy cried.

“Rat-rat!” It squeaked, dodging by Charmander’s claws. There was smoke drifting from her nostrils. And through the gaps in her teeth I thought I saw fire.

“Deep breath, Charmander! Now channel it into a Flamethrower attack!” I ordered her.

“CHAR!” She roared.

“Yeah, you can do it!” I cheered her on. “Now pull back! Keep that fire burning!”

“Rattata, use Quick Attack and then Bite!” Ah-ha, he did know some Dark moves! I was very glad I’d gotten Cleffa out of there.

“Flamethrower, now!” Please, be fast enough!

She was. The rattata walked straight into a face full of fire! It squeaked and darted to the side, trying to scrub its face clean of soot more than worrying about burns.

“Don’t give it time to recover! Follow up with Scratch while it’s blind!” I told her.

“No, Rattata!” He groaned. “I can’t believe you beat me so easily.” He glumly returned his pokemon.

“Ah, well,” My hands nearly fumbled Charmander’s pokeball. “I did have the advantage of having a pokemon you’d never seen before, and Charmander’s put in a lot of work to get stronger. Your butterfree and rattata were very good though. I think your rattata is close to evolving!”

“What, really?” I nearly jumped out of my skin when Ash popped up at my side. I hadn’t noticed him wrapping up his own battle.

He pulled out his pokedex and searched for the article on raticate.

“Raticate: The evolved form of Rattata. This pokemon has sturdy teeth capable of cutting through iron. It is commonly considered a pest due to its species’ proclivity for stealing food.” Dexter announced.

“Rattata and I have been working really hard so it can evolve!” The boy I’d been battling grinned. He didn’t seem too put down by his loss. That was good. “After it evolves, we’re going to go challenge AJ’s gym again!”

“AJ’s gym?” Ash cocked his head in confusion.

“He built the gym himself! He’s got almost a hundred straight victories!” He explained. “AJ’s really strong and his pokemon are even stronger!”
“Heh, sounds like my kind of challenge!” Ash decided.

“What about Vermillion city?” Misty asked him.

“Vermillion city’s not going anywhere but when will we next come through here?” Ash reasoned. “I’ve gotta check this out! This guy’s got almost a hundred straight wins, but I’ll bet he doesn’t have any badges.”

“Oh, well, if you really think that’s best.” I said uneasily. A hundred straight wins was no small feat and Ash wasn’t exactly undefeated himself.

So, I guess we were headed for this mysterious AJ’s gym.

We found it in the forest. Strong, stout walls made of logs dominated the area and above the door there was a large sign advertising his wins. A disclaimer disavowing any connection to League gyms was just underneath.

“Hmph, this guy isn’t even affiliated with the league!” Ash scoffed.

“Don’t get cocky, Ash!” Misty warned in a sing-song voice. “After all, you’ve only got nine wins in a row, and he’s got almost ten times that!”

“Yeah, well, I go for quality not quantity!” He retorted.

“That’s sort of admirable.” I admitted. “But it’s also a lot harder to pull off, I think.”

“Feh, you’ll see, Pikachu and I will win this no problem!” He declared.

“Win this, huh?” We all jumped, turning around to see a slightly older boy had come up behind us. He had spiky, dark green hair and was carrying a satchel bulging with pokeballs. “Does that make you my next victim?”

“I’m Ash of Pallet town! I heard there was a strong trainer around here who built his own gym. Is that you?” Ash stiffened.

“That’d be me alright. I’m AJ, and it’s a pleasure to beat you.” He laughed, moving past us to open up the door.

He threw the bag on the ground as soon as he walked in. A moment later a butterfree appeared and started to carry it away.

“What’s in the bag?” Ash asked, apparently not having noticed the same thing I had.

“The wild pokemon I just caught.” AJ answered easily.

“Whoa, cool!” Ash beamed, the prospect of wild pokemon erasing any trace of seriousness from his face. “Can I see them after the match?”

“Sure, if ya want.” AJ shrugged, walking over to the battleground. “So, what pokemon are you picking to be my 99th win?”

“Grr!” Ash fumed, turning beet red. He might’ve stomped all the way to the other side of the arena.

“Alrightie then!” AJ pulled a bullwhip out of his pocket. I admit I flinched when he cracked it. And I did not like the implications of him having it. “As my sign says, I’ve got 98 straight wins! And
once I reach a hundred, I’m gonna go out and start earning badges!”

“You mean you’ve got 98 wins and no badges?” Ash huffed a laugh. He flipped his vest collar back to show off the Boulder and Cascade badges. “I’ve won nine battles and won two badges!”

Well, “won.” He would have won the Boulder badge if Brock’s siblings hadn’t interfered and convinced him to stop. And it honestly could’ve gone either way against Misty. It had been too soon to tell between them.

“Ha! You must’ve been to some loser gyms then!” AJ snickered. “Where were they? Loser town or Wimpsville?”

“Loser gyms?” Misty and Brock hissed. Standing between them, I did my best to appear small and non-threatening.

“Ash, you’d better beat this guy!” Misty declared hotly.

“Yeah, teach him the power of the Pewter city gym!” Brock added.

“Give it a rest! I know what I’m doing!” Ash frowned at them. I did my best to blend into the background.

“Sandshrew, front and center!” AJ cracked his whip. From his side, a sandshrew pulled free of its pokeball.

Small, but that hide was thick and the claws were lightly poisonous. For a sandshrew it shouldn’t be strong enough to affect anything bigger than a rattata, but it was still something to keep in mind. Ground-type, fairly strong against electric attacks, weakened by water.

“Pidgeotto, I choose you!” Ash released his companion. A good choice as far as typing goes but for being so small sandshrew were surprisingly heavy set. I wasn’t sure how good Pidgeotto’s Gust would be against it.

The battle was…enlightening.

Ash ordered Pidgeotto in close. Pidgeotto’s speed and maneuverability? It should’ve been easy for him to keep out of sandshrew’s reach.

But this sandshrew could almost fly. He rocketed forward, curled up, flying straight into the sky and ramming head on against Pidgeotto. Poor Pidgeotto wasn’t prepared for it and was stunned by the blow.

“Ah, Pidgeotto!” Ash returned him before sandshrew could finish it. “Why, you! Butterfree!”

“He’s letting himself get angry.” I muttered.

“Yep,” Brock nodded seriously. “If he loses his temper, he’ll lose the match.”

“Butterfree, use Stun Powder!” Not a bad move but sandshrew had some natural resistance to that, thanks to a large diet of bug type pokemon. I didn’t expect Ash to know that though. Butterfree was still strong enough that it should be pretty effective.

If it connected anyway.

AJ cracked his whip again. It must’ve been some kind of signal, though I’m at a loss to explain how sandshrew could understand different commands from the same sound. Regardless, this one
directed sandshrew to use Dig and burrow underground to escape the Stun Powder.

“Hey, where’d it go?” Ash froze.

“Oh no.” I had a bad feeling.

“Sandshrew, now!” AJ cracked his whip, harder this time. Butterfree had been nervously hovering over one spot of the arena. Sandshrew flew out of the ground behind him, out of sight until it was too late for Butterfree to react. Sandshrew’s Tackle hit head on and drove Butterfree into the ground!

A part of my mind chose to highlight that a sandshrew’s natural diet consisted of bug types.

“Butterfree!” Ash cried out, half reaching forward.

“Ha, ain’t so free no more!” AJ taunted him. “Better call it back before I let my sandshrew take a bite out of it!”

“Aaarrgghhh! Butterfree, return!” I sighed in relief. I didn’t know if AJ would actually allow his sandshrew to eat another trainer’s pokemon but I didn’t want to find out!

“That just leaves Pikachu!” Ash realized, turning on his heel to face Pikachu.

Pikachu…refused to battle. With prejudice.

“How could I have lost to someone without any badges?” Ash asked himself after AJ changed the sign and went into the main tent.

“Badges aren’t always a good indicator of strength or skill, Ash.” I pointed out. “They aren’t the only indicators either. His sandshrew looked very fit.”

“You’re supposed to sympathize with me.” He pouted.

“I…thought I was?” I fiddled with my hands.

“Don’t blame Cal, Ash.” Misty put her hands on her hips. “It’s nether fault you let your recent victories go to your head. You got a big head and AJ put a hole in it. That’s all.”

“Who asked you?” He crossed his arms. Maybe he would’ve suggested sticking around a while so he could train and challenge AJ to a rematch. He didn’t have the time before we heard AJ shouting though.

“You call that a battle?” CRACK! Went the whip.

“He’d better not be doing what I think he’s doing.” I surprised myself with a rather fierce growl. Ash had a similar look of distaste as we approached the tent and stealthily pulled the flap out.

Pokemon were everywhere, but they were the common varieties found in this area. Sandshrew was the only real stand out in terms of species.

But they were training and the methods I was seeing.

The pokemon were all wearing some kind of harness. Butterfree were trying to lift weights. Rattata were running obstacle courses.

Sandshrew was diving into a pool of water.
“Hurry it up!” AJ cracked his whip so Sandshrew would jump out and shake itself off. “Back in the water! Go!”

“Hey! Quit it!” Ash launched himself forward. He lunged for AJ’s whip and both of them were sent tumbling into the water.

“Ash!” I yelped, running forward to help him out. I might not be able to swim but I could pull a friend out, right?

“What in tarnation?” AJ spluttered when he surfaced. “What was that for?”

“You were hurting it! Don’t you know that water weakens rock and ground types!” Ash defended himself. I knelt down and offered him my hand to pull himself out.

“Che,” AJ scoffed, climbing out on his own and sending a scathing look to the diving board overhead. “Sandshrew, dive!”

Even if I could swim I wouldn’t have been fast enough to make a difference. Sandshrew was in and out of the water so fast it made my head spin! And it didn’t look pained or weakened at all!

“What? It’s not weakened by water?” Ash looked as stunned as I felt.

“You’re looking at the only sandshrew in the world that’s unaffected by water!” AJ boasted proudly.

I took another look around, taking in all the Pokemon training here.

AJ was certainly getting results here. Impressive ones, if his sandshrew was any judge. But looking around at the harried expressions they wore, the harnesses they were strapped into? Looking at his whip and hearing his derogatory remarks?

He might be getting results but I liked Ash’s methods much better.

Chapter End Notes

I DON’T WANNAAAAAAAAAAAA--------!!!!!!!!! *Miserably goes to slog through ANOTHER two thousand words that will still, somehow, never be as good as the original.*
The Quiz

Brock, AJ, and Misty all got drawn into a conversation about pokemon food. I wasn’t sure how much Misty was getting out of it since AJ didn’t seem to have any water pokemon, but there was probably some overlap there.

Meanwhile, Ash kept watching the pokemon.

“AJ, I, uhm, have a question,” I started hesitantly.

“Yes, little missie?” He looked at me.

“Your pokemon,” How to phrase this? “Do they all stick out with the training? All the time?”

“Mm, well, no.” He shook his head. “In fact, most of them don’t.”

“Because your methods are way too harsh!” Ash pounced on any perceived weakness.

“It’s the method of winners, boy, and every pokemon still here knows it!” He scoffed. “These pokemon you see before you are the cream of the crop, the best of the best! Future champions in the making!”

“Physical strength is all well and good but I don’t see this fostering much in the way of friendship or loyalty.” I sighed quietly. “And that could as good as cripple some pokemon who rely on those feelings in order to develop and evolve.”

“Now what are you going on about?” He frowned at me. “My pokemon are plenty loyal, and our bond’s stronger than steel!”

“Oh, well,” I fidgeted slightly. “Some pokemon, they’re strengths tie into their emotional states. For example; Rage, which is affected by a pokemon’s, well, rage. But there are also pokemon in the world who can’t evolve without strong bonds of friendship and loyalty, emotional support more than physical. Some pokemon will, even though they may be capable, simply refuse to evolve without that kind of connection. Um,” I looked around the room at several wondering faces. “Am I making any sense?”

“I get what you mean, Cal.” Ash crossed his arms. “I’ve always thought it was the bonds between trainer and pokemon that were most important. Physical training’s important, sure, but if you’re not friends with your pokemon than what’s even the point?”

“Hey! The point is that we’re all getting stronger! To be the best!” AJ glared at him. “And we’re friends! Sure we’re friends! Sandshrew and I are close as can be!”

“Oh yeah? Then where is your sandshrew? Because I don’t see it.” Ash pointed at the training floor.

“He’s right over…here?” AJ walked over to the weights section. For a moment, we all stared. AJ broke the silence. “Boy, what is your pikachu doing?”

“Ahh, Pikachu!” Ash knelt down and began fighting with the buckles. “He must’ve got tangled up in one of these stupid harnesses!”

“Uh, hold on,” I knelt down beside him and began searching for a safety release. Something like
this that put such strain on a pokemon’s body had to have an emergency release.

“Right here,” AJ twisted a part and all the joints clicked and opened, letting Pikachu uncurl with a grateful sigh of relief.

“Now where is Sandshrew?” He muttered, standing up. “SANDSHREW! Where’d you go? Training’s not over yet!”

“Close as close can be, huh?” Ash snickered.

“Ash!” I scolded him quietly.

“Oi, you lot,” AJ addressed the other pokemon. “Any of you seen Sandshrew?” A variety of negatives came from the gathered pokemon.

“Maybe it wandered off?” Brock suggested, not sounding very convinced of his own reasoning.

“Or ran away.” Ash muttered.

“Ash!” I glared at him. “How would you feel if Pikachu was missing?”

That got him thinking. The way he instinctively tightened his grip on Pikachu spoke volumes. It might be a low blow but I’ll never find making fun of someone who’s lost their pokemon to be acceptable. That’s a line no one should cross.

“Alright everyone, fan out and search!” AJ didn’t give any indication that he’d heard, but he looked worried all the same.

My hands drifted to my belt, counting pokeballs. One, two, three. Charmander was strong, Spearow could survive on his own, but Cleffa was young, maybe still just a baby. Would she be okay if she wandered off somehow?

Good Ho-Oh, I hoped I never have to find out.

“We’ll help you look for it.” Brock offered. “Between the five of us and all the pokemon it shouldn’t take long.”

“Yeah,” I stood up. Spearow could search from the air. I thumbed his pokeball.

A faint tremor ran underneath my feet. My heart skipped a beat and I looked for something to…climb on?

The ground broke apart and Sandshrew came flying out. It had used Dig and come up beneath our feet.

“Sandshrew!” AJ grinned, grabbing his partner in a whirling hug. “Where you been, partner? Had us all worried for ya!”

“Shrew, shrew sand!” It pointed at the hole and at something it had dragged back with it.

“Meowth!” We gasped. That was definitely the talking pokemon of Team Rocket lying insensate on the floor. Our raised voices were even enough to rouse him.

“Yikes!” He scrambled back and away from us. “What am I doing here?”

“Team Rocket, I shoulda known you’d be behind this!” Ash growled.
“Prepare for trouble,” I suppressed a groan, turning towards the door frame.

“Make that double,” Sure enough, Team Rocket. At least the only agents I had ever seen. Jessie, James, and Meowth.

“To protect the world from devastation,”
“To unite all peoples within our nation,”
“To denounce the evils of truth and love,”
“To extend our reach to the stars above,”
“Jessie,”
“James,”
“Team Rocket, blasting off at the speed of light!”
“Surrender now or prepare to fight!”

That motto gets really tiring after a while.

“Team Rocket, Pokemon Thieves,” I stiffened, hand closing around Spearow’s pokeball. He’d be fresh for the fight ahead. Cleffa I’d keep in reserve.

“Thieves, eh?” AJ scowled. “So they’re the ones that nabbed my Sandshrew?”

“That was an unfortunate little mix-up.” Jessie brushed her hair back. “We don’t have any use for a second-rate sandshrew. We wanted Pikachu.”

“And you…confused Sandshrew for Pikachu?” I cocked my head to the side in confusion.

“Our disguise didn’t provide a lot of visibility! We picked based on size!” Though clearly not by weight.

“Hold on now.” AJ unfurled his whip. “Now, I don’t hold with Pokemon Thieves so that’s already strike one, and hearing that you only got my Sandshrew by mistake? That’s strike two! But strike three? That was calling my Sandshrew second-rate.”

“Oh, I think we made him mad, Jess.” James smirked.

“I see that, James.” Jessie lifted her nose at him. “Well, if he’s that insulted maybe we can make an exception and take his sandshrew and all the other pokemon here as well!”

“Not on my watch!” AJ snapped his whip, bringing Sandshrew to full attention.

“They have a koffing and an ekans, along with the meowth.” I warned him.

“Thanks for the warning, little missie,” His smirk was cold, anticipatory. “But we’ve got a handle on this. You and your friends just sit back and watch me earn win number one hundred.”

“Ekans, use Bind!” Jessie threw her pokeball.

“Sandshrew, you know what to do!” AJ twirled his whip in the air. Sandshrew curled up tight, making itself impossibly small. Ekans couldn’t get a good grip that way and Sandshrew slid right out.

“Koffing, Sludge attack!” James shouted in frustration.

“Keep up that spin, Sandshrew!” AJ called.

The sludge slid right off Sandshrew’s hide. A tackle took the koffing out of the fight easily. Team
Rocket tried to send Meowth in next.

Weirdly, I think Meowth might actually be weaker than the average member of his species. I wasn’t seeing any firm muscle and his teeth were positively brittle. Not a good diet, not good training. Had there been some trade off in learning to speak and walk on two legs?

“Sandshrew, finish’em off with a Fissure Attack!” AJ commanded. I jumped to attention at that.

A Fissure Attack? Sandshrew had to be close to evolving if it was capable of something like that already.

I didn’t have time to consider it more closely. The ground began to heave and split apart between my feet. Misty grabbed me by the arm and pulled me back to solid ground but I lost balance and landed hard on my rear.

Huge cracks ran through the earth for meters all around. It was an impressive feat of strength for a sandshrew. Impressive enough to send Team Rocket fleeing for their lives.

“…We did it.” AJ seemed stunned by the sudden end to the fight. “Sandshrew, we really did it!” He was beaming now, falling to his knees to embrace his partner. “A hundred wins!”

A hundred wins.

I’m writing this late at night after everyone has gone to sleep. AJ has set out on his own journey and I wish him the best of luck. If he’s quick enough he might even get the badges he needs to compete in this year’s Indigo League. We might see him there.

We’re back on the road to Vermillion city now. Misty is bound and determined to teach me to swim when we get there.

I’d better finish up and get some rest. I’m keeping the light dim but I don’t want to risk someone waking up and seeing my pokedex. I don’t how I’m ever going to explain it when it’s so much more advanced than the “modern” pokedex. Well, I guess I’ll write more tomorrow.

Late nights could be such a pain. Waking up in the morning is certainly no picnic. The chilly fog that had rolled in didn’t help matters. Even with my cargo pants and jacket I was still shivering. Maybe I need something better than a tank top under my jacket.

I would’ve liked to say that we began our usual daily trek in peace and harmony, or at least in drowsy silence, but by the time I’d managed to drag myself out of my sleeping bag, Misty and Ash were already sniping at each other over the Bike Argument.

“This happen a lot?” Brock whispered to me. We were walking a little ahead of Ash and Misty, not that it helped much.

“Oh, trust me, it used to be even worse.” I rolled my eyes. “If we don’t find some way to distract them they’ll shoot back and forth at each other all day.”

“Hmm, well, it’s a little early but,” Brock scratched his chin thoughtfully.
“Hm?” I stopped in surprise. He began digging through his bag, setting out a picnic blanket and then pulling out a teapot, along with some easy travel snacks and other supplies.

“Nothing soothes foul tempers like a good cup of Cerulean Coffee!” He boasted. “Ah, but you kids are probably a little too young for that. How does herbal tea sound? Along with my world famous crepes!”

“Oh, I love crepes!” Misty gasped excitedly.

“Uh, tea sounds…nice.” I nodded hesitantly.

“But there’s just one thing missing.” Brock clenched his fist around a whisk.

“What’s that?” Ash asked him.

“A fire.” Brock nodded seriously. “I can’t make tea or crepes without a fire and a fire needs firewood! Which means one of you needs to go out and get me some!”

“Well, I love crepes and tea but I guess I can surrender the excitement of finding firewood to Ash in order to keep you company!” Misty happily declared, already making herself comfortable on the picnic blanket.

“Uh, I’ll help Ash.” I volunteered.

“Firewood, firewood,” Ash muttered under his breath as we walked. Most of what we could easily find was too damp thanks to all this fog. If Ash wasn’t constantly muttering to himself I’m afraid I might’ve lost track of him.

Maybe I should summon Charmander? Her light might be helpful here and she might be able to dry out some of this wood.

“Charmander, I choose you.” She came out expecting a fight. I got on my knees beside her to show her there was nothing dangerous around. “Hey, Charmander? There’s nothing to worry about right now. I was just wondering if you’d mind helping us gather some firewood? Most of what’s here is damp so do you think you could try drying it out? Could be good training for keeping a steady flame.” I suggested.

“Char char char!” She nodded, looking much happier knowing there wasn’t anyone to fight.

“Hey, Cal, I think I see a fire up ahead!” Ash was more of a vague shape than anything, but I heard his voice clearly. I could also see the fire’s glow he was talking about.

“Oh? Do you think someone else is camping near here?” I brushed off my knees as I stood.

“Let’s check it out!” He grabbed my hand and started pulling me along. Charmander and Pikachu could barely keep up. As we got closer we were able to make out more through the fog. Multiple people, surrounding someone, and the flames were too small to be a campfire. Candles? And what was that machine one of them was running on?

“Pop quiz! What is the name of this pokemon and what does it evolve into?” I couldn’t see what they were holding up, but the boy on the machine was panting for breath. “Better answer fast or we’re turning up the treadmill again.”

Treadmill? The machine making him run in place?
“P-Pidgey!” He gasped. “Evolves into Pidgeotto!”

“EEERRR!” The boys surrounding him laughed. “This is a pidgeotto dumb-dumb, and it evolves
into Pidgeot! Turn it up to the next setting!”

“Ah, no!” The boy grabbed the handrails on either side of him but it was clear that the treadmill
was moving much faster than before. There was no way he’d be able to keep up that pace for long.

“Hey, leave him alone!” Ash burst forward. “Stop bullying that kid!”

“Huh?” Unfortunately, Ash’s attempted rescue managed to surprise the victim enough that he lost
his grip and his pace, being sent flying by the machine.

“Ooh, are you okay?” I winced, stepping forward to help.

“I-I’m okay, really.” The boy accepted my hand.

on here?”

“These guys were bullying this kid.” Ash pointed accusingly.

“We were helping him study for Friday’s test.” One of the candle-holders scoffed, turning up his
nose at us. “Though I’m not surprised a bunch of wild savages like the four of you wouldn’t
recognize studying.”

“We at Pokemon Tech have to hold ourselves to higher standards than you do. Joe should be
grateful we took time out of our day to help him.” Another added.

“Why you!” Ash grit his teeth.

These kids rubbed me the wrong way. I couldn’t put my finger on it. Maybe I just really disliked
bullies? Maybe I didn’t appreciate being called a savage?

“We’ve wasted enough of our valuable time here, guys.” The leader of the group decided. “Joe,
we’ll see you later in the dorms for another study session.”

“Yeah, okay.” The boy I’d helped agreed easily.

“Pokemon Tech, where have I heard…Oh yeah!” Misty began digging through her pockets and
pulled out a crumpled flier. “Pokemon Technical, the school for future pokemon champions!”

“Champions?” That caught Ash’s interest.

“Says here it’s a school dedicated to teaching students about the fundamentals of pokemon,
guaranteed to allow admittance into the Pokemon League upon graduation, guiding young minds to
be the next champions, quickly!” Brock read over her shoulder. Curious, I leaned in and scanned
over the lines. One in particular caught my eye.

“Graduate in only five years? They call that quick? Ash will be in this year’s Indigo League in ten
months!” I spluttered in shock. Admittance at age ten, graduate at fifteen. Why didn’t they just go
on a Pokemon journey? If they had the money to cover tuition they certainly had enough to buy a
pokemon, right?

“Ha! You tell’em, Cal! Besides, I’ll bet you’re smarter than any of those Tech students!” Ash
puffed out his chest. “After all, you’re gonna be a Pokemon Professor someday!”
“Pfft!” I guess the bullies hadn’t left just yet. “You expect us to believe you are going to be in this year’s Indigo League? And she’s going to be a Pokemon Professor?”

“Yeah? What’s so strange about that?” Ash glared at them, daring them to continue mocking either of our dreams.

“Please! I bet she doesn’t even know how much a Snorlax eats in one day!” One of them challenged.

“About 900 pounds a day, on average.” I rattled off without thinking. The bullies exchanged looks.

“What’s an Alakazam’s IQ?” One asked.

“Estimated to be over 5,000, but in that range it’s impossible to accurately test.” I blinked. How did I know all this?

“A Dodrio’s top speed?” Another question.

“Um, if we’re talking a speed it can maintain for long periods of time, then 40 miles per hour is the accepted answer. When sprinting it can reach speeds between 70 and 100, depending on training and level.” I paused, considering for a moment. “Interestingly, Doduo’s maintaining speed is 60 miles per hour, but sprinting it is only capable of reaching 80, tops.”

“No way!” They looked startled.

“How does she know all this?”

“Is it true what she said about Dodrio and Doduo?”

“See? What’d I tell ya?” Ash put his hands on his hips proudly. “Cal’s going to be a Pokemon Professor and I’m going to be a Pokemon Master!”

“And I’m going to be a Water Pokemon Master!” Misty declared.

“And you’re looking at the world’s next Top Breeder for me.” Brock grinned.

Funny, we’re a rather ambitious group, aren’t we? I’d picked Pokemon Professor because it was the first thing that popped in my head but maybe I could actively pursue it.

But I still need to regain my memories and figure out a way home first.

“Attention students and faculty: Today’s Fog Training has ended. Please prepare for Tomorrow’s Snow Battle Training.” We all tensed up. A faint humming noise I hadn’t even been aware of suddenly stopped and the fog began to clear. In moments we were able to make out the full campus.

It was…big and impressive looking. Kinda familiar in the ‘Have I ever been here before?’ kinda way.

Have I been here before? Or somewhere like here? I should do a little more research into Pokemon Technical. Maybe something will jog my memory.

“With the tuition cost and these facilities, it’s not just any kid that can go here.” Brock whistled.

“So this is one of those snobby private school’s only millionaire’s kids can go to.” Misty rolled her eyes. “Of course.”
“Millionaire’s kids?” What’s a millionaire?

I’m going to have a lot of research to do once I get access to another computer.

While we were talking the bullies had all stalked off somewhere. Ash was still heated up by them. He really feels strongly about bullies, but I guess I should’ve known that already just from how he reacted when he thought AJ was bullying his pokemon.

Joe started explaining about the different levels of students. Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced. Somehow those levels corresponded to badges? I don’t really understand that.

You can know every move a pokemon’s capable of, their evolutions, their habits, but if you never actually use that knowledge how are you supposed to be able to react in a real time battle? In the real world? What good is the theoretical without any of the practical?

“You know Cal, you should meet Giselle!” Joe looked up at me. “She’s one of the top students here so she’s got a lot of pull with the teachers! I bet she could arrange to give you a scholarship so you can come here too!”

“Eh? Scholarship?” Another unfamiliar word. “But, uh, I don’t really want to attend here. So, thanks for the offer, but no.”

“Huh? How come?” He looked perplexed. “Wouldn’t you rather study in a classroom than go on a harsh journey?”

“Honestly? No.” I answered honestly. I held up my hands to forestall any argument. “Far be it from me to have any say in someone else’s Pokemon Journey, but a classroom has no real appeal to me.”

In some ways maybe staying at Pokemon Technical could’ve helped me in my goals better. Better access to technology for one. But I’d be giving up a large amount of personal freedom.

A Trainer License marks me as a legal adult by Kanto law. I’m still too young to drink or drive, but in all other matters I can be tried as an adult. But the people here didn’t have licenses, I was sure. They were still considered kids. With all the responsibilities and freedoms therein. If I stayed here I’d be expected to conform to a schedule and trying to leave later would only draw unnecessary attention on me.

No, better to keep traveling with Ash.

Well, my argument must have been less than convincing because Joe decided to introduce us to Giselle anyway. He led us through the school and we eventually came to a room with lots of computers. Big, bulky ones that I was beginning to get used to.

“Giselle spends most of her time training here.” Joe informed us.

“Training?” There didn’t seem to be enough room in here for any training. “How so?”

“With these, of course!” He patted one of the computers. Sitting down, he brought up a screen and logged in. In a moment he had a simulation of a weepinbell fighting a starmie, which the starmie quickly lost. “See, like this you can see how any pokemon would fare in a fight!”

“Ha! If you think a starmie would lose that easily then you’ve got a lot more studying to do!” Misty laughed. “I’ll have you know my starmie could handle any weepinbell easily!”

“But grass types have an advantage over water types.” His eyes went wide. “How can you say a
water type would beat a grass type?”

“How can you say they couldn’t? Look, I’ll even prove it!” Misty pulled out one of her pokeballs. “I’ve got a starmie right here!”

“Oh, then I can check out a weepinbell from the school library and we can settle the matter!” Joe smiled.

“From the library?” I repeated.

“Like it’s a book?” Ash seemed equally confused.

A few minutes later we were at an indoor arena. Misty’s Starmie vs. Joe’s borrowed weepinbell.

It was a short match, but apparently long enough for the famous Giselle to find us, accompanied by the same pack of bullies from before.

“That’s her, Giselle.” One of them pointed directly at me. “The girl who was able to give Advanced level answers to Advanced level questions!”

“Oh, wow you wouldn’t think that just to look at you.” She posed in a thoughtful manner.

If I was a poochyena my hackles would’ve gone up.

“Giselle, you saw my battle?” Joe gasped. “Then please, explain how a weepinbell could’ve lost against a starmie!”

“Isn’t it obvious, Joe? You really are an embarrassment to our class.” She sighed in a put upon manner. “The reason you lost is because that starmie had way more experience than the weepinbell did. On top of that, starmie is fully evolved but a weepinbell is not, thus the type advantage wasn’t as strong as it could’ve been.”

“But right now I’m not interested in your remedial studies,” She stepped towards me. “I’m more interested in the girl with ambitions to be a Pokemon Professor. You know that is a very exclusive career, don’t you?”

“Uh, fairly so, yes.” I nodded hesitantly.

“Give me a full breakdown on the Starly line!” She ordered me.

“Starly:” Another test? “Native to Sinnoh, evolves into Staravia and then into Staraptor. A cross Normal/Flying type. Bird pokemon, their native diet consists mainly of small bug type pokemon and berries. They have the natural ability Keen Eye, but some have been known to have Reckless instead.” Hmm, what else? Giselle was nodding along to everything I was saying so far.

“No special moves beyond those any flying type can learn.” Oh, right! “The final form, Staraptor, is capable of transporting a fully grown human on its back and can easily break the sound barrier, even with the added burden!”

“Correct.” She twirled a lock of hair. “Now, how about Meditite?”

“Meditite: Native to Sinnoh as well, but can also be found in Hoenn and Kalos,” I glanced over at the others. They all seemed pretty impressed! I looked down at my feet in embarrassment. “Ah, um, evolves into Medicham, and is a cross Fighting/Psychic type. Due to this unique cross, it’s physical endurance is much lower than other fighting types, but typically higher than most psychic
“Abra!” She walked forward until she was standing right in front of me.

“Abra: Presumed native to Kanto but found all over the world, likely due to the ability Teleport. Evolves into Kadabra and then into Alakazam.” Unbidden, I thought of my Alakazam. The one that had been there when I woke up near Pallet and again in Cerulean city. “Abra sleep for up to 18 hours a day, but their psychic abilities are strong enough that even asleep they can still be considered a formidable threat.”

“Doduo!” She cut me off. I had to switch mental tracks fast. I knew a lot more about Alakazam’s line than I had thought.

“Doduo: Evolves into Dodrio. Native to Hoenn, but found in most regions due to their once widespread use in travel. They mostly eat smaller pokemon, though not bug types. Ah, Doduo can maintain a speed of 60 miles per hour while Dodrio can maintain 40.” I gave her the same information I’d given the bullies earlier.

“Tepig!” She frowned, but still nodded to whatever I was saying.

“Tepig: Native to Unova, evolves into Pignite and then Emboar.” You get the picture.

“Well, I admit, your knowledge base is impressive.” She brushed back her hair. “For not attending any sort of school that was a rather impressive display. Those aren’t exactly common pokemon.”

“Um, what…was that about?” I asked. “I mean, why quiz me like that?”

“My fellow students told me about you and I decided I had to see it for myself. So, how about it?” She smirked. “Care for a battle?”

“Hold up a moment!” Ash butt in. “If anyone’s going to be battling you, it’s me?”

“You? And what’s so special about you?” She sniffed.

“Don’t underestimate me! I’ve already got two badges and I’m going to be in this year’s Indigo League, just you wait and see!” He declared hotly.

“Ash is a better trainer than me.” I admitted freely. “I think you’ll be really surprised if you battle him. And he’d enjoy it more than I would anyway. I’m not a serious battler like he is.”

“Hm, is that so?” She pouted, looking Ash up and down. “Alright then, I’ll battle you. And when I beat you I want to battle little Ms. Pokemon Professor, got it.”

“If you beat me.” Ash glared. “Are you ready for this, Pikachu?”

“Pi-KA!” Pikachu pumped his tiny fist.

“Hmph, battling me with a pikachu? And you’ve only got two badges, you said? Bold choice.” She smirked. “I choose Cubone. Let’s take this outside, shall we? I’d hate to damage school property.”

We didn’t go far, just to the pool right outside. It was probably meant for water battle training, judging from the platforms.

“Cubone, huh?” Ash pulled out his pokedex.

“Cubone: The Ground-Type Pokemon, their skull helmets are passed down through their
families.” Dexter informed him.

“Right.” He nodded, pocketing his pokedex to focus on the battle ahead. “It’s a ground type so electricity won’t do much good, but we’re still going to win this!”

“Ha, you really are a beginner, aren’t you? It’s true that there’s more to pokemon battles than type advantages, but there are limits, you know.” Giselle laughed haughtily.

I did not like this girl.

I held my tongue though. Ash’s battle would speak for itself.

“A better trainer than you, Cal?” Misty whispered in my ear, startling me. “Where did you come up with that load of malarkey?”

“Huh?” I blinked at him.

“She’s got a point, Cal. Ash is talented, I’ll give him that, but why are you so confident that he’s better than you?” Brock whispered on my other side.

“Wha?” I looked between the two of them. “He just…is? I mean,”

“Bonemerang!” I refocused on the battle. Pikachu had taken one bonemerang, but he avoided the second. He jumped as it sailed past him and landed on the cubone’s head, twisting its skull helmet to blind the ground type. Pikachu couldn’t use Bite or Scratch, but they could still bite and scratch if you get my meaning.

It didn’t do a lot of damage but it did keep cubone distracted until the bonemerang came back and clapped it against the head.

“See?” I smiled as the cubone began to wail. Cubone were considered baby pokemon. Some pokemon’s pre-evolution stages were juvenile and only became adults when they evolved. Cubone was one of those, and a pichu would be another example. They could be trained and battle and could go grow pretty strong, but in the end their physical and emotional maturity just wasn’t as high as it could be.

“Oh, Cubone.” Giselle knelt down and wrapped her cubone in a hug. “There, there, don’t cry. Return and have a good rest.”

After a moment, Giselle stood up and faced Ash directly with an indecipherable look on her face.

“Well, I have to admit I’m surprised.” I saw her glance my way and didn’t curb the proud smile on my face. “None of the textbooks mentioned pikachu winning by anything other than electricity, certainly not by using my pokemon’s own moves against it.”

“There are other methods of winning not listed in your textbooks too!” We all jumped, surprised by the sudden arrival of three newcomers.

I am not re-writing their stupid motto today.

It was kind of interesting to learn that James and Jessie both apparently applied for Pokemon Technical and that they both scored the lowest grades in the school’s history. Less interesting was how easily they were turned aside.

We left the school again. Joe has decided to return home and start a real Pokemon Journey.
“Hey, Cal?” My hand spasmed, almost closing the journal entry without saving. *That* would’ve been a lot of re-writing.

Ash was awake? It was almost midnight!

“Uhm, yeah?” I answered nervously, tucking my pokedex a little more under myself. Had he noticed its faint light? Heard me typing away on it?

“You didn’t doubt me for even a second during my match with Giselle.” He was speaking quietly to avoid waking the others. I scooted a little out of my sleeping bag so we could hear each other easier.

“Well, yeah, I knew you would win.” I told him.

“But you’ve seen me lose before.” He frowned. He had one hand absently petting Pikachu asleep on his chest. “And Giselle wanted to challenge you, but you stepped aside so I could fight her instead. Why?”

“It was important to you, right? More important than it was for me.” I answered.

He was quiet for a while. If I wasn’t looking at him I would’ve thought he’d fallen asleep. Ash isn’t the kind of guy who strikes you as being thoughtful, but he sure looked it right now.

How to reassure him?

“You’re a good trainer, Ash. You care for your pokemon, treat them as your friends, and you get a little better every day. Sure,” I shrugged lightly. “You can get a little cocky, a bit big-headed, but you never…you never stay that way for long. And I’ve never seen you hurt anyone when you do either.”

“I really believe you’re going to be a Pokemon Master someday.” I told him.

“Thanks, Cal. And you’re definitely going to be a Pokemon Professor someday!” He got a little too loud, making Pikachu squirm and flick his ears. He smiled sheepishly and continued petting until Pikachu settled down again.

“Mmm, good night, Ash.” I laid down again.

“Good night.” He yawned.

Once I was sure he was really asleep this time, I pulled out my pokedex and finished writing.

I wonder what the requirements for being a Pokemon Professor are.
The Abandoned

The late nights and early mornings are really starting to get to me. I’m always the last one awake. I wouldn’t be up so late if I could write down my experiences during the day but if I want to keep my pokedex a secret I don’t have a choice. Maybe I could get a conventional diary and write in that? But what if someone found and read it?

Well, that’s a decision that will have to wait for us to reach some kind of civilization again. Let me get started on what happened today.

As was becoming normal, I was the last one up this morning. My brain felt like it was stuffed with cotton and for the life of me I can’t remember what we talked about over breakfast. They could’ve been discussing the founding of a cult for all I know. Note: See if there’s any way Brock would be willing to share his coffee with me.

I woke up a little more once we started moving. Exercise is good for waking yourself up. Once I felt a little less like the walking dead I was able to focus on where we were and where we were going.

Thick, dense forest in every direction. Sunlight poured in between the leaves above and there were dozens of little streams that we passed along our way. There were places where the grass grew thigh high and more than a few little dips and valleys that snuck up on us.

Walking around it was easy to feel like the only people in the world. There was no path paved by the people before us, or any evidence that there had been any people at all.

No path…Hmm…

“Um, Ash, do you…know where we’re going?” I spoke up hesitantly.

“Vermilion city, of course!” He answered over his shoulder.

“Right, but, uh, are you sure this is the right way?” I asked.

“See, Ash? Even Cal knows this can’t be right!” Misty snapped. “You’ve gone and gotten us lost!”

“What makes you think we’re lost?” He challenged her.

“Listen up, knucklehead! When you don’t know where you are or what direction you’re going in, then you. Are. Lost!” She yelled at him.

“You’re the one who suggested this short cut!” He tried arguing.

“No, I didn’t!” Brock and I sighed on the sidelines.

“Allright, that’s enough, kids!” Brock clapped his hands twice. “Let’s sit down and have a brief rest. Hopefully that’ll cool your tempers.”

I sat down on a free patch of grass. It was a beautiful forest and all but I would’ve liked to know we were going the right way.

“Hey, look over there!” Misty whispered urgently. She pointed at a little stream where an oddish was getting a drink of water. It hadn’t noticed us yet. “Isn’t it adorable?”
“Oddish: This Grass-Type pokemon has been known to travel for miles spreading its seeds and pollen. Their leaves are extremely sensitive and trainers are advised to not pull them.”

“Aww, it’s a grass-type?” Misty groaned. “I was hoping it was a water type. I would’ve liked to catch it.”

“But I still can!” Ash grinned excitedly. “Butterfree, I choose you!”

“Free!” Butterfree fluttered in place.

“Butterfree, go use Tackle on that oddish!” Ash ordered.

“FREE!” Butterfree nodded, antennae twitching. Butterfree shot off on a collision course with the oddish.

It looked like a sure thing. The oddish noticed the incoming attack but was too stunned to dodge properly. I was confident that Butterfree was stronger than oddish too so the capture shouldn’t have been too difficult.

Except something Tackled Butterfree before Butterfree could connect.

“What’s—?” Ash gasped in shock. “A Bulbasaur!”

“Bulbasaur: Considered a Starter pokemon in Kanto, this pokemon bears a large seed on its back from birth. Scientists are divided on whether to classify Bulbasaur as a plant or animal. They are also known to be difficult to catch in the wild.”

“A Bulbasaur would be a way better catch than an oddish!” Ash decided. “Butterfree, use Sleep Powder!”

Bulbasaur took one look at the approaching cloud of blue powder and sucked in a great big breath. I thought at first that Bulbasaur just planned to hold its breath but then it blew out all the air in one big gust. The powder was washed back to Butterfree, who dizzily drifted to the ground.

“Oh no, hang in there, Butterfree!” Ash urged it to stay awake. Bulbasaur wasn’t going to wait for Butterfree to recover though. It launched a strong Tackle attack that put Butterfree down.

While we were distracted by Butterfree’s defeat, Bulbasaur and the oddish both took off into the forest. Within seconds we’d lost sight of them completely.

“Oh, darn it!” Ash slumped. “I wanted to catch it!”

“There will be other opportunities, Ash.” I tried patting him on the back.

“You’re right!” He bounced back fast. “C’mon, let’s chase after it!”

“Ah, hold on!” I made sure my backpack was fastened properly before taking off after him.

“Hey look, a bridge!” Brock spotted it first. It was a swinging rope bridge suspended over a chasm with a rushing river at the bottom. Not something I really wanted to fall into.

“Heh, I’ll bet there’s tons of Bulbasaur in this forest.” Ash snickered to himself as he led us across.

“Ah, geez,” I began making my way gingerly across. The bridge didn’t look to be in good repair. It was the first sign of anything man-made in this forest and I couldn’t help but wonder when it was made.
With good reason, as it turned out. We were a little more than halfway across when one of the supporting lines suddenly snapped. Ash got a grip on the bridge itself and Misty grabbed him.

I…didn’t grab anything.

“AAAAAAAAIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIEEEEEEEE!” I screamed the whole way down. *I can’t swim! I can’t swim! I can’t swim!*

“CAL!” My name was the last thing I heard before I hit the water.

The cold shocked all the air right out of me. The current was the only reason I was able to find the surface, but it was strong and there was nothing for me to grab hold of.

“Cal!” Someone screamed my name again.

“Gah! Help!” I coughed, flailing my arms and hoping one of the others could see me. I lost balance and slipped under the water again. I tried kicking my legs but my clothes and bag were weighing me down.

An arm wrapped around my waist and pulled me to the surface.

“I’ve got you, Cal! I’ve got you!” Brock’s voice. I could’ve wept.

“B-Brock?” My teeth chattered.

“I’m here! Grab hold of me and kick your legs, like this.” I could feel him pumping his own legs. Where mind had been a panicked spasm *his* motions were smooth and with a wider range of motion. I noticed immediately that it was a lot easier to keep my head above water using his method.

“The current’s too fast to fight, we have to wait and hope it slows down!” He yelled over the pounding rapids.

With a friend, it was easier to push down the fear. I wasn’t disoriented and there was nothing in the water grabbing at me. I just had to trust that Brock would keep me safe.

“Oh my! Grab hold!” My eyes were blurred by all the water but I thought I could make out a woman standing on the river bank. Brock reached out and caught her hand before we could be swept past her.

“Take Cal first!” Brock used his free hand to give me a boost. The woman nearly lost her hold on Brock’s arm, but I twisted around and caught his other hand to help haul him out of the water too.

“My goodness, are you two alright?” Once I wiped my eyes I could see she was a very beautiful young woman. Long blue hair and comfortable overalls.

“Yes, thanks to you.” Brock sighed, his face tinted red.

“We really appreciate the help, ma’am.” I gave her a short bow. “And Brock, thanks for saving me from drowning.”

“No problem, Cal. We’ll definitely teach you to swim soon.” He promised me.

“I’m glad you’re both alright.” The woman smiled. “My name is Melanie, and you are?”

“I’m Brock, Brock Harrison, and this is my friend, Cal.” Brock babbled, scratching the back of his
head. And was that…? He was blushing!

“Uh, hi.” I waved lamely. Quick, think of something to say! “Um, I’m glad to see there are people in this forest after all! Do you live here?”

“Oh, well,” She looked down, fidgeting with her hands. “I’m the only person who lives around here. Why don’t I show you around? It’ll give you a chance to dry off.” She suggested.

“That sounds great!” Brock accepted quickly. “And please, if there’s anything we can do repay you for saving us?”

“No, no, I really don’t need any thanks!” She refused politely and stood up. “Please, follow me.”

She bent down to retrieve a basket of freshly picked herbs and started leading us down a small footrail. Not what I’d consider a proper path but it was easy to follow.

“You live out here? All alone?” Brock asked with some concern.

“Oh, I’m not alone.” Melania smiled. “Alright, we’re here! Welcome to my little village.”

There was one building, a friendly looking cabin by a pond. Bowls were scattered throughout the yard and there was a neat and rather large garden in the back. What really caught our attention though was the pokemon.

“Oh wow!” I gasped, delighted. Oddish, staryu, parasect, rattata, butterfree, wurmple, all the different kinds of pokemon you’d expect to see in a forest like this! They ran around playing with each other out in the open. When they saw us they immediately began circling Melania, welcoming her home.

“Settle down, settle down!” She laughed, clearly at home with all her friends.

“Are they all yours?” Brock asked, kneeling down to allow a curious rattata to sniff his palm.

“They aren’t mine, but I take care of them.” Melania smiled sadly. “Sometimes pokemon end up hurt or abandoned, and then they come here. I try to nurse them back to health so they can return to the wild.”

“You’re very good at it.” Brock whistled. “These pokemon look fit and healthy.”

“Yes,” She sighed slightly.

“Um, Melanie?” I started tentatively. “I’m sorry to ask since you’ve already helped us so much, but when we fell into the river we were separated from our friends, Ash and Misty. Do you have any idea how we could find them?”

“Oh dear,” Melania looked concerned. “They might’ve gotten caught in one of the traps!”

“Traps?” We echoed.

“The pokemon make them.” She explained tiredly. “You see, while they’re here they don’t want to battle or be captured, so they do their best to make sure humans stay away. So they build traps around the area. The traps aren’t really dangerous, but your friends might be stuck for a while if they fall into one.”

“Then we’ll have to go and rescue them, just as you rescued us!” Brock declared.
“They might be following the river trying to find us.” I suggested nervously. At the very least it gave us a place to start looking.

“Wait here a moment, I’ll send Bulbasaur with you.” Melanie told us.

“Did she say Bulbasaur?” Brock gaped. Melanie walked inside her cabin and a minute later she walked out. I couldn’t be positive but I was almost sure it was the same Bulbasaur that Ash had wanted to capture.

“Bulbasaur will lead you to your friends.” Melanie sounded so pleased by that. Bulbasaur didn’t look very happy though.

Well, it did lead us to Ash and Misty. We found them in a net hanging from a tree. As we walked back to Melanie’s cabin we explained what had happened and what Melanie was doing out here. They seemed impressed by everything Melanie had done so far. Ash even apologized to the oddish he’d tried capturing earlier.

Bulbasaur wasn’t happy about us still being here though. At one point it even tried pushing Ash to leave. Bulbasaur was the leader of this little village and their guardian, and if all these pokemon had been injured and abandoned by their trainers, then yeah, I could see why it might be protective against humans. It’s kind of sad but…something else too.

Familiar?

Maybe more would’ve happened but that was when Team Rocket made their regularly scheduled appearance.

“Prepare for trouble!”
“And make it double!”
“To protect the world from devastation!”
“To unite all people within our nation!”
“To denounce the evils of truth and love!”
“To extend our reach to the stars above!”
“Jessie!”
“James!”
“Team Rocket, blast off at the speed of light!”
“Surrender now, or prepare to fight!”
“Meowth, that’s right!”

Writing that out is just tiring.

They had some kind of huge machine attached to half a dozen balloons. A vacuum like the one from Cerulean city. Where did they keep getting this stuff? There weren’t any stores to rob all the way out here.

“Everybody get inside!” Brock shouted, directing us all to the cabin. I bent down and took two rattata in hand before they could be pulled into the air. Anything not nailed down was flying up towards the hose and that included the pokemon.

“Oh no, oddish!” Misty screamed. Over my shoulder I saw the little grass type being pulled into the air. It would’ve been sucked down the vacuum’s hose if Bulbasaur hadn’t caught it using Vine Whip.

The winds were strong enough that even Bulbasaur was struggling to stay on its feet. Ash ran out
and began helping, keeping Bulbasaur from losing its footing.

“We’re all safe in here.” Melanie sighed with relief, locking the door for good measure.

“Wait, Bulbasaur!” Ash got the rest of us to look over. Bulbasaur was using a vine to pull open a roof access panel and was climbing up the ladder as fast as it could. “It’s going to the roof!”

“It must be planning to attack Team Rocket!” Misty realized.

“Not alone it’s not!” I scowled, reaching for Spearow’s pokeball. Ash and I made it to the front door at the same time and we both released our flying pokemon.

“Spearow, use Gust!” I yelled over the wind.

“Pidgeotto, you too!” Ash shouted beside me.

Our pokemon beat their wings as hard as they could. It didn’t take long for their winds to clash with the vacuum’s winds. The air currents twisted up and formed a raging tornado and since the vacuum was sucking and our pokemon were blowing the tornado went straight for Team Rocket.

“We did it!” Ash whooped and cheered.

“Great job, Spearow. I think you’ve gotten a lot stronger lately.” I offered my arm as a perch.

“Spear, spearow, row.” He preened smugly.

“Are they really gone?” Melanie asked shakily, shielding the doorway with her own body.

“Yep. Pidgeotto and Spearow sent them flying!” Ash bragged. “It’s safe now. You can all come out.”

The pokemon all darted out, running around our feet as they celebrated. It was hard to believe these pokemon had ever been injured; They looked so healthy and energetic.

And that, it turned out, was part of the problem.

“This village is well protected thanks to Bulbasaur.” Ash remarked. With good reason. Bulbasaur had used Vine Whip against the vacuum’s hose which was probably the only reason Spearow and Pidgeotto hadn’t been sucked down its gullet.

“Yes,” Melanie agreed with a melancholy smile. “Ash, don’t you think Bulbasaur would make a good addition to your team?”

“Yeah, that’d be amazing!” His eyes drifted off a bit, likely imagining the scenario.

“Then please,” Melanie picked up Bulbasaur in her arms. “Take Bulbasaur with you.”

“Huh? But…what will happen to the village without Bulbasaur to protect it?” His eyes went wide.

“It’s true that Bulbasaur is a great protector, maybe even too great,” She petted Bulbasaur’s head. “You see, the pokemon here feel so safe that they never want to leave, even after they recover. Healing pokemon is my passion, but I know my job isn’t done until they return to where they came from so they can start families or meet good trainers who will treat them well and help them grow stronger.”

“And this village is too small for Bulbasaur. If it stays here I’m afraid it won’t grow any stronger.”
She continued sadly. “So please take it with you. I promise it won’t be a burden.”

“Bul-Bulba!” Bulbasaur interrupted, staring Ash straight in the eyes.

“What’s that?” He blinked, thinking something over before his eyes lit up. “Oh, I get it! Before you decide to come with me, you want to have a battle, is that right?”

“Bulba!” Bulbasaur nodded seriously.

“Then okay! Pikachu and I will battle you!” Ash straightened up.

We cleared some space so the match could begin. Pikachu vs. Bulbasaur. Ash sent Pikachu forward quickly, but Bulbasaur was ready and used Vine Whip to herd Pikachu into position for a full on Tackle. It was a harsh move that knocked Pikachu head over tails!

“Pikachu, get up and try again!” Ash called.

“Pika, pi-kaa!” He shot off, this time managing to deliver his own Tackle to send Bulbasaur stumbling back.

“BulbAUR!” His vines shot out and wrapped around Pikachu’s middle. With that grip it was easy for Bulbasaur to shake him around.

“Thunderbolt!” But the vines also provided direct conduits for Pikachu’s electricity.

“Alright! Now go, pokeball!” We all watched the pokeball arc through the air, homing in on the nearest wild pokemon. Bulbasaur was sucked in and the button flashed red, shaking back and forth as Bulbasaur tried to free itself.

Once, twice, three times, success! The pokeball sealed shut!

“I caught a Bulbasaur!” Ash jumped in the air and pulled off a victory pose. He ran up to claim the pokeball and spent a moment just basking in his victory before releasing Bulbasaur again.

“Sa-Saur?” Bulbasaur appeared confused for a moment.

“I figured I’d let you say goodbye to all your friends before we go.” Ash offered in explanation. Bulbasaur was clearly touched by this. I thought I even saw tears glistening in its eyes before it turned towards the other pokemon and started speaking to them, rapid fire. A list of instructions and warnings?

“Today’s been a good day.” Misty walked up beside me.

Getting lost, falling into a river with Brock, fighting Team Rocket, a lot had happened today.

“Yeah,” I beamed.

Melanie was able to point us in the right direction, but that still left a lot of ground to cover. And by the end of three days we were a little turned around and stopped by a stump in the middle of the path for a break.

“You’ve got to be kidding me! We’ve been looking for Vermillion city for ten whole days now!” Misty screamed to the high heavens.
“Misty, don’t shout like that! You’re scaring away all the pokemon!” Ash scolded her, peering through his binoculars. “Not that there’s much other than spearow here.” He added with a grumble.

“Uh, Misty? There’s a bug on your—” Brock was cut off by Misty screaming and jumping onto the stump, waving her arms and legs to dislodge whatever bug type had crawled on her.

“Where is it? Where is it? Is it still on me?” She checked herself over.

“Oh, oops, my mistake. It was just some grass.” Brock held up a large weed.

“UGH! I’m sick of these stupid forests!” Misty screamed.

“Well, Route 24 goes straight to Vermillion city.” Ash told us. He had the map up over his face and he turned it around to show us.

“Really? And does this path lead to Route 24?” Misty smiled hopefully.

“By my calculations it does.” He answered proudly.

“Er,” I winced and gently took the map from him. He’d scribbled his calculations all over it, writing estimates of how far we’d traveled every day, ignoring the legend key at the bottom.

He was in the right ballpark if I was reading this right. And there was a Pokemon Center marked nearby. This path branched out a few times but it was almost a direct shot to the Pokemon Center.

“Alright then, let’s go!” Misty was all gung-ho and eager to get going. I didn’t blame her. I was longing for a real bed myself. “Gah!”

“Misty?” We all rushed towards her. Just a little down the path, just out of sight from our chosen stopping point, was a massive boulder that the path curved around. And on top of that boulder was...

“A Charmander!” Ash grinned.

“Wow, you don’t see many of these in the wild.” Brock scratched his head. “And actually, this one doesn’t look like its doing well.”

No, it didn’t. It looked cut up and bruised, even through the scales. Some scales had flaked off, leaving exposed patches of skin.

But the most damning part was its tail flame, hardly bigger than a candle. When I compared it to my Charmander’s boisterous, fist-sized flame, it looked truly pitiful.

“…I’m going to catch it, then we can take it to a Pokemon Center.” Ash decided.

“Look at it’s tail flame, Ash.” I put my hand over his to stop him from sending Pikachu forward. “I don’t think this Charmander could fight right now.”

“Oh, yeah, you might have a point.” He realized. “It’s flame is way smaller than your Charmander’s.” Maybe seeking the reason for that, he pulled out his pokedex.

“Charmander: The Fire-Type Kanto Starter Pokemon. This pokemon’s tail flame is directly tied to its life force. If the flame goes out, the Charmander will die.” Dexter’s usual neutral tone only highlighted the seriousness of the situation.

“Try throwing a pokeball.” Brock suggested. Now we were all worried about the Charmander.
“Right. Go, pokeball!” Ash pulled a free one out and let it fly. It arced through the air towards its target and we waited for it to open and pull Charmander inside. But it never opened.

“Huh? What the?” Ash caught the returning pokeball, eyes darting between it and the pokemon.

“That reaction means this isn’t a wild pokemon,” I explained. “It must have a trainer somewhere, but,” Where was the trainer? If my Charmander was in this bad a shape I’d be sprinting for the nearest Pokemon Center.

“Piikaa, Chu!” Pikachu jumped from Ash’s shoulder and started scaling the boulder. At the top he started talking to the Charmander. Poor Charmander’s voice was weak and tired, barely audible to us on the ground.

“Pikachu, did it tell you what’s up?” We all knelt down to be more on Pikachu’s level.

“Pika pika, pikabi!” Pikachu mimicked someone adjusting a necktie.

“A tie?” Brock guessed.

“Maybe, a man!” Ash guessed. Pikachu smiled and began motioning putting something away, all the time chattering away in pokemon language.

“Ash, do you know what Pikachu is saying?” Misty frowned.

“I think so. He’s saying that Charmander is waiting here for someone.” Ash translated.

“Pikachu!” Pikachu nodded.

“Then, I guess we should leave it here. It’ll be better if its own trainer tends to it.” Brock didn’t look too happy though.

I looked up to check the time and saw the clouds rolling in. It had been cloudy when we set off that morning and it was threatening rain now.

In its condition, Charmander didn’t stand a chance against a Splash attack let alone a real downpour.

Decided, I rolled my bag off my shoulders and dug through it for the umbrella stored inside. It was a plain black one that I’d had since I first woke up, but it was easily replaced.

“Hey, Charmander? Take this.” I unfolded the umbrella and expanded it, showing the fire type how it worked. “It’ll keep you dry until your trainer comes back, okay?”

“Ch-Char,” It nodded, taking the umbrella from me.

“That was a nice thing you did.” Brock smiled at me as I rejoined them.

“Ah, I just,” I scratched my cheek.

“There she goes, clamming up again.” Misty snickered.

“If it’s not battling or pokemon,” Ash added with a nod.

“Mm,” Well, they had a point. My confidence around people was spotty at best.

“We’d better hurry and find that Pokemon Center if we don’t want to get soaked.” Brock told us.
“Yeah, let’s go!” Ash took off running. A beat later we were all trying to keep up with him.

The Pokemon Center was half a mile away. The rain started just before it came into view and it came down hard. In seconds we were soaked. We probably brought in enough water to fill a pond when we stumbled through the doors.

“Phew, we made it.” Ash sighed, happily wringing out his hat.

“Brr, let’s get something warm to eat while we dry off.” Misty suggested. It was too late for lunch to be served but there were snacks in the lobby. One of the machines poured out coffee and hot cocoa and we all got a cup to warm us up.

I heard Brock sigh and saw him staring distantly out the window. The rain pounded down hard enough that we could barely see the other side of the road.

“Still worried about the Charmander?” I asked him gently.

“Yeah,” He admitted. “I just hope its trainer got back to it already.”

“Whoa, Damien, you’re amazing!” We all looked over at another table. One boy about our age, probably Damien, was leaning back with a pile of pokeballs on the table in front of him that all the other trainers were admiring.

“Whoa, he’s got a lot of pokemon.” Ash remarked. At the other table the trainers continued to praise Damien’s collection.

“He must not be registered for the League.” I hummed absent mindedly.

“What do you mean, Cal?” Ash looked at me.

“Oh, uh, a League trainer is only permitted to carry six pokemon, any other pokemon caught are sent to the place you first got your pokemon.” I explained. “So, say you caught seven pokemon? That seventh pokemon would be automatically teleported to Professor Oak’s lab, since, ah, that’s where you first got Pikachu.”

“Yeah, I used to have a Charmander.” I think we all straightened up when we heard that. “But it was too weak! It couldn’t even beat a Bellsprout!”

“You don’t think?” Ash looked distressed.

“So what’cha do with it?” One of the trainers asked. I was really interested in hearing that answer too.

“Eh, I left it on a rock on the way here and told it to wait there and I’d come back for it. And it believed me!” He boasted. Like there was anything to boast about. Like he hadn’t just admitted to abandoning his loyal pokemon!

I was mad, but Brock? He was furious. And he stood up and stalked over to that poor excuse for a trainer to let him know it.

“Go. Get. It.” He snarled, grabbing Damien by the collar.

“Wha?” Damien tried to pull back which only resulted in Brock shaking him.

“I said go get it! Your Charmander, that poor pokemon you lied to! It’s still waiting on that rock in the rain and if its tail flame goes out, it’ll die!”
“And? Why should I care?” That piece of scum sniffed arrogantly. “It’s survival of the fittest and if that Charmander doesn’t survive, then well it wasn’t the fittest.”

“Then give us Charmander’s pokeball!” I stomped over to him. “We met the Charmander earlier and couldn’t catch it because it’s still registered as one of your pokemon. So hand it over!”

“And why should I?” He shoved himself away from Brock and grabbed a pokeball from the pile. Oh if it was a fight he wanted he was going to be in for such a burn.

“You’d better not mess with Damien! He’ll cream ya!” One of the other unimportant trainers warned us.

“I’ve fought bigger and badder things than a glorified toddler throwing a temper tantrum because his toy wasn’t as bright and shiny as he wanted.” I snarled at them.

“Break it up! Break it up!” Nurse Joy ran over and jumped between us. “There will be no fighting in this Pokemon Center.”

“Feh, like I’d waste my time fighting a bunch of losers.” Damien huffed, grabbing his pokeballs. I noticed though that his ears were burning.

“You kids shouldn’t get involved with that bunch,” Nurse Joy looked us over. “They’ve got a bit of a bad reputation around here.”

“Wow, she’s pretty. Definitely the prettiest Nurse Joy I’ve ever seen.” Brock sighed after she walked away.

“What are you talking about? She looks just like all the other Nurse Joys.” Misty frowned.

“Yeah, it’s a Joy-ful world.” Ash rolled his eyes. “More importantly, Cal, I’ve never heard you talk like that before.”

It took me a moment to figure out what he meant.

I’d just trash talked that piece of scum. Even writing this now, I’m still insulting him. I mean, he doesn’t exactly deserve any respect but I’ve never gone off on someone like that before.

At least I don’t remember going off on anyone before.

“AH! The Charmander!” Brock gasped, jolting out of his stupor.

“We’ve got to help it!” He ran to his bag and pulled out a rain coat. The rest of us did the same and we all ran out the door into the storm.

The road was getting slick with mud and the wind cut through our coats like they weren’t even there. None of us complained. There was a pokemon in trouble and in this kind of storm I wasn’t sure how much good my umbrella could do.

We ran as fast as we could and made it to the rock in time to see a small flock of spearow attacking the Charmander. Their talons raked through my umbrella, filling it with holes and eventually knocking it out of Charmander’s grip entirely.

“Alright, that’s enough! Pikachu, Thunderbolt!” Ash cried.

“PI-KA-CHUU!”
Pikachu was standing too close and with all the rain? Being shocked for the second time was actually worse than the first. My muscles spasmed and locked tight. There was a sharp pain in my shoulder where I was sure I’d pulled a muscle seizing up like that.

“That’s…great, Pika…chu.” Ash coughed weakly. “Next time, not so…close, okay?”

“Pii kaa.” Pikachu apologized.

“It’s tail flame is almost out!” Brock whipped off his rain coat and wrapped it around the Charmander. “We have to hurry.”

“I’ll make sure it’s tail doesn’t go out.” Ash took off his own coat and used it to shield Charmander’s tail from the wind and rain. Every time the direction of the wind changed, Ash adjusted the coat to better protect the fire.

It was another slippery, hazardous run back to the Pokemon Center. Misty and I ran ahead, making sure the boys knew where all the slipperiest places were to avoid them. We were panting for breath by the time we got back to the Pokemon Center. That was almost a full mile at a dead sprint, and Brock had been lugging around a thirty-forty pound pokemon in his arms the whole time too.

“My goodness, what happened to you four?” Nurse Joy gasped as we scrambled to get inside.

“Charman…pant…der…pant…Help.” I whimpered, clutching a stitch in my side that only then made itself known.

“This Charmander needs help, desperately.” Brock was a little more coherent.

Nurse Joy took one look at Charmander’s tail and gasped, whirling around to direct orders to her Chansey. We followed her, Brock only letting Charmander go when it was time to put it on a gurney and rush it into the surgery room.

That left us waiting. We’re still waiting now. The others are waiting by the door but I came back out to the lobby so I could write this entry and…because I needed a little distance.

Damien’s not here anymore. It’s late enough that the curfew has kicked in and all the doors and windows are locked but he’s not listed in the registry as staying the night. I’d probably get in trouble for looking at the registry without permission. I don’t know what I would have done if Damien did turn out to still be here.

Maybe show him what properly training your Charmander can accomplish.

I can’t be in the waiting room right now. I just keep seeing my Charmander in its place. If she was ever hurt that badly, if any of my pokemon were hurt that badly I don’t know what I’d do.

I can barely see what I’m typing. I should try to calm down.

I put away my pokedex and pulled out Charmander’s pokeball. In a flash of light she was there, nervously holding her tail and looking around for any threats.

“It’s okay, there’s no one around to fight.” I reassured her.

“Char? Char, charman!” She gasped and reached up to wipe away my tears. “Charman Charmander! Char?”
“Are you asking me what’s wrong?” I hiccuped. “Well, we met this other Charmander earlier today.” I told her everything. Meeting Charmander, meeting Damien.

“The other Charmander is still in surgery and we don’t know yet if it will be okay.” I finished. “That’s why I’m so upset, I guess. I just keep imagining it happening to you. I’d never abandon you, but if something ever happened and you came close to dying? I’d be heartbroken.”

“Chaar,” She hugged me, climbing up into my lap to do so. She was warm to the touch, just on the edge of burning hot, and her tail was bright and flaring with life.

“Call!” Misty came running down the hall. I had a single heartbeat of panic before I saw the great, big smile on her face. “Charmander’s going to be okay!”

“That’s great!” My cheeks ached from smiling so hard.

“C’mon!” She laughed, already running back down the hall.

“Charmander, do you want to come with me?” I asked the pokemon in my lap.

“Charmander!” She smiled and nodded. I didn’t bother putting her down. It was just faster to carry her.

“It’s resting now, but Nurse Joy says it will be fine in the morning.” Brock told me as we came in. He paused for a moment then made a little ‘oh’ sound. “You left the waiting room because this charmander made you think of yours?”

“Um, yeah,” I looked at my feet.

“Wait, that’s why you left?” Ash’s eyes went wide.

“I’d just,” I gulped. “I’d be devastated if anything happened to my Charmander, so,”

“But everything’s gonna be fine now.” Ash patted me on the back. “This Charmander will be fine and nothing bad’s gonna happen to yours.”

“Mhm, thanks Ash.” Still, I gave my Charmander one more squeeze before I returned her to her pokeball.

This Pokemon Center was on the smaller side and didn’t have as many rooms for visitors, so we camped out in the lobby. Nurse Joy was very apologetic about it but she couldn’t go waking up the other trainers to ask them to move for us. The rooms were first come, first served.

We didn’t mind. The couches were comfortable after ten days of sleeping outside. As soon as I finish up this entry I’m going to get some sleep too.

What kind of person was I before I lost my memories? I haven’t really asked myself that question before. Was I always shy around people? From my reactions to pokemon thieves, bullies, and abusers, I think I was a good person. But I can’t know for sure unless I get my memories back somehow.

I hope I was a good person. I hope I treated my pokemon well and had friends and family who miss me. Or maybe, given time travel is involved, they don’t even know I’m gone yet.

I hope they aren’t too worried.
Chapter Notes

I've been re-watching the series to give myself a refresher and so I can properly plot out future knowledge stuff and I'm at episode 395 now. And it hits me. It hits with all the force of a donphan's Roll Out. *I NOW KNOW WHO CAL'S MOTHER IS!* I've known who her father was from chapter 1 and even most of her backstory, stuff I'll be excited to elaborate on later, but her mom? Up til now has been a total mystery to me. (No, it's not actually anyone from ep 395, that's just when the epiphany hit me.) So, guys, look forward to that because it's gonna be a HECKA long time before those identities are revealed. Hecka long. Like...Wow, I'm not even through with the Kanto arc. Dear sweet Mike why did I do this to myself?

Well, enough of my venting. Onward!

“Guys, wake up! Wake up!” The very first thing I heard in the morning was Brock yelling at us. I startled bad enough that I reached for my first pokeball and summoned Charmander.

“Wha? Who’re we fighting?” I slurred, blinking at the bright sunlight I was only now noticing.

“It’s Charmander!” Brock had no patience for my sleepy head tendencies. “Charmander’s disappeared from the ER!”

“What?” We gasped. Tossing aside our blankets, we ran to the recovery room where Charmander had been resting. The big, open windows and fresh breeze told us all we needed to know. Nurse Joy was staring out the window with her hands clasped over her chest.

“It just left?” Misty said in shock.

“I don’t understand. Didn’t it understand that we cared about it?” Brock asked the room.

Surprisingly, it was Ash who answered.

“Of course it did, Brock. But it’s still loyal to Damien, so it had to leave.” He looked down at Pikachu in his arms. “He’s probably gone back to the rock to wait for him.”

“That poor thing,” Nurse Joy closed her eyes.

“Then there’s nothing we can do.” Misty pouted. “We can’t force Charmander to forget about Damien, much as we might want to.”

“We saved its life,” I reminded Brock. “And now that it’s recovered it’ll be able to fight off other pokemon and take care of itself just fine. Charmander wouldn’t have survived if it wasn’t strong.”

“Yeah…Yeah, I guess you’re right.” He made a visible effort to appear confident.

No one had much of an appetite at breakfast, not even Ash. We left the Pokemon Center with none of us feeling better but with no better idea of what to do.
Misty, at least, took it upon herself to cheer us all up.

“Alright!” She clapped her hands. “Nurse Joy said this path leads straight to Route 24! We’ll be in Vermillion city before you know it! There’s a gym battle for you, Ash. And Cal? You can bet I’m definitely teaching you to swim when we get there!”

“Looking forward to it.” I grimaced. It would be nice to not need saving in the water.

One minute we’re walking, just starting to shake off our melancholy. The next? The ground vanishes from under us and we start falling.

It was a sharp drop to the bottom. I landed on my pokeballs and I’m lucky none of them got damaged.

“Who put this hole here?” Ash groaned, hissing as he sat up.

“Oof,” I grunted when his elbow accidentally hit my side.

“Aha! Prepare for trouble!” Oh no.

“And make it double!” Not them.

“To protect the world from devastation!” Not again, please!

Yeah, I’m not writing all that. Skip forward to the end of the motto.

“Team Rocket, don’t you ever give up?” Ash shook his fist at them.

“Pikapi!” I tensed, looking up.

Pikachu wasn’t in the hole with us.

Pikachu was facing Team Rocket alone.

“CHUUU!” That was the sound of a Thunderbolt. But there was no explosion, no fading cries as Team Rocket blasted off.

“Silly Pikachu, rubber doesn’t conduct electricity!” What was going on up there?

“You’re coming with us now!” I could hear Meowth’s smug smirk.

“Pika!” Pikachu sounded startled, frightened.

“We’ve got to get out of here!” Ash scrambled to his feet, heedless of who might be under them as he tried to climb up the sides.

“Ash, wait!” I got up a little more carefully. There was just enough room for all of us to stand, though we were in each other’s breathing space. Still, I laced my fingers to act as a step ladder. “I’ll boost you.”

“Thanks, Cal!” He put one foot forward. I did my best to heave him up high enough for him to reach the top of the hole.

“Hey, what’s that Charmander want?” I automatically looked at my belt, expecting to see an empty pokeball.

But it wasn’t my Charmander they were talking about.
“It says you should give Pikachu back to those guys or else.” Meowth translated. Ash had his arms over the side and was struggling to pull himself up until Brock came in to give him a better boost.

“Or else what?” Or else turned out to be Flamethrower and whatever they were using against Pikachu’s attacks clearly wasn’t as effective against heat.

“TEAM ROCKET’S BLASTING OFF AGAAAAIIIINNNN!”

Ash got over the top and called back to us that Pikachu was okay, Charmander had saved him. Brock gave Misty and I a boost and then we worked together to bring him up out of the hole.

“Charmander, that was amazing!” Ash praised it.

“You really saved us back there.” Brock nodded proudly.

“Hey, Charmander? How would you like to come with us?” Ash bent down and extended his hand.

“Your old trainer is—!”

“Has been looking for you everywhere, Charmander!” My hand went down to my belt as we all turned to see Damien coming up behind us.

“Damien, you bragged about abandoning Charmander!” Ash yelled.

“Good thing I did. It toughened it up. And I didn’t even have to put in the time and effort to raise it myself.” He smirked like that was something to be happy about. A bonus. “I wasn’t going to come back but then I saw what it was capable of.”

“You jerk, raising a pokemon is the best part of being a trainer.” Brock scowled. “You don’t deserve to even have a license.”

“Feh, shows what you know. Raising a pokemon’s the most boring part.” He rustled through his pockets and pulled out a pokeball. “Now return, Charmander.”

“Chrr, CHAR!” Rather than allow himself to be returned, Charmander swung his tail and knocked it right back into Damien’s face.

“Why, you!” He pulled out more pokeballs. “I’ll show you!”

“Try it.” I released my own pokemon. Beside me, Ash, Misty, and Brock did the same. Suddenly facing our own pokemon, Damien looked a lot less sure of himself.

“Char, char char!” Charmander stepped in front of us and unleashed another Flamethrower. I could tell it wasn’t very strong but it didn’t have to be against a human. It was enough to singe his hair, maybe a few first degree burns. He ran off screaming, leaving just one pokeball abandoned on the ground.

“Oh!” I quickly plucked it out of the ground and checked it.

“Is that Charmander’s pokeball?” Ash asked me.

“Yup.” And with a vicious grin, I dropped it on the ground and stomped on it. It cracked apart beneath my shoe, splintering into a dozen pieces and releasing Charmander. Now there was nothing left tying him down.

We all returned our pokemon and that left us to decide what to do with Charmander.
“You catch it, Ash.” Brock made the decision.


“You kept its tail from going out, you deserve the credit as much as I do.” Brock protested.
“Besides, I know you’ll train Charmander to be a great pokemon.”

“Alright, I will!” Ash grinned down at Charmander. “What do you say, Charmander?” He held out an empty pokeball.

“Looks like you got a new pokemon and a new friend all in one.” Misty commented.

“Ehehehe, I got a Charmander!” He cheered.

And then it was back on the road to Vermilion city.

“Dadadaadadadadadadadadadadadadaa,” I didn’t recognize the song Ash was humming but given he had caught two pokemon in two days I figured he was due for a little celebration.

“You know, Cal, I just thought of something.” Misty nudged me.

“Congrats, Misty.” Ash didn’t miss a beat, turning around to give her a cheeky grin.

“Grr! I wasn’t talking to you, Ash Ketchum!” She smoothed out her features and turned back towards me. “Cal, do you think it’s going to get confusing now that there’s two charmanders in the group? We can’t just call them Ash’s Charmander and Cal’s Charmander.”

“Oh, you’ve got a point.” I thumbed her pokeball. “And males and females of the species look nearly identical, if they’re ever fighting at the same time it could get confusing.”

“Oh, I know! Since Cal’s Charmander is a girl, we can put a big pink bow on it!” Ash suggested, now fully invested in the conversation.

“Err,” It wasn’t a bad idea, just a little silly. Eventually Charmander would become a Charmeleon and then a Charizard. The bow would start to look pretty ridiculous around then.

“Hmm,” I didn’t have any bows anyway but maybe there was something else I could use. I pulled my backpack off my shoulders and started rummaging through it. Clothes, poke-medicine, pokechow, a sewing kit, did I know how to sew?

“I have this,” I pulled out a black scarf from the depths of my bag. It looked like I had a winter coat in there too. Nifty!

“Cool, now we’ll be able to tell them apaaAAHH!” The ground caved in under us. This time I had the dubious fortune of landing on Ash and Misty but that was balanced by Brock landing on top of me.

“If this is Team Rocket again I swear,” I huffed, trying to find a way to get up without hurting anyone. It took quite a bit of maneuvering before we could all sit up.

“Squirtle squirt,” That, thankfully, did not sound like the Team Rocket motto.

“Squirtles?” Ash blinked in surprise.
“A whole school of them!” Misty gasped in delight.

Five little squirtles, all wearing shades. One of them had a larger, angular pair of shades that marked it apart from the others. I wagered that one was the leader.

Aaaaaannnddd they were laughing at us.

“Hey, what’s the big idea! Somebody could’ve gotten hurt!” Ash scolded them. That only made them laugh harder, one even turned and wagged its tail at us.

“Here Cal, let me give you a boost.” Brock patted my shoulder.

“Uh, right.” I stepped into his hand and reached for the lip of the hole. With a little effort I was able to pull myself up. The squirtles all backed up but continued their mockery, more of them wagging their tails at me while their leader stood with its hands on its hips.

“Alright Misty, you next.” Brock boosted her up and I helped her climb out. Then Ash came out and we all worked together to pull Brock from the hole.

“You dirty tricksters!” Ash fumed, shaking his fist at the squirtles. “I’ll show you! Pikachu!”

“Pii-ka!” Pikachu launched forward with an electrical attack. Not quite a Thunderbolt but not far removed either. He was aiming for the leader, but one of the other squirtles jumped in the way instead.

“Squirtle squirt Squirtle!” The leader cried, handing its injured friend over to the others before pointing at Pikachu. “Squirtle!”

“Pika Pikachu!” Pikachu’s cheeks sparked.

Water vs. Electric, I anticipated a quick fight. I knew how strong Pikachu was and the lead Squirtle clearly did too, judging by the stiff way it held itself in front of its friends.

The battle would’ve been short, bright, and maybe a little brutal if Officer Jenny hadn’t arrived then. At the first hint of sirens the squirtles all took off, carrying their stunned comrade.

“Well, that happened.” Ash frowned, disappointed he hadn’t gotten his battle.

“Hey, are you kids alright? Was anyone hurt?” Officer Jenny pulled up alongside us.

“No, officer, we’re okay.” Misty answered her. “A little bruised maybe.”

“I’m glad none of you were seriously injured.” She sighed with relief.

“What was with those squirtles just now? They ran off as soon as they heard you coming.” Brock asked. Did his cheeks look a little flushed just now? And he was holding himself very stiffly.

“People call them the Squirtle Squad, they’re pokemon vandals, always causing trouble in this town.” She pinched the bridge of her nose. “Why not come with me to the police station? My presence should convince the Squirtle Squad not to bother you again.” She offered kindly.

“Thanks, we really appreciate it.” Ash accepted for us. “And can you tell us more about the Squirtle Squad?”

“Sure thing.” She walked her motorcycle and led us to the police station.
"The Squirtle Squad have been running riot for weeks now. They paint graffiti, steal food from the markets, throw laundry off the lines, trample gardens, and just recently they’ve started digging holes like the one you lot fell into.” She explained. “And they’ve all got one thing in common.”

“What’s that?” Brock asked, curious.

“They were all abandoned here by their trainers.” Officer Jenny informed us sadly.

“Abandoned?” We repeated. It was just… just… What is wrong with all these people that they just abandon their pokemon so often? First the hidden village with Bulbasaur and the other pokemon, then Charmander, and now these Squirtles!

“That’s awful!” Ash raised his voice. “Why would they do that?”

“I don’t understand it myself.” Officer Jenny admitted. “I can’t even imagine ever leaving my Growlithe behind.”

She did tell us that they were all properly released, so they were all catchable, but since they went everywhere as a group they were hard to beat. She advised us to be careful of more pitfalls and told us where the Squirtle Squad usually hang out, just in case any of us wanted to catch one.

“Well, Ash? Do you want to catch one?” Misty asked as we came to a stream. We made ourselves comfortable on the bank and Misty pulled out a rod since, as she reminded us, squirtles were water pokemon.

“Definitely!” Ash clenched his fists. “I could tell that leader of theirs was pretty strong. I’d love to have it on my team!”

“What about you, Misty? They are water pokemon after all.” Brock pointed out.

“Hmm,” She thought it over, flicking her rod over the water. “You know, not this time. Squirtle don’t really interest me.” She decided.

“Well they interest me! With a Squirtle on my team I’d beat Gary, no sweat!” Ash was practically vibrating with excitement.

“Oh yeah, he did choose a Squirtle.” I remembered. I hope he’s treating it well, I didn’t get the best impression of him but he didn’t strike me as a piece of scum.

“Hey, I think I caught something!” Misty cried, tugging on her rod. We all sat up to see what she’d pull out. At first all we saw was a round, blue head. Then we saw the round shades.

“It’s one of the Squirtle Squad!” Ash realized.

“SQUIRTLE!” It drenched us all with a low powered Water Gun.

“Why…you!” Ash coughed, spitting out half a gallon of water. “Pikachu, Thunder Shock attack!”

“Pika-CHUU!” My muscles all seized up and cramped.

“StOoOoOp PiKaChUuUuU!” Ash was barely able to speak while the rest of us could do nothing but wait for Pikachu to stop.

“Pikapi,” Pikachu scratched the back of its head.
“Water…conducts…electricity.” Brock moaned.

“Oowww.” I whimpered.

“Squirtle squirt squirtle!” Oh joy, the whole gang was here to laugh at us.

“SQUIRT!” One of them fired a Water Gun before we could recover and knocked Pikachu into the stream.

“Pikachu, swim for shore!” Ash rose to his feet. We all tried to do the same. How did he shake off the shock so quickly? All my muscles felt like limp noodles.

“Pi pi pi pi pi!” It was a little sad to see an electric type was a better swimmer than me. “CHU!” Something underwater struck Pikachu and sent him flying up onto the bank.

“Oh no, Pikachu!” Ash tried to run towards his pokemon but the Squirtle Squad had other ideas. They threw lassos around us and circled us faster than we could keep up. In moments we were wrapped up and helpless. This was going a step beyond pitfall traps.

“Squirtle,” The leader smirked, nodding to its friends.

“Good work, Squirtle.” Meowth stepped out from behind the trees.

“Wha? Meowth!” Ash growled. “You did something to trick the Squirtle Squad into working for you, didn’t you?”


We couldn’t convince the Squirtle Squad that Team Rocket was bad news. They trusted a pokemon’s word over ours and Meowth could spin a convincing yarn when he wanted to. They took us directly to their hide out. The path was steep with a rickety old bridge. The whole time I was crossing I felt like it was only a matter of time before we fell in. Gotta say, it was relieving to reach the other side, even when they took us into a cave and tied us to a rock.

“Cha…chaa…” Pikachu whined from inside its cage.

“Pikachu’s badly hurt. It needs a Super Potion.” Brock grimaced.

“Do we have any of those?” Ash looked at us.

“Um, no.” I had poke-medicine, but nothing as strong as a Super Potion and there was no Pokemon Center in town either.

“There’s a store in town that sells them. I noticed it earlier.” Brock told us.

“Wait, really?” Ash turned to the pokemon. “Squirtle Squad, please, you have to let me go buy medicine for Pikachu!”

“Squirtle squirt squirt!” The leader scoffed.

“The Squirtle says ‘please, I know what humans are like. If we let you go, you’ll just run away.’” Meowth translated for us.

“Please, I promise I won’t run away! I’ll buy the medicine and come straight back!” Ash tried to bargain.
“Squirtle Squad, the rest of us will stay here as your hostages.” I offered. “Ash is our friend and he’d never abandon us or Pikachu, he will come back but Pikachu might not survive without that medicine!”

“Please, Squirtle Squad, I’m begging you.” Ash bowed his head. I was on Misty’s other side, but I could hear him stifling tears.

“…Squirtle.” The leader sighed. With a gesture, it directed one of the other squirtles to untie Ash.

“Wait a minute! You’re really gonna take that chance?” Meowth tried to derail things.

“Squirtle Squirt!” From the way the leader pointed at Pikachu, I got the feeling it was saying something like ‘it could be that pikachu’s only chance!’

“Squirt Squirt Squirtle.” The leader faced Ash.

“Aarrghh, The Squirtle says ‘You had better get back before noon tomorrow or we’re shaving the girls heads.’” Meowth hissed.

“What? Shave?” Misty screamed, appalled.

I wasn’t overly fond of my brown hair and bob, but I didn’t want to be shaved!

“Ash, you had better get back here on time!” Misty scowled threateningly.

“I will, I promise.” Ash nodded. A moment later he was gone, taking off at a dead sprint in his rush to get back to town. Meanwhile outside I knew the sun was beginning to set.

“…This is going to take a while, isn’t it?” Misty sighed, slumping in her bonds.

“Looks like.” Brock nodded with a sigh.

Between them, I wished I’d gone to the bathroom before we got captured.

Picking up where I left off, we were tied to that rock until long after nightfall. Meowth started looking nervous when nightfall came and went without his team showing up. For our part, we tried to doze in our ropes. It wasn’t the most comfortable position. Thankfully, the Squirtle Squad did give us a bathroom break, though they also ended up stealing the food from our bags and leaving us with nothing.

“Chaa….chaa…” Pikachu stirred a little.

“What do you think it was hit with?” Brock asked us.

“Probably a Horn attack.” Misty surmised. “I recognize the pattern and there’s supposed to be goldeen in that river.”

“I hope Ash gets back soon.” Brock looked towards the cave entrance.

Me too.” I sighed.

It was a long, uncomfortable night. Morning dawned hot and bright and the rocks were no comfier than before. Meowth took to pacing, clearly wondering what was keeping the rest of Team Rocket so long. Hopefully they got themselves arrested by Officer Jenny.

It was getting closer to noon, around ten in the morning, when the Squirtle Squad shook
themselves off and started untying us.

“Hey, what are you guys doing?” Meowth protested.

“Squirtle Squirtle.” One of them shrugged.

“But…But what about shaving the girls if the twerp doesn’t get back in time? You’re just letting’em go?” He squawked.

“Squirtle squirt squirt Squirtle.” A second one nodded.

“What? You say you was bluffing?” Meowth jumped back in shock.

“Well Meowth, unlike you I guess they’re still good pokemon.” Misty stuck her tongue out at him.

Meowth couldn’t stop them without blowing his cover. And one Meowth against five Squirtle? That was a sure bet.

“Oh, poor Pikachu.” Misty lifted him carefully.

“We should wait outside. If we tried to head back to town now we might miss Ash on the way.” Brock reasoned. We gathered our things and went out into the sunlight together to keep an eye out for Ash’s return.

We weren’t outside long before we heard rocks shifting inside the cave.


How? Was there a back entrance?

“Squirtle Squad, what did you do to my friends?” He demanded angrily.

“They didn’t do anything, we’re over here Ash.” Misty giggled.

“Misty! Cal! You’ve both still got your hair!” He laughed.

“Of course, the Squirtle Squad was just bluffing, they wouldn’t really do something to hurt someone.” Misty winked. “More importantly, did you get the medicine.”

“Yeah, I’ve got it right here.” He pulled the potion out of his vest. “Let’s spray it on Pikachu fast.”

Pikachu’s wounds looked a lot better after the first spray. By time we finished the whole bottle Pikachu looked none the worse for wear. And now that he wasn’t in so much pain he’d be able to rest better.

It was a nice, heartwarming moment before Team Rocket had to go and spoil it with their flash bombs.

“Team Rocket!” Ash whirled on them.

“Prepare for trouble,”
“And make it double!”
“To protect the world from devastation!”
“To unite all people within our nation!”
“To denounce the evils of truth and love!”
“To extend our reach to the stars above!”
“Jessie!”
“James!”
“Team Rocket, blast off at the speed of light!”
“Surrender now or prepare to fight!”
“Meowth, that’s right!” Meowth darted past us, swiping Pikachu from Misty’s lap.

“Give me back my Pikachu!” Ash started to run after him but James and Jessie dropped more bombs from above.

“Quick, everybody inside!” Brock grabbed me and Misty by the arms and hauled us back to the cave.

“Squirtle!” We looked back to see the lead Squirtle had been knocked on its back by the force of the explosion. And a Squirtle on its back was totally helpless.

“Squirtle, I’m coming!” Ash yelled.

“Ash, wait!” Brock kept me from following him. Ash ran out into the bomb fire, shielding Squirtle with his own body. The bombs knocked loose whole clouds of dust and debris, obscuring our vision. We waited breathlessly to see if our friend made it out okay.

“I see him!” Misty gasped. I didn’t waste any more time. I elbowed Brock into letting me go and ran towards where I’d seen last seen Ash.

He was bruised and battered and his clothes were torn, but he was okay.

“C’mon, get up!” I put one of his arms around my shoulder and helped pull Squirtle to its feet. More bombs were raining down. “Run!”

Ash was able to stand on his own after he’d caught his breath and he didn’t waste any time in going back to the secret entrance he’d used before. I followed close on his heels with Squirtle. There was a part of this small entrance that continued straight and another part that went up, towards the top of the mountain. Ash took that one and we followed him. At the pace we were going it was only a minute before we surfaced nearly on level with Team Rocket’s air balloon.

“How did they?” Jessie screamed when she saw us.

“Squirtle, use Water Gun attack!” Ash pointed at the balloon.

“Spearow, catch Pikachu!” I threw my own pokemon out there. Spearow and Pikachu were close in size but all I really needed was to keep Pikachu from hitting the ground. Spearow was able to slow their descent and the three of us up on the cliff slid down to meet them.

“Pikapi!” Pikachu was awake and happy to see Ash again.

“Pikachu!” Ash pulled him into a hug.

“Good work, Spearow.” I held out my arm for him to roost on.

“Are you kids alright?” Officer Jenny was coming around the mountain. “I’m sorry I took so long, it was hard to find a path around without the bridge.” She looked up behind us. “Oh no!”

The bombs hadn’t been just flash, there was now a raging forest fire behind us. The wind at our backs was pushing the inferno towards the town.
“If we don’t think of something fast the whole town will go up in smoke!” Officer Jenny jumped off her bike.

“I’ve got an idea,” Ash perked up. “Squirtle Squad, if you all use your Water Gun together then you’ll be able to beat this fire no problem!”

“Squirtle squirt!” The leader nodded. It waved its arm at its friends and they all sucked in a big breath before unleashing their attacks.

“Wow, just look at them go.” Officer Jenny whistled. “They’ll have this fire licked in no time.”

Sure enough, the fire went out before it could reach the town. We found the townspeople had done their best to evacuate and organize a firefighting party, but it was clear they were underequipped for that kind of undertaking. That’s what gave Officer Jenny the idea to fold the Squirtle Squad into the town by publicly thanking them from stopping the fire and naming them the new town firefighters.

We left town glad that the Squirtle Squad weren’t bitter towards humans anymore. It was the best thing we could’ve hoped for really. But it didn’t feel like a surprise when the lead Squirtle followed us down the road and Ash ‘caught’ it. Honestly, I was expecting it.

That brings Ash up to a full team. We’re not far from Vermilion city either. His next gym badge and my first swimming lesson. I guess I should probably buy a swim suit.

Oh, that reminds me. Once we started making camp for the night Ash reminded me of the scarf I was going to give to my Charmander.

“Hi, Charmander.” I smiled as she appeared.

“Char?” She looked nervous to be the center of attention.

“I’ve got something for you, if you don’t mind.” I held up the scarf. When she didn’t object I laid it carefully over her throat. It was a little big on her but I figured she’d grow into it. “What do you think?”

“Char char Charmander!” She rubbed the end of it against her face.

“There’s one more thing,” I held up a finger. “I want to give you a nickname.”

“Char?” She cocked her head to the side.

“Ash and I both have charmanders and we don’t ever want to get the two of you mixed up in a battle.” I explained to her. “So I’ve been thinking of something to call you. I figured the easiest thing to do is just shorten it, so if you’re okay with it I’d like to just call you Char from now on. Is that okay?”

“Chaar?” She paused to think about it before smiling. “Char Charmander!”

“That’s great! Thank you, Char.” After that the rest of us let all our pokemon out for dinner. Char and Charmander finally got a chance to meet and talk. I think Charmander has a little crush on Char! So far everyone seems to be getting along.

Now the pokemon are back in their pokeballs and everyone except me is asleep. I’d better wrap this up and get some shut eye. Funny, the more I write the more it feels like I’m talking to someone instead of just recording my thoughts.
We should have reached Vermilion city in two days.

Obviously, that didn’t happen.

“How did we end up taking the scenic route instead of the fast, straight one?” Misty sighed. The sun was starting to set and we’d have to stop and make camp soon.

“I’m not sure,” Ash turned the map sideways. “We’re on the coast so at least we’re heading in the right direction.”

“This path is going to take us three more days though.” Brock sighed. He made a visible effort to cheer up. “On the bright side, you can challenge the gym when we get there!”

“Yeah, and win my third badge! I need eight badges and six pokemon to compete in the Pokemon League and I’ve already caught the six pokemon!” Ash looked pumped up.

“You didn’t catch most of them, they just decided to follow you!” Misty argued. “A real pokemon trainer battles wild pokemon to catch them.”

“Um, actually, Misty? Ash’s methods are perfectly legitimate.” I interjected.

“Huh? You can’t be serious? He’s so…” She waved her hand, not elaborating.

“So…what?” Ash frowned at her.

“I’m serious.” I assured her. “If Ash can convince pokemon to follow him without a battle, then why shouldn’t he? And, well, he’s not the only person who does that. Cleffa decided to follow me too, remember?” A thought occurred to me, a thought that just demanded to be shared.

“Besides, there are lots of trainers who force pokemon to follow them, whether they want to or not. I’d, well, I prefer Ash being who he is rather than being someone like Damien.” I grimaced at the thought.

“Eck,” Misty cringed. “Okay, you got a point there. He’s better than Damien. But that’s not exactly a high bar to jump.”

“Hey!” He glowered at her.

“Besides, he’s always bragging about two measly badges and he’s only caught six pokemon.” She held up her hands.

“That’s true. Most trainers catch twenty or thirty pokemon.” Brock nodded, though he didn’t seem convince.

“Um, correct me if I’m wrong, but,” I blinked at them. “Isn’t Ash the only one here with a full team right now?” Their faces went gray.

“Ha, you tell’em Call!” Ash laughed.

“They do have a point about the bragging, Ash. It comes off as rude and insensitive.” I warned him. “Now and again is fine, everyone brags sooner or later, but doing it every time the badges come up in conversation is a bit much.”
“Mm, you think?” He looked thoughtful. “But still, I would like to catch more pokemon.” He nodded, a determined grin sliding across his face. “Right, I’m going to catch another pokemon!” He took off running up the hill without waiting for us.

“Do you really feel that way, Cal?” Misty asked as we chased after him.

“About?” I spared a moment to look across at her.

“About Ash’s methods being just as good as the normal methods!” She grunted, darting around a large tree.

“Just because you don’t understand how it works, doesn’t mean it stops working!” Ugh, running and talking took up too much energy.

“It vanished!” Ash screamed. He was on the beach, staring at his empty hand in amazement.

“Your pokeball? Remember what Cal said,” Misty huffed, putting her hands on her hips. “Trainers registered for the Pokemon League can only carry six pokemon at a time, all others are teleported to the place they got their first pokemon from.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know.” He rolled his eyes. “I was just surprised, is all. I didn’t expect it to really vanish out of my hands! I just caught that krabby!”

Misty looked a little interested to hear it had been a water type. I wish I could’ve seen the battle. It must’ve been a quick one since we didn’t see it at all. Which pokemon did he use?

“Hey, Cal, is there a way to make sure Krabby got to Professor Oak okay?” Ash turned to me and asked.

“Er, well,” I thought for a moment. “You could call him or…um, could you pull out your pokedex for a second?”

Ugh, clunky buttons and keys. And such a tiny screen. How would he read anything on there? No wonder it could only relay information verbally.

“Ah, there,” I found the right buttons. “Your pokeballs are all automatically registered to the pokedex, so if you want to switch them out you can just use this, choose the pokemon you want to switch, and presto!”

“But I don’t want to switch my pokemon, just make sure Krabby is okay.” Ash frowned. “I guess that means we’ve gotta find a phone, huh?”

“Not much chance of that happening.” Brock sighed. “We haven’t passed a phone all day and it’s still a long way to Vermillion city.”

“Ugh, and it’ll be dark soon.” Misty reminded us. “I don’t want to camp outside again! I’m sick of sleeping in a sleeping bag!”

“Pika pika!” Pikachu shouted, jumping and pointing.

“What is it, Pikachu?” Ash followed Pikachu’s gaze. “Hey guys, look over there!”

A little further back was a cliff with a lighthouse situated on top. A good place for it and it looked to be in good condition. Which meant it was likely still in use.

“A lighthouse has to have a keeper, and I’ll bet a keeper has a phone!” Ash cheered.
“And maybe some spare beds!” Misty beamed. “C’mon!”

Turns out, it was farther away than it looked.

“Whoo, that was…a climb.” Ash panted.

“Yeah. You know, this lighthouse looks a little weird.” Brock noticed.

“Arcanine, Scyther, Electabuzz,” I started listing off the pokemon I recognized. All final evolutions and all carved artistically into the door. Kind of unusual for such an out of the way place.

“Guess we’d better ring the bell, huh?” Misty gulped nervously.

“I got it.” Ash stepped forward. The others all jumped at the orchestra of bells, but I kind of enjoyed it. They were just a recording but they still sounded magnificent.

“Who goes there?” A young man’s voice came over the intercom.

“Eh-Excuse me, sir,” Brock cleared his throat. “My friends and I were travelling and happened to spot your lighthouse. We were wondering if we could come inside and perhaps use your phone, please?”

“And if you’ve got any extra beds we’d really appreciate it!” Misty cut in.

“And if possible I’d love to be able to use your kitchen to make us all something to eat!” Brock offered. Brock was great at open fire cooking but I must admit I looked forward to what he could pull off with an actual stove. His famous Brock Soup had been amazing.

“Really? It’d be great to have something other than tofu! Please, come inside!” The doors unlocked and swung forward for us.

“Um, sir? Could we use your phone now?” Ash called through the entry way.

“There should be a phone on your left as you walk in!” The young keeper informed us.

A table with a video phone was sitting nearby. The handheld part was shaped like a bellsprout, cute!

“I’ll just make sure Krabby’s okay.” Ash sighed with relief. “I hope Professor Oak doesn’t mind me calling collect.”

It only took a second for Professor Oak to answer. He was in front of the camera cooking some ramen in a small pot, adding a few vegetables it seemed.

“Oh, Ash! I just got your krabby a minute ago!” He smiled as he saw us.

“Wait, Professor! You’re not gonna eat my krabby are ya!?” Ash cried.

“Oh no,” Professor Oak laughed. “I’d never eat a trainer’s pokemon, Ash, and besides, your krabby is too small to be a very hearty meal. Gary’s krabby on the other hand, could feed me for almost a week!”


“Indeed,” Professor Oak moved over to the side so we could see the table behind him. Two bowls
were on the desk, both holding a krabby inside. One was…a good deal larger than the other, shall we say. There was a cute little sticker with Ash’s face on the smaller bowl though.

“Nnng,” Ash bit his lip. From the way he kept looking between the two pokemon I could guess he was comparing them.

His krabby was a lot smaller than I would’ve expected, but looked fairly healthy.

“I think yours is younger, Ash.” I blinked.

“How?” He looked at me in confusion.

“Pokemon never stop growing, even if they don’t evolve.” I told him. “I’m not sure, but, uh, I think your krabby must be very young and Gary’s krabby is much older. Though I couldn’t begin to tell you their exact ages.”

“That’s very astute of you, Cal.” Professor Oak’s eyes sparkled. “And correct, Ash’s krabby is very young. I’d estimate it’s about a year old actually. Whereas Gary’s krabby is actually in its thirties!”

“Whoa, really?” Ash’s eyes were wide. “Huh, so mine’s a baby krabby.”

“Mhm, and Ash, you don’t need to compare yourself to Gary that way.” Professor Oak assured him. “You’re both very different trainers! Why, Gary’s already caught 45 pokemon while this one is your 7th!”

“45!” Ash cried out.

“Oh my,” The professor chuckled nervously. “Oh, by the way, where are you calling me from, Ash?”

“A lighthouse on a hill, why?” Ash calmed down.

“Oh, I thought I recognized the number! That’s Bill’s lighthouse! One of my former students, now a pokemon researcher!” He smiled. “Make sure you pay attention to anything he tells you! He could teach you a lot about pokemon!”

“I’m here, Professor, and I’d be happy to talk to your friends about pokemon!” The keeper’s, Bill’s, voice came through the speakers above.

“That’s great, thank you, Bill! Now kids, I have to go now but call me again when you get the chance!” Ash and I both waved to the professor as he ended the call.

“Well, I can hardly ignore a request from my favorite teacher. Welcome friends, I am Bill, the keeper of this lighthouse and a pokemon researcher.” The lights came on overhead, casting the room in a much friendlier atmosphere.

At the foot of the stairs was a giant kabuto.

“A kabuto! But they’re supposed to be extinct!” Brock recognized it too.

“It’s…certainly large enough to have lived that long…I guess.” I muttered. Not that anyone really knew how long a kabuto’s lifespan really was but I didn’t think I’d ever heard of one being this big before.

“I’m not a kabuto, please believe me! This is only a costume!” The…Bill’s voice came out of the
costume. “I’m… actually stuck inside so if one of you wouldn’t mind helping me?”

“Oh, sure, just tell me what to do.” Ash bounded towards it.

“There’s a button under the right arm, if you could please press that?” Bill requested.

“This one?” There was a slight hiss of air as the front face of the costume broke away, allowing the man inside to step out of the shell.

“Oh, thank you for that, my friend! I’ve been trapped in that costume for hours!” He sighed with relief, stretching his arms above his head.

“Did you just come back from a costume party?” Misty asked curiously.

“Nothing of the sort.” He happily denied. “Rather, this costume is for my research. I find that getting into a pokemon’s skin helps me get into their minds, let’s me see how they would’ve lived their lives! Which is vital since kabuto are long extinct.”

“That’s an… interesting school of thought.” I admitted. Dressing up as a pokemon for research. Not something I’d ever want to do, especially if I couldn’t get out on my own again.

“It’s a new one, I’ll admit.” He chuckled. “But one I’m beginning to understand. This planet has existed for roughly 4.6 billion years, and in that time many pokemon that once walked this earth have gone extinct. What were they like? How did they live their lives? With my research, I hope to find the answers to those questions!”

“Although right now there’s only one pokemon I’m really interested in.” He smirked.

“One pokemon? Which one?” Ash cocked his head to the side.

“I’ll show you.” He led us up the stairs to the viewing platform. The walls were all carved with pokemon, just like the door.

“Say Bill, what’s up with all these carvings?” Misty asked. We were passing a section dedicated to water pokemon.

“This lighthouse is decorated with all the currently known Kanto-native pokemon, extinct or otherwise.” He informed us, a hand running over a carving of an omanyte. “There are 150 living pokemon confirmed to be native to the Kanto region.”

“Wow.” Ash breathed as we continued ascending. Finally we reached our destination and we looked out over the ocean as a thick fog gathered.

“Since I’ve stationed myself at this lighthouse I’ve begun picking up readings of a pokemon unlike any other.” He told us. “A pokemon of truly momentous size. Maybe even the largest pokemon ever encountered! And,” He turned towards us.

“That pokemon might also be the only one of its kind.” We all jolted at that.

“The only one? It doesn’t have any friends or family?” Misty gasped.

“None. My readings indicate it’s a single pokemon, traveling alone. And recently I’ve even been able to hear its cries.” He held up a remote and pressed a button. Instantly, a haunting melody of a pokemon’s cry began playing over the speaker. It was sad, lonely, so filled with longing that it could almost bring a tear to your eye.
“I’m lonely. I want a friend.” Bill sighed, wiping away a tear himself. “That’s what this cry says to me.”

I closed my eyes, focusing everything on listening. Pokemon were usually named for their cries. It was an easy identifying method. Listening to the sad moaning though, I couldn’t pick up anything like that. It didn’t sound like there were any consonants or any repeating parts you could work a name from.

It was just crying.

“I made a recording of myself with a similar melody,” Bill informed us after we’d listened for a while. The next song he played was filled with hope just as much as longing. “This one says, I want to meet you. I want to be your friend.”

“After a few days, I began hearing a reply!” He told us excitedly. Another press, another song. “I am coming. Let’s be friends!”

“It’s beautiful!” Misty twirled. “It’s like music!”

“Would the lady care to dance?” Brock bowed.

“Why, thank you.” I watched the two of them smiling and dancing. The recording kept playing.

And then a loud, echoing cry reached us from over the water.

“It’s here!” Bill cried. “The giant pokemon is here!”

The fog was so thick we couldn’t make out any real details, none except for size. Even standing in the water it was taller than the lighthouse. The sheer scale of it was mind boggling. I thought I saw wings on the back, and maybe tentacles, but I couldn’t make anything clear out.

A water/flying type? I couldn’t be sure.

But it was here, called here by Bill’s recordings. How far must it have traveled hoping to find another one of its kind? And for us to be here when it arrived! I couldn’t do anything but stare up in awe.

Awe that turned to horror as something impacted the pokemon and exploded against its flesh.

“WWOOOAAARRRRRR!!!” The pokemon cried out, in pain this time.

“What’s going on?” Ash grabbed the railing to avoid being knocked off his feet.

“Something’s attacking it!” I raced to the railing and looked down. I couldn’t see them, but two more explosions lit up against the pokemon’s stomach. Some sort of rocket launcher? Grenades?

“Look out!” Ash grabbed me and Bill and pulled us to the floor. Overhead the giant pokemon’s arm swept out, easily snapping through the lighthouse’s light and taking off the entire top floor, narrowly missing us on the platform.

“Everybody inside and downstairs, quick!” Brock shouted. The lighthouse shook alarmingly, tilting dangerously over the cliff.

We raced down the stairs. My hand was on Spearow’s pokeball the entire time. As soon as we were outside I had his pokeball in my hand, ready to call him as soon as I found those responsible. I edged towards the cliff and looked down.
There was no one there.

“No, pokemon! Please come back!” Bill shouted. The giant had turned and was beginning to march away over the water.

But it didn’t.

We couldn’t sleep in those beds Misty wanted since the lighthouse wasn’t structurally stable. Brock didn’t get to cook for us on a stove either. So it was another night under the stars with all of us sick and disappointed. If I ever got my hands on whoever tried to attack that pokemon I swear I’ll give them a battle like never before!

Bill especially seemed quiet all night, but by morning he was already talking about rebuilding and trying again. With perhaps a little extra security to prevent unsavory sorts from making a second attempt.

“Do you think we’ll ever discover all the pokemon there are?” Ash asked him as we were getting ready to leave.

“No, Ash, I don’t.” Bill stated happily. “I believe there are more pokemon than we can ever imagine. But I think we’ll all have some great fun trying, won’t we?”

“Yeah!” Ash grinned.

A terrible end, but a hopeful beginning. We left the lighthouse to continue on our way to Vermillion city.

I hope I never lose any of my memories ever again. I don’t ever want to forget meeting such a wonderful pokemon, even if we never actually got to see it up close.
The Lesson

Chapter Notes

I FORGOT! I'm sorry! Sure, this story doesn't have a whole lot of fans but still. I didn't remember that it was Saturday, and thus Update Day, until I was leaving for work this afternoon. I only got home a little while ago and it is officially Sunday now. Grrr. Regular posting resumes next Saturday, I'll do my best to not forget again.

Have a good day and please leave a comment!

The journey was…frustrating, to say the least. But we made it! Vermillion city! Dirty, bruised, battered, and not just a little hungry after short rations for three days, but we’d finally made it.

A note: I seemed to be handling the dirty, hungry, battered business far better than the others. To be honest, three days of short rations didn’t really bother me. Yeah, I felt kinda gross and I was sore, but it just didn’t affect me the way it did everyone else. Even Brock got in on the complaining, though he handled it the next best.

Of course Ash wanted to hit the gym as soon as we arrived, but the rest of us managed to slow him down long enough to realize that Pikachu, and all of us, needed a rest first. And some food. A shower maybe.

So we asked directions to the Pokemon Center. There was a nurse Joy at the front desk, as is expected. I noticed a lot of trainers hanging around in the lobby, despite it being the middle of the day. A little unusual for a day with such fine weather.

“Welcome to the Vermillion City Pokemon Center!” She greeted us as we stepped up to the desk. “How can I help you?”

“My Pikachu and other pokemon need a good rest before our gym battle.” Ash informed her, pulling out his pokeballs and depositing Pikachu onto the front desk.

“Your gym battle?” Nurse Joy’s shoulders slumped. “I see,”

“Is there something wrong?” Brock asked in concern, placing his hand over hers.

“Well, you see,” She was interrupted by a Chancey shoving the front doors open, pulling a gurney with an injured rattata. A young trainer was following behind them, tears streaming down his face as he fought to keep up.

“That’s the fifteenth one this month.” Nurse Joy moaned, tiredly rubbing her face before standing up.

The rattata must not have been injured badly enough to demand her immediate attention, because she led us to a room filled with recovering pokemon. Oddish, sandshrew, pidgey, rattata, fourteen of them all lined up with their trainers hovering over their bedsides.

“They all came from Lt. Surge’s gym.” Nurse Joy informed us sadly. “Most Gym Leaders stagger their teams to provide a fair challenge to trainers, but Surge doesn’t subscribe to that practice. He
uses his toughest pokemon every time.”

“That’s cruel.” Brock’s eyes hardened. An onyx might seem like an unfair opponent to most newbie trainers, but Brock’s onyx was fairly young I think, and inexperienced. I wondered if he had older, more powerful pokemon left at home with his father.

A door on the far side of the room opened up, admitting the unlucky number fifteen to the room with its trainer.

“So, still feeling confident, Ash?” Misty elbowed him. “All these trainers took on the Gym Leader and look how they ended up.”

“Uh, Misty?” I lifted my hand tentatively.

“Yeah,” Ash gulped nervously but quickly puffed out his chest. “But I’m not afraid. My pokemon are strong!”

“You sure? Because the badges you have now you only got out of pity, remember?” Misty continued to egg him.

“Misty? Ash?” I tried,

“I earned those badges fair and square!” Ash defended himself. Loudly.

“Guys?” I tried a little louder.

“Just you wait, we won’t end up like those other trainers! We’re gonna face Lt. Surge and we’re gonna win!” He declared.

“Guys!” I cried, stepping between them. “Please, you’re disturbing the other people!”

“They say when two people fight its because they care about each other.” Nurse Joy giggled.

“What!? Me, care about her?” “What!? Me, care about him?”

Sweet Lugia, take me now.

Back in the pick-up room we found Pikachu finishing up a snack. He’d clearly had a bath and looked much better on a full stomach. Ash happily let Pikachu finish eating, clicking his pokeballs back into place along his belt.

“Alright, you ready to do this, Pikachu?” He posed bravely.

“Pi-ka!” Pikachu posed as well, much more adorably.

The doors slammed open and another gurney, this one with an injured pidgey, was rushed through straight towards surgery. From the little glimpse I caught, this one was going to require Nurse Joy’s direct attention.

“Another victim of that Gym Leader.” Misty bit her lip.

“Pi?” Pikachu’s ears twitched. “Pi pika?”

“Hm, what’s the matter, Pikachu?” Ash looked down at him.

“Pika, Pika pikachu pikapi!” He flapped his arms and mimed fainting, chittering furiously the
whole time.

“Huh?...Do I want you...to end up like that pidgey?” Ash guessed.

“Pi!” Pikachu nodded tearfully.

“Of course not!” Ash looked affronted. “I’d hate it if you were hurt!”

“Pi-kaa,” Pikachu sighed with relief.

I, knowing Ash and knowing what to expect, took two big steps back.

“But you’re way stronger than that pidgey so I know you’ll be fine! We’re gonna win this one, Pikachu!” Boast given, he tried to lift Pikachu into his arms and march proudly for the exit.

I say tried, because Pikachu clamped onto the table and refused to be lifted. When Ash attempted to yank Pikachu decided to *electrocute*.

“So glad that’s not me this time.” I muttered under my breath.

We did make our way to the gym though. Pikachu must’ve resigned himself. From the lightning bolts decorating the outside of the gym it was easy to guess what type they specialized in. All that was left was to go inside and let Ash demand a gym battle.

“Last chance to back out, Ash.” Misty taunted in a sing-song voice.

“Not a chance!” He huffed, shoving the doors open.

The room was darkened, for ambience. As we stepped in further we could make out the silhouettes of three people near the back.

“I’m Ash from Pallet Town, and I’m here to earn a Thunder Badge!” Ash clenched his fists.

“Ha!” One of the silhouettes snickered. “Look at that, boss! Another victim for the emergency room.”

“I can see that.” The silhouette in the middle stood from the chair they’d been reclining in. I expected him to top out a little taller than Brock.

He didn’t.

Seven feet tall and built like a brick wall. Lt. Surge was easily the biggest man I’d ever met.

And looking at him I felt…

*I know him. From somewhere.*

But that can’t be right. If my time travel theory is the correct one, and I’m sure it is, then how can I possibly know him? Or is it that I *will* know him? An older version of him.

I have no way of knowing how far back I traveled. Maybe a few decades, maybe a few months. My pokedex argues for years but I have no idea how fast technology will progress in the coming days.

I don’t know. And unless I get my memories back or somehow end up meeting my past (future?) self then I have no way of ever finding out.
Could I meet myself somewhere on this journey? Maybe I’ll run into a toddler me.

Or maybe I’ve already somehow prevented my own birth. It’s time travel, who knows?

Getting back on track,

“Which one of you is my next challenger?” He looked over the four of us. He zeroed in on me and Misty quick. He even bent over and pulled Misty into a warm hug.

“My next challenger is quite the cutie, but don’t think I’ll go easy on ya.” He warned with a smirk.

“Actually, I’m not the challenger.” Misty smiled uncomfortably.

“Not you, eh?” He turned and looked at me.

“N-No, not me!” I waved him off, ducking behind Brock.

I repeat, *seven feet tall and built like a brick wall!*

“I’m the challenger! I already said it! Ash, from Pallet Town!” Ash groaned.

“Relax, baby, I’m just messin’ with ya.” Lt. Surge straightened up.

“Don’t call me ‘baby!’” Ash fumed.

“I call everybody who loses to me ‘baby.’” Lt. Surge waved him off, not paying any attention. He did spot something low on the ground.

Pikachu, clutching onto Ash’s pant leg. I didn’t blame him for being intimidated. Pikachu was barely *one* foot tall.

“HAHAHAHAAA! Guys, check this out!” He bellowed over his shoulder. “Baby brought a baby *pokemon*!”

“Where do you get off calling Pikachu a baby?” Ash growled.

“Heh, I’ll show you.” He pulled a pokeball from his belt and threw it up into the air. It released mid-spin and the light reformed into a raichu.

This raichu was a good deal bigger than Pikachu, and just as mean looking as its trainer.

“Anyone aiming to be a pokemon trainer ought to know enough to evolve their pokemon as quick as possible to get all their best moves.” Lt. Surge snorted.

Which was…why did so many people believe this. Every time I hear this it just sounds more and more *stupid*. And short-sighted! Forcing pokemon to evolve in the fastest way possible was okay for powerful moves, but not for maturity or experience or loyalty.

It just feels wrong and I don’t know why I feel so strongly about it. Even Misty and Brock believe it to some degree. Ash and I are clearly in the minority here.

Maybe it’s a school of thought that changes in the coming years.

“*Raichu: The evolved form of Pikachu. This pokemon is capable of summoning over 100,000 volts, enough to render a dragonite unconscious.*” Ash’s pokedex informed us. He glared at the device for a moment before he shut it with finality, lifting his chin to face his opponent.
“We’re not afraid of you.” He said.

I would’ve expected Pikachu to be afraid. Up until today Pikachu has never struck me as a hot-blooded pokemon. But today things were different. Here and now, Pikachu’s cheeks were already sparking with electricity.

“Can Pikachu beat raichu?” Misty asked Brock.

“I seriously doubt it.” I tried not to pay them any mind.

“So, Baby, did you just come here to show us your baby pokemon?” Lt. Surge mocked them.

“We came to earn a Thunder Badge.” Ash stated, not intimidated in the least.

Maybe I wasn’t the only one getting sick of this evolutionary mindset.

We relocated to the arena. Brightly lit and fairly clear, no major obstacles. Raichu and Pikachu were already on the floor ready to begin. Brock, Misty, and I were relegated to the audience section.

The referee took his place and held up a microphone.

“This battle will be a One-on-One, no substitutions allowed. The Gym Leader has chosen Raichu, the Challenger has chosen Pikachu.” He stated formally. “Begin!”

“Pikachu, give him a Thundershock!” Ash yelled. A fast opening move, but not enough to catch Surge off guard.

“Feh, you call that an electrical attack?” Surge scoffed. “Raichu, show ’em a real Thundershock.”

“CHUU!” Raichu didn’t hesitate. Pikachu didn’t have a chance to dodge. He took the full force of that blow, getting knocked for a loop.

“Heh, one hit KO.” Surge smirked.

“Pikachu, are you okay?” Ash almost left the competitor’s box.

“Piiii-ka!” Pikachu painfully climbed to his feet.

“This isn’t looking good. Pikachu took a lot of damage.” Brock grit his teeth.

“They won’t win with electrical attacks.” I nodded sadly. No, raichu could more than handle anything they could dish out at this level. It’d have to be physical or nothing.

But they had to try.

Pikachu did his best. I think even Surge was surprised by how much punishment he could take before falling. Finally though, the referee had to call an end to the battle for Pikachu’s own safety. It was a loss and we had to retreat to the Pokemon Center.

Within the hour we were sequestered around Pikachu’s sickbed.

“Piikachu…” Pikachu grumbled, not looking at any of us.

“Pikachu was badly hurt.” Brock muttered, a touch too loudly to avoid being heard.
“I can see that.” Ash snapped angrily.

“No, I meant,” Brock shook his head. “His *spirit* was hurt. Pikachu tried its hardest to beat that raichu and just…couldn’t measure up.”

Ash didn’t have anything to say to that and neither did I. Pokemon usually healed quickly but did that include non-physical wounds?

“…We’ll get him. Next time, Pikachu and I will win!” Ash vowed.

“But Pikachu already did its best today, how do you think you can pull off a win after that?” Misty huffed.

“We’ll train for it! Night and day, as long as it takes!” Ash stood from his seat.

“Maybe you ought to rethink your strategy and use a different pokemon.” She tried suggesting.

“Pika!” Pikachu protested, turning to look at us for the first time since he woke up.

“Pikachu wants to beat that raichu, and I want to help him!” Ash held a hand over his heart. “I just know there’s a way for us to beat Surge!”

“Excuse me, I couldn’t help overhearing.” We all jumped, turning to see Nurse Joy standing in the doorway. “And I think I have something that might help.”

She walked forward until she was right in front of us, then moved her clipboard to reveal the little velvet box she held. Inside was a sea foam green stone with a lightning bolt inside.

“This is a thunderstone, it came into my possession a few months ago. With it, you can evolve your pikachu into a raichu.” She held it out for Ash to take.

“Like with a moonstone?” He checked with me.

“Uh, yeah, exactly like that.” Only much more common than a genuine moonstone. Huh, come to think of it I still had that one moonstone shard in my bag, didn’t I? Maybe Cleffa would want to use it to evolve someday.

“But if I use this…won’t that make me just like Surge? Evolving my pokemon just so that they’re stronger?” He wondered.

I grimaced. First because the image of Ash’s face on Surge’s body floated to the forefront of my mind. *Then* because I didn’t want Ash to change like that.

For a new trainer though he was pretty firm in who he was. Rather than make the choice himself, he gave the decision over to Pikachu. He offered the thunderstone and gave Pikachu the *choice*.

And Pikachu refused.

I might never know exactly what Pikachu said, but I feel like I understood. Pikachu wanted to win this fight, *as* a pikachu, for his own pride as a pokemon. He refused to change himself for that.

Of course, Ash would’ve liked to go and challenge Surge for a rematch right away, but Pikachu still wasn’t fully recovered and wouldn’t be until tomorrow. We left Pikachu to get some rest and went to the break room to get something to eat.

“Man, this whole thing has me so nervous.” Misty sighed, putting in the coin for a soda.
“There’s nothing to be worried about.” Ash dismissed her.

“I’m not worried about you! I’m worried for Pikachu!” She sniffed.

“Hey guys,” We all turned towards Brock. “Correct me if I’m wrong, but Surge said he evolved raichu as soon as he caught it, right?”

“Um, yeah, I think so.” I nodded.

“Good,” Brock smirked. “Then I think I know a way Pikachu can win.”

Hearing his idea and his thoughts on the matter, I had to agree it sounded reasonable. Better than that even; It sounded brilliant! I almost can’t wait until tomorrow to see it in action.

I’d like to skip forwards to Ash’s rematch, but I can’t.

You see, all told between arriving in Vermillion City, visiting the Pokemon Center, the Gym Battle, and returning to the Pokemon Center afterwards, we hadn’t eaten up more than a couple of hours.

There was still plenty of time for Misty to drag me off for my first swimming lesson.

A lesson which had to start, by necessity, at the nearest clothing store in order to buy a swimsuit for me.

I had to try on a few. I didn’t like any of them though. They were all so…revealing. I couldn’t even bring myself to leave the changing room.

“Uh, Misty? Don’t they have anything, um,” I flinched away from my reflection. “With a little more cover?”

“Cal, we’ve already tried every kind of one-piece they have!” She scolded me. “There’s only a couple of hours before the pools close. Hurry up and pick one, we can come back some other time and try to find one you do like.” She promised.

But there was just so much skin. It was worse than having to borrow Misty’s clothes. I was shivering!

The one I had on now was green, the same shade as my jacket. The shade itself was nice on my pale skin and there were no frills or straps to contend with. It was a plain, basic swimsuit.

It just…didn’t cover enough for me to feel comfortable moving around in public with.

Trying to distract myself from the suit, I ran my hands over my legs hoping to warm them up. I didn’t have a lot of hair there but I do have some scars.

Faint ones, claw marks on my shin, a single thin line just over my right knee. Curious, I inspected myself closely.

In showers I never gave myself much time to get to know my body. I cleaned up as quick as I could so I could get back to doing other things.

There was a patch on my right arm that looked like I’d badly skinned it up at some point and parts
of it had scarred over. Old too, easily three or four years.

I was thin, actually a little thinner than Misty who boasted a rather petite frame for a girl our age. I could feel my ribs through the suit. My collarbones stuck out obviously. But I did have some muscle, mostly in my arms and legs so I definitely had an active lifestyle. I was never as tired out by the daily trek as the others were, it was just the lack of sleep that got to me.

And I wasn’t as badly affected by the short rations either.

“Cal!” Misty’s impatient voice brought me out of my musings.

The green swimsuit was the least offensive of the lot so that was the one I went with. Next step was locating the nearest public pool.

“Alright, this place looks good. It’s not too crowded either so we’ve got some room.” Misty beamed brightly. There were only a couple of families splashing in the water.

“Let’s get changed!” She pulled me towards the changing room.

“There, see? That’s not so bad!” Misty slapped my back as I emerged from my stall. Her swimsuit was a blue and white two piece.

“Misty, I don’t like this.” I tugged on my suit, trying to find a way to cover a little more skin.

“Stop picking at it, Cal.” She slapped my hands away. “You look fine.” Her face softened, just a little. “I promise, when we find a store with better variety we’ll get you a swimsuit that you can be comfortable in. For now, just try to grin and bear it so we can get the basics of swimming down, okay?”

“Okay.” I nodded miserably.

The lesson itself was, well. Misty had me walk around in the waist deep section first, just to get used to being in the water at all. I hated the way it made me feel slow and clumsy, but this I could handle. It helped that the water was crystal clear and free of any wild pokemon.

The next step was to get me used to floating.

“Here, just lean back and let me hold you.” Misty held my upper arms as I leaned back, trusting her to keep my head above water. Actual floating was an unusual experience.

“How’s that?” She asked, smiling brightly.

“Not bad.” I tried to return the smile. Experimentally, I kicked my legs around a little. Misty helped me adjust my position a little until I could float on my back without support. That one was a little nerve-wracking to be honest, but I got through it.

Still, my hand drifted to my side and I couldn’t stop the momentary flash of panic when I couldn’t feel my pokeballs. They were in my bag. I could see my bag by one of the tanning chairs.

“Okay! Next up, we’ll try a simple stroke!” Misty cheered. “Stand up for a sec, Cal. Watch what I do, okay?”

I watched her demonstrate a few swimming styles. She was a good teacher, using the demonstrations and then talking me through her actions for each one. By the time the lifeguard announced the pool was closing I felt I had a decent handle on the stroke. At least enough to
hopefully save myself the next time I fell into water.

We toweled off and changed back. I was extra thankful for my covered skin as the air started getting chilly. We got back to the Pokemon Center and met the guys in the cafeteria for dinner. Then we still had a couple of hours before curfew and light’s out so we decided to do our own thing. Ash went back to Pikachu’s room, Brock went to our bedroom, I’m not sure where Misty went, and I sat myself down at a free computer terminal to finally answer a few questions.

Looking back over my entries, I’d built up quite a list of questions to answer. Most of those are in a separate file folder but I’ll put a few in here for the more personal ones.

Firstly, I now know what a millionaire is.

It’s a person who has over a million dollars.

Why does that confuse me? I understand money, I know the basic concepts, I understand supply and demand. Why does the idea of millionaires and billionaires boggle my mind?

I’m starting to feel like my memory erasure might’ve been more hodge-podge than first believed.

Secondly, I now know the requirements to become a Pokemon Professor, at least the basics. I had to go to the Pokemon League main website for that and I know that was more of a basic overview. I almost got distracted by the long list of pokemon related careers listed. I might go back and look at those in more detail later.

A Pokemon Professor is considered the expert in his or her region. They’re also considered researchers, and are often responsible for giving new League trainers their first pokemon. Each Professor also had a main specialty that they focused their research on. Professor Oak, for instance, specializes in the relationship between Pokemon and humans.

That is, word for word, the main blurb attached to the link on the League website. I had to go digging through some source articles to learn more.

One thing that all the Professors have in common is that they started as normal trainers. One way or another they all got interested in studying a certain aspect of pokemon. Professor Oak started by doing sketches of all things. But how they got interested wasn’t as important as what they did afterwards.

Some of them ended their journeys right away and worked to apprentice themselves under a current Professor, preferably one that shared their specialization. At some point they would attend university, Celadon University seemed to be the best rated of those schools. Professor Oak even taught there as a young man, before he became an official Pokemon Professor.

I opened a new tab and checked out the university. I almost clicked back out when I saw the tuition. I barely made enough to buy a swimsuit and chip in for our travel supplies! I did stay on that tab though, because I remembered another question I had that needed answering. What were scholarships?

Celadon University offers a wide variety of scholarships. Several of them I even qualified for. There was one scholarship down near the bottom of the page that especially caught my eye.

The Pokemon Professor Scholarship. Tuition would be waived if the student in question kept up a 3.8 or higher GPA and agreed to serve five years as a professor at the university after graduation. The scholarship even included a research stipend. But there was one more requirement before this scholarship would be awarded to anyone.
I’d need letters of introduction from five Pokemon Professors.

That was…well…Pokemon Professor still isn’t my main goal. Recovering my memories and finding a way home is.

I ended up spending the rest of time before curfew on the school’s website, looking up the courses I would have to take. They had on-line courses for a majority of them, but those had very strict requirements.

“Excuse me, it’s time for trainers to retire to their rooms for the evening. The doors will be locking in five minutes.” Nurse Joy tapped me on the shoulder, scaring me out of a year’s growth.

“Eep!” I jumped. “Uh, yes ma’am.” I closed out the computer and gathered my things.

Misty and the boys were already in the room. Pikachu had been released on the promise that he’d get a good night’s sleep and a final check up in the morning.

We said our good nights and all laid down, glad to have real beds for the evening.

I stayed up for an hour and a half, typing this. Now it’s done and I can finally get to sleep. Tomorrow is Ash’s rematch against Surge and I just know he’ll win.

Goodnight, Alakazam.

Morning was...well, I finally broke down and had some coffee in the cafeteria. I sipped it gingerly at first, expecting to be hit by a foul taste and require a ton of cream and sugar to tolerate it but I found the drink surprisingly tolerable. I did add a little cream and sugar anyway, but it wasn’t as bad for eleven year old taste buds as I’d been led to believe.

Ash was pumped at breakfast and Pikachu was determined. We ate quickly and left for the Surge’s gym.

On the way to the gym something happened that was so weird that I’m still not entirely convinced it actually happened. It started within two minutes of us leaving the Pokemon Center.

“Alright, Pikachu are you ready for this?” Ash pointed his finger at the sky. “We’re going to challenge Lt. Surge and we’re gonna win! Our lucky star is shining today!”

“Really? I don’t see it.” Misty made a show of looking around for the star.

“I don’t mean it’s actually shining!” Ash shoved her. He and Pikachu looked so affronted by Misty’s joke, I had to hold a hand over my mouth to hide my smile. They stepped away, moving ahead of us.

“They seem determined.” Brock commented.

“They’re going to win today.” I nodded.

We walked for a little while, passing some houses on our way to the gym. I was just thinking that it was a nice day and wondering where we’d be heading after we were done here when out of nowhere three people jumped out in the middle of the street ahead of us.

“Hey, what? Who are you guys supposed to be?” Ash tensed up.
The people were covered head to toe, with even big shades obscuring most of their faces.

“To protect the world from devastation—!” The two taller ones were cut off by the short one whacking them with a folded up fan.

But that was all I had to hear to know who they were.

“We’re the Pokemon Gym Battle Cheering Squad! Here to cheer for your Pikachu!” Meowth introduced them.

And then…bedlam.

It was…cheering, I guess. Three separate cheers even. Performed at the same time.

“Go, Pikachu!” With a final…rousing…cheer, they all quickly began running away.

“Thanks for the cheer, Team Rocket!” Misty called after them.

“I don’t…understand what just happened.” I watched until they were out of sight.

Weren’t they Pokemon Thieves? Dangerous criminals? Willing and able to use potentially lethal force to reach their dastardly goals?

It distracted me the rest of the way there. I was constantly on the lookout for pitfalls or snares or some kind of trap. That had to be what that was, right? The set up for some kind of trap?

But we got to the gym without any further harassment. Ash issued his challenge and we were once again in the arena, Raichu vs. Pikachu.

“Alright baby, ready for another beating?” Surge snickered. “You didn’t even evolve your pikachu!”

“We don’t need to. We’re going to win this!” Ash declared.

“Let the battle, begin!” The referee called.

“C’mon, Pikachu! We planned for this!” Ash sent him out.

“Ha, so you planned a new way to lose? Raichu, give’em the whip!” Surge ordered.

Pikachu’s timing was off. He didn’t dodge it in time and one whip was quickly followed by a half dozen more.

“Now Body Slam!” We all flinched as Pikachu squealed under raichu’s weight.

“Finish with another Body Slam, raichu!” We tensed.

“Watch out!” Ash yelled, encouraging Pikachu just enough to get up and dodge, letting raichu slam face first into the floor. “Good, now Agility!”

Pikachu blurred around the battlefield, circling raichu over and over again. It kept trying to follow its trainer’s orders, but Pikachu never stayed still enough for the Body Slam to connect. Once, twice, three times raichu slammed itself into the ground before Surge cut in.

“Raichu, give’em a Thunderbolt!” He roared.
“RAI-CHUUUUUUU!” The raichu was mad now and unleashed a powerful blast. Arcs of lightning blasted all around, shattering the windows above us. I counted ourselves lucky that the raichu still had enough control to keep the attack away from the humans in the room.

But for all the attack’s power, none of it matters if it doesn’t *hit*.

“He grounded himself with his tail!” Brock laughed in delight. Pikachu stood on his tail, glaring at the raichu with all his might. I leaned forward eagerly, ready to see the rest of the match play out.

“Give’em another Thunderbolt!” Surge growled.

Raichu tried. I saw its cheeks spark even from the other end of the room. It tried and tried, panting hard. A slow smirk found its way across my lips.

“It lost its temper. It overextended itself with that last attack!” I realized.

“Now Pikachu, Quick Attack!” Ash leapt for the opportunity. Pikachu sprinted forward and slammed directly into raichu’s stomach. Another dash, another sprint, and then Pikachu hit it from the side. Raichu’s cheeks sparked brighter, a sign of its rising temper, but it did nothing as Ash and Pikachu finished with a Thunderbolt of their own.

“Raichu is unable to battle! Pikachu wins!” The ref called it.

“Whoo! Yeah!” Misty jumped to her feet.

“We did it! We did it, Pikachu!” Ash happily ran out onto the field, grabbing Pikachu into a warm hug.

“Ya sure did.” Surge sighed, smiling. “You’re no baby, Ash Ketchum, and in honor of that I award you this Thunder Badge.”

“Oh, wow!” Ash took the badge in hand. This one was shaped like a sunflower which I found a little odd. What did sunflowers have to do with an *electric* gym?

“Look, Cal! Brock, Misty!” He waved it at us.

“I see, I see!” I giggled. It was so good to see him win, to see him grow into a better trainer!

Three badges down.
The Ambush

There was still plenty of time left in the day and no real reason to lounge around doing nothing. We started walking through the city and found our way to the port. Misty had the idea that we might find a better swimsuit for me.

“Man, look at all these ships.” Ash gasped in wonder.

“They sure are impressive.” Brock hummed.

“Can you imagine how luxurious it would be to travel on one of those?” Misty sighed. “The sun, the surf, lounging on the deck working on my tan!”

Tans meant swimsuits. Nope, I could live with being pale as milk.

“You’d probably see lots of interesting water pokemon traveling that way.” Brock chuckled. “But there’s no way we’d ever be able to afford it.”

“Darn, reality can sure be a bummer.” Ash groaned. Brock and Misty both nodded, looking equally disappointed at the reminder.

“Um, it’s not that bad.” I tried to cheer them up. “Besides, if you really wanted to be on the open water you could just, uh, ride a pokemon?” I quickly thought of a few examples. “Lapras are good for traveling between islands and are capable of some very long distance voyages, though you’d probably have some trouble packing enough food and water for a long trip.”

“A lapras?” Ash pulled out his pokedex. “It’s not in the pokedex. What region are they from?”

“I don’t know if they come from any particular region,” I bit my lip. “They don’t really leave the water.”

“I bet they look beautiful.” Misty sighed, giggling. Her smile quickly turned to a melancholy frown as she looked up at a big, fancy ship. “Still, it would be nice to go on a luxury cruise someday.”

“HEL-LO~!” We all jumped back as two girls broke away from the crowds in front of us. Both were deeply tanned, one had short blonde hair and the other had long light-red hair.

“Like, you’re trainers, aren’t you?” The redhead asked us.

“Yeah, why?” Ash tilted his head curiously.

“Like, how would you like to attend the most cool, unforgettable trainers-only party? All aboard the St. Anne!” She waved a ticket in his face.

“It’s gonna be, like, totally radical!” The blonde cut in.

“Oh, but,” His shoulders slumped. “We can’t possibly afford the tickets.”

“Like, not to worry!” The redhead giggled. “See, we were gonna go with our totally hot boyfriends, but they cancelled last minute, so, like, we were looking for some totally cool trainers to go in our place!”

“Yeah, you guys, like, look totally cool!” The blonde agreed.
“So, like, here’s the ticket! Have fun and, like, tell us all about it when you get back!” She pressed the ticket into Ash’s hands and she and her friend ran off.

“That seemed…a touch suspicious.” I muttered. “Ash, may I see that ticket?”

“Uh, sure.” He passed it over.

I had no idea what a legitimate cruise ticket looked like, but this one didn’t look fake to me. It was a pass for a group between 2 and 4 people to board the luxury cruise liner the St. Anne. The date and time of departure were stamped at the bottom.

“Why would they just give this away to some total strangers?” I flipped it back and forth, as if that would reveal some flaw.

“Who cares?” Misty snatched the ticket out of my hand. “The St. Anne is famous! I’ve always wanted to ride it someday! This is like a dream come true!” Her eyes read over the ticket and she gasped.

“Guys, it’s going to be leaving soon! We have to hurry!” She rushed us, running down the pier.

“Hey Misty, wait up!” Ash called as the rest of us followed her.

Something really didn’t sit right with me about this.

“Look, there it is!” She came to a stop in front of the biggest ship in the port. Calling it a ship was actually a little misleading, but I didn’t know a word that really encompassed all that it was. I’d wager that a thousand people could’ve fit on board.

“C’mon, it’ll be leaving in a few minutes!” Misty rushed for the stairs.

At the top was a man in uniform who barely even glanced at the ticket before waving us through. I looked over my shoulder at him, watching as he welcomed another late arrival with the same casual attitude.

When I looked forward again I found myself standing in an opulent room crowded with people and pokemon. Stalls were set up, the dull roar of people talking made me feel like a man lost at sea. And the worst part?

I’d somehow managed to get separated from the others.


“Hey, move it or lose it!” A voice behind me snapped. “You’re blocking the way!”

“Oh, sorry!” I jumped to the side, almost colliding with someone carrying an oddish. “Sorry, my fault,” A step to the right and I nearly tripped up a waiter. “My bad, sorry!”

Had I ever seen so many people gathered in one place? I ducked away towards the stalls and tried to find my friends through the crowd. No such luck though.

“Okay, calm down,” I took a deep breath. “If I were Ash, where would I be?”

“Hey, girlie,” I froze, expecting someone else to scold me for standing in their way. When nothing else was forthcoming I turned around and saw the stall I’d backed up to had a salesman standing over a tank of magikarp. “Like what you see, eh? Behold, the king of carp! The magikarp!”
“Um, yeah,” I turned to fully face him. “Are you…selling magikarp?”

“Aha, figured it out at just a glance, eh? Beauty and brains!” He dipped his arms into the water and held out the magikarp towards me. “Now look at this, look at this! See how healthy this magikarp is?”

“It, uh,” It flopped and wiggled in his hands. “Looks lively, the scales look shiny and the fins look strong.”

“Mhm, mhm,” He nodded along. “And between you and me, these pokemon are a goldmine! A goldmine, I tell you! Do you know what’s so special about magikarp?”

“They…evolve into gyarados.” I guessed.

“True! But alsooo,” He leaned forward conspiringly, nearly dropping the magikarp back into the tank. “Magikarp lay a thousand eggs, did you know that? And all those eggs hatch and lay a thousand more eggs each, that’s ten thousand magikarp! They lay eggs, that’s a million magikarp! Sell them for just a hundred dollars apiece, and by generation three you’d be a set for life! A billionaire!”

“Erm, I don’t…” That’s not how supply and demand works.

“And girlie, you look to me like someone who’d like to live the high life! So I’ll cut you a deal!” He pushed the magikarp into my hands and pulled out a crate of items. “Not only will I sell you this magikarp for 100, but the breeding kit, the polishing kit, the owner’s manual, all for just 300 dollars! I’m practically giving it away!”

“Ah, wait, I don’t need all that.” I found it hard to wave him off without dropping the magikarp, which was no happier to be in my arms than his. “Really, I don’t even…Your business model is —!” I stopped.

“So, hm, ah? What do you say? You want to bargain? I warn you, I go no lower than 250, and I’d be taking losses.” He warned me playfully.

I thought about it.

No, I didn’t actually believe anyone could get rich breeding magikarp. Not only would that require a frankly astonishing amount of space and facilities, equipment, personnel, but there was also the problem that nobody really wanted these pokemon in those numbers!

But magikarp evolve into gyarados.

I hefted the pokemon in my arms, testing the weight. A big fella, easily twenty to thirty pounds by body weight. That was a little above the average.

How hard would it be to raise a magikarp to become a gyarados? It proposed an interesting challenge, to say the least.

“I’ll take the magikarp.” I said out loud.

“Great, that’s great!” The salesman beamed. “So 300 as agreed—!”

“You said 100 for the magikarp by itself, right?” I interrupted. I was almost surprised by my own boldness. “I’ll just take the magikarp, please.”
“Oh? You sure?” He pouted.

“Mhm,” I bent over to put the magikarp back in the tank so I could rifle through my bag. “So does it already have a pokeball or…”

“One pokeball, free of charge!” He quickly smiled, snapping the money from my hand and tossing a gold painted pokeball at me. I returned the magikarp to it and thanked him politely before taking my leave.

“And hey! If you change your mind about the breeding kit!” He yelled after me. Over my shoulder I saw him pull out another pokeball and release another magikarp into the tank. A man in the St. Anne’s uniform was walking by and I saw the salesman stop him, likely giving him the same spiel he’d given me.

“I don’t know how I’ll raise you, exactly,” I spoke softly to the ball in my hands. “But I promise I’ll do my best.”

“Now, if I could just find the others.” I looked up. Suddenly the whole ship shuddered.

“Passengers, please be aware that the St. Anne has officially left port. We hope you enjoy your stay!”

We were moving. I waited a moment to see if the moving would bother me but it didn’t look like the rocking was bad enough to trigger any nausea. Not that I even knew if I did get seasick. Just one more thing that getting my memories back would answer.

I sighed and started looking at the different stalls as I walked. Some were pokemon salesman like the one I’d just left, but with better variety and much higher prices. Given I’d just blown through almost all my money for my Magikarp, I couldn’t even dream of affording them. I shook my head ruefully and had to look forward to avoid walking between two boys holding hands. Just as I did, another waiter carrying a tray of tiny sandwiches walked past.

Of course! Sooner or later Ash would end up wherever the most food was and the others would follow him!

The buffet table was…It was…

I’ll be honest, my jaw dropped. The amount of food available was staggering. There were dishes I didn’t know the names of. A wide variety that seemed to have no end with something for everyone.

My stomach clenched. I could feel the drool piling up in my mouth. Like a zombie I began piling up a plate as high as I could build it. Only when the contents threatened to topple over did I find a table to sit down at, close enough that I could keep an eye on the buffet table.

I began working through the food, bite by bite. Roast psyduck, Taurus steak, creamy mashed potatoes and gravy, corn on the cob, buttered rolls, honeyed emboar, all found their way into my stomach.

“Cal, there you are!” I nearly choked on a bite of stuffed pepper. Ash and the others had found me.

“Wow, hungry much?” Misty laughed, setting her own plate piled high with desserts down beside me.

I chewed quickly so I could answer.
“There’s just…so much food.” My eyes stung a little. I actually had to blink back a few tears.

“Hey Cal, you missed it! Butterfree and I won a fight against a raticate!” Ash informed me. His plate was piled even higher than mine had been, though with far fewer vegetables.

“They’re doing battles here too?” Huh, if I’d known that it would’ve made finding them a lot easier. “Congratulations on winning.”

“Yes, it was a most exciting match!” A strange man and woman, both dressed finely, approached our table. “Your butterfree is certainly impressive, young man.”

“Thanks, I put a lot of work into raising it.” Ash blushed lightly.

“Indeed,” The man leaned forward on his cane. “And tell me, what did you think of my raticate?”

“It was awesome!” Ash was never shy about praising a pokemon. “You trained it really well!”

“I’m glad you think so! That’s why I propose a trade!” He held up a pokeball, presumably the one with the raticate in it.


“When two trainers like each other’s pokemon, then they trade!” He spread his arms wide, nearly swinging his cane into a passing girl. “You raise your pokemon, build bonds of friendship with them, then you meet another trainer, trade with them, raise and bond with their pokemon as they bond with yours! That’s how friendship spreads across this great, big, beautiful world of ours!”

Maybe it was because I’d just gotten away from a salesman of my own, but I could smell a sales pitch from a mile away.

“That’s why I want you to trade your butterfree for my raticate!” He finished.

“Uh, I dunno,” Ash looked at us. “What do you guys think?”

“Spreading friendship is wonderful, I’d love to trade!” Brock’s whole face was red and he was staring at the pretty lady who was with the gentleman.

“Cal?” Ash looked at me.

“Um,” I forced myself not to look at the gentleman and lady. “I…wouldn’t, honestly. I’d, uh, I don’t think I’d trust a stranger to look after my pokemon as well as I did, so,”

His eyes widened a little, like that part hadn’t occurred to him. To be fair, this gentleman was a much better talker than the salesman I’d met. He stared at his plate for a moment before he raised his eyes to look the strangers in the eye.

“I appreciate how much you like Butterfree, but I’m not going to trade.” He straightened his spine.

“I understand, and thank you for your time.” I might have imagined it but I thought I saw him look my way before he left.

“Alright, let’s get back to the food!” Ash grinned, lifting his fork and knife.

Ah yes, the wonderful food.

At last though, we could eat no more. My own stomach felt like I’d gained ten pounds.
Considering how heavy my plate had been I didn’t consider that much of a stretch.

“So Cal, where’d you go after we got separated? One second you’re there, the next you’re gone!” Brock asked me.

“Oh, um,” I took the gold pokeball off my belt. “I couldn’t find you guys so I ended up near the stalls. There was one man selling magikarp and I decided to buy one.”

“What? Why would you want one of those? They’re…” Misty struggled to find a word to describe them.

“Magikarp: The fish pokemon, these pokemon are notoriously weak swimmers and lack any attacks other than Splash. Their only claim to fame is that they evolve into gyarados, though no one is sure how.” Ash smiled sheepishly as the pokedex finished.

“So, gyarados huh?” He clicked a few buttons and a moment later his pokedex started playing again.

“Gyarados: The Water Dragon pokemon, this pokemon has a vicious temper and is largely regarded as the king of the seas.”

“Ugh, gyarados.” Misty shuddered.

“Um, Misty, you don’t like gyarados?” I frowned. “Even though it’s a water type?”

“I like all other water types!” She quickly reassured us. “It’s just that, well, I had a bad experience with a gyarados once. They’re the only water pokemon I don’t like.”

“But Cal, how do you plan to get your magikarp to evolve? The pokedex said no one knows how it evolves into gyarados.” Brock pointed out.

“That’s actually what convinced me to buy it.” I scratched my chin. “The challenge of figuring it out.”

“I guess that makes sense for a future Pokemon Professor.” Misty huffed a laugh. “Now th— YIPE!” She jumped back, pointing behind us.

Behind me and Ash were the windows and they were all, throughout the whole room, slamming shut with big metal shields. The other exits were being sealed shut too.

“Hey, what’s going on?” Someone yelled.

The sound of a dozen machines powering on caught my attention. Nearby I saw a waiter tear off his red and blue uniform, revealing a black one underneath. He also pulled out a large backpack with vacuum hoses attached to it.

My eyes landed on the big red R emblazoned on his chest.

All through the room more people began to do the same, tearing off their uniforms and revealing menacing technology and a red R stamped on everything.

“Team Rocket!” I snarled, pulling out my first three pokemon. Magikarp wouldn’t be any help here, though when I saw what those vacuums could do I quickly grabbed its pokeball and stashed it inside an inner pocket of my jacket.

“Pikachu, Thunderbolt!” Ash rallied fastest.
“Char, Flamethrower! Spearow, Quick Attack the machines on their backs, there are pokeballs inside!” I commanded them, keeping an eye on where they went and how far from me they were. “Cleffa, stick close to me.”

“Clefafff.” She whimpered, clinging to my leg. This probably wasn’t a good place for a baby fairy type.

“Charmander, Bulbasaur, Butterfree, help us out!” Ash pulled out more pokemon.

“Geodude, you too!”

“Starmie!”

Team Rocket wasn’t expecting such a strong resistance. And when other trainers saw us fighting they started fighting too. Pretty soon the whole room was in on it, fighting anything wearing a red R. Every time a Rocket goon went down someone would take his vacuum bag and empty it out, allowing people to reclaim their pokemon.

“They’re falling back, pour it on everyone!” I shouted over the din. “Spearow, Quick Attack left! Char, don’t get too far away!” I vaulted over a table and grabbed a tray one of the former waiters had dropped. A short pause to make sure no one would get in the way and I let it fly, knocking the feet out from under one goon who’d been trying to leave with his ill gotten goods.

“Char! Char chaa-ack!” I whirled around to see Char clutching her throat where someone’s zubat had Wing Attacked her.

“Cleffa, help Char with Pound!” I yelled, completely forgetting about the goon I’d knocked for a loop.

“Clef-FA!” The little fairy type struck fast and hard, pushing the opponent away so Char could recover.

“They’re on the run!” Someone yelled.

I saw a black blur out of the corner of my eye and reacted with a mule kick that would’ve made a dodrio proud. The Rocket goon grunted as he fell over and Spearow was at my side in an instant, cutting apart the straps holding the machine.

“Damn you brats!” The goon rolled to his feet. “You’ll regret the day you ever went up against Team Rocket!”

“Not now and not ever!” I retorted. “Surrender now and there’ll still be something left for Officer Jenny to arrest.”

The ship lurched to the side and dropped three feet. No one managed to stay standing but the goon I was talking to used the confusion to get away.

“Gang, front and center!” I pushed myself up. I needed to make sure my pokemon were okay.

“Char!” Char came first, actually carrying Cleffa.

“Spear Spearow!” Spearow was glaring off at where the Rocket goon had disappeared to. The force of his glare was actually, no, no that wasn’t the glare!

Spearow glowed hot, bright white. Each beat of his wings came stronger than the one before, until
I was almost knocked back by the force behind it. The light faded away and where my Spearow once was there was now a Fearow!

“You evolved!” I gasped, delighted.

“Feeeeaaa!” He cried, proudly stretching his wings. “FeaROW!”

This time the ship lurched to the right, tilting almost dangerously. I slid along the floor, arms flailing to find something to grab. Fearow’s talons latched onto one arm and lifted me up.

“Char, Cleffa!” I cried. They were tumbling end over end towards the wall. I noticed that the doors and windows had been unsealed, leaving one open nice and wide for them to tumble through. “Oh no! Fearow, put me down!”

“Fear fear!” He released me. My arm was red and definitely going to bruise but I’d take that over slamming through a window.

“You did good, Fearow, and I’m so proud of you but you can’t fit in the halls!” I pulled out his pokeball and returned him. “Char, Cleffa, I’m coming!”

Behind me I heard someone shout my name. I didn’t pay them any attention. I leaped over any obstacle in my way and grabbed the door frame to turn me in the right direction.

“Char, Cleffa, shout if you can hear me!” I yelled as I ran. My bag thumped against my shoulders with every step, not secured as tightly as it should be. I didn’t care, taking the next turn so fast I almost twisted my ankle.

“Char!” Char was there, and luckily she still had a hold of Cleffa.

“You’re okay!” I dropped to my knees and wrapped them in my arms as tight as I could. “Oh, thank you Ho-Oh!”

“Cleeff cleffa!” Cleffa sobbed into my chest. Char was looking a little watery eyed too.

“Hey now, it’s okay. I’ve got you.” I reassured them. “That was scary but we’re okay now, and you two both earned a good rest.”

“Cal!” Ash came running after me, followed by Brock and Misty. “We have to get to the lifeboats! The ship is sinking!”

“What!” I nearly swallowed my tongue. I let my pokemon go and fumbled for their pokeballs. “Okay, back in your pokeballs, now! Especially you, Char!”

I returned her first. I made sure her ball was properly secured even as I lifted up Cleffa’s.

Another wave hit the ship. Everything happened in slow motion. Cleffa turned to light and was pulled inside her pokeball. I lost my balance, tipping forward.

I lost my grip on her pokeball.

“No!” I was on my feet before the ship righted itself. “Cleffa!”

“Cal!” Ash and the others chased after me.

The floor was tilted almost forty degrees. I kept running, using corners and door frames to slow myself down and control my turns. The pokeball kept rolling always just a little bit out of my
“Almost, almost,” My sides ached. My pulse pounded in my ears. I couldn’t bear to leave her. My fingers brushed against the pokeball just as another wave hit, this one harder than all the rest.

Then everything went black.

Consciousness returned…fitfully. It was nothing like that morning in the forest. It was peaceful then and I’d felt well rested.

Now my head ached like a ryhorm was using it for drilling practice, my arm throbbed, and for a scary moment I couldn’t remember who or where I was.

That passed quickly, thankfully, but the panic did push me to sit up before I was really ready. The world spun and I gripped my head between my hands and felt something wet on one side.

Ouch, okay. *Ow.*

First things first, how bad am I hurt?

Definitely a head wound with possible concussion. Indeterminate amount of blood loss. That and my right arm were the worst of it.

Carefully, I opened my eyes. After a moment to adjust the light didn’t bother me and I was able to take better stock of my injuries. My arm was bruising all around where Fearow had grabbed me. He hadn’t had the time to learn his new strength. The bruising felt deep.

There wasn’t an excessive amount of blood on or around me and it seemed to be mostly coming from a laceration on the side of my head. Under the hair which was going to make it hard to bandage.

I nodded to myself, both to confirm my own mental plan and to test my sense of balance and pain level for signs of a concussion. Results: Inconclusive.

Next step, survey my surroundings.

A lounge, with everything flipped upside down in a way that made my stomach tie itself in knots. Ash, Misty, and Brock were with me and none had regained consciousness yet. None looked seriously injured either though I could see some bruises forming on Misty’s skin.

Cleffa’s pokeball was lying right beside me.

“Thank you,” I shuddered, not sure who I was thanking this time. I checked it and the rest of my pokeballs for damages, finally putting Magikarp’s pokeball on my belt where it belonged as well.

Step three, triage.

I slid my bag from my shoulders and pulled out the first aid kit. There was some cream that would help the pain in my arm but my first priority was the head wound. I needed a reflective surface to really see what I was dealing with though.

I looked around the room and saw the window. A small school of remoraid swam by.
“Oooohhh,” I whimpered.

Underwater. Probably *miles* underwater.

Afraid of what I’d see, I stood and walked over to the window. Outside I could hardly see anything and what little I *could* see was probably thanks to the St. Anne’s external lights. Cliffs and reefs mostly, and seaweed.

The seaweed gave me hope. That couldn’t grow too far from the surface. It would get too dark and cold for the plant life. That meant we were at a depth we might be able to escape from!

There was nothing else in the lounge that would work as a mirror so I had to make due with the shoddy reflection from the window. I used a water bottle to wash out the wound and traced it with my fingertip. It wasn’t very long but it probably needed stitches. I couldn’t give stitches to *myself* though and I doubted the others knew how. It would have to wait until a proper doctor could look at it.

But I could use the gauze to wrap it up and hopefully stop the bleeding.

“Mmmggghhh.” Brock moaned, slowly coming to as I finished dressing my wound.

“Nnn,” Misty jolted out of her sleep, hand rushing to clutch her shoulder. “Oooww.”

“Easy there,” I approached her cautiously. “Let me take a look at it okay?”

“Cal?” Tears started falling out of her eyes. “Oh my gosh, what happened to you?”

“Uh, hit my head against something, I guess.” I shrugged. “Does your shoulder hurt?”

“Urrggh, yeah.” She tested the range of motion. “I think it’s okay, just sore.”

“Let me see,” I gently laid my hand on her shoulder and felt the joint. It didn’t feel dislocated but the muscle was hot and dense under my fingers. “Ouch, yeah, that’s probably going to be sore for a while.”

“Ugh, wha?” Brock finished rousing himself, blinking blurrily up at the…floor.

“Brock, does anything hurt?” I crawled over to him and leaned over his face.


“I’m fine but Cal hit her head on something.” Misty tattled on me.

“It’s not that serious, just a cut in an awkward position.” I reassured them. “Ash and Pikachu are still out.”

“Piii,” The electric mouse proved me wrong, rolling onto his side before pushing himself onto his feet. “Pika! Pikapikapika, Pikapi!” He ran over and started shaking Ash’s shoulder.

“Nn-huh? Shto-stop it, Pikachu!” Ash thrashed a little. His eyes blinked open and he froze, staring up at the…floor. “Am I still dreaming?”

“If this is a dream, I’d like to wake up now.” Brock deadpanned.

“Guys?” Ash rolled over. “Whoa Cal! Your head!”
“Yeah,” I hissed, patting the tender spot on my head. “I already treated it and it’ll wait for a doctor. You hurt anywhere?”

“Uh, no, I feel fine.” He answered after a brief pause. “Why’s the ship upside down?”

“We must have capsized.” Misty made the mistake of craning her head to look around. Apparently that range of motion did not agree with her shoulder.

“Here, maybe this will help.” I poured some of the cream I’d intended for my arm and started rubbing it into her shoulder.

“Whoa, there are fish swimming out there!” Ash gawked at the window. “We’re underwater!”

“This is bad.” Brock grit his teeth. “We need to find a way back to the surface.”

“Yeah.” Misty nodded. Her shoulders were finally able to relax now that whatever muscle she’d pulled wasn’t screaming in agony. I took the chance to apply some cream to my own arm too.

“Let’s find a way out then.” Ash got to his feet.

We left the lounge and wandered through the halls. Even if we’d gotten a chance to explore the ship earlier it wouldn’t have done any good with everything flipped upside down. Eventually we found the stairs only to find everything below us was flooded.

“Do we go up or down?” Ash asked.

“Up is where the ship bottom is, down is where the deck and all the exits are.” Misty grimaced. “So we go down.”

“Ah,” I gripped my backpack tightly. I wasn’t that confident in my swimming.

“But if there’s a dead end we’d be goners.” Brock reasoned.

“Leave this one to me!” Misty nodded and threw out a pokeball. “Goldeen!”

“Goldeen goldeeen.” The beautiful water pokemon landed with a splash.

“Goldeen, go look for a way out! If you find one bring something from outside!” Misty ordered.

“Goldeen,” The pokemon nodded before diving, leaving us to wait for its return.

While we waited my hands drifted over my pokeballs, back and forth. One, two, three, four now.

If I hadn’t lost my grip on Cleffa’s pokeball we wouldn’t be in this mess. We would’ve made it to a lifeboat and we’d be heading to safety already.

But I lost my grip and the others chased after me. I was glad to not be alone, but I hated getting them mixed up in my mess. What if there wasn’t a way out? We could all drown down here. Or just starve slowly if the water didn’t completely flood the ship.

“Guys, I’m, I’m sorry.” I couldn’t look up from my feet. “If I hadn’t lost my grip on Cleffa’s pokeball…”

“Hey now, that wasn’t your fault.” Brock placed a hand on my shoulder. “If anything, blame those Team Rocket guys for sending the ship into a storm like that. None of us regret following after you.”
“That’s right! We’re your friends, Cal!” Ash declared fiercely.

“Yeah, we know you’d do the same for any of us.” Misty ran her hand over my back.

“Goldeen sure is taking a long time.” Ash frowned at the water.

“Maybe she can’t find a way out.” Misty worried. If there wasn’t already a way out we’d just have to make one ourselves. Let’s see, did we have any pokemon that could melt through walls? Breaking a window was an option but then we’d be trying to swim through a room filled with glass.

Geodude would be able to break a window no problem and with all of Misty’s pokemon and Ash’s Squirtle we had enough for each of us. Maybe we could get a door or something to act as a raft.

“Hey, there’s something coming!” Ash knelt down by the water. I refocused and saw a dark shadow rising towards us. A shadow too big to be Goldeen.

“Oh, Ash, you might want to step back!” I warned him just as the shadow breached the water.

We all screamed, jumping back to avoid the bodies being thrown at us. We got back as far as we could on the landing, staring in fear at what Goldeen had brought back.

Team Rocket. Specifically, Jessie, James, and Meowth.

“Whoa, they don’t look so good.” Brock hissed in sympathy. The trio was half-drowned, with blue lips and coughing up a great deal of water between them.

“Prepa-prepare for…trouble.” Jessie burbled.

“Make…double.” James coughed.

“Meowth, that’s right,” Meowth shivered.

“Ughh, what…?” Jessie blinked, her eyes focusing on us. “Twerps?”

“What? The twerps?” They all jumped up, nearly landing back in the water again.

“Looks like we’ve finally got you cornered!” Jessie smirked.

“And now Pikachu will be ours!” James concurred. Both whipped out their pokeballs.

“If it’s a battle you want then it’s a battle you’ll get!” Ash and Brock stepped forward.

“No!” I screamed, darting between the groups and spreading my arms. “No battling!!”

“Eh? And why should we listen to you, little girl?” Jessie put her hands on her hips.

“Uh, maybe because we’re miles underwater and a battle could destabilize the ship and cause it to lose what air we have left?” I offered, pointing at the water lapping at their feet. The water level had already risen since we arrived here.

“Just what I was thinking.” Misty joined me. “If we battle here and now, both our groups will die! For now, the only thing we can do is try to escape together.”

“There aren’t any better options, Ash.” I sighed regretfully. Personally I would’ve *loved* to really see what Fearow could do to these guys.

“Hmph, I hate to admit it, but you’ve got a point.” Jessie huffed, though she didn’t put away her pokeball. “Fine, a truce. *For now.*”

“Goldeen, did you find any way out down there?” Misty asked her pokemon. Goldeen sadly shook her head. “Thanks for trying.”

“So nothing but dead ends down below.” Brock crossed his arms, eyeing Team Rocket suspiciously. “Anyone got any ideas?”

“As a matter of fact, I do!” Misty stuck out her chest. “When I was younger I built a model of the St. Anne, so I know where the hull is thinnest. If we go up past the engine room we can cut our way out and make it to the surface!”

“Well, sounds like a plan.” Ash nodded. “But I don’t think we’ll be able to use these stairs.”

I walked over to see what the problem was and winced. Big pieces of furniture and what looked like a door were piled up there. Not to mention the difficulty of trying to climb upside down stairs in the first place.

“There’s a stairwell with a more open plan back the way we came.” Misty informed us. “Alright everyone, let’s go!”

I kept an eye on Team Rocket as we watched. They took turns giving me the stink eye back. With every step my hand would brush my belt. In these cramped quarters Char would be my front liner, but I was all too aware of the metric tons of water all around us. Fearow would have a problem moving in any direction other than *forward*. That left me with Cleffa and Magikarp and Magikarp, well, wasn’t a battler.

“There, the stairs!” Misty pointed ahead.

Yep, those were stairs. Above us.

“Ah, hmm,” I chewed on my lips trying to think of a way to get us up there. Did I have rope?

“Leave this one to me, guys.” Brock tossed a pokeball over in his hand. “Onyx, make a staircase!”

“OOOONNNNN!” The rock snake pokemon did as asked, arranging his body into an easy incline for us. Brock went up first, followed by me, Ash, Misty, and Team Rocket. Onyx was returned and we kept going.

Between one hallway and the next the lights went out. Some wiring must have been damaged or destroyed.

“My turn.” I heard the sound of a pokeball opening and then Charmander was standing in front of us, tail providing light to see by.

“It shouldn’t be far now.” Misty narrowed her eyes.

As we walked the air started getting a little smoky. I was starting to sweat under my jacket by the time we reached the former engine room, now bathed in flames below us.

“The bridge is out! How are we going to get across?” Ash groaned, eyeing the twisted metal.
“Um, well,” I eyed the fire below and the airspace around us. “Hold on.”

“FEeeeeAAA!” Fearow squawked. The flames below danced and wavered under the wind caused by his wing-beats.

“Whoa, Cal! When’d you get that?” Ash squawked louder.

“Spearow evolved during the battle with the other Rockets!” I told him excitedly. “Isn’t he gorgeous?”

“Yes, yes, your overblown feather duster is very impressive. Can we go now?” Jessie snapped at me.

“Insult my pokemon like that again and I’m leaving you here.” I leveled her with my best glare.

“Ah, did I say feather duster?” She cleaned up her act real quick. “I meant beautiful flier!”

“Fearow, we could use a lift. Over there, if you would.” I pointed to the door on the far side. “Do you think you can carry us one at a time?”

“Fea Fearow!” He nodded, turning and presenting an open back to jump on.

I didn’t hesitate. I made sure I wouldn’t knock his wings as I landed on his back. My arms wound carefully over his shoulders and collarbones, avoiding his neck and wing muscles. His flight destabilized with my added weight, but he quickly adjusted and soared straight to the other side of the room. Behind me I heard Ash use his pokedex on Fearow.

On the other side I jumped from his back, putting my arms out to catch the door frame in case I lost balance. I landed safely though and turned around to pet Fearow’s beak in thanks.

One by one he carted everyone over to my side. I helped pull them in when they lost their balance. While Brock, Ash, and Misty all got a dignified piggy-back ride, Team Rocket got grabbed by the talons and almost tossed through the door frame.

I chose not to scold him.

Above us the metal creaked and groaned.

“Hear that?” Misty smirked in satisfaction. “The metal’s really weak here, this must be the place!”

“Right, Charmander, we need you to weld through the hull.” Ash ordered.

“Alright everyone, once the water starts pouring in, tie yourselves to a water pokemon!” Misty ordered.

“I’ve got some rope here.” Brock quickly passed out a line to everyone.

“Here Brock, you take Starmie. Cal, you take Staryu.” Misty unleashed pokemon for us and we quickly tied our lines.

“Hey wait, what about us?” Team Rocket cried.

“Grab a water pokemon!” Misty snapped impatiently.

“Uh, Misty? Pretty sure they don’t have any.” I pointed out.
“No, wait! We do have a water pokemon!” James snapped to attention, pulling out a….

Gold pokeball.

“You bought a magikarp too?” I gasped in shock.

“Wait a moment, if you bought a magikarp, why aren’t you tying yourself to it?” Jessie asked, though she was already hard at work securing herself to James’ magikarp.

“Because they’re weak swimmers.” I winced. They didn’t know that? Magikarp would never be able to pull them through the torrential waterfall!

Even as I was thinking it, Charmander finally finished cutting through the hull. Water came crashing down in big waves. Ash almost didn’t return Charmander in time!

“Quick, get over here!” Brock and I could both take an extra and Meowth didn’t weigh that much. Misty could take him and—!

Team Rocket was struggling with the knots they’d used for their magikarp’s harness. That was the last I saw of them before the hull started to split above us.

Ocean water is freezing. My muscles seized up immediately. I had enough presence of mind to take a big gulp of air before Staryu started pulling me upwards, fighting against the current.

Leaving Team Rocket behind.

It was a good thing I had the harness because I never would’ve been able to hold onto Staryu. The current by itself was strong enough to rip me away but the cold numbed everything. The salt burned my eyes and I struggled in the dark just to hold my breath.

How long would it take to reach the surface? Would I run out of air first? I didn’t dare count the seconds.

Were the others okay? Would Team Rocket make it out?

Everything was so cold. The water pressed in on all sides. My chest began to burn, aching for sweet oxygen.

*Please Arceus, I don’t want to drown!*
Air, I’ll never take you for granted again.

“Cal, over here!” My eyes were too blurry to make anything out but I could hear Misty calling. I tried to kick my legs like she’d shown me but swimming’s a lot harder in full clothes than in a skimpy swimsuit. Luckily Staryu saw me struggling and provided itself as a buoy for me to grab.

“Cal, I’m here!” I heard Misty splashing to my left.

“Misty, it’s...cold!” My teeth started chattering.

“Yeah, I know.” My vision was starting to clear up. Misty looked half drowned herself but she was swimming under her own power, not Goldeen’s. “C’mon, there’s a makeshift raft over here. Don’t worry about swimming right now, just let Staryu carry you.”

“No...arguments.” I was shivering. Brock had to help haul me onto the raft. He and Ash were also shivering, looking damp and miserable. Pikachu was shaking himself out, causing his fur to fluff up.

“Team Rocket?” Ash asked in concern.

“They haven’t surfaced.” Misty answered somberly, climbing up to join us. Of the four of us she seemed to be handling our dunk in the ocean the best. Probably thanks to past experience. “We need to try to warm up. Is there anything in our bags that’s not soaked?”

We began checking. I did, as it turned out, have two water proof pockets in my bag, but those held toilet paper and matches. The first aid kit was water proof, so at least there was that. Everything else in my bag was soaked though.

“Um, toilet paper and matches. Oh, also, the first aid kit’s alright.” I reported to the others.

“I got nothing.” Ash groaned, holding up a pair of soggy trousers.

“I knew I should’ve sprung for the water proof bag.” Brock grumbled, holding up the food we’d restocked on in Vermillion.

“I’ve got two changes of clothes and, ah,” Misty flushed red and coughed into her hand. “And nothing else important.”

“What? If you’ve got something you should share it with the rest of us!” Ash growled.

“Well unless there’s something you’re not telling me I doubt you need pads, Ash Ketchum!” She snarled right back.

“Ash and I can strip down to our boxers and lay our clothes out to dry. It’ll be better than standing around in wet clothes waiting to get sick.” Brock decided. “Cal, Misty, you should change. We’ll turn around.”

“I’d better not catch either of you peeking.” Misty warned them, passing me one of the spare outfits. I noticed it wasn’t one of her regular ones. This one had a regular t-shirt. It wasn’t much but at least it was more than what her regular outfit covered.

“Cal, as soon as you’re done changing, I’d like to take a look at that head injury.” Brock said to
me. “The ocean water probably didn’t do any favors to it.”

“Uh, yeah, okay.” I agreed easily, feeling it throb as I bent to pull up the suspender shorts.

“I’ll try to be gentle.” He promised, unwinding the bandages from my head. To his credit he was far gentler than I’d been with myself. It’s just that the salt water in the wound made every light touch sting.

“What should we do now?” Ash was uncharacteristically quiet, sitting cross-legged with Pikachu in his lap.

“Try to find land?” I suggested with a shrug.

“I read a story once about a person named Noah and when he was lost at sea he sent a bird pokemon to find land. He told the pokemon to bring back a branch if they found anything.” Brock told us.

“Hey, yeah!” Ash jumped to his feet, digging through the pile of clothes for his belt. “Go, Pidgeotto!”

“Pidgeooo!” The bird pokemon flew up.

“Fearow can help too.” I threw his ball in the air. Both bird pokemon locked eyes, sizing each other up.

Ah, maybe releasing a pidgeotto at the same time as a fearow wasn’t the best idea.

“Alright you two, try to find some land! Bring something back if you find anything!” Ash yelled up at them.

With a caw and a squawk they took off in opposite directions. From the speed with which they flew I wagered that they were going to compete over who found land the fastest.

Brock finished replacing my bandages and the boys eventually decided their clothes were dry enough to put back on. I don’t think they were very comfortable with salt encrusted clothes but they didn’t have a lot of options.

“Pidgeooo!” We all looked out over the water at Pidgeotto’s return. He was towing something through the water. Before I could realize what they were Pidgeotto had already dragged them onto the raft.

“Team Rocket?” We all stared in shock.

They were…very still. Pale white, with blue lips. The only sign of life was their magikarp, now flopping on our deck.

“Are they…?” Misty didn’t finish her question.

“I’ll, I’ll check.” I edged forward nervously, kneeling down beside them. Hand shaking, I tested James’ pulse. Then Jessie’s. Then Meowth’s.

“Their alive.” I reported, torn between relief and aggravation. On the one hand, I never really wanted them dead. On the other, somehow I doubted any of this would inspire them to turn over a new leaf.

Pikachu, I noticed, looked equally conflicted.
After a while Team Rocket woke up. Invisible lines were drawn along the raft while we waited for Fearow to return.

“It sure is taking a while.” Ash commented.

“Heh, maybe that fearow’s decided to run away. I know I would if I were that twerp’s pokemon.” Meowth snickered.

“You take that back! Fearow would never run away from Cal!” Ash and the others leapt to their feet.

“Guys?” I blinked.

“Facts is facts, twerp. And the fact is that fearow ain’t—”

“FEEEEAAAAA!” This time I was the one who jumped to their feet. I looked up and out over the water, watching a distant speck grow closer and closer.

“Fearow! Great to see you!” I welcomed him back with a wave.

“Fea-Fearow!” He flew over, dropping something from his talons into my arms as he passed overhead and began circling.

“A tree branch!” Brock grinned.

“That means Fearow found some land!” Misty cheered.

“You did amazing, Fearow.” I held the branch tightly.

“Everyone find something we can row with.” Misty stretched out for a piece of flotsam.

“Grr, why don’t we just get the pokemon to pull us?” Jessie complained.

“Because if an emergency hits then we’ll want our pokemon fresh and well rested! That’s why!” Misty waved her makeshift oar around threateningly. “Now c’mon and row! We don’t know how far it is to the nearest land!”

“Fearow, return!” I recalled my friend. I was about to join the others in rowing when I noticed one pokemon hadn’t been returned yet.

“Um, James, right? Aren’t you going to…” I gestured to his magikarp.

“Are you kidding? That thing is worthless and I’ll not bother myself with it!” He lifted his nose high in the sky before following it up with, “Besides, I lost its pokeball.”

“Ah,” I winced in understanding.

Our heading was almost due west so it wasn’t hard to stay on course. At least, not until the sun went down. The air grew crisper as stars began lighting up the night sky. It was safer if we didn’t try to navigate at night, though I knew the current would still be carrying us. I just hoped it would carry us towards land.

Normally we’d sleep in our separate tents or at least in our separate sleeping bags, but we didn’t have that option tonight. Our sleeping bags were still wet and there wasn’t nearly enough room to set up a tent. It was cold though, and we all ended up lying side by side trying to suck some warmth from each other. I placed myself on the outside, with Misty and Ash lying between me and
Brock.

Team Rocket didn’t stay up long. Even now they’re snoring away. Shipwrecked with our worst enemy, what a cliché.

Hopefully, tomorrow we’ll find land.

The sun was brighter out on the ocean. It woke me up long before I was ready. Long before anyone was ready.

We sent Fearow and Pidgeotto out to confirm the direction we needed to row in, then we got started.

“So hungry,” Ash’s stomach grumbled loud enough for everyone to hear.

My own stomach felt like a hollow middle. With all the food I’d eaten on the St. Anne I couldn’t believe I was hungry at all, but there it was.

“If I’d known we’d be starving I would’ve stuffed my face on the St. Anne.” Misty pouted.

“Ugh! Can’t…row…anymore.” Meowth slumped down behind us. “I’m wasting away here!”

“karp karp karp magikarp karp.” James’ magikarp continued flopping on deck.

“I’m so hungry I could eat…I could eat…” Ash started drooling a little. “Filleted magikarp.”

“Oooh, or fried magikarp.” Brock stared off into space.

“Mm,” Jessie licked her lips. “marinated magikarp!”

“That’s it! I can’t take anymore!” Meowth pounced on the magikarp. “We’re eating. Now!”

“Oh, you shouldn’t—!” I tried protesting too late. Meowth had already learned the hard way that magikarp’s scales weren’t just for show.

“Geez, look it up! Magikarp are nothing but scales and bone!” Misty shook her makeshift oar at everyone. Her face and shoulders were turning red from sunburn. I had a feeling mine weren’t much farther off, though I’d changed into my own clothes again.

“So not only can this thing not swim but it can’t even be eaten?” James shook his fist. “Why, you! I don’t want to be your master anymore!” He reared back and delivered a solid kick, sending his magikarp flying off into the water.

“Hey!” I shouted. “There’s no call for that!”

“It’s a worthless pokemon and I dearly regret paying my advance salary for it!” He defended himself.

“Guys? Guys!” Misty screamed, pointing at the water.

A bright, white light that every trainer should know was emerging from magikarp. In seconds the source of the light had more than quintupled in size.
“It evolved.” I realized.

“Wow, so that’s a real, live gyarados!” Ash scanned it with his pokedex, though as I recalled he’d already looked at that entry.

“GYAAAAAAAA!” Gyarados roared.

“It’s a real, live nightmare is what it is!” Jessie screeched. “James, control that thing!”

“Gyarados, it’s me, your master!” James struck a heroic pose, proving once and for all that an IQ minimum in the double digits was not a requirement for Team Rocket.

“GYAAAAAAAAAA!”

“Leave this to me!” Misty threw all her pokemon out.

“What’s the plan?” Brock widened his stance.

“The plan is…Run away!” Misty screamed. She grabbed the rope harnesses and tossed them to her pokemon, who slipped them on quickly and began towing us as quickly as possible.

“Row, row for your lives!” James squealed. We all grabbed our oars and did our best to push ourselves faster.

For a while Gyarados kept up with us, then it just suddenly stopped.

“It did just evolve, maybe it’s out of energy?” Brock suggested hopefully. Up above, I saw storm clouds gathering with unnatural quickness.

“That’s not it.” Misty looked pale beneath her sunburn. “I’ve heard stories from sailors. This…is Dragon Rage.”

“We need to keep rowing.” I gripped my oar tight enough to turn my knuckles white.

We didn’t get far.

One gyarados is cause for fear. A school of them was enough to make all attempts at escape meaningless. They swam in circles, faster and faster, roaring the whole time as we desperately tried to make distance.

And they formed a cyclone.

“Everyone, hold on!” We latched onto each other’s hands. Team Rocket was gone and I had no way of knowing where. I couldn’t even keep track of my friends with the way we were spinning through the air.

And our grip was slipping.

“Hang on!” Ash was across from me and I could still just barely hear him. “We have to ho---AAAAAAAHHH!”

And just like that, we were torn apart.
“Cal! Cal, wake up!” Someone shook my shoulder.

I came up swinging.

“Whoa, watch out! It’s just me!” Brock yelped, dodging my flailing punch.

“Wha-huh? Oh, I’m so sorry!” I flinched back, bringing my hands in close.

“Hey, no worries.” He reassured me with a chuckle.

We were on a beach. Everyone looked okay, if a bit battered. The sun was burning bright up above, it had to be close to noon already.

“Pikachu?” Ash looked around. “Pikachu! Are you here?” He shot up, turning in circles looking for a bright yellow furball. His hand went down to his belt and I saw Ash go pale for the first time ever.

“I’m missing three pokeballs!” He cried in distress.

The rest of us felt the same panic and we rushed to check our own belts. I counted mine. One, two, three, four.

“I’ve got all mine.” Brock sighed with relief.

“Same here.” Misty nodded.

“Me too.” I reported.

“I…I think I still have Butterfree and Pidgeotto.” Ash held up the two pokeballs to study.

“Then Pikachu, Charmander, Squirtle, and Bulbasaur are the ones missing.” Misty realized.

“They must have washed up somewhere else.” Brock concluded. “Let’s start looking for them.”

“Right. Pidgeotto, I choose you!” In a moment the bird pokemon was hovering over us. “Pidgeotto, Pikachu, Charmander, Bulbasaur, and Squirtle are missing! Try to find them!”

“Pidge-ooo!” He took off, flying out over the beach.

“I’m sure they’ll be fine, Ash.” Brock patted him on the shoulder. “In the meantime, we can search too.”

“Yeah.” He still seemed worried. I couldn’t blame him. If it was my pokemon missing I’d be half frantic!

We searched, walking along the beach and calling out for them. Only when Pidgeotto came back reporting nothing in the other direction did we turn to the forest.

“PIKACHU!” Ash bellowed. All of us were calling out for the lost pokemon. Ash and I both sent out our bird pokemon but they weren’t out long before they came back in a panic.

“What do you think spooked Fearow and Pidgeotto like that?” Brock asked me as we brushed aside some frond leaves. It was getting dark out and soon we’d either need to stop and make camp or make some torches to see by.

“Honestly, I have no idea.” I frowned. “Pidgeotto can be threatened by fearow, but otherwise they
have no natural predators. And Fearow don’t have any natural predators at all. Maybe,” I thought for a moment. “Maybe it’s humans? But I don’t know what any people could be doing to scare them so bad.”

“Oh, I think I know, Cal.” Misty said shakily.

“Huh? What?” I watched as she raised a trembling hand, pointing at something above us and coming closer.

It was big. It flashed with occasional bursts of lightning. And the screech!

But my first impression was BIG!

“G-Gi-Gi-!” I began shaking head to toe.

“It’s heading straight for us!” Brock gasped. “We’ve got to run!”

“Gi-Gi-!” I kept trying.

“Cal, run!” Brock grabbed my hand and began pulling me. Ash and Misty were right beside us as we pelted through the jungle.

“GIANT ZAPDOS!” I screamed.

“A WHAT!” Misty screamed beside me.

“ZAPDOS! LEGENDARY POKEMON! LIGHTNING!” My heart was trying to beat itself out of my chest. “GIANT! Oh, Arceus, Palkia, Dialga, Mew, Lugia, Ho-Oh, protect us!”

“That’s a legendary pokemon?” Ash had to leap over a large rock in his way. I thought I saw him stick a hand in his jacket where he kept his pokedex, but he must’ve thought better of it because he didn’t pull it out. “That thing’s huge!”

We ran and ran with that thing overhead. We tried to stay away from trees but that’s kind of hard to do in a jungle. Finally we lost it. Or maybe it just lost interest in us. Either way, the four of us collapsed and tried to soothe the aches in our sides.

“…We can’t…hah…stay out here.” Brock was taking in big gulps of air. “We need to find…hah…a safe…a safe place…hah…for the night.”

“Agrreed.” Misty moaned, clutching a cramp in her side.

I didn’t write this entry that night. I was too tired to do so. We all fell asleep almost before our heads hit the ground. None of us even bothered to pull out the sleeping bags and we were even too exhausted to think about food. We just found a cave and slept like the dead.

Morning was another matter.

I was still the last one to wake up. I’m starting to think I’m just not a morning person no matter how much sleep I get.

“Let’s get going.” Ash put on his hat. “We need to find Pikachu and the others and get off this crazy island.”
“No arguments there.” Brock nodded.

We were more cautious this time. We didn’t want to run into that giant zapdos again. I couldn’t believe how big it was.

And it wasn’t the only one we saw.

“That’s…That’s, uh,” My mouth was dry. I could only stare up and hope it didn’t turn around and see us.


“We need to run, don’t we?” Misty laughed nervously.

“You.” Ash gave one quick, stiff nod and then led by example.

Giant pokemon abounded. Giant oddish, giant pidgey, giant everything!

“I don’t understand!” I cried as we ran. “What do these pokemon eat!?”

“Who knows? Who cares! I just don’t want it to be us!” Ash screamed. “PIKACHU! WHERE ARE YOU?”

We found a land bridge and we were making our way across when a giant pikachu came around the cliff-side.

“Not the pikachu I was looking for.” Ash whimpered beside me.

“It doesn’t…hah…make sense!” I panted, dropping my hands to my knees while I tried to catch my breath.

“PIIIKAACHU!” It sounded cheerful enough, but it bumped against the cliff and the land bridge under us began to crumble.

We all screamed on the way down. I can only be thankful it wasn’t actually that high up. We landed in a confusing mass of limbs and pain. I got someone’s elbow directly in the head, right over the cut I’d gotten on the St. Anne. I think I might’ve kicked someone in the neck too.

Somehow we got ourselves righted and found, to our surprise, that we were in a runaway mine cart with the human members of Team Rocket.

“We’ve got you cornered now, twerps!” Jessie smirked. “hand over pikachu!”

“GAH! But not that big one!” James squealed, shaking at the sight of the giant pikachu still chasing us.

“Look over there!” Misty pointed to one side. Two more giant pokemon were running and just ahead of their feet were Ash’s pokemon! Along with Team Rocket’s!

“They’ll get trampled if we don’t think of something!” She grunted.

“We have to stop the cart!” Ash nodded. “Where’s the break?”

“Here.” Jessie handed a metal rod to us.

“Ah! It’s broken!” Ash despaired.
“Guys, up ahead!” Brock shook our shoulders. We turned around in the cart and saw…

“Why is there a loop on a mine cart track?” I asked, my voice reaching at least two pitches higher than normal.

“I hate rollercoasters!” Jessie wailed.

We clung to the cart as best we could. Getting turned upside down like that wasn’t easy on the stomach. I felt myself be lifted up and held on all the tighter for it.

“Pikachu, Bulbasaur, Squirtle, Charmander! Jump in!” The loop had given the pokemon time to catch up with us but the giant ones were catching up too. The four of us each caught a pokemon as it jumped. Ekans, Koffing, and Meowth all jumped too and were caught by Team Rocket.

“I missed you guys!” Ash hugged Pikachu tightly. “I’m so glad you’re safe!”

“We’re not out of the woods yet!” Brock reminded us.

“The way our luck is going, next the line will snap.” James stated, sounding unusually calm and resigned.

_Snap!_

A black cord I hadn’t noticed behind us suddenly snapped.

“Then we’ll be tossed into the air.” Jessie sighed with a pout.

“Oh, guys?” Brock tensed up. I didn’t even have time to look before our cart flew up into the air.

“The Zapdos!” Ash screamed. We were flying straight at it. We all ducked under the lip of the cart, kneeling and elbowing each other even as we crashed straight _through_ it.

“A mechanical pokemon?” Brock gaped at the cloth and metal falling around us.

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“Then we’ll fall into the water after a long fall.” Meowth nodded sagely.

“Water?” I repeated. I was holding Charmander. Below us, ocean.

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“Ash, Charmander’s ball!” I screamed. Luckily for us, Bulbasaur was carrying everyone’s pokeballs in his seed and he quickly handed Charmander’s pokeball to us. There was barely enough time for Charmander to turn into light before we hit the water.

The water was a shock of cold. I flailed around at first, panicking. Thank Arceus for Misty’s lessons. I saw sunlight above me and started kicking for the surface.

“Everyone okay?” Brock called.

“Bulba!” Bulbasaur was floundering in the water.

“Bulbasaur, where’s your pokeball?” Ash coughed. Bulbasaur’s seed spat out two more pokeballs and Ash quickly returned it. “Squirtle?”

“Squirtle squirt!” Squirtle was doing just fine, carrying Pikachu on his back.

“Hey guys, look over there!” Misty was the best swimmer, treading water and able to point out a boat passing nearby with Pokemon Land written on the side.
“A tour boat?” Brock cocked his head in confusion.

Turns out, the island of Giant Pokemon was something called a theme park. All the giant pokemon were mechanical.

And we’d just totally wrecked the place.

“So we’re agreed that we take this to our graves?” Brock clarified as we snuck in with the tour group.

“Agreed.” Even Team Rocket was nodding along.

I’m not proud of it but I’m also not in a hurry to confess. None of us were in a hurry to admit we’d been the ones to trash the place. Ash even let me wear his hat to hide my bandages. We got a ride back to the nearest island, Porta Vista, and parted ways.

It’s late and I’m exhausted after a crazy day, so I’ll finish this up tomorrow.

Back again and ready to finish recounting yesterday’s events.

Porta Vista is a beautiful island resort. Surf, sun, and fun abound. After the morning we’d had we were all glad for the chance to relax and soak up some rays.

“C’mon Cal, the shops here are bound to have more variety!” Misty started tugging me towards the boardwalk.

“We’ll wait for you guys by the snack bar!” Brock waved as we walked away.

“Don’t take too long!” Ash called.

“A full body swimsuit is just the thing for you, Cal.” Misty assured me as we walked into a store that specialized in beach things.

“Welcome to Chansey Swimwear! Can I help you?” The retail lady behind the front desk greeted us.

“Do you sell full body swimsuits? My friend here is a little body shy.” Misty waved her hand over me. I just ducked my head and fiddled with my hands.

“Not a problem! Full body swimwear is very popular with the surfing crowd. You’ll find them in aisle four.” She informed us.

“Thanks!” Misty pulled me by the hand.

“Oh, I like these.” I realized as we reached the aisle. They covered everything my regular clothes did except for my feet.

“I thought you might.” Misty patted herself on the back. “Go ahead and pick a few out to try on.”

I only tried on two of them. I chose to keep the black one with green trim. I’m starting to think green might be my favorite color.

“I definitely like this much better.” I said to myself as I checked myself out in the mirror. This and
a pair of cheap sandals and I’d be ready for the beach!

I even felt brave enough to wear the suit out of the store! Misty decided to change into a red two-piece and even pulled out an inflatable beachball from her bag.

“Looks like the guys just couldn’t wait.” She noticed. We could see them streaking towards the water in their swim trunks.

“What happened to waiting for us?” She asked them teasingly.

“Whoa, Misty?” Ash’s jaw dropped as he stared.

“What?” Misty frowned, looking down at herself in case her suit had slipped or something.

“I’ve just never seen you look so much like a girl before.” He blinked, still totally stunned.

“Why, you!” Misty pulled back and threw the beachball with enough force to send Ash toppling backwards into the water.

“Cal, you’re looking good.” Brock complimented me.

“Uh, thanks.” I smiled shyly.

I didn’t play in the water as much as the others. I’d had enough swimming over the last few days but it was nice to wade in the shallows. It wasn’t long before everyone decided to get out and play in the sand for a bit.

Misty and I reclined on a couple of towels she had. Misty was probably getting a better tan than I was but I was just happy to be warm.

“Cal, Misty!” Ash ran up to us. “C’mon, Brock borrowed a boat!”

“Wow, really?” Misty jumped up, pulling up her towel. We followed Ash to the dock where Brock and Pikachu were already on a neat little boat.

“Wow, this is great!” Misty cheered as we got going. The ocean spray in our face felt great. “Who’s boat is this anyway?”

“I dunno!” Ash laughed. He was having a blast driving the boat, though we were being careful to stay away from the swimmers. “Brock’s the one who borrowed it. He must have some rich friends!”

“Huh? I thought you borrowed it!” Brock frowned.

“Wha? But…You were already on board!” He and Ash exchanged worried looks.

“I only followed Pikachu!” Brock defended himself.

“Um, guys? Did…Did we steal a boat?” I felt myself get a little lightheaded.

“We’re in trouble.” Ash gulped.

As if accidental boat theft wasn’t bad enough, then we hit something under the water. Maybe a part of a coral reef or something? Or just a big rock? Either way, it damaged the rudder and Ash lost control of the steering.
We crashed directly into the pier.

“Anyone hurt?” I groaned. Touching my head, I suddenly remembered that I still hadn’t seen a doctor. I probably needed to check the bandages too.

“MY BOAT! MY DOCK!” We all winced at the old man’s voice.

“Why you rotten vandals!” He started scolding us as we stepped onto the damaged pier.

“I-I’m sorry!” Ash ducked behind Misty.

“We’re very sorry, sir. We’ll pay for the damages.” She and I bowed apologetically.

“Oooh, a couple of pretty young girls.” He leered at us. “I can tell you two will be a lot of fun in seven or eight years.”

We both ducked behind Ash and Brock.

“Well you hooligans, I expect to be repaid for this stunt!” He huffed, almost mad enough to blow steam out his nostrils. “The four of you are gonna work off your debt, you hear me?”

“Yes, sir.” We all nodded quickly.

So we ended up working at Moe’s restaurant. Misty and I were waitresses, Ash and Brock tried to bring in customers. We hadn’t been working longer than twenty minutes before they both came back inside without drawing a single customer.

“Team Rocket’s working next door!” Ash growled. “Moe, where are more of those fliers?”

“Wait a sec, Team Rocket? Next door?” Misty tried to ask him.

“Here ya go, youngster.” Moe came out front with a big stack of fliers.

“Pikachu, Squirtle, you guys hand these out to people on the beach.” Ash ordered. That was when I noticed that he had Squirtle, Pidgeotto, and Charmander out of their pokeballs.

“Pidgeotto, use a small Gust to keep the grill warm.” He sent off his pokemon. “Charmander, help Moe in the kitchen.”

It was like flipping a switch. People loved to come to a place with pokemon working. In a few minutes we were busy, in half an hour we were swamped, in an hour we were drowning. Brock had to come in and help as an extra waiter and Ash set up a bunch of umbrella tables outside.

Then well, I guess when you’re working in such a rush you’re bound to make a few mistakes. Pikachu and Squirtle lost their fliers to a huge burst of wind. Charmander used a little too much flame on the stove. Misty and Brock both lost their footing and ended up spilling some food on the customers.

“Well, at least things went pretty good there for a while.” Moe sighed tiredly as he sat down at a table with us.

“I don’t get how so much could go so wrong so quickly.” Misty grumbled.

“Feh, business not going well, old man?” The speaker was an old woman with bright red hair pulled into two big pigtails sticking out on either side of her head. She’d shrunk with age and she couldn’t have been too tall as a young woman either. Flanking her was Team Rocket.
“Brutella.” Moe glared sourly at the old woman.

“Money’s due tomorrow, old man.” She reminded him with a taunting finger. “And with how empty this dump is I doubt you’re gonna have enough! If you can’t pay me in cash I’ll be happy to take that boat of yours.”

“Not my boat, you old witch!” He stood, shaking in anger. “You’ll get your money but you’ll not touch my boat!”

All the fight went out of him when they left though. He slumped back in his seat looking tired and worn out.

“That was Brutella, the owner of the restaurant next door.” He informed us. “I had a bad time of it last season and had to borrow some money from her. I’ve got most of it but I’m still 2,000 short. It looks like she may get my boat after all.”

“Hey, don’t talk like that!” Ash protested passionately. “That boat’s important to you, right?”

“I dreamed of sailing around the world with it.” He nodded sadly.

“You can’t just give up on your dreams!” Ash argued. “We’ll help you get the last 2,000! You’ll see!”

“Eh? You really want to help?” He looked at us, both stunned and suspicious. “Wouldn’t think a bunch of hooligans like you four would be willing to help an old man out like that.” We all flinched at the reminder of what we’d done.

“But how are we going to raise 2,000 dollars by tomorrow?” He asked.

“I might have a suggestion.” We all jumped. We turned to the door and, lo and behold, who should stand there but Professor Oak himself.

“Professor! What are you doing here?” Ash’s eyes went as wide as dinner plates.

“Oh I’m not the only one here, Ash.” He stepped inside, leaving room for another person to enter.

“Ash!” Ash’s mother didn’t waste any time, stepping up and wrapping her son in a big hug.

I…Seeing that…

I want that. I want to find my parents and have them hold me the way Mrs. Ketchum held Ash.

I will find them.

“Mom? You’re here too?” Ash was stunned.

“The Pallet Town Volunteer Patrol is taking a tour of Porta Vista.” She informed him. “Oh, I’m so glad we’re here at the same time you are!” She pressed a kiss to his forehead.

“Mom!” Ash, typical ten year old boy that he was, pushed her away and brushed off the kiss.

“Excuse me, Professor Oak? What did you mean by a suggestion?” Brock cleared his throat.

“I meant this.” He pulled a flier out of his labcoat. “The Porta Vista Beach Beauty and Costume contest! There’s cash prizes for both entries and hundreds of people come to watch and they’ll all want food! I’ll bet if you advertise this place you’ll make bank!”
“Oh, the contest! I’d completely forgotten about it!” Moe slapped his forehead. “This is great, all those hungry customers!”

“Hey Cal, you and I should enter the contest!” Misty clutched the flier tightly. “Look, we can dress our pokemon in cute costumes! You have to enter with me!”

“I…I do?” I gulped.

I did.

Brock got a lucky break and landed a gig as the announcer when the original one failed to show up. It paid well and I was sure Moe would appreciate it. Misty was the first one up for the contest and the crowd loved Starmie and Squirtle dressed as an alien and u.f.o.

And then…Gary happened.

And I had to follow that.

“Oh boy,” I was quaking backstage. I was dressed in the green one piece swimsuit instead of the full body one and I was already nervous about that. Now I had to follow up an entire cheer squad?

“Feeaaa,” Fearow nudged me with his beak, rubbing my cheek.

“Okay, I’m okay,” I gave myself a little pep talk. “At least you look great, Fearow. Ready to show the crowd?”

“Our next contestant is Cal Memo, another young trainer who matches beauty with brains! And she’s got a real treat for us folks!” That was my cue.

“Let’s go!” I hopped onto Fearow’s back and we were off, bursting out on stage and flying over the crowd to roaring applause.

“And there she is, ladies and gentlemen! Cal Memo is putting on a show for us with Fearow dressed as a Zapdos!” We flew another circuit over the crowd to even more applause.

I’d gotten some yellow color dust from a poke-shop. It temporarily dyed fur and feathers bright yellow. It’ll wash off after a quick soak. Then I’d tied a bunch of yellow ribbons to Fearow’s wings and talons to look like lightning coming off him as we flew.

Now I just had to smile and wave to the crowd. I tried my best, still shaking with nerves.

“Cal! Hey, Cal!” Ash was in the front row, standing and waving both arms. Professor Oak and Mrs. Ketchum were waving too.

Somehow, seeing them helped. I stopped shaking and I was able to smile wider.
Better late than never, right?

I was wrapping things up and about to direct Fearow to land on the stage when I noticed something coming out of the water. I shifted my weight to make Fearow turn. There, rising out of the ocean and coming onto land was what appeared at first glance to be a gyarados.

To be fair to the people who began panicking below, a first glance is usually more than most people would want to see of a wild gyarados.

“Uh-oh, now who do you think is behind this?” I narrowed my eyes. Having seen a real gyarados it was easy to tell this one was a fake but it was sure causing a panic down below.

“Everyone, don’t panic!” I heard Ash over the sound system. “That gyarados isn’t real! It’s a fake!”

Ash had climbed up on stage and snagged the mike Gary was using before. I couldn’t see their expressions from here but Ash looked to be in control of the situation. The people had stopped running and were now taking a second look at the supposed rampaging pokemon.

“FEAROW!” Fearow cried, bringing my attention back to the fake gyarados. A missile was being fired out of its mouth!

“Mew protect us!” I cursed, tugging up on Fearow’s shoulders to direct him higher.

“What’ll you do now, Ashy-boy?” That was Gary’s voice, wasn’t it?

“Pidgeotto, Charmander, I choose you!” Ash seemed to have a plan in mind.

Pidgeotto was carrying Charmander while they used the heat of his flamethrower to pull the missile off course. I watched as it locked onto the fake gyarados. It would’ve been wiser for them to reverse back into the ocean but I guess they didn’t think of that. Fearow and I watched from above as the fake gyarados and missile both crashed into Brutella’s restaurant.

“Oooh,” I winced, though there was a wicked part of me that was glad for her misfortune. “Well, that happened. Let’s go land on the stage, Fearow.”

“Fear!” He nodded, turning us back to the contest stage.

“Cal, did you see what it hit?” Ash asked me as we touched down beside him.

“Brutella’s restaurant.” I answered. “I, uh, don’t think anyone was hurt though, except for maybe Team Rocket.”

“Officer Jenny is already on her way there.” Brock left the announcer’s desk to join us.

The crowd seemed to realize then that the danger was passed. All at once we were hit with a
sound-wave of applause.

Which, unfortunately, reminded me that I was wearing the stupid swimsuit.

I used Fearow as a shield to get backstage so I could change.

In honor of his heroism and bravery, Ash was given the contest trophy and the cash prize. He gave the money to Moe so he could pay off his debt and finally go on his world cruise. The trophy he handed over to his mom.

“We should be going now.” Ash smiled as we stood prepared to leave. “I promise I’m going to make you proud, Mom.”

“I already am.” She assured him as we walked away.

“Your mom is pretty great, Ash.” I clutched the straps of my backpack.

“Yeah, she is.” He agreed with a grin.

We had to walk to the far side of town where the ferries came. There we’d get a ride back to the mainland.

To bad we had the misfortune of arriving after the ferry left.

“It’s not too bad.” I tried to reassure them. “It’s only three hours until the next ferry.”

“What are we gonna do for three whole hours?” Ash groaned, flopping down on the pier. “We can’t go back to the beach because we might miss the next one and there’s no Pokemon Center to wait in here.”

“Ah, true.” I conceded. I wouldn’t have minded visiting an internet café to do a little research but after paying for my ticket and buying that full body swimsuit, plus the ribbons and color powder, chipping in to replace the supplies we’d lost after being shipwrecked, I didn’t have a lot of cash to spare. It was a good thing our tickets were transferable or I’d have had to borrow money from one of the others.

“Guess we just have to sit around and wait.” Brock concluded.

“Well this wait won’t be so bad!” Misty giggled. “Look, a horsea!” She pointed out at the water.

“Wow, a horsea?” Ash perked right up, already digging for his pokedex.

“Horsea, the Water Dragon Pokemon. Thousands of eggs are laid each year which the males of the species then raise. When threatened it will spew ink from its mouth in order to escape.”

“It looks injured.” Brock frowned seriously. It was true, the little horsea had a black eye and some bruising along its head.

“Oh, the poor thing! And there’s no Pokemon Center around.” Misty crooned. “I’m going to catch it and treat its injuries!”

“Sea! Hor-Sea!” The little horsea surprised us by spewing ink over the water. It wasn’t trying to hide itself so it could run away though. It was painting a picture.
“Tentacool and tentacruel?” I guessed, watching the lines of ink connect. That was some impressive artistic talent for a wild pokemon.

“What do you think it’s trying to tell us?” Ash asked me.

“Oh, maybe it was hurt by tentacool and tentacruel?” I shrugged helplessly.

An explosion knocked us for a loop. A boat on the water had suddenly just exploded and several people were jumping overboard to escape the flames.

“Oh no! We’ve gotta help them!” Misty threw out all her pokeballs. “You guys, find us a boat!”

“Right!” The boys shot up.

“We’re…gonna steal another boat? Aren’t we?” I slumped in realization.

“It’s for a good cause!” Misty humphed at me.

Brock and Ash found a little motorboat for us to use and we began pulling sailors out of the water.

“They can’t move!” Ash realized with shock as we pulled another on board. Indeed, the men were mostly conscious but none of them were doing more than twitching!

“Have ta…tell boss.” One of them babbled. “Tell boss,”

“Tell your boss what?” Ash leaned in to hear him better.

“Te-Tenta…cool.” His eyes rolled into the back of his head.

“Eeh, is he okay?” Ash flinched back.

“Here, let me,” I leaned down and checked their airways and breathing. None of them seemed to be struggling for air. There arms and legs had ropey bruises on them that I suppose would match a tentacool’s tentacles. “They’re just paralyzed. A few hours and they’ll be fine, it’s only external.”

“Ex…wha?” Ash blinked at me.

“Oh, uh,” I thought for a second. “There are two types of paralysis, external and internal. External causes loss of motor control and sometimes unconsciousness but will wear off naturally in a matter of hours even without medical intervention. Internal paralysis is normally caused by something like Stun Spore, where it can get inside the body. Internal paralysis will weaken the voluntary muscles and cause serious illness and, most importantly, cannot be relieved without the aid of special medicine.”

“Looks like someone called emergency services.” Brock noticed as we pulled up closer to the dock. Paramedics were waiting to take the people we’d saved.

“You kids did good saving these men.” Officer Jenny nodded respectfully. “Your quick action saved a lot of lives today.”

So it seemed we wouldn’t be getting in trouble for stealing this boat. Nice.

“It was our pleasure, Officer Jenny!” Brock rushed up and clasped her hand in his. “Indeed, how could we have seen such danger and stand idly by with you to act as our example?”

“Okay, that’s enough.” Misty grabbed Brock by the ear and pulled him back. “Remember, we still...
have to see their boss and tell them what happened!”

“Maybe their boss will be a beautiful woman in a stylish suit.” Brock drifted off into a daydream.

Teenaged guys are kinda weird.

“Oh, the horsea!” Misty gasped, turning around to scan the water. The little horsea was much nearer the dock now and we could see its injuries more clearly. “You poor thing, hold on, I’ve got just the thing!”

She started digging through her bag and pulled out a deflated rubber...thing. It was bigger than the beach ball had been. It took a while for her to blow up but eventually I could see that it was a tiny swimming pool. She probably had it for her pokemon and now she filled it with seawater for the horsea.

“C’mon little guy.” She knelt down and held out her arms. “Jump up here. I’ve got some medicine that will make you all better!” She enticed it.

“Sea? Hors-Horsea?” It was a trusting little guy and only hesitated a moment before jumping into Misty’s arms. She gently carried it to the kiddy pool and set it down before digging out a Super Potion from her bag.

“Now this might sting a little but I promise it’ll make you feel better.” The whole time she treated it she kept up a gentle stream of encouragement and praise while the rest of us could only watch.

“Wow, when it comes to water pokemon she’s really something else.” Brock muttered to us. Ash, Pikachu, and I could only nod.

“We still need to go see their boss, Misty.” Ash reminded her.

“I know,” She frowned. “I don’t want to leave Horsea all alone though.”

“Pika! Pikachu!” Pikachu jumped off Ash’s shoulder and rummaged through Misty’s bag until it found a floaty. “Pika!”

“You’ll stay with Horsea until we get back?” Misty checked.

“Pika!” He confirmed, holding up the floaty for her to inflate.

“Alright, we’ll be back soon, Pikachu.” Ash agreed. With that, the four of us left to meet this mysterious boss and tell them what had befallen their men.

Their boss did turn out to be a woman. However she was most definitely not Brock’s type.

“Welcome, friends, to Nastina’s office! I’m Nastina!” She welcomed us while surrounded by a cadre of young men in…minimalist attire.

“I can’t thank you enough for saving my men today!” Other than her clothes and the…entourage…she looked exactly like Brutella. Apparently they’re cousins.

“You could give us a ride to the mainland.” Ash suggested hopefully.

“Oh I can’t do that! How could I possibly let you leave before you see the wonders of Nastina’s
“Resort?” She gestured to a table with a bunch of plastic figurines on it. “It’s not finished yet but once it is it’ll be the jewel of the ocean!”

“Hundreds of gorgeous suites, all surrounded by the most beautiful coral reefs in the world!” She spoke with passion. Passion that quickly turned to rage as she continued. “Or at least it will be if I ever get rid of those tentacool!”

“Tentacool?” Misty repeated, worried.

“Ever since construction began it’s been one thing after another with those despicable water vermin!” Nastina raged. “And it’s been getting worse too! Today’s attack is just the latest! Who knows how they’ll try to top themselves next time?”

“Um, Miss Nastina, ma’am?” I tried to get her attention. “You, uh, mentioned coral reefs?”

“Yes, indeed, my dear!” Her tone did a complete one-eighty as she led us towards the floor to ceiling window where we could see the construction site. “Right over there, you see? Can you imagine how lovely it’ll be once it’s finished?”

“But, uh, those coral reefs?” I continued nervously. “Those are the tentacool’s natural habitat. So, uh, building on top of them,” I trailed off.

“They can find somewhere else to live!” She scoffed before she quickly changed attitudes again. “Ooerr,”

“Or?” Ash prompted nervously.

“Or you young trainers can help me exterminate the nasty vermin!” She offered in a cheerful tone. “And as a reward you’ll get free luxury class dinners for a year, a million dollars in cash, and vouchers for free stays at the hotel! Isn’t Nastina generous?”

“You’re disgusting!” Misty scowled, grabbing the guys by the arms and pulling them to the door. “C’mon guys, we’re leaving!”

“Huh? But, Misty!” Ash protested the whole way back to where we’d left the horsea and Pikachu.

“I can’t believe anyone can be so despicable!” She stormed down the street as we walked along in her wake.

“Not to mention the damage to the ecosystem, the tentacool aren’t the only ones who would suffer.” I added quietly.

“I don’t understand how a person like that can exist!” Misty continued her one-woman march. “How could anyone want to exterminate such beautiful creatures?”

“Beautiful creatures?” Ash echoed. “Hold on, let’s see, tentacool…”

“Tentacool: The Jellyfish Pokemon. This pokemon is 99% water with the remaining 1% being the organ which creates its poison.”

“Yikes.” He hissed. “You call that a beautiful pokemon?”

“I guess beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” Brock muttered.

“Tentacool are beautiful!” Misty rounded on them. “That smooth blue skin! Those graceful tentacles! The red spots on their heads are called the Rubies of the Sea!”
“Who calls them that?” Ash asked, raising a skeptic brow.

“I do.” Misty proclaimed proudly.

“Sheesh,” He scoffed. “When you talk about water pokemon it’s like you get a whole different personality!”

“Kinda like Cal when she’s battling.” Brock commented.

“Mm.” I fidgeted with my hands.

“Hmph!” Misty put her hands on her hips and looked away. “I don’t get why you guys don’t see water pokemons natural beauty! Like that Horsea! It was such a talented artist!”

“Oh, yeah.” I remembered that. “It drew a tentacool and a tentacruel.”

“Hmm, do you think it was trying to tell us something about the tentacool? And why the boat sank?” Brock suggested.

“Maybe,” I shrugged, uneasy. It was certainly possible.

“Pika!” Oh, we’d arrived. Pikachu and Horsea were still happily splashing in the kiddy pool.

“Horsea’s looking a lot better already.” Brock smiled gently.

“Are you feeling better, Horsea?” Misty knelt down by the pool.

“Sea!” The little pokemon nodded.

“Attention all citizens of Porta Vista!” We all jumped, surprised by Nastina’s voice broadcasting throughout the city. “This is Nastina of Nastina’s Ocean Resort speaking! And I am offering a one million dollar reward to whoever can exterminate the tentacool that so trouble our fair city! Isn’t Nastina generous?”

“Why that old bag!” Misty scowled.

“If you want mone—I mean, if you care about the development of our city, come to Slowpoke Square for more information!”

“Ha! No one but pure monsters would ever agree to something so horrible just for some money.” Misty declared confidently.

Unfortunately, the people of Porta Vista did not agree with her.

“Uh, do you guys…feel that?” The ground was trembling beneath my feet.

“Uh-oh!” Brock gasped. Behind us a whole sea of people were running headlong towards us, presumably in the direction of Slowpoke Square.

“Oh no, Horsea!” I turned and saw Misty had lost her grip on Horsea. The people were overtaking us and for a second I was afraid the poor thing would be trampled underfoot. Luckily it got to the water before that happened.

“It’s okay! It got to the water!” I grabbed Misty’s arm so we wouldn’t be separated as the crowd carried us away.
Finally the crowd came to a stop and Misty and I were able to hook back up with the boys. That’s when I saw something that chilled me right down to the bone.

“A Shelgon Class Battle Tank.” I didn’t recognize my own voice. My knees felt watery. The crowd faded from my attention.

My hand went down to my belt. We had to get out of here. *fast. Alakazam would—!*

But I didn’t have Alakazam.

“Cal, are you alright? You look kinda pale.” Ash put his hand on my shoulder.

“Mmhmm.” I nodded, tight lipped. I didn’t trust myself to say anything. I was barely keeping myself from pulling out Fearow.

Why did just the sight of that tank panic me? Why did I know what kind of tank it was on sight? What sort of experience do I have with those things?

“Alright, listen up!” Nastina popped out of the turret. “You all heard me! There’s a one million cash reward to whoever can exterminate all the tentacool!”

---

I have to stop, just for a moment. It’s late now and my hands are shaking just from writing this. *Why?*

I’m not stupid, I can put the facts together. I just don’t like the answer I’m coming up with. Even now, I’m shying away from it.

It’s late now, the others are asleep. I wish I was sleeping but I’ve got a funny feeling that I’m not going to like my dreams tonight. I wonder if there’s any truth that sleeping with a fairy type can protect you against nightmares?

Let’s continue.

---

Out of nowhere, a rose arrow stuck itself to the gun of the tank.

“Prepare for trouble.” Out on the water on a motorboat stood the people I least wanted to see. “Make it double.” Seriously, hadn’t we dealt with them enough today?

“To protect the world from devastation,”

“To unite all people within our nation,”

“To denounce the evils of truth and love,”

“To extend our reach to the stars above,”

“Jessie,”

“James,”

“Team Rocket, blasting off at the speed of light!”

“Surrender now or prepare to fight!”

“Meowth, that’s right!”
“Hey now, those guys have a lot of spunk!” Nastina nodded approvingly.

“That’s a new definition of the word ‘spunk’.” Ash snorted.

Team Rocket, I think, must have noticed the same thing about Nastina that we had. Namely, her uncanny resemblance to another old woman with poor personality.

Nastina does not like to be compared to her cousin Brutella.

“So you three think you’ve got what it takes to get rid of these vermin?” Nastina eyed them. “Then give it a go! And if you succeed, it’ll be one million dollars for ya!”

“Go ahead and start getting our money ready!” Meowth laughed as their boat pulled away from the dock.

“I do not see this ending well.” I grit my teeth. With the crowd in the way there was no way for us to get to the water in time to stop them, but we tried anyway. We pushed our way to the water and watched their boat get further and further out towards the construction site.

“They didn’t look like they were carrying weapons. What do you think their plan is?” Brock worried.

“The…” I swallowed around a rock in my throat. “The…easiest way to kill water pokemon… would be to poison the water. But if they do that—!”

“They won’t just kill the tentacool!” Misty realized.

We couldn’t let this happen! We had to find another boat and go after them! But there wasn’t one in sight!

“Look!” Misty cried. Out on the water and surrounding Team Rocket’s boat were hundreds, maybe thousands, of sparkling red lights.

The tentacool.

I’d thought things would be bad. I was picturing dead and sick pokemon for miles around, ecosystems destabilizing as pokemon fled these waters and invaded new territories, the attacks people would experience as a result of all those stressed and displaced pokemon.

I was not picturing a fifty-story tentacruel evolving from the depths.

“Ooohhh boy,” I’m not sure which of us said it. Tentacruel had risen up in a foam of water and light and it wasted no time in wrappings its many arms around the hotel construction site. We could hear the metal screech as it was bent and broken beneath his grip.

And once the hotel was destroyed, Tentacruel turns its eyes towards the city.

“We need to get to high ground! Now!” Brock shouted, grabbing me by the hand and tugging me away from the water. Ash grabbed Misty and we and the rest of Porta Vista did our best to reach the highest point of the city, the skyscrapers.

The tidal wave was devastating. I watched it flatten homes, smash concrete, rip poles from the ground. And the tentacool swarmed, using their attacks to further destroy everything the wave hadn’t already broken.

And it was all…Familiar. Hopelessly, achingly, familiar.
There was a part of me that urged me to release Fearow and fly far, far away. I shouldn’t be merely standing here and watching.

“We’ve got to stop this. Don’t they realize this will only make things worse?” Misty was getting teary eyed beside me.

“Tentacruel just grabbed something!” Brock hissed, breathing a curse I don’t think he meant for us to hear.

It was hard to make out at this distance, but that was definitely Meowth from Team Rocket!

“Humans, hear this! Hear this!”

“They’re talking through Meowth.” I realized, feeling my eyes go wide. “But they’re not psychic? How are they—?”

“For too long humans have destroyed our nesting grounds! We have tried time and again to turn you away and still you insist on destroying our homes!” Tentacruel continued to broadcast, using Supersonic to ensure we all heard his message. “No more! Now it is you who will know the pain of lost homes and lost lives!”

“Hm?” Tentacruel turned towards the water slightly. “It is too late for that, Horsea. The humans have gone too far.” We couldn’t see Horsea but we knew he was trying to help.

“We will not meekly allow our homes to be destroyed any longer!” Horsea must have said something to really tick him off, because one of Tentacruel’s tentacles swept out over the water and sent Horsea flying straight at us.

“Pidgeotto, catch it!” Ash had the fastest reflexes. Pidgeotto was able to save Horsea from a terrible fall and bring him safely to Misty’s waiting arms.

“We can’t let this happen!” Ash shook beside me. “Everyone, come out!” He threw his pokeballs in the air. The only one he didn’t send out was Charmander, who’d be severely risking his life fighting all those water pokemon.

“Yeah, go Zubat!” Brock followed.

“Fearow, Cleffa, Magikarp!” I almost rethought that one. But Magikarp does need experience and this is kind of a do-or-die situation.

“Staryu, Starmie, Goldeen!” Misty threw hers out too, though I knew how much it had to pain her to fight Tentacruel when they had such grievances.

With all our pokemon working together the tentacool could be fought. Their numbers were vast but they didn’t have the same maneuverability that ours did. Even Magikarp could use Tackle, though it wasn’t doing much damage, mostly acting as a distraction for the others.

Tentacruel was another matter. But Pikachu was brave. On Pidgeotto’s back he flew right up to Tentacruel and started talking to it, trying to reason with it.

“Do you think Pikachu can convince it to back down?” Brock asked.

“I…” I couldn’t answer. Stop the fighting? In any way other than overwhelming force? Was that even possible?
(A ringing in the back of my head, a weight, always there until it wasn’t anymore.)

“If you side with the humans then you will be treated as the enemy!” Tentacruel started broadcasting again and struck out against our pokemon. I saw Fearow nearly get thrown out of the sky and he had to abandon his next attack to save Cleffa when she fell off.

“PLEASE STOP, TENTACRUEL!”

“Misty!?” We looked but she was gone, left when we weren’t looking. It sounded like she’d gotten up on the roof! I leaned out the window, holding one of the bent supports to try to get a glimpse of her.

“We understand now! We realize that we’ve hurt you! We’ll stop, I swear!” She yelled, doing her best to make herself heard. “So, please! Take them back to the ocean!”

It worked. How, I don’t know. But it worked. She got through to him. The fighting stopped.

I actually fell to my knees. The fighting stopped.

They were leaving. All the tentacool were slithering back to the ocean. Tentacruel tossed Meowth away and started making his way through the wreckage left in his wake. That should’ve been the end of it.

Except Nastina had ammunition to spare.


“Cal!” Ash yelled but he was too late to stop me. The wind whipped at my face and hair. I spread my arms and legs wide to slow myself down a little but I trusted my pokemon. Fearow was there in a second and I landed on his back, already directing him towards Nastina.

“Use Gust to knock those weapons out of her hands!” I held tight to Cleffa as we soared closer. Fearow beat his wings, knocking Nastina clean off her feet and, yes, sending the guns flying. “Now grab her!”

“What! Hey, what’s the big idea!” She thrashed ineffectively in Fearow’s talons.

“Drop the attitude or I’ll drop you!” I gave her a piercing glare. Only after she went limp did I look up into Tentacruel’s eyes. “I’m sorry! We’ll make sure she’s held responsible for her part in this! Please know that this woman does not speak for the rest of us!”

Tentacruel narrowed his eyes at me but in the end he continued on his way and had soon vanished beneath the waves.

“…Fearow,” My bird pokemon looked at me. “Drop her.”

“What? AAAIIIIIEEEEEE—!” SPLASH!

“Call!” I checked over my shoulder to see Ash, Brock, and Misty all running down towards the waterfront. Our pokemon were with them, though I noticed Pidgeotto was struggling to carry Magikarp. Was it my imagination or did Magikarp look slightly bigger?

“We did it!” Misty jumped on me with a hug. “We stopped the fighting!”
“Yeah!” I choked up a little.

“You kids are something else.” Officer Jenny, looking more than a little water logged, limped over to us. I noticed her leg was inexpertly wrapped and her growlithe was favoring one of his legs. “You saved a lot of lives today.”

“Awww shucks, we were just trying to help.” Ash blushed.

“What happens now?” Brock looked around at the wreckage.

“First, we get in touch with the mainland and organize an evacuation, as well as getting volunteers to start, ah,” Officer Jenny cut herself off with a cough. Restarting, “First, you kids follow my growlithe to the nearest intact police department. Wait there until I or another officer come to get your statements, okay?”

“Are you sure? We could help.” Ash offered.

“You’ve done enough for today.” She reassured us. “I think you and your pokemon have all earned a good rest. I’d appreciate it if you could look after growlithe for me too.”

“Well, alright.” He agreed hesitantly.

“Growl!” Growlithe barked and started down the road. We all returned our pokemon and followed him. It took a while to reach the police station since we had to go around some wreckage and Growlithe couldn’t move too fast with his hurt leg.

We walked along the water for a good portion of the way. Water was still draining out of the city and we were all soaked up to our knees before long. The most interesting part of the walk was when we came across the remains of Team Rocket’s boat.

“Uh, guys? Hold on a sec,” I climbed up some rubble to get to it.

“Cal? What are you doing?” Ash asked me.

“I just need to check something!” I called down. I had to be cautious of any shifting rubble but I got to the boat okay. There were two barrels still inside. One had cracked open and was spilling over everything with a noxious yellow substance. The other was still very much intact and had a crossed out picture of a tentacool on it.

“Brock, can you get Geodude to carry this, please?” I rolled the barrel onto its side.

“That? Sure, why?” He started reaching for his pokeball.

“I don’t know what’s in this, but it was Team Rocket’s plan for exterminating the tentacool so I know it’s not something to leave lying around.” I definitely didn’t want anything getting into it. “The other one spilled out, so we should be sure to tell Officer Jenny so she can cordon this place off until someone can clean it up.”

“That might take a while if she’s busy.” Ash reasoned. “Pidgeotto, I choose you!”

“Pidgeoo!” Pidgeotto hovered overhead.

“Pidgeotto, we need you guard this boat and don’t let anyone but Officer Jenny get close, okay? That yellow stuff might be poisonous.” He explained. Pidgeotto nodded seriously and sat down to roost on the boat’s railing.
“Geodude?” Brock’s Geodude appeared. In a moment it was happily carrying the barrel for us as we continued towards the police department.

“Phew, I’m glad all that’s over.” Ash collapsed on the couch with a sigh. We were in the break room, helping ourselves to the comfortable seating. Brock was on the floor doing what he could for Growlithe.

“Yeah,” I stared at the barrel. We’d set it up near a computer terminal and that was giving me a funny idea. “Um, Ash? What’s the Professor’s number?”

“Huh? Why’d’ya ask?” He frowned.

“I want to talk to him about the giant Tentacruel. They’re definitely not supposed to get that large and, uh,” I struggled to find the words. “If its growth has anything to do with that substance Team Rocket had, I think he should know about it.”

“Oh,” He frowned and stood up. A minute later we were waiting for Professor Oak to answer.

“Hello?” Professor Oak sounded cautious up until he got a good look at who was calling. “Oh! Ash and Cal! I was a little worried when I saw the call was coming from a police department!” He quickly grew serious again.

“You two aren’t in trouble are you?” He sobered up.

“No, sir.” I quickly shook my head. “But, well, a lot…A lot happened after we left you and Mrs. Ketchum.”

“A lot, hm?” He repeated. “Are you kids alright?”

“Yeah, we’re all fine, Professor.” Ash answered for us. “But you’ll never believe what’s happened!”

“Um, it’ll probably be on the news soon, I mean,” I considered that with a wince. “If it isn’t already.”

“The news?” We must have gotten his attention because we saw him fiddle around. I think he shrunk our video box so he could see another tab. We could hear him start to play a news feed and we could see his expression when the camera showed the ruins of Porta Vista city.

“What!?” He scrambled to his feet. “But-But…We left the island just two hours ago! We only just got back to Pallet! How could so much destruction…?” He stopped the news feed and focused back on us. “Tell me everything. And are you really okay, Ash? You know your mother is going to be worried when she sees the news.”

“Yeah, I’m fine, not a scratch on me! Pikachu’s okay too!” Ash reassured him again.

“Right,” He mopped some sweat from his brow. “How did this happen?”

“Well, sir, you see,” I took a deep breath to steady myself. “It started when we got there just a few minutes too late to catch the ferry. We were waiting by the water when,”

I told him everything. Horsea’s warning, the attack on the boat, meeting Nastina and her intention to exterminate the tentacool, Team Rocket’s attempt and how that somehow led to a fifty-story tall Tentacruel laying waste to the city.
“We found the remains of their boat and I have a whole barrel of the stuff we think caused the Tentacruel’s giant evolution.” I informed him. “It’s here in the police department with us and we’ve got Ash’s Pidgeotto guarding the boat until Officer Jenny can get to it.”

“Mm, a substance that can cause spontaneous evolution and even turn normal pokemon into giants?” Professor Oak looked grave. “I’m going to want to run some tests on that. It’s a good thing you’ve got a whole barrel of it because I know a lot of other professor’s who will be interested in this too. We’ll find out what it is.”

“I’ll contact the Pokemon League and we’ll see if it would be possible to send a researcher to examine this giant tentacruel as well.” He continued, making a few notes. “It’ll have to be handled carefully for the safety of both human and pokemon, but this isn’t something we can afford to make mistakes on.”

“I don’t think the tentacool are going to want any humans anywhere near their coral reefs for a long time.” I warned him. “Are there any researchers who have water/psychic type pokemon like Slowbro or Slowking? That might make communication with Tentacruel easier.”

“Slowbro don’t commonly form the necessary bond for telepathy with humans.” Professor Oak informed me. “A Slowking though, I’m afraid I don’t know any researchers off the top of my head with that pokemon but a Slowking could easily handle interpretation! That’s brilliant, Cal!”

“Huh? Telepathy? Bonds?” Ash looked at the screen and me.

“Most psychic type pokemon are able to use the ability Telepathy.” I explained. “However, for reasons not fully understood, using that Telepathy to communicate with humans is oddly difficult for them. They can understand us but we can’t understand them, understand? But when a trainer bonds with their psychic type it becomes possible for that pokemon to forge a sympathetic bond, allowing them to speak to their trainer and translate pokemon speech for them.”

Which was…exactly what I must have had with Alakazam to be able to understand him. At some point we trusted each other enough to form a link between our minds.

“Yes, that’s exactly correct.” Professor Oak nodded. “But Cal, how do you know this? Psychic pokemon capable of forming that bond are rather rare and it isn’t common knowledge outside those trainers lucky enough to have one.”

“Cal knows all sorts of cool stuff about pokemon, Professor! Someday she’s going to be a Pokemon Professor like you!” Ash laughed.

“Really?” He looked positively delighted. “Well, it’s not often you see someone with such ambitions! Most are content to aim for researcher or lab assistant! Becoming a Pokemon Professor is no easy thing you know!”

“I’m aware of that, and I know it’s not something I’m going to accomplish quickly or easily.” Or maybe at all.

“Well if you ever have any questions feel free to call me any time!” He offered happily. “I’ll be glad to provide the help to someone aiming for my own field.”

“Um, thank you, sir.” My cheeks were starting to burn. I swore I could hear Brock and Misty whispering to each other behind us.

“And you know, I’ve got an idea!” Professor Oak snapped his fingers. “Hold on, give me a moment!” He ran off and we could hear him rifling through drawers of papers.
“Uh, what is he doing?” I looked to Ash.

“I dunno, he gets like this sometimes.” He shrugged nonchalantly.

“Aha! Found it!” He messed with something else out of view before he sat in front of the camera again. “Cal, look around, is there a copier in there with you?”

“Erm,” I found one under the table. “Yes, sir. But, uh, why?”

“I’m sending you a basic format for a few different kinds of research papers. Please keep them and use them to write about the things you discover on your journey!” He urged me. “Including that giant Tentacruel! Send them to me when you get the chance!”

“Oh, uh, okay!” A moment later there was a notification showing the papers had arrived.

A few different formats turned out to be twelve. A dozen different formats. Three of them are almost perfectly identical except for subject order and pacing.

“I’ll, uh, get this done as soon as I can.” I promised.

So this is what getting homework feels like.

I don’t like it.
The Festival

It is really getting late now. I’ll be lucky to get more than four hours of sleep. That settles it, I’m getting my own supply of coffee at the very next town we visit.

Which should be in a few hours. After talking with the Professor for a while Officer Jenny came back, along with other officers and they took our statements on everything that had happened. Officer Jenny assured us that the boat was under guard and the barrel of mystery substance would be delivered safely to Professor Oak’s lab. Then we were escorted to the docks to take our ferry back to the mainland.

Almost everyone on Porta Vista was taking a ship somewhere but we got on the ferry heading for the town of Maiden’s Peak. It’s an overnight trip so we should arrive around nine in the morning tomorrow. Maybe I can sleep in for a bit.

But before I sleep there’s one more thing I need to write down. One more thing to face.

I don’t think I come from a peaceful background. Let’s lay out the facts.

Fact 1: My name is Cal and I’m eleven years old.
Fact 2: I have amnesia, possibly caused by an Alakazam.
Fact 3: I come from the future.
Fact 4: My knowledge base is hodge-podge, with odd gaps. (Ex: I did not know what a millionaire is.)
Fact 5: Long periods of little food and water do not trouble me as much as my companions.
Fact 6: I am well versed in emergency first aid for both humans and Pokemon.
Fact 7: I have numerous scars of mysterious origin.
Fact 8: I can identify guns and other related weaponry at a glance.
Fact 9: I have a strong Fight or Flight instinct regarding guns and other related weaponry.

These are the things I know for certain.

Hypothesis: I come from some point in the future from a region at war.

Evidence For: Skill in first aid, being accustomed to rationing food and water, ability to identify weapons, and strong Fight or Flight instinct.

Evidence Against:

I’m…drawing a blank on that one. Maybe I’m just too tired, stressed out? Overthinking this? There has to be another explanation that I’m just too tired to see right now.

I’m too tired to keep writing. The words are starting to blur together. Goodnight, Alakazam.

I did not get to sleep in as much as I wanted but five and a half hours of sleep is better than four. I guess I should be grateful Ash woke me up in time for breakfast. I’m so glad to finally put yesterday behind us and even more glad that there was coffee with breakfast.

Up on deck we let our Pokemon out for their own breakfast and to enjoy themselves. I forgot to mention that Misty caught Horsea! Ash was annoyed when she copied his capture pose. Brock
decided he wanted to try it the next time he caught a pokemon and he and Misty somehow convinced me to try it too. I have to admit teasing Ash is kind of fun.

“You’re definitely bigger than you were before.” I remarked to Magikarp as I watched it splash in Misty’s kiddy pool. As weak a swimmer as magikarp are, if I let my Magikarp swim alongside the ferry he’d get left behind in our wake. Now he was almost too big for the kiddy pool. “Could be a change in diet. Could be a sign of upcoming evolution. It’s too big a change to just be age though.”


“Hm,” Given what had happened, “James’ magikarp evolved almost right after he bought it. Clearly that salesperson knew what he was doing in raising magikarp, even if it was just to make a quick buck.” Made sense, kind of. Can’t sell sickly pokemon after all.

“Magi-Magikarp-karp.” Magikarp kept on splashing.

“Cal, working with Magikarp today?” Brock and the others walked over.

“Oh, um,” I hunched over a little. “Yeah, sorta. It’s still an hour until we see land, so…”


“You’ll never guess what I heard one of the other passengers say!” Misty was bouncing in place with excitement.

“What did they say?” I asked.

“There’s a big end of summer festival happening at Maiden’s Peak today!” She squealed. “There’ll be rides, games, all sorts of food stands, it’s going to be great!”

“Especially after yesterday. We deserve a chance to unwind and have fun!” Ash declared boldly.

“Yeah, have fun,” We all looked quizzically at Brock.

“Um, Brock, is there something wrong?” I half reached out.

“It’s the end of summer.” He moaned. “I can’t believe I didn’t realize it until now.”

“So? What’s the big deal?” Ash frowned in confusion.

“The big deal? The big deal!” Brock grabbed him by the shoulders. “The big deal is that the end of summer means the end of bikini season!”

“Summer means bikinis and bikinis mean pretty girls to wear them! And I’ve just wasted another summer without getting a girlfriend!” He started off shaking Ash by the shoulders but slowly lost energy, falling to his knees in despair.

“Oh don’t be such a downer, Brock.” Misty huffed. “You’ll meet plenty of other girls over the year.”

“But…But…Bikini season!” He whined.

“This…This is a teenaged male thing…right?” I blinked slowly.

“If it is then I never want to grow up.” Ash muttered.
Now that would be a sight to see, Ash being as girl-crazy as Brock was turning out to be.

The last leg of the trip passed quickly. Soon we were all gathered by the rail straining our eyes to see the landmass coming into view.

“Oh, I see it! Maiden’s Peak!” Misty pointed to a jute of rock.

“And there’s the festival!” Ash grinned ear to ear.

The festival was amazing to see. Hundreds of stalls were set up with colorful banners and decorations. People were all over the place, laughing and smiling and eating foods I’d never seen before. Some of them were dressed in kimono and kosode. There were these big machines that I guessed were the rides. One of them was a giant wheel with baskets for people to sit in. I’d wager the view was pretty spectacular from there.

“Oh, I want to ride that!” I pointed to the giant wheel.

“The Ferris Wheel? Yeah, that’ll be fun! Especially at night with all the paper lanterns!” Misty gushed.

A Ferris Wheel, huh.

“Another year riding the Ferris Wheel alone.” Brock sighed to himself.

I was so busy taking in all the sights with Ash and Misty that for a moment we completely lost track of Brock and Pikachu. They both nearly got trampled by the other passengers disembarking the ferry.

“She was…the most beautiful…” He was slack jawed, staring at another pier.

“Who was?” Ash looked in the same direction as me.

“She vanished!” He groaned.

“C’mon Brock, forget about your fantasies and let’s have some fun!” Misty pulled him to his feet and dragged him towards the festival.

There were so many games and exhibits! The games had prizes! If I’d had the money to spare I would’ve tried to win a few. I saw a cute Charmander plushie that I would’ve loved! Ash bought us some caramel candies to eat while we walked too.

“She was so beautiful.” Brock didn’t seem to be cheering up though. Whatever or whoever he’d seen before was still weighing heavily on his mind.

“Hey, you there!” An old woman in priestess garb came up behind Brock and leveled a magnifying glass at his face. “I can see it! A beautiful woman will lead you to a cruel fate!”

“Well I’m the most beautiful woman here but I’d never hurt Brock.” Misty fanned herself.

“I was talking about an elegant, young woman,” The priestess scoffed. “Not a scrawny ragamuffin like you.”

“Pfft! Scrawny!” Ash doubled over laughing.

“Why, you!” Misty seethed. Pikachu had to jump into my arms to avoid being pummeled along with Ash. Then Misty started carting both Brock and Ash away.
“Ah, well, that was certainly…something.” I coughed awkwardly. Looking back, I tried to find the old priestess in the crowd but she’d already disappeared.

“Pikaaa,” Pikachu nodded in agreement.

We found ourselves following a crowd up towards Maiden’s Peak itself where a temple stood. An elderly priest was standing on the veranda with a covered painting.

“2,000 years ago there lived a maiden in this fair town!” He began. “Her lover was a soldier who sailed off to join the great war plaguing these lands in those days and she vowed to wait for him at the cliff until his triumphant return! She waited and waited, even after news of the war’s end reached the village she still waited, hoping to see his sails on the horizon!”

“She continued to wait, never leaving her spot. Legend says that in time her body turned to stone, the same as the cliff she stood on!” He reached for the cover. “And this is the maiden in question!” He ripped it away.

“It’s her!” Two voices cried out in shock. Brock was one of them.

James of Team Rocket was the other.

In sync, they staggered forward and started climbing the steps towards the painting. The priest had to physically bar their way to stop them.

“Do you have any idea what’s going on?” Misty leaned in to whisper to me. I numbly shook my head.

“Wait, you fools! This painting is over 2,000 years old and is removed from this shrine only once a year!” He yelled at them.

“The Maiden’s rock, where is it?” Brock demanded.

“Hmm? Why, it’s just over there, behind the temple.” The priest answered, looking a little confused.

I wanted to know what James was here for but he split off too fast and with Brock acting strange I decided it would be better to stick with my friends. Besides, I figured Team Rocket would pop up again sooner or later.

“So that’s it, Maiden’s Peak.” Brock gazed out towards the jute of stone that was the town’s claim to fame. It really did look like a woman was standing there. Was it carved or did the waves naturally erode the stone like that? There seemed to be a red flower growing out of the side of her head.

“If she was my girlfriend I’d never let her out of my sight.” He sighed, leaning against the fence that lined the cliff side.

“A rock’s a rock, Brock.” Misty frowned. “Just forget about it. Let’s go have some fun at the festival.”

“You go, I’ll catch up in a bit.” He sat down without turning to face us.

We exchanged looks.

“You remember where we’re staying?” Ash asked, hesitantly adjusting his backpack.
“The Pokemon Center by the docks.” Brock recited immediately. “I’ll be back before curfew.”

“Is this more teenage guy stuff?” Ash wondered as we left Brock.

“I don’t know.” Misty shrugged. “Granted, most teenage guys I’ve met were always going ga-ga over my sisters so this isn’t too unusual, I guess.”

“Cal?” He looked at me.

“I, uh, have no clue.” I shrugged helplessly. “I guess, if he’s not better by tomorrow, we could try to cheer him up?”

“Then that’s what we’ll do!” He nodded, determined. “But in the meantime, let’s enjoy the festival!”

And we did enjoy it. I know I have amnesia and all but I still think this might’ve been the most fun I’ve ever had. For a while I even forgot about Team Rocket! The only thing that would’ve made it better was if Brock had been there with us.

We rode rides, played a few games, ate festival food. I especially like takoyaki, though Misty and Ash spat theirs out after being reminded it was made from tentacools. It didn’t bother me though.

And we rode the Ferris Wheel twice! The second time was after it got dark and all the paper lanterns got lit. Misty was right, it was definitely even better that way!

But it was getting late by then so we decided to call it a night and get to the Pokemon Center.

“Today was great, huh Pikachu?” Ash sat down on a bench.

“Pika Pikachu!” Pikachu rubbed his stomach, stuffed full with a caramel apple. I wasn’t sure caramel was good for pokemon but Pikachu looked happy enough.

“Hey guys, look at the time.” Misty pointed to the cuckoo clock on the wall. Ten minutes until eleven.

“Almost curfew.” Ash realized.

“I’ll check to see if Brock made it back ahead of us.” I stood and walked to the front register.

“Can I help you?” Nurse Joy smiled.

“Yes, ma’am,” I bowed politely. “We were wondering if our friend made it here ahead of us. His name is Brock Harrison.”

“Hm, Brock Harrison.” She worked on the computer, opening the registry of trainers staying at the Center that night. “I’m sorry, it doesn’t look like he’s here right now. We still have room available for you and your friends though. Is one room okay?”

“Oh, yes, that would be fine. We usually share a room.” I nodded, concealing my worry. I handed her my license briefly and then rejoined the others.

“He’s not here?” Misty guessed from the look on my face.

“There’s still time.” Ash pointed out, though I’d eaten five minutes getting us registered for the evening.
But five minutes passed without Brock showing up and the shields descended over the door.

“It’s curfew time! The light’s will be going out in ten minutes!” Nurse Joy informed us.

“But our friend’s still out there! Let me go out and find him, please!” Ash pleaded.

“I’m sorry, but it’s officially past curfew.” Nurse Joy said sternly. “That means the doors stay locked until morning.” She softened a little. “I’m sure your friend will be fine.”

We didn’t have much of an option. We retired to our room and tried to get some sleep. The others took a while to drift off so I could write this.

Brock, I hope you’re okay.

The next morning we were up bright and early. As soon as the doors opened we were running back to the temple and Maiden’s Rock to start searching. Given we didn’t even stop long enough for me to get some coffee I was more than a little blurry eyed but there’s nothing like an early morning jog to wake you up.

“His bag’s still here!” Misty gasped. Brock’s bag was left abandoned by the fence, the same place we’d seen it yesterday.

Worried, I peered over the ledge. I couldn’t see anything worrisome at the bottom. I didn’t really believe Brock would toss himself over just because he couldn’t get a girlfriend but I was still relieved to find nothing.

“Brock! Brock, where are you?” Ash yelled, cupping his hands around his mouth.

“James! James, you’d better come out right now!” Another, frustratingly familiar, voice called out.

We circled around the temple and by the doors we found two thirds of Team Rocket, Jessie and Meowth.

“Yuck.” Jessie stuck up her nose at us.


“Hmph, twerps like you should mind their own business.” Jessie sniffed. Then, she struck a pose, filling me with an emotion I can only identify as aggravation.

“Prepare for trouble!” For the second line her voice deepened. “And make it double!” Back to high.

“To protect the world from devastation! To unite all peoples within our nation! To denounce the evils of truth and love!”

“To ExTeNd OuR rEaCh To ThE sTaRs AbOvE!” Came a warbling voice.

For a second we were all frozen, then Jessie rallied herself and continued.

“Jessie!” She cried, brushing her hair away from her ears.

“JaMeS!” Slowly, we all turned towards the temple. I tiptoed up the steps towards the door.
Team Rocket, blasting off at the speed of light!” Jessie followed me, equally cautious.

“SuRrEnDeR nOw Or PrEpArE tO fIgHt!” We threw the doors open and jumped back out of the way as James and Brock fell through.

“Brock!” “James!” We took our respective friends and tried to rouse them.

Brock’s skin was clammy and cool to the touch. His eyes weren’t tracking movement, or at least not tracking movement the rest of us could see. He was awake but not aware.

“So beautiful…” He sighed. “I want…to be with…you.”

“He’s delirious.” Misty cringed.

“Looks like James is too.” Ash commented, looking over at where Team Rocket was trying to slap some sense into their teammate. “Right. Pikachu,”

“Pika?” Pikachu looked inquisitively up at him.

“Thundershock both of them.” Ash ordered. The rest of us quickly dumped our friends and jumped out of range.

“CHUU!” Just in time it seemed. Thundershock might be Pikachu’s weakest attack but it was by no means harmless.

“Huh? Wha? Where…am I?” Brock groaned, finally focusing on us. “Guys?”

“So it is exactly as I predicted.” My nerves must’ve already been shot for the day because I nearly jumped a foot in the air. The old priestess from yesterday was back, leaning on her cane as she approached us and inspected the two teenage men we were crowded around.

Huh, you know, this is the first time I’ve realized that Jessie and James are around the same age as Brock. They’re maybe, what? A year or so older? Sixteen or seventeen and already criminals.

Moving on.

“Every year this happens.” She tutted, using her cane to lift James’ chin for inspection. “Every year she lures in hapless young men and does this to them.”

“She? Someone did this to them?” Misty asked.

“Yes, there’s no mistaking it!” The priestess clucked her tongue. “This is the work of the Maiden’s ghost!”

“The, uh, the what?” I schooled my expression to keep from gaping. Ghosts. Not ghost types. We get to deal with ghosts now.

Are they real? Do some people just linger after death? I’m not sure what to believe and today’s events really don’t help matters.

“Every year for 2,000 years the ghost of the Maiden makes herself known.” The priestess began to explain, moving past us to enter the temple. “She longs for the return of her soldier and so she lures in young men. She sucks up their life energy and leaves them babbling and confused here in this temple.”

“Even so, she’s so beautiful I’d give her my very soul if that is what she desired.” Brock sighed,
lovesick.

“EEK! Not me!” James shivered. “I don’t want to get my soul sucked out!”

“If you wish to keep the Maiden’s touch off you, then you will need these.” She opened a chest and pulled out a pack of talismans.

“Do they really work?” Misty was the first to step forward.

“They do, but there is one small problem.” The priestess fanned herself with them.


“They don’t come cheap.” The priestess moved to the side and revealed a cash register behind her.

A funny thing to note: A trainer’s license also serves as their Pokemon League debit card. People pay to see Pokemon Battles, the League pays trainers for battling with their pokemon, more people pay to see battles. Fighting Team Rocket and battling other trainers kept us in travel supplies with a little left over for the odd splurge.

Out of the four of us, Ash had the most money. Unlike Misty and me he hadn’t bought new swimsuits or pokemon accessories. He put in his part for our travel supplies and occasionally treated us all to fast food at whatever town we stopped in. He also battled the most out of all of us, and Gym Battles paid more than regular battles on top of that.

Basically what I’m trying to say is that Ash paid for all the talismans. The priestess was having a two for one deal and we gave the extra pack to Team Rocket too.

And no, those talismans were not cheap.

We plastered a bunch of them to Brock himself and then used the rest of the pack to cover the temple, focusing mainly on the doors and walls. Team Rocket did the same with James. Once that was done all that was left to do was wait for nightfall.

“Man, I wish we could go back to the festival.” Misty sighed regretfully. “I know it goes on for three days but I wanted to ride the rides again.”

“I want to eat more festival food.” Ash mumbled. Our stomachs all rumbled in agreement.

“Ha! That just goes to show how childish you twerps are!” Jessie snickered. “We members of Team Rocket are much more disciplined than—!” The rest of her sentence was cut off when her own stomach rumbled.

“Um, I know Brock usually cooks, but uh,” I looked over at Brock who was staring wistfully at the painting of the Maiden.

“Wait, Cal, you can cook?” Ash’s eyes bugged out of his head.

“Um, simple stuff sure. I’m…nowhere near as good as Brock is though.” During the earliest days of our journey none of us had the kind of supplies Brock did. Nor the money to get them. We’d eaten trail food and granola bars mainly. Food that was quick and could be packed up for later.

We had all our supplies with us but we couldn’t exactly start a fire inside the temple. And going outside turned out to be dangerous because Brock and James kept wandering towards the cliff and trying to climb over the fence so we moved back inside. That limited what I could make but we had
plenty to work with.

At the bottom of his bag Brock had a small cooler where he stored the perishables. Fruit and meat mainly. He also had a rice cooker that didn’t require an open flame, just a few batteries or an electric pokemon. I just gave the adapter cord to Pikachu and started making rice for onigiri.

While the rice was cooking I started making ham and cheese sandwiches.

“Um, Cal?” Ash got my attention. When I looked up I found he was staring at something over me? Above me?

I looked up.

Jessie and Meowth were hovering over me with their mouths open, threatening to drool on me and our food.

“…Uh, excuse me?” I hunched over away from them. They both stiffened up like they hadn’t even realized what they were doing. They ran back to their side of the temple but now that I was paying attention I could feel them staring. I started going back to food preparation but…

But, oh darn it!

“Should I…offer them some?” I looked to Misty and Ash for answers. Brock, I felt, would normally not hesitate to share our food but he was in no state to make decisions about anything except how pretty the Maiden was.

“I don’t think they have any food with them.” Ash looked uncomfortable.

“I guess there’s no helping it.” Misty crossed her arms. “Hey, Team Rocket! We’ll make you some food but you’d better be grateful!”

“Oh yes, very grateful!” Jessie beamed.

“The most gratefullest! Say, you got any tuna in there?” Meowth added.

“You’re getting ham and cheese and you’re going to like it.” I shot them a quick glare.

Brock and James didn’t have any appetite. James didn’t seem as affected as Brock was but he was genuinely terrified of the Maiden’s Ghost. Brock just…nibbled. He’d rather stare at the painting.

After we’d eaten there was still a whole day to get through. Misty pulled a much battered romance novel from her bag and Ash laid down for a nap. Lacking a better idea, I pulled out the research forms Professor Oak had sent me and a fresh clean journal to start in on the homework given to me.

It was a boring way to spend the day but we managed. For lunch Ash and I ran back to the festival to get some food and we stopped by the Pokemon Center to inform the Nurse Joy that we wouldn’t be returning for the evening. I made up a lie about us staying at a friend’s house for the night.

I got the paperwork finished. I’ll send it off at the Pokemon Center tomorrow.

It felt like forever before the sun set. Still we waited. The priestess told us the Maiden’s Ghost usually began to act at midnight.

Midnight came and we were all waiting. The wind picked up, shrieking and howling like it was something alive. A scraping sound like claws on wood reached us, like the Maiden’s ghost was
trying to get in. Brock and James shifted between trance-like and aware. Sometimes one or the other would get up and shamble towards the door and we’d have to dogpile them.

My arms were covered in goosebumps under my jacket sleeves. The hairs on my neck stood on end. Ash and Misty were both looking a little wild eyed long before two A.M. came around. Pikachu’s cheek pouches kept sparking whenever the wind picked up and I saw Meowth drop to all fours and bristle more than once.

“Gosh, I’m tired.” Misty yawned. She pinched her own cheeks to wake herself up. “I hope morning comes soon. Ash, what time is it?”

“It’s, uh,” Ash opened up his pokedex to check. “4:50.”

“Sun comes up at, what? About 6:00?” I rubbed my arms, trying to get the goosebumps to go down.

“Sun comes up early at this time of year.” The priestess nodded. She hadn’t moved since dinner, sitting in a meditative pose at the temple alter. I admired her discipline but I couldn’t even begin to imagine how stiff she had to be.


I dozed off for a little while. I didn’t even know I was asleep until I was suddenly awake. The wind howled! The whole temple shook with it and we could hear paper tearing as the talismans were ripped off.

We didn’t even have time to climb to our feet before the doors suddenly burst open. A pale silhouette floated a foot in the air and she reached out a hand towards the guys. Another blast of wind knocked their talismans off too.

“My love,” We all shook. Her voice was sweet but echoey. “I’ve been waiting for you.”

“Yes,” Brock began levitating. “I’m here now.”

“AAAAAIIIIIEEEE! I don’t wanna go! I don’t wanna go!” James tried to grab something to slow himself down.

“Brock, hang on!” Ash tried to grab Brock by the leg. The ghost sent another blast of wind to knock him off his feet first.

“Wait! Leave him alone! He’s not your lover!” I screamed, scrambling to follow them outside. They were heading towards the cliff!

“You will not interfere.” The Maiden frowned.

BANG!

A smoking hole appeared in her midsection and the guys dropped. We barely caught Brock before he went over the edge and James had to save himself by grabbing the ledge. When I looked over my shoulder I saw Jessie with a rocket launcher.

When and where did she even get that?

“Women like you make me sick.” She declared haughtily. “Always whining and complaining, needing a man in your life. I would’ve waved him off with a see ya later! There are plenty of fish
“You will cease interfering.” The Maiden repaired the hole and glared at us.

The forest shook and shuddered. Every leaf rustled and from between the trees came a steady stream of lost souls. Laughing, crying, screaming in rage and denial.

“Ah! What are those?” Misty screamed. We put our backs to Ash, watching the phantoms surround us.

“They’re not like any pokemon I’ve ever seen!” Ash protested, shakily bringing his pokedex out.

They weren’t pokemon. I knew that much. I didn’t expect what happened next though.

“No pokemon detected. Searching, searching,” The pokedex hummed. Distracted from his fear, Ash started waving it slowly side to side. Finally, he pointed the camera at the Maiden. “Pokemon identified! Gastly: The Poison/Ghost pokemon. This pokemon and its evolutionary line are the only ones known with its unique typing.”

Well I had something new to add to the pokedex now. Gastly, at least the really powerful ones, were also capable of psychic abilities.

“Well,” He revealed his true form. “I suppose the fun had to come to an end sooner or later. Yes, I am indeed a pokemon. I sometimes appear as a Maiden,” He turned into the Maiden again, then became the old priestess. “Or the mysterious old woman! But!” He took his true form again.

“I am always and forever awfully Gastly!” He cackled, spreading his dark purple cloud further.

“Well, a pokemon is a lot easier to handle than a ghost.” I reasoned, pulling out Char’s pokeball.

“Char!” She appeared, still wearing the scarf I’d given her. I saw her widen her stance and swing her tail, ready to fight.

“Char, use Flamethrower!” I yelled.

“You know how to handle a pokemon? Well I know how to handle a flame!” Gastly laughed, changing form again (Or appearing to change form) into a fire extinguisher.

“It’s an illusion, Char! It can’t hurt you!” My reassurance fell on deaf ears. Char had never fought a psychic type before and couldn’t tell the difference.

(For a moment, just a single moment, there was a weight in the back of my mind that perked up and took notice.)

“Darn. Char, return!” She wouldn’t do any good running scared like that.

“Pikachu, give him a Thunderbolt!” Ash was beside me, providing his arm as a springboard for Pikachu to launch himself from.

“For a mouse, a mousetrap!” Gastly became a comically oversized mousetrap. The kind used to catch pichu, plusle, or minun.

Such a thing by itself shouldn’t have scared Pikachu. A fire extinguisher could be deadly to a Charmander, but the mousetrap, however large, wasn’t nearly as much as a threat.
And yet, Pikachu ran away from it. There had to be some kind of targeted psychic resonance that Gastly was producing. Something that pressed the panic button in their brains.

“Grr! Squirtle, Bulbasaur, attack together!” Ash must’ve had the idea that Gastly couldn’t scare them both at once.

Unfortunately, he was wrong about that. Gastly could create a blastoise and a venusaur both at once. He could also blend them together. I wish I had a camera for that! In fact, I’m making a note of it. The very next time I’ve got the extra money I’m buying a camera! It’ll provide great evidence for future papers!

“Maybe everyone at once?” I suggested, fingers running over my pokeballs. Char, Fearow, and Cleffa together might be able to do something. Magikarp….Uh, well, all it would take was an illusionary pidgeotto to frighten Magikarp.

We didn’t get to try that strategy though. I hadn’t fully noticed it at the time but it was easier to see than it should have been. We were already standing in the pre-dawn light and as we faced down Gastly we saw the first rays of sunlight reach over the horizon.

“Gah! How I hate sunlight!” Gastly pinched his eyes closed and slunk back into the shadows.

“Well, it seems our time is up. Until next year!” His voice and his form both faded from view.

“Hey, what’s going on?” Brock sat up.

“You’re back to normal?” Misty checked.

“Normal? What do you mean?” He took a look around, giving a brief double take to the Maiden’s Rock. “Ah! Now I remember! I was hypnotized by a ghost pokemon!”

“I was hypnotized too!” James wailed, grabbing Jessie by the leg.

“Quit your crying! The ghost is gone now!” She scolded him, shaking him off.

“So, we did it?” Ash blinked. “We won?”

“I,” I hesitated. “I don’t know if it was a win, but it is over.”

“So,” He blinked slower. “Does that mean we can sleep now?”

We all paused to think this over. Pikachu came to a conclusion first and quite happily flopped onto his back and started snoring.

I’m not really sure when Team Rocket took their leave. We just grabbed our bags from the temple and found a shady spot in the forest to nap in. We didn’t get up until noon and by then we’d restored enough energy to gladly participate in the final day of the festival.

And with Brock there it was even better than before. The festival committee was even loaning out yukata for people to wear for the final night. We got a little boat with a candle and sent it drifting out on the tide then changed clothes and danced! It was kind of fun to dress up!

All in all, a good day.
The Shiny

Chapter Notes

Hey all, just a quick thing before we get to the chapter. I'm not so good at tagging because I don't know how to tag without spoilerising future stuff so I keep it minimal but I'm aware that not everything I write is going to be everybody's cup of tea. So if there's something that you guys think should be tagged let me know in the comments? Pls?

With our latest adventure behind us, we began the next leg of our journey. The next nearest gym was the Saffron gym. Brock had the map today and we were walking along the coastline.

“Hey, I can see the edge again!” Ash broke out into a run. The road had led us away from the water for a while but now it had curved back to the ledge and we all gathered to look down at the crashing waves below. “Whoa, look at those rocks down there.”

“One wrong step and the ball game’s over.” Misty snarked.

“There’s the ridge that leads to Saffron city.” Brock gasped. He pointed down along the coast. The ridge looked good, decently stable. I’d probably still keep one hand on Fearow’s pokeball the whole time though.

“Hey, look up there. What are those?” Ash pointed above the ridge. A bunch of glittering shadows were flying around, weaving around each other.

“Hold on,” Brock pulled out a pair of binoculars. “Oh, that’s the butterfree migration! I guess we’re in time for their season of love.”

“Season of love?” Ash’s expression curdled.

“Yup.” Brock nodded sharply. “Every year the butterfree gather in this spot to pair off and find mates, then they fly across the ocean to lay their eggs!”

“The Orange islands are in that direction,” I added. “And, let’s see, after several stops on the islands they’ll fly back up to the Johto region before flying over the mountains back to Kanto.”

“Whoa, that’s a lot of flying.” Ash hummed thoughtfully.

“Ah, a round the world trip sounds like the perfect honeymoon, doesn’t it Cal?” Misty sighed.

“Oh, um, Yeah. I guess.” I chuckled nervously. Romance was really the last thing on my mind.

“So, all butterfree do this?” Ash looked at me and Brock for the answer.

“If they want to have babies, yeah.” Brock nodded seriously. “In fact, lots of trainers will come here to release their butterfree so they can start families.” He paused suddenly and turned his binoculars to scanning the area. “Actually, I’d bet you anything there’s—Aha! Hot air balloons! There must be someone renting them out!”
“Really? Where?” Brock found the salesman and led us to him. We stopped a little ways away when we saw the prices.

“Yikes.” Misty grimaced. “I know it’s a one-day rental but that is steep.”

“I could afford it.” Ash didn’t sound too enthusiastic about it though.

“Better think hard about this, Ash.” Brock cautioned him. “If you just want to get up there to watch the migration, that’s fine. But you have a butterfree too, remember.”

“Yeah, I know.” Ash pulled Butterfree’s pokeball from his belt. “This migration and this season of love thing is really important to the butterfree, which means…” He frowned. “I should give my Butterfree the chance to start a family too.”

“You don’t have to.” I tried to be reassuring. “Lots of trainers don’t.” But he shook his head.

“I don’t want to be like other trainers. I want to give Butterfree the choice.” Determined, he walked up to the salesman and used his pokedex to pay for a one-day balloon rental.

“You know, sometimes he can be almost admirable.” Misty huffed, crossing her arms over her chest. “Just sometimes though.”

“Heh, right.” I chuckled nervously.

I wasn’t sure we’d all fit at first. Ash had bought a small balloon and I was a little leery of summoning Fearow with all these free bug pokemon around. I figured it might be in poor taste. I didn’t have to worry though. There wasn’t much in the way of personal space but we all fit in the basket.

“Alright, here we go!” Brock manned the engine and soon had us up in the air.

Flying in a balloon is different from riding Fearow. I feel like I have much less control with the balloon and it’s so much slower. The ride is smoother though and a lot easier on the thighs.

“Check out that view!” Ash looked all around. This was his first time flying somewhere at all. Come to think of it, the times I’ve ridden Fearow I never really had the opportunity to just look around and take in the sights.

“And there are the butterfree!” Brock grinned. Watching them from the ground was amazing enough. Seeing it all on their level was breath taking. Most of them were doing courtship dances. Some were showing off their moves like Tackle, Gust, and Stun Spore. The last one required that we all keep some distance between us and the flock but it was gorgeous to watch from afar.

I really wish I had a camera!

“Right.” Ash took a deep breath. “Butterfree, come on out!”

It didn’t take more than a second for Butterfree to realize what was going on. I swear we could see his shock just from the twitch of his antennae!

“Butterfree,” Ash got his attention. “It’s your migration, right? If you want to, then go and find yourself a mate!”

“Free! Free!” Butterfree trilled and happily leaned forward, nuzzling Ash with his antennae as a thank you before flying off to find a mate. Ash looked a little watery eyed for a moment but he
quickly blinked it away.

Around us more balloons were releasing their butterfree. They joined the main flock, showing their dances and moves to attract mates.

I brought out my notebook and started taking notes. Butterfree could be difficult to sex from a distance but from watching some trained butterfree pass our balloon I was able to match actions with pokemon. The males usually did the courtship dance first, fluttering around the females. Females, in contrast, were in the majority when it came to showing off their moves. Stun Spore seemed to be the most popular move.

Roughly 65% of the female presenting butterfree used Stun Spore to attract mates. Those with a wider area of affect appear to be the most successful. 32% of the remaining female presenting butterfree used either Tackle or Sleep Powder. Less than 3% of female presenting butterfree chose to use Gust. Gust using butterfree were quickly surrounded by other butterfree of both male and female sexes and were pushed downward to fly below the main flock. Reason is likely to do with spreading the Stun Spore and Sleep Powder further and irritating the other butterfree.

“Cal, what’cha writing?” Ash, already close enough to brush my elbow, leaned in to read over my shoulder.

“I’m recording my observations on the butterfree and their mating habits.” I answered with a grin.

“Hey look, Ash’s Butterfree found one it likes!” Misty grabbed my arm on the other side, nearly causing me to rip the page I was writing on.

I thought it would be harder for me to pick Ash’s Butterfree out of the line up but it was helped along by the fact Butterfree was dancing around a shiny butterfree!

“Oh wow, I really wish I had a camera!” I moaned.

Amazingly, there is a Category: Shiny butterfree among the common variety. This butterfree appears to be female and is a bright, fluorescent pink. While the arms and legs are the same color as the common varieties I also note that the wings appear to have a dark gray patterning rather than the standard black. The pattern itself appears similar. It is currently unknown whether this is a wild pokemon or a trained one.

“Oh no, it got rejected!” Misty cried, causing me to look up again. Butterfree was drifting, falling down towards the forest while the pink butterfree continued to fly.

“Shot down by its one true love, I know the feeling.” Brock clenched a fist. “How tragic! I could write a book on love and heart break!”

“Would it be your auto-biography?” Misty rolled her eyes. “Hurry up and take us down!”

“Right!” He shook himself, working at the engine to bring us down into a clearing.

Ash hardly waited for the balloon to reach the ground before vaulting over the side of the basket. Misty and I followed right away while Brock waited to secure the balloon first. We wouldn’t be able to get Ash’s deposit back if the balloon flew away without us.

“Butterfree!” Ash bellowed.

“Pika! Pikachu!” Pikachu joined him. We all started calling for him.
“Butterfree!” Ash yelled again. He stopped, doing a quick double take in one direction.
“Butterfree, there you are!”

“Did you find it?” Misty asked.

Butterfree was on the ground. His wings were limp and his antennae were curled in tight near his forehead. I was pretty sure that position indicated embarrassment.

Poor Butterfree was devastated by his failure. Pikachu even tried to talking to him but that didn’t seem to help.

“He just don’t get why that other butterfree can’t see how great my Butterfree is.” Ash glared at whatever the screen was showing him. He shoved the pokedex back in his pocket and turned to me. “Cal, you’re smart. How can Butterfree get that other butterfree’s attention?”

“I just don’t get why that other butterfree can’t see how great my Butterfree is.” Ash glared at whatever the screen was showing him. He shoved the pokedex back in his pocket and turned to me. “Cal, you’re smart. How can Butterfree get that other butterfree’s attention?”

“Er, well,” Everyone was looking at me. My reputation must’ve even spread to our pokemon because even Butterfree was looking up at me with hope-filled eyes. I scanned over my notes to buy more time.

“It’s a shiny butterfree, which complicates things somewhat.” I started. “But, erm, if the dance didn’t work then the next best thing to try would be attack moves. I noticed Stun Spore and Sleep Powder were most effective for other butterfree trying to attract mates. You should definitely avoid wind based attacks like Gust or Whirlwind though. The other butterfree didn’t like those. Tackle might get the shiny butterfree’s attention, but if your Butterfree can show how strong its Stun Spore is that might convince her to mate with you.” I finished by addressing Butterfree directly.

“Interesting that the wind based attacks would prove so unpopular.” Brock hummed thoughtfully. “But the phrase you used, shiny? The coloring was definitely bright but I wouldn’t say it was shiny.”

“Oh no, shiny is just a term used for a pokemon that doesn’t match its breed’s coloring patterns.” I explained. “Like, if Pikachu was orange instead of yellow. Shiny pokemon aren’t usually any stronger or weaker than their counterparts, but they’re much rarer because they don’t tend to survive in the wild for very long.”

“Guys, geek out about pokemon research stuff later!” Ash snapped. “So we should use Tackle, then Stun Spore and Sleep Powder, right, Cal?”

“Yes, right.” I coughed, forcing myself to focus. I checked my notes again. “Um, try going for a large area of affect with the Stun Spore, that seems to be a good indicator of strength without actually hurting the other butterfree.”

“Right then,” Ash nodded decisively. “Butterfree, we’re gonna win you a mate!”

“Free!” Butterfree got a little spirit back, jumping back into the air with a happy trill.

“Hold on a sec!” Brock hit his fist against his open palm. He dug through a side pocket in his bag and pulled out a length of yellow ribbon. I think it was left over from Fearow’s Zapdos costume. “A little extra plumage never hurt and this’ll help us keep track of you in the flock!”
“You look great, Butterfree!” Misty clapped her hands. “That pink shiny butterfree doesn’t stand a chance!”

None of them recognized the term shiny. Ash I wouldn’t be surprised by, but Misty and Brock? Especially Brock, who’s aiming to be a Pokemon Breeder. I wonder when that term will hit the mainstream? I’ll have to keep an ear out for it.

In the air again, Ash commandeered Brock’s binoculars to find the shiny butterfree.

“Where is it? Where is it?” He muttered.

“You’re really serious about this, huh?” Misty commented.

“Of course! I raised that butterfree and I want everybody else to see how great it is!” He retorted without giving up his search. “Ah, there it is! Butterfree, go!” I had my notebook out and was ready to record more observations.

The flight pattern of the shiny butterfree differs slightly from the standard, weaving more side to side than up and down. This could theoretically be an indication of a weak flyer but the shiny pokemon keeps easy pace with the rest of the flock. My current theory is that the shininess of this pokemon is not limited to mere coloring but the wing joints might also be slightly different. Will confirm if opportunity—

I looked up blankly. Far ahead I saw Butterfree pulling off a good sized cloud of Stun Spore. I saw plenty of other butterfree giving him due attention for it but I couldn’t see the shiny one’s reaction.

I was a little more preoccupied with the odd noise coming towards us. A whirring chop-chop noise that sounded kinda like a—

“Prepare for trouble!”
“And make it double!” Like a helicopter flying a big Team Rocket banner with Jessie and James’ faces printed on it.
“To protect the world from devastation!”
“To unite all peoples within our nation!”
“To denounce the evils of truth and love!”
“To extend our reach to the stars above!”
“Jessie!”
“James!”
“Team Rocket, blasting off at the speed of light!”
“Surrender now or prepare to fight, fight, fight!”
“Meowth, that’s right!”

“Not them again!” I wasn’t sure which of us groaned it. Probably all of us to be honest.

They were flying a Staraptor class helicopter with extra armament. Not quite military grade but perfectly capable of hauling heavy loads quickly over short distances. A long pole was extending out from the bottom with a giant ball at the tip. With a clatter of smoke and metal the ball fell open and a huge net unfolded.

“They’re trying to steal the butterfree!” Brock cried in horror. “Hey Team Rocket, stop this! You’ll disrupt their whole egg laying season!”

“Can’t you see these butterfree are in love?” Misty shouted angrily beside him.

Team Rocket either didn’t hear or didn’t care. They passed through the flock, catching dozens of
butterfree in their giant net.

Including, we were shocked to see, the shiny one.

“Look at Butterfree!” Ash pointed. His Butterfree, identifiable by the bright yellow ribbon around his neck, began using Tackle on the helicopter’s windows.

“That won’t work!” I grit my teeth. “Butterfree’s not strong enough to break through the shielding! You’d need something moving at mach one to break that glass!”

“Butterfree, try your Stun Spore!” Ash called out. Butterfree heard and flew over the helicopter, dusting the blades with the yellow powder.

“Stun Spore only works on something alive, Ash!” I gripped the edge of the basket. Maybe if he aimed for the net?

I looked down. If we’d still been over land I would’ve suggested it. The Butterfree could slow down their descent and we could help them out of the net once we’d landed.

But we were over the water now.

Team Rocket’s net was full. Butterfree kept on them, throwing Tackle after Tackle at it. Trying to find a weak spot. I already knew he wouldn’t find one.

“If Butterfree can’t do it then I’ll have to use Pidgeotto!” Ash declared.

“Ash, wait!” Misty grabbed his hand before he could throw the pokeball. “Look at Butterfree! It’s trying its hardest!”

“But Misty, in love or not those pokemon need all the help they can get!” I argued.

“There’s a fog up ahead!” Brock warned us. Cliffs and bluffs jutted out from the ground.

We’d lost sight of Butterfree but we could still faintly hear the sound of the helicopter. We followed that as best we could until it stopped too.

“BUTTERFREE!” Ash shouted himself hoarse. “BUTTERFREE, WHERE ARE YOU?”

“…free!” A tiny sounding trill reached us. From beyond a craggy cliff came Butterfree. He was breathing hard and covered in bruises but still looked fit to battle.

“Butterfree, is the pink butterfree over there?” Ash asked.

“Free.” Butterfree nodded. If he’d had the anatomy for it I’m sure he would’ve growled.

There was a warehouse. I made special note of it to report to the police later. The helicopter was sitting outside and Team Rocket and all the stolen butterfree were inside.

“The doors are locked.” Ash scowled. We had to circle to the side to find the windows.

“Right then,” I measured the height and distance with my eye. Then I hefted up a big rock.

For the record? Turning their motto on them is soooo satisfying.
“Team Rocket, prepare for trouble!” Ash started us off, posing dramatically.

“And make that quadruple!” Misty chimed in.

“To protect the world from your infestation!” Brock held a flashlight under his chin.

“To save pokemon from across the nation!” I smirked.

“Defending the beauty of truth and love!” Misty pulled out a pokeball.

“To send you flying to the stars above!” Ash and Butterfree looked ready to go to war.

“We’ll send you packing at the speed of light! So give up now or prepare to fight!”

And then? Blessed anarchy.

Butterfree targeted the cage the butterfree were in, hitting it with Tackle again and again. Misty called out Starmie and attacked Team Rocket directly. I called out Char for the same thing while Brock ran to the door, ready to throw it open once the butterfree were out.

Butterfree shattered the cage. Most of the butterfree scattered to find an exit but I saw the pink one hovering near him.

“This way! Fly out through here!” Brock directed them towards the big doors.

“No, they’re getting away!” Meowth yowled.

“I’ve had enough of this!” Jessie screamed, hefting a sledge hammer. There wasn’t time for Starmie to dodge before she swung.

“Char, give her a Flamethrower!” I called, giving Starmie time to recover.

Team Rocket’s slippery, I’ll give them that. They threw down some smoke bombs and made a beeline for the helicopter. We couldn’t get there before they took off again but our balloon was still ready to go. Geodude had been holding it down for us so we didn’t have to worry about tying it down.

“Can’t this thing go any faster?” Ash complained.

“We’re going as fast as we can!” Brock did pull on the rope again though.

“Free! Freee!” The pink one fretted.

“Easy, easy there.” I gently pet her head. “We’ll stop them. Don’t worry.”

But they were catching up to the flock and we were falling behind. They were extending the net for a second round.

“Free!” Butterfree flapped his wings. He looked at Pikachu and repeated himself.

“Pika!” Pikachu jumped from the basket, landing on Butterfree’s back.

“Huh? Pikachu, Butterfree, where are you going?” Ash reached out an arm for them.

“I think they’ve got a plan.” I smirked again, eager for the lightshow to come.

And it did not disappoint.
The butterfree flock was safe at last. Butterfree brought Pikachu back and we made our way back to the coastline. The other hot air balloons had mostly been returned to the man renting them out. We returned ours and stood on the coast to say our goodbyes.

“Hey,” Ash got down on one knee to address the shiny butterfree. “This is a really good Butterfree, so take care of him for me, okay?” She nodded.

“And Butterfree, you…” Ash sniffed, voice cracking under the pressure. “You take care of yourself. I’ll let the others know what’s going on and maybe we’ll see each other again someday.”

“Free, Butterfree.” Butterfree’s eyes watered. Ash pet him once gently behind his antennae, then the two bug pokemon lifted off to join the main flock.

“Your babies are gonna be beautiful.” Misty’s smile wobbled a little.

“Have fun out there, watch out for any more pokemon thieves.” Brock waved as they left.

I couldn’t think of anything to say. I could barely see anything with the tears in my eyes. I had to settle for smiling and waving and hoping they knew how happy I was to see them off on this next step of their lives.

I remembered Ash catching Butterfree back when he was still a caterpie. How kindly he’d treated it after the initially harsh battle. The way he’d tried to console him after Misty hurt his feelings. To think that little caterpie would grow up to be such a strong, confident Butterfree!

Ash was crying now too. Tears streaming down his cheeks even as he kept yelling encouragements.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” Misty sighed, leaning against me as we looked over the water. I had to wipe my eyes to see it better but she definitely wasn’t exaggerating. The Butterfree were still throwing Stun Spore and Sleep Powder attacks as they flew and the light of the setting sun glinted off them. I don’t have a camera so I just had to burn it into my memory and hope I never forgot it.

I think my pokedex can actually take pictures and record videos but I’d have to explain to Ash, Misty, and Brock if they saw it. Maybe someday, maybe even someday soon, but not right now.

Ash stopped waving. I watched him pull Butterfree’s pokeball from his belt. It was easy to reset a pokeball back to factory default, thus freeing the pokemon registered to it, but he didn’t do that. He shrunk the ball down, pulled out his pokedex and typed something into it, then teleported the pokeball away.

“Ash?” I stepped up beside him.

“I don’t want to free Butterfree because I don’t want anyone else to catch it.” He explained, taking a moment to wipe the drying tears from his face. “So I sent the ball to Professor Oak. I’ll call him and explain in the next town.”

“Pretty smart.” I looked up but the flock was out of sight now. The sun was just barely peeking over the horizon now.

Good luck out there, Butterfree.
I love my friends. I’m grateful for their company, their companionship. Ash’s optimism and determination and kindness. Misty’s passion and drive. Brock’s gentle care and handy skills. I wouldn’t trade them for anything.

Except maybe another two hours of sleep.

“Why?” I mumbled, barely managing to put one foot in front of the other. I had one hand loosely wrapped around Brock’s so I didn’t stumble into anything.

“Ash wanted to get an early start of it and Misty says she knows the way.” Brock answered me, repeating the same answer he’d given me a minute ago.

“But…why?” I whined, stumbling over a rock or a root or something. Brock adjusted his hold and continued tugging me along.

Brock snorted, amused by my poor morning outlook.

If it even counted as morning. The sun wasn’t up yet. Considering sunrise happened around five-ish in the morning that didn’t say very good things about the time. There was early and then there was just cruelty. I didn’t even have any coffee.

Coffee. Coffee. Why do I keep forgetting to get that? Should’ve gotten some while we were still at Maiden’s Peak.

“Did we…have breakfast?” I questioned confusedly. I didn’t remember eating.

“Finally starting to wake up? No, we haven’t had breakfast yet.” Brock sighed.

“Oh sure, Misty, this is definitely the way to Saffron city! Now you’ve got us lost!” Ash’s loud grumbling startled me.

It was early. I needed more sleep than this. This could not be healthy.

“Me!” Misty snapped at him. “With your sense of direction you’d get lost in a mirror!”

“At least I don’t crack them!” He yelled back.

“Guys, calm down. You don’t really wanna stand around arguing, do you?” Brock let go of my hand as he tried to calm down our friends. Former friends.

Maybe they wouldn’t be so short-tempered if they got more sleep.

“Yes we do!” Their response snapped the last strand of Brock’s patience. All three started yelling and arguing, taking the early morning hour out on each other.

I leaned against a tree and rubbed my face. If I was up then I was going to be up. I needed my wits about me.

“Hey, look over there!” Ash broke up the fight, distracted by something past the trees. I had to move closer to the others before I saw what he did. A little girl dressed in white, playing with a ball.
“Excuse me, little girl? Are we close to Saffron city?” He called.

“Hehehe!” She continued to giggle and play with her ball. Without any indication she’d heard us she turned around and started to run.

“Hey, wait a minute!” Ash, of course, took off after her.

An early morning run is a surprisingly effective way to wake up in the morning. As soon as I was really moving I was wide awake. I dodged trees and large rocks, jumped over smaller plants to keep up with Ash. Misty and Brock struggled in our wake but were keeping up admirably well.

And then Ash ran straight off a cliff.

“ASH!” I screamed, hand diving down to Fearow’s ball. How steep was the cliff? How tall? What was at the bottom?

Ash tossed up a pokeball faster than I could. Bulbasaur had barely materialized before his vines snagged Ash. I got to the cliff edge and sighed with relief when I saw the vines wrapped around his waist.

It was a long fall.

“Ash, you scared me half to death!” I helped him up. “You have to watch your footing in the dark!”

“Yeah, sorry.” He looked a little shaken by his close brush with death. We were both trembling from the sudden shock of adrenaline hitting our veins.

“Are you guys okay?” Misty and Brock caught up to us.

“Yeah, yeah we’re fine.” I nodded shakily.

“Where’d that little girl go?” Brock asked.

That’s right. It wasn’t just Ash who’d been running around in the dark. Nervously, I looked over the edge again for a hint of white. I didn’t see anything.

“Look! Saffron city!” Misty pointed the way. Beyond the cliff was a beacon of shining lights. Saffron city didn’t look quite as big as Viridian city but it was definitely more colorful.

“Maybe the little girl went there?” Ash suggested uncertainly.

With all of us now wide awake and a pre-dawn light beginning to show we made our way safely down the cliffside. We kept an eye out for the little girl in case she was still wandering nearby but she didn’t turn up. None of us wanted to risk running off another cliff so we decided to head straight to the city first before we considered seriously searching for her. With luck she was a local who knew the place well and just snuck away from her parents. If not, then we’d be back out to help find her.

“Wow, so this is Saffron city!” Misty’s eyes gleamed as we entered the gates.

I was just looking around at the signs and billboards, eyes scanning for the Pokemon Center logo, when the ground below us erupted into a series of Bangs and bright lights.

Blind and afraid, my hand fell on Char’s pokeball. I brought it up and thumbed the release while my watery eyes tried to find the shooters.
Tried to find the shooters. Sweet Celebi, I really am from some war torn region, aren’t I?

That’s the assumption I’m going to have to work with until I recover more information. Until I get the rest of my memories back I have to work with my instincts and muscle memory.

As it turned out, it was lucky that my first reaction was defense orients instead of offense oriented because we weren’t being shot at. We’d stepped over a portion of the ground primed with small fireworks that reminded me far too much of landmines to feel safe. We weren’t in any actual danger.

Not yet at least.

“Congratulations!” Two girls in alolan style hula skirts stepped out of the shadows and pecked Ash on the cheeks.

“Huh? What’s going on?” Ash was right to be suspicious. When something happened out of the blue like this it usually had something to do with Team Rocket.

“You’ve won a fantastic prize!” The hula girls cheered. “You’re the millionth visitor to Saffron city!”

“Wow, really?” We started to relax. I put Char’s pokeball back on my belt.

Do people really get prizes for stuff like this?

“Please, follow us!” They led us towards a big tower. A few signs identified it as the Saffron city TV Network Building. “This way, step lightly now!”

“What great luck!” Ash grinned, looking around excitedly. “Do you think we’ll get to be on tv?”

“I hope they let us get cleaned up a little first.” Misty ran a hand through her hair.

The lobby was empty. The sun was just barely creeping over the horizon but there should’ve been someone at the front desk, right?

My steps began to slow. The others were a step ahead of me.

The hula girls had stopped three steps back, just out of reach.

I saw their smug smirks and Pikachu caught in their grasp. The brunette was wearing rubber gloves and was holding Pikachu’s mouth shut. Ash and I both tried to charge at them, get Pikachu back, but…

But there was a bright flash of light. Colors swirled and sounds grew garbled. It was like a full body twitch.

And then we were somewhere else.

‘Teleportation.’ I realized. But no warm press of someone else’s mind beside my own. This was something else.

Mechanical teleportation. The building probably had a psychic pokemon hooked up to some equipment in another room to power the machine. A second-hand teleportation.

Still in shock but distracted by the circumstances, I checked my surroundings. A room without a door or any windows. Every surface was identical save for the one bright orange pad we stood on.
Was that the focus for the machine?

“Whoa, where are we?” The others were recovering, not quite as used to the suddenness of teleportation as I was.

What was the range? Did the pad have something to do with it? A target? Could similar pads be placed anywhere the pokemon was familiar with or did it lack that limitation? Did a human, a computer, or the pokemon itself choose the destination coordinates? It hadn’t activated when we all stepped on the tile so presumably it was remote activated, not weight or motion.

‘No, focus Cal.’ I chastised myself. We were in trouble and I needed to focus on that not the potentials of the technology before me.

(Why wasn’t I familiar with this technology? Had it never caught on by my time? Was it still experimental? Why was it in a TV Station of all things?)

I refocused on the situation as a flat screen tv descended from a slot in the ceiling.

“You’re watching the ‘Prepare for Trouble, Make it Double!’ Show!” The hula girls appeared on screen, sans Pikachu.

They then proceeded to duck below the camera and, from the clothes and wigs thrown haphazardly about, tore off their disguises. Jessie and James jumped back into view, both trying to hide their panting.

“Team Rocket!? Again!?” Ash groaned loudly. “And… Yuck! They both kissed me!” He ripped off the flower necklace and began scrubbing his cheeks.

While they did their motto the rest of us began looking around the room for a way out. The walls looked pretty solid and I’d hate to have to destroy public property but if that was our only option then we’d just have to live with it.

“Hey! Don’t ignore us!” Jessie screeched. It was no wonder it had taken me so long to realize they were close to Brock in age, considering how shrill she could get her voice to sound.

“Maybe this will get your attention.” They both stepped to the side, revealing Pikachu tied up in rubber ropes with Meowth standing guard over him.

“Give me back Pikachu right now!” Ash yelled in warning.

“Or what? Hm?” Jessie gave him a smug smirk. “The only way in or out of that room is through the Warp Tile and we’re in the control room, not you. Oh but don’t worry, I’m sure the staff will let you out in a couple of hours!”

“Or we can just break out with our pokemon.” I pulled Char’s ball from my belt. “I doubt the walls here are as thick as the hull of the St. Anne.”

That made them sweat. But I cursed my tongue a second later when the screen turned to static.

“Hey! Come back! Leave Pikachu alone!” Ash slammed his fist into the screen. He quickly turned back to me. “Cal, we’ve got to get out of here before they get away!”

“Yeah, le—!” I cut myself off so sharply that I bit my tongue. The sound of displaced air is soft, like a gently shush.
Behind me, not on the Warp Tile, was the little girl from the forest, holding Pikachu.

“You’re…that girl.” Ash looked a little stunned as Pikachu jumped into his arms. “You saved Pikachu for us? Thank you, I—!”

Colors blurred and swirled together. Sounds became garbled and meaningless. Every muscle in my body twitched and I barely kept my feet under me.

I took in my new surroundings quickly, trying to ignore the abrasive static in the back of my mind. We were in a courtyard or a pavilion, lots of pathways and benches. There was one building with unique, sweeping pillars in the center of it all.

The building had a presence. Something I hesitate to describe. It was like a phantom itch in the back of my skull.

No, not an itch. More like someone had placed a book on my head for me to balance. A subtle pressure that I had to be constantly aware of.

I’m certain now that it was a psychic imprint, left by all the psychics who trained there every day and their leader herself who’d called the place home her entire life.

But at the time I didn’t know what it was, except that it felt both familiar and dangerous all at once.

“Did that little girl teleport us here?” Misty rubbed her sore bottom as she stood up.

“Where is here anyway?” Ash grumbled, making sure he had a secure hold on Pikachu as he climbed to his feet.

“You folks come to this city and don’t know Sabrina’s gym?” We all startled a little to find a man in a green jogging suit behind us.

“Word of warning to you, if you’re hoping to challenge the Pokemon League this is one gym you’d be better off avoiding.” He warned us before he turned and continued on his way.

“Well, that was…strange.” Misty shuddered.

“I don’t care what this gym’s reputation is! I’ve already decided this is where I’m going to earn my next badge!” Ash declared confidently.

“Do, um, do any of you guys know what type of pokemon Sabrina uses?” I asked nervously.

“She’s kinda reclusive as far as gym trainers go.” Brock frowned contemplatively. “I don’t even know what she looks like.”

“C’mon Cal, it’ll be fine!” Ash slapped me on the back. “Just watch, pretty soon I’ll be leaving here with a Marsh Badge.”

“If you say so.” Still, that weight I could feel coming off the building bothered me.

“Hello, is anyone home?” Ash called as we walked in.

“I don’t like this place. It’s creepy!” Misty grabbed my arm for comfort.

“It’s not…so bad.” I tried to put a brave face on it but I was getting more and more worried by the second. After a while we started to pass some doors and we stopped to peek inside one.
“What are they doing?” Ash asked.

“Practicing psychic abilities.” I answered easily. “The people at the card table are practicing mind reading. The people with spoons are practicing telekinesis. I don’t see anyone practicing teleportation but that’s not exactly something you should practice in a crowded room.”

“Psychic stuff? I thought that stuff was fake! Only pokemon have those abilities, right?” Misty looked at me in shock.

“Oh, not really. Some humans are born with amazing abilities too. I think psychics make up, uh, two percent of the world’s population? I’m not sure.” I shrugged.

“Well at least one of you has some prior knowledge.” I managed to keep from jumping with the others but I was getting a little sick of all the jump scares lately. The man who’d appeared before us had long red hair and wore a medical mask over his face. “Though I am astonished so many of you came here in ignorance. What is your purpose in the Great One’s gym?” He demanded from us.

“I’m Ash Ketchum, and I’m here to challenge the Gym Leader Sabrina for a Marsh Badge!” Ash stood straighter.

“Ha! You fool!” The man pulled a spoon from his pocket and glared at it heatedly for…for a while actually. He didn’t seem to be breathing and the veins around his forehead grew more pronounced, what we could see of his face began to flush.

“Aha! You see!” The spoon bent.

A little.

I felt kind of awkward watching that. He looked so proud of himself and it had taken him a whole minute just to make that much difference.

“Are you alright? You look like you’ve got a headache.” Ash asked in concern.

“Fool, it’s telekinesis! You can’t control a Psychic type pokemon without telekinesis!” He declared.

“Uh,” I clapped my hand over my mouth before I could argue. I knew, I knew that a trainer could raise a Psychic type pokemon without being a psychic themselves but now wasn’t the time to argue with some stranger. Besides, I didn’t exactly have any proof with me, even to myself. Did I really raise Alakazam?

“Cal?” Misty looked at me, worried.

“Nothing, it’s nothing.” I waved her off.

“Psychic or no psychic, I’m going to challenge Sabrina to a Gym Battle!” Ash boldly declared, taking the spoon from the man’s hands and bending it through sheer strength. “See? Strength over mind!”

“Just pretend we’ve never met him.” Brock muttered to Misty and I.

“Guys,” I scolded them in a whisper.

Okay, sure, it was a little awkward and embarrassing but he wasn’t hurting anybody. Ash is a kid,
cut him a little slack.

“Hmph, I suppose there’s no saving those determined to doom themselves.” The man scoffed. “Very well, follow me.”

“Here we are.” He threw open the doors to the arena. A chill swept up my spine.

“Sheesh, this looks more like a temple than a gym.” Brock shivered.

“What ever’s it’s like I don’t like it.” Misty began to rub her arms for warmth.

It had a standard arena but the walls were lined with torches. Smoke gathered in pools at the ceiling and were drawn off into vents. The room smelled like incense and the psychic pressure I was still trying to acclimate to was much stronger here.

On the far side of the room was a reed curtain. Our guide crossed the arena quickly and knelt before it, very much like a priest supplicating to his gods.

“Oh great Sabrina, these unworthy ones have come to challenge you! Though I do not know why you should bother with such pathetic im—

Hack!

He was lifted off his feet, nothing we could see supporting him. He flailed for a second and then was still with a kind of rigidity that made me think he couldn’t move. “For-Forgive me, Great One! It is not I who should decide who is worthy! Please, forgive me!” He pleaded. He fell to the ground and quickly jumped to his feet, crying apologies as he ran straight past us and into the hall.

Behind the curtain came a giggle.

“Huh? Wait a second,” Ash stepped forward hesitantly.

Although the lighting didn’t change we were suddenly able to see beyond the curtain, just a little. Enough to see that on a big throne there was a familiar little girl.

“You’re the girl who saved Pikachu!” Ash smiled. “You’re Sabrina?”

“That’s right!” She said brightly. “Do you want to battle me?”

“Yeah, I’m here to earn a Marsh Badge!” He nodded decisively.

“Okay! But if you lose,” She added warningly. “You all have to be my friends and play with me!”

“Play? Sure, we can do that!” Ash agreed easily before turning to us. “See, guys? She might have some telekinetic powers but she’s still just a little girl.”

“Don’t underestimate her, Ash.” I frowned, looking over his shoulder. I remembered the abrasive feel of her abilities. It didn’t feel friendly.

“And, uh, I wouldn’t be so sure about the ‘little’ part.” Brock stammered, pointing.

The curtain had pulled up. Instead of a little girl there was now a much older, but similar looking, girl. She looked around Brock’s age, give or take a year. Long, dark green hair and a face chiseled from marble. And the little girl in her lap dangled in her grip like a doll.

“This will be a one on one, all out match, no substitutions. Do you accept?” The older girl spoke tonelessly.

“Yeah, I’m ready!” Ash nodded, looking much more serious now.
“Abra.” The little girl’s pokeball flew out, opening to release an abra.

“D’aww,” I cooed, seeing it sit sleepily in the center of the arena.


“Uh, well, mmm.” I smiled shyly, feeling my cheeks burn.

Yes, okay, I thought the abra was cute. I thought it was stinking adorable. I wanted to cradle it in my arms.

Maybe I did raise Alakazam. All the way from an abra?

“Pikachu, you’re up!” Ash refocused, sending Pikachu out into the ring.

“Pika! Pika pika, pikachu pika!” Pikachu waved his tiny fist in challenge. Abra, being asleep, didn’t respond.

“It’s not really sleeping is it?” Ash asked uncertainly. “Who sends out a sleeping pokemon?”

“Don’t underestimate abra, Ash.” I warned him.

“Abra: This pokemon sleeps for eighteen hours a day and can even Teleport away from danger without waking up.” Ash’s Pokedex read off the short entry.

“Then we’ll just have to be fast. Pikachu, Thunderbolt!” Ash jumped right in.

As expected, the abra Teleported away without moving. Ash and Pikachu tried it a few more times and never came close. Abra could probably keep up that teleport for a while before it got tired.

Kadabra could keep it up even longer.

A white glow began to emit from every inch. I blinked and missed the transition. Suddenly there was kadabra, awake and ready to bring the full brunt of its abilities to bear.

“It evolved!?” Ash gulped. “I guess that doesn’t count against the no substitutions rule, huh?”

“No such luck.” Misty shook her head though Ash wasn’t looking our way. He was totally focused on the battlefield in front of him.

“Pikachu, fill the whole stadium with lightning!” He ordered.

“Oh, that’s clever!” I noticed his plan.

“Cal?” Misty leaned in to me.

“He’s going to try forcing kadabra out of the ring for a technical knock out.” I explained quickly, bracing myself for the flash.

Pikachu outdid himself. Unfortunately, Sabrina trained her kadabra well and being a psychic she didn’t have to waste time saying her orders.

“That’s Confusion, Ash look out!” I cried as I recognized the move that hijacked the lightning out of Pikachu’s control.

“Huh? What the-!?” Ash didn’t have time to do anything about it. The lightning that had filled the
arena gathered together into a concentrated beam to strike Pikachu’s retreating back. “Oh no, Pikachu!”

“Pii…kaa…” Pikachu groaned. His fur was singed along his back.

“Pikachu, can you stand?” Ash was shaken. He would either make a great comeback from this or he wouldn’t.

There was a very real possibility he wouldn’t.

Pikachu stood, but not under his own power.

“Why is he dancing?” Ash was incredulous.

“It’s not him, it’s kadabra!” I tried to warn him.

Too late. Pikachu’s body flew up and hit the ceiling with a loud smack! Down, faster than mere gravity could pull, until he hit the floor.

It was brutal. No hint of mercy or kindness. Every hit was as strong as the first. For a horrible second that stretched into eternity we stood there frozen, watching it happen.

“Stop the match!” Ash recovered first. He ran out onto the field and was just two steps too late to catch Pikachu on their final descent. He wrapped his arms protectively around Pikachu, but kadabra made no move to continue the beating.

We ran out after him. Pikachu didn’t look too badly hurt. A couple of hours in a Pokemon Center and he’d be good as new. Still, that kind of brutality wasn’t something we’d faced before. We hadn’t expected it.

“Remember, you promised you’d be my friends and play with me when you lost!” The little girl chided us with a giggle.

And then, well…colors blurred, sounds grew garbled, everything twitched and suddenly we were somewhere else.

With an abrasive headache in the back of my skull.

“I am getting really tired of being Teleported around like that.” I fumed quietly.

“Where are we?” Misty climbed unsteadily to her feet.

It was a neighborhood, somewhere in the suburbs. Immaculate lawns, perfectly trimmed flower bushes, white picket fences. The houses had a little individuality in terms of color but the designs were all identical.

“Seems pretty empty.” Brock commented. Not a single blade of grass stirred. There didn’t seem to be anyone around at all.

“Let’s look around, see if we can find some answers.” Ash was still cradling Pikachu as we walked.

“That house has a door open.” Brock pointed out. Lacking a better idea, we decided to investigate.

My headache wasn’t going away. The others were surprised to see a dinner table set with cake but no one around but I just took the opportunity to sit down. It felt like we’d been going at a hundred
miles an hour since chasing Ash to the cliff.

That hadn’t been too long ago. More than an hour less than three? Say, two or so?

I sighed and tried to make myself comfortable. The chair didn’t have much cushion though. Ash went off to explore the rest of the house, calling for any occupants as he went. From the corner of my eye I spotted the plush couch in the living room, with throw pillows and a blanket folded over the back. It was calling me.

*Cal….Caaaalllll….Come lay on me.*

I sighed again and stood up. A few short steps and I twirled on my heel to sprawl onto the cushions.
The Ghosts

I slammed into the plastic furniture hard enough to see stars.

“OOOoowwwww!” I moaned, rolling onto the floor and cradling my head.

“Cal?” Misty and Brock ran in from the kitchen.

“It’s haaaarrrdd!” I whined, sitting up and patting the back of my head. Right next to the still healing cut from the St. Anne too. *Ouch!*

“The couch is plastic too! Just like the cakes!” Brock gasped.

“Whhhyyyy?” I cried. This had *not* helped my headache. What was before a nuisance to be endured had now rocketed up to a relentless pulse that refused to be ignored.

“Guys, I think I know where we are.” Misty gulped. “We need to find Ash, *quick!*”

I forced myself to my feet and followed her. We found Ash upstairs, outside the bathroom. He was gaping at something inside like he couldn’t make sense of it.

“Ash, I don’t know how but we’re inside a—aaAAAHHH!” Misty’s voice turned into a scream as the roof was lifted off the house. Above us were the little girls. I didn’t know which one was Sabrina, or if they both were. But they weren’t so little anymore.

“Let’s play!” The littlest giant laughed.

“Run!” Brock grabbed Misty and I and pulled us through the door. We leaped downstairs with Ash close on our heels.

“These are dollhouses! I think this whole place is a toy box and she somehow shrunk us to fit inside!” Misty explained hastily.

“That’s crazy! Can telekinesis really do that?” Ash caught up and ran alongside us as we pelted down the street. I didn’t know what we’d do when we got to the edge of the box. Could Fearow fly us all out of here? Would we return to normal size or be stuck like this? Would Fearow have shrunk too?

“I’ve never heard of this being within a psychic’s abilities!” I measured my breathing as we ran. Underneath us the earth jumped and shook as the littlest giant followed us, bouncing her ball along the way.

“I wanna play catch!” I risked looking over my shoulder at that. She had her ball, now the size of a boulder, in hand.

“Look ahead!” Misty screamed.

A dead end, marked by a giant photo of the little girl and two people, presumably her parents. Nowhere left for us to run.

“Catch!” She threw the ball towards us.

“Mew, protect us.” I whispered, pulling out Char and Fearow’s balls.
There was the distinctive *shush* of displaced air again and the jogger from earlier appeared before us.

“Let your minds rely on mine!” He told us.

Colors blurred together, sounds became garbled, my entire body twitched as we settled someplace new. The only thing lacking was the abrasive static in the back of my mind. The headache was still there, but it hadn’t gotten any worse and in fact even felt a little better. The only lingering sensation was a warm press, like someone laid a hot, damp rag on my brain.

We were in the courtyard in front of Sabrina’s gym again.

“ tainted.

“You…You saved us.” Ash panted.

“Thanks for that.” Misty gulped in air beside him.

“Ye-Yeah,” I coughed, putting my pokeballs away.

“I won’t be able to do that a second time. Take my warning to heart,” He narrowed his eyes. “Leave this city and never return.”

“I need a Marsh Badge.” Ash’s own eyes drilled into him.

“There are other gyms, boy.” The man said gruffly. “Try your luck at one of those. If you face Sabrina again you will end up as her playthings for the rest of your life.”

“Not if I win.” Ash clenched his fists. “Next time, we’ll just have to be faster! We’ll have to pour on the lightning before she has a chance to start in on that psychic stuff.”

“Not…Not a good idea, Ash.” I put my hand on his shoulder. “It’s obvious she and Kadabra are bonded, she doesn’t have to give *vocal* commands and psychic attacks are nearly instant.”

“Then what should we do?” He looked at me.

“Right now, our best options if you really want the Marsh Badge, is to try to catch either a psychic or ghost type pokemon, train it, then bring it back here.” I sighed.

“Cal, are you nuts? Go back there? What if we end up as dolls again? C’mon Ash, there’s plenty of gyms and you only need eight badges to compete in the Pokemon League.” Misty tried reasoning.

“Listen to your friend, boy. I will not be able to save you a second time.” The stranger cautioned him.

I didn’t try arguing. I trusted Ash to be a good person and do what he felt was right. If he felt driven to earn the Marsh Badge over trying for an easier one, then I’d support him in whatever he chose.

Besides, there was another thought in the back of my head that I wrapped in sheets of fire.

Part of a trainer’s responsibilities is to find local problems and help solve them. *Sabrina* was a problem.

Someone needed to stop her.
The jogger tried to discourage Ash. He tried to scare Ash with a show of his own psychic abilities, pulling down his pants and then increasing his weight until he was pancaked against the road.

I ended up joining in on that show. What was I supposed to do? Watch? I ended up pancaked beside him after I tried dividing the stranger’s attention by throwing rocks.

Didn’t work.

But I guess Ash’s determination got through somehow. He told us there were ghost pokemon to be found in Lavender town. Before we left the city we stopped in at the Pokemon Center to make sure Pikachu was really okay. I took the chance to do a little digging and make sure we weren’t being sent on a wild zangoose chase.

It seemed he was honest about it though. Now we’re camped out on the side of the road. Lavender town isn’t far, we should get there tomorrow.

I’m glad this day is over now. I’m exhausted. I’d normally try to analyze my reactions deeper to try to piece together my past but I’m not really feeling up to it right now. Maybe tomorrow night.

We continued to Lavender town bright and early, but thankfully we didn’t have to get moving before sunrise this time. We actually slept in a little. It was nice.

The road was easy to follow up until we got to the forest surrounding most of Lavender. A thick fog started rolling in.

“Do we really have to do this?” Misty sounded uneasy.

“We’ve come this far.” Brock pointed out, though he didn’t sound too happy either. The fog cast everything in an eerie light.

“Quit your bellyaching, you don’t hear Cal complaining.” Ash huffed at them. He paused to look around. “It would be easy to get separated in this fog though, we should hold hands.”

“Right,” Misty sighed, taking one of his. I held onto Brock’s with one hand and took Misty’s other one. As a human chain we continued down the road.

“I hope this fog lifts soon.” She groaned. “I’ve heard stories of Lavender town and none of them are nice happily ever after stories!”

“Ah, really? I’m sure they’re not real though.” I tried to reassure her.

“There have been strange reports from this area though.” Brock spoke up behind me. “People run afoul of the ghost pokemon here and then sometimes aren’t found for weeks.”

“Weeks?” Misty squeaked.

“That just means the ghost pokemon are powerful! You remember how strong that Gastly on Maiden’s Peak was?” Ash pointed out cheerfully.

“I remember.” Brock shuddered. “And I don’t want to end up in love with a rock again.”

“I’m sure it won’t be that bad.” I laughed nervously. I’m pretty sure the Gastly we’d faced before was extraordinarily strong and likely very old if it was the same gastly that had been around for
hundreds of years. Though I suppose its possible the yearly attack on young men was a tradition past down through various ghost pokemon.

“We’ll have to be prepared…for ANYTHING!” Ash whipped around without warning, a skull mask where his face should be.

“AAAAAAAAAAHHHH!” The three of us jumped back, nearly tripping over ourselves. Even Pikachu was startled by his transformation.

“Oh man, that was great!” Ash doubled over laughing. He pulled the mask off and stowed it back in his jacket pocket. “Sorry guys, but you’re gonna have to get used to fear if we’re gonna catch a ghost pokemon!”

“Piikaa!” We wisely decided to take two steps back as Pikachu’s cheeks sparked.

“Uh, c’mon buddy, can’t you take a joke?” Ash gulped.

“CHUUUUUUU!”

“That should teach you not to play pranks.” Misty humphed. “Now let’s hurry up and get to Lavender town so you can get your ghost pokemon so we can leave!”

“Everybody’s a critic.” Ash pouted. After a minute to make sure he was alright we started moving again. The fog was starting to lift but it was getting late.

Lavender town isn’t very big. Most of the land is dedicated to graveyards.

“Geez, this place really is creepy.” Ash commented as we passed the third grave site for pokemon.

“Lavender town is considered sacred so lots of trainers bring their pokemon here to be buried.” I told them what I’d read. “That’s, uh, also why there are so many ghost pokemon reported to be here.”

“Do people come from all over?” Ash asked in a subdued tone.

“No, other regions have places similar to Lavender town, and some people prefer their own graves. But for most trainers,” I looked sadly through the chain link fence. There was a marowak leading three little cubones through the graves. They stopped and started dancing around one. “I guess they like to rest their pokemon where they know they’ll always be tended to.”

“Is that what those pokemon are doing?” Misty asked me.

“Mm-hm,” I nodded. “Marowak and cubone make good caretakers for places like these. I think different regions use different pokemon. Johto, I think, uses vulpix and ninetails. Hoenn has the Gardevoir line. Um,” I wracked my brain for more.

“Sinnoh has bronzor and bronzong. Then there are munna and musharna in Unova. Espurr and Meowstic in Kalos. Um, Alola,” I paused, thinking. Nothing came to mind. “I’m not sure actually, but they likely have a sacred place for pokemon to be put to rest too. I don’t know about Galar either.”

“Heh, the things you learn from a future Pokemon Professor.” Misty chuckled.

“It was interesting enough to keep us distracted until we arrived, look up ahead.” Brock pointed down the path. We’d left the town and arrived at the Pokemon Tower.
“I…like what they’ve done with the place.” Ash chuckled nervously.

“Alright Ash, good luck in there.” Brock patted his back.

“Huh?” He blinked at him.

“You wanted a ghost pokemon so you can go inside. Without us.” Misty said, hugging my arm.

“Yeah, besides you know how sensitive Cal is. It’d be better for Misty and me to stay out here and keep her company so she doesn’t get scared.” Brock nodded hastily.

“Um, what?” I blinked at them.

“Grrr! Well, if that’s the way you feel about it then fine!” He spat. “Pikachu and I aren’t afraid. We’ll go in there and…” Pikachu jumped from his shoulders with a small blanket in his mouth. In seconds Pikachu was curled up and fake snoring like his life depended on it.

“And…err,” Ash faltered. He took another look at the tower then at his pokemon, still fake snoring.

“You know what? When you’re right, you’re right.” He nodded and slung his backpack off his shoulders, going for the sleeping bag. “It’ll be better to get a fresh start in the morning.”

“Oh no you don’t!” Misty stopped him. “I am not camping outside a creepy tower! It would probably give us all nightmares!” She seemed to rally herself. “We’re going to go in there, get a ghost pokemon, then get out and away from this creepy town!”

“And you’re going first!” She put her hands on his shoulders and pushed him towards the door.

“AAAAAAaaaaaaaAAAaAAAAaaHHHHHHhhhhHHHHH!!!!!”

I froze mid-step. Up until that very moment I hadn’t found the Pokemon Tower creepy. I thought the carvings were interesting and decorative, the state of ruin and decay didn’t bother me.

But now, with that blood curdling scream left hanging in the air around us, I suddenly wanted to be anywhere but here.

“Do-Do you think that was…a ghost?” Misty clamped herself to Ash’s back. For his part Ash had tensed so much he might’ve been paralyzed.

“I’m…I’m sure there’s a…reasonable explanation for this,” And then he looked at me to provide said reasonable explanation.

“Um, yeah, probably.” I nodded absently.

“AAAAAIIIiiiiieeeEeeee!!!”

“And, uh, the explanation is…screams of the forsaken souls dwelling within, yep.” I nodded once, turned on my heel, and started walking away.

“Not so fast.” Brock grabbed the back of my jacket to stop me. “Look, it’s scary, sure, but we can’t just ignore those screams. Someone could be hurt in there.”

“So we’ll go in, together.” Ash checked. We exchanged looks, gathering our courage. Misty grabbed my hand as we walked to the door.
“It’s pitch black in here.” Misty whimpered. She had a steely grip on my hand that was slowly cutting off circulation. Not that I was complaining. I liked the reassurance of a living person’s hand in mine too.

“Charmander, I choose you!” Charmander’s tail light did help a lot.

“Whoa, watch your step. There’s a big hole in the floor.” Misty gasped.

“Hey, I found some candles.” Brock brought over a candle stick for Charmander to light.

“Chaaar!” Flamethrower straight to the face. Poor Brock’s eyebrows would never be the same.

“Gah! Light the candle, not me!” He snapped, patting his singed eyebrows.

“Where should we start?” Ash put his hands on his hips.

“There’s a room over there. Might as well start down here before we think about climbing.” Brock suggested once he’d recovered. With his candle and Charmander’s tail light we were able to see a bit around us in all directions.

The door Brock had suggested led to a dining room, but instead of being rundown and abandoned, this one looked like it had jumped straight out of a storybook. Everything was clean and polished, the food was still lightly steaming and looked as delicious as the stuff on the St. Anne had.

“There’s a rope with a card attached.” Ash walked over to it. It was connected to a ball hanging from the ceiling. “Huh, ‘Pull this.’” He shrugged and did so.

A burst of confetti and streamers was accompanied by a large banner, spelling out Welcome.

“Friendly bunch, aren’t they?” I hummed thoughtfully.

“Hello? Any ghost pokemon there?” Ash called out.

I couldn’t see anything but that didn’t mean nothing was there. There was a chance that if I pretended to be bored and uninterested the ghost pokemon would take that as a challenge and appear. I walked closer to the table to inspect the food.

It was past dinner time and the food looked good. There was roast psyduck and parsnips, sweet potatoes, corn on the cob next to baked krabby.

It all looked so good. Unfortunately, it was nothing but a beautiful trap. As soon as I reached for an empty plate the whole table began to shake. Dishes and silverware and even the chairs flew into the air, circling each other, sending food and broken glass flying in all directions.

“Duck and cover, people!” I screamed, grabbing a passing tray to use as a shield.

“Agh! Help!” Brock got caught by one of the chairs. Pikachu and Charmander were both scooped up on big platters.

“Quick, jump!” I called. I swung my improvised tray to send forks and knives flying away. Misty and Ash made for the door, grabbing it before it could swing closed on us. Brock, Pikachu, and Charmander jumped from their platforms and we all ran, chased by everything not nailed down. It didn’t stop until we were out of the tower and the doors slammed behind us.

“That… pant pant… was horrible!” Misty clutched her side. Her whole body was shaking and I still had a hold of the tray.
“It’s easy to see why a ghostpokemon is the bestpokemon to send against a psychic.” Brock nodded in agreement.

“Okay, one more time!” Ash declared.


“I need a ghostpokemon to beatSabrina, so I’m going to get one.” He spoke decisively.

“Piiiii,” Pikachu’s ears tucked back. Charmander was holding his tail like Char did when she was nervous.

“Hey,” Ash gentled his voice and knelt down. “I know it’s scary, but we can do this. I believe in us. We can beat a ghostpokemon and we can beat Sabrina. I know we can.”

“But not unless we’re willing to face our fears.” He took a deep breath. “So, are you guys with me?” Pikachu and Charmander looked at each other, then nodded, bravery shining in their eyes.

“Right!” Ash stood up, facing the tower the same way he faced tough opponents. “Let’s go.”

I started following automatically. It felt like ever since he’d led us over a cliff away from a flock of spearow that’s what I’d been doing, following him.

There are probably easier ways to make a friend for life but if there are I certainly don’t know them.

Misty and Brock stayed behind.

“All you, Ash. Good luck!” They waved cheerfully, already several feet back down the path.

“Mmm. Cal?” He looked at me questioningly.

“I’m with you.” I did a little fist bump for support. Ash grinned and together we reentered the tower.

“Hello? Ghostpokemon? Come out, come out wherever you are!” Ash yelled.

“Hold on,” I held up a hand. “Do you hear something?” We both stood in silence for a moment before I heard it again. Voices, or something like that, but not with any words I could make out.

“It’s coming from down there.” Ash pointed to the big hole we’d skirted past before. Carefully, we crept up to it, making sure the rest of the floor wouldn’t give out on us. There was a murky mist hanging below and voices drifted up to us.

“Alright, this is it.” Ash pumped himself up. “Pikachu, give it a Thunderbolt.”

“Pii-kaaa-CHUUUU!” The lightning hit something down below. We heard its shriek.

“Now Charmander, Flamethrower!” I moved aside so Charmander could have a clear shot. We saw it hit something down below. A second later a ball of fire began circling the room, accompanied by some high pitched squeals.

“Huh, a fire ball? Could it be a Ghost/Fire type?” Ash wondered.

“I didn’t know there were any in this region.” I frowned.
“PIKA!” Pikachu screamed, scaring us both.

“What? What is it?” Ash and I turned to look. There was nothing there. “Are you seeing things?”

“Um, maybe, maybe not. Ghost types can become invisible, remember?” I pulled Ash up by the hand and positioned us back-to-back. “Keep an eye out, don’t let it sneak up on you.”

“Right.” He was determined, focused.

I didn’t focus too narrowly on one place, letting my vision spread out as I waited for some sign of motion. The room was dark and chilled. The furniture cast odd shadows and Charmander’s tail was the only light we had.

“It’ll be okay, Cal. Don’t be scared.” Ash tried to reassure me.

“I’m…fine?” I turned my head a little.

There was something big and purple holding Ash’s hand. It came up past my waist, had dark purple fur and skin, big, pointed ears and a devilish smile. It saw me looking and playfully put a finger to its mouth, telling me to keep quiet.

“Um, Ash?” I started hesitantly. “There’s a…uh, a gengar, I think.”

“A what?” Ash looked over his shoulder and saw the ghost pokemon. “AAAAAHHHH!”

“Gengengengen!” The gengar laughed as Ash ripped himself away from it. He tripped over Charmander, scaring him into letting out a Flamethrower that nearly barbecued me. I dived to the ground to avoid the flames and shimmied back up as soon as I could.

My vision went dark as two clawed hands covered my eyes.

“Haunt haunt?” The pokemon responsible jokingly asked.

“Ash! Get it off!” I shrieked, stumbling around. I tried to grab the pokemon’s hands but they just phased right through. Shaking and twisting did nothing to loosen its grip.

“Hold on Cal, I’m coming! Charmander, use your Leer attack!” Ash was somewhere to my right. Where was that hole from earlier? I didn’t need to fall and break something.

It wasn’t hurting me. Okay, just calm down. It wasn’t doing anything but hanging there, blinding me. Was it playing?

“Ha…ha…” I tried to force out a laugh. “Okay, you got me. You, uh,” What had it said? Haunt? If there was a gengar here then, “Haunter?”

“Haunter!” It cried joyfully, lifting its hands away from my eyes. Once I was able to see it my heart rate slowed down. It was smiling and googling its eyes, laughing at the ‘game’ we’d just played.

“Good one, really had me there.” I smiled sickly.

“Charmander, return!” Ash had been trying to battle the gengar and the gastly that had showed up.

“Ash, they’re playing! Play along!” I called. Haunter flew over to its friends and the gengar pulled out a folded paper fan. Gengar slapped Haunter so its eyes bugged out again while I walked over to Ash and Pikachu.
“They’re playing?” Ash repeated, sounding not just a little confused.

“Uh, yeah, I think so.” I chuckled nervously. The three ghost pokemon had seen their slapstick was having no affect so they were moving to a different gag, ‘dying’ dramatically like our response had fatally wounded them.

“Oh, wow, you guys are really talented!” Ash clapped. He looked at me to check he was doing the right thing. I gave him a quick thumb’s up and joined in the applause.

“Mmhm, you must practice a lot.” I laughed. The pokemon seemed happy.

“Now let’s see what Dexter has to say.” Ash snickered.

“Haunter: The Ghost Pokemon. No information is available at this moment.”

“Gengar: The Ghost Pokemon. No information is available at this moment.”

“What? Nothing on either of them?” His jaw dropped.

“I guess research about them is still on-going.” I shrugged helplessly. “Um, if it helps, gastly evolve into haunter which then evolves into gengar, so they’re all from the same line. They’re unique because, uh, they’re all ghost/poison mixes. That’s not a common mix.”

“Well, they’re ghost types so that’s good enough for me!” Ash decided. He put the pokedex away and pointed at the pokemon. “Hey there, I’ve got an important battle with a psychic coming up and I’m here to capture one of you for it! So who’s it gonna be?” In answer, all three pokemon began to sink through the floor.

“Maybe, um, that wasn’t the best way to go about it.” I winced.

“Hey, don’t go!” Ash dived after them, trying to get a grip on one before they could all sink out of view.

There was a jingle overhead, like rusty chains brushing each other. Over Ash and Pikachu’s position was a big chandelier, shaking ominously.

“A-Ash!” My feet moved faster than my tongue. No time for thought. I dive tackled them both and knew I’d be too late.

And then…

On the one hand, no one would believe me if I told them what happened inside that tower. On the other though, there’s a part of me that wants to prove it. Document and study it. Imagine the possibilities reliable astral projection could offer! For one, I believe it would make communication and study of Ghost types much easier. It would allow for exploring areas previously unreachable by mankind. Coma patients and patients with terminal diseases might be able to experience life again and even speak to their friends and family!

I’d need a ghost pokemon to properly begin study of the phenomenon though. Preferably either a gastly, haunter, or gengar for the control group. The fact this ability isn’t widely known leads me to believe it can’t be done while the trainer is conscious. Is sleep different from unconsciousness for the purposes of this study? Can all ghost pokemon do this or is it an ability unique to the gengar line? I know haunter and gengar can do it but can gastly as well? Or is it an ability only learned after evolution?
Definitely something I’m interested in pursuing. Maybe I’ll use one of Professor Oak’s research outlines to perform the study but I’d need more resources than I currently have access to. I’d need at least one ghost type pokemon to even start and now that I’m seriously considering that there’s a lot of things that could go wrong in this field of study.

Does it have any side affects? I haven’t noticed any yet but I was only separated from my body for a brief amount of time. Twenty to thirty minutes, tops. I’d like to have someone with a medical background overseeing my body if I ever did this again. Preferably I’d like a psychic I’m bonded to like Alakazam to translate speech between myself and a ghost pokemon so I can ask it some questions.

I’m getting myself wound up thinking about this. I should try to get back on track. A study like this would take years to do properly. Pokemon, facilities, assistants, technology, funding, there’s so much that would have to go into it.

I have a mission and it isn’t to study pokemon. That was just a cover I made up because I’m bad at coming up with things on the spot. I just keep it up so I don’t arouse suspicion.

My mission is to figure out why my memories are gone, get them back if I can, and figure out a way home. That’s it. I have exactly two lines to dedicate my life to. Beware Teams of Pokemon Thieves. Alakazam will watch over you.

It would be an amazing study though. Maybe I could suggest it to Professor Oak sometime?
It was sort of like waking up, but without that minute-long reboot sequence. One second fast asleep (or unconscious) and the next I’m wide awake.

And transparent. And floating. And *Sweet Mew, is that my body!*??

If I’d had a working heart and lungs I would’ve fallen into a full blown panic attack. My hands came up and squeezed my head, tugging at strands of hair that felt too ephemeral to be real. I could see straight through my body to the broken chandelier and our broken bodies below.

*Our* bodies.

That knocked a little of the shock off. I went from panicking about myself to panicking about Ash and Pikachu. My thoughts scrambled, part of me screaming into the void and another more irrational part trying to figure out how I’d contact his mom.

“Cal, are you okay? Calm down, it’s fine.” Ash…floated…up in front of me and grabbed my hands. I allowed him to pull my hands free as I took in his translucent face. Pikachu was hovering over his shoulder, looking just as concerned.

“Nnng.” I couldn’t form words. Below us our bodies were tangled together. It looked like I’d tried to throw Pikachu clear but he must’ve hit his head on something. I was mostly on top of Ash, a fruitless effort to shield him from a few hundred pounds of rusted metal.

“Hey, hey, it’s okay.” He said again. “I don’t think we’re dead.”

“We’re not?” I wanted to cry and then suddenly there were *tears* in my eyes. Despite the fact I no longer had the necessary muscles or glands for tears. I’d just *wanted* them and they’d appeared.

I was breathing but I didn’t have a heart or lungs. Heck, I was thinking and didn’t have a brain!

I looked down again. Slowly, my ghostly form lowered to the ground until I could make out the sounds of breathing and see the rise and falls of our chests.

“We’re alive.” I fell back and started floating on my back. Tiredly, I wiped my face.

“Haunter haunt!” In my panic and subsequent relief, I’d failed to realize we still had company. Haunter passed *through* me, laughing and enjoying himself. He pointed to Ash, then me, then at himself, laughing the whole while.

“You’re saying we’re alike now?” Ash interpreted.

“Haunt haunter!” He nodded.
“Um, not that this isn’t…*fascinating* and all, but there is a way to kinda *reattach* to our bodies, right?” That was a major concern for me.

“Gengengen!” Gengar and Gastly circled us with their own bursts of laughter. Gengar grabbed my hand and Gastly used its body as a platform to carry Pikachu. Haunter grabbed Ash and the six of us ascended through the walls and upwards, out of the tower.

“Whoa, what a view!” Ash’s eyes sparkled. “I can see Misty and Brock!”

“Er, yeah.” They were standing under a couple of lamp posts.

“Let’s have a little fun with them!” Before I could say anything or think of something to say he’d already gotten down to Misty.

“Let’s go for a little ride, Misty!” He grabbed her under the armpits and rose up.

“AAAAHHH! The ghost got me!” She screamed, flailing her legs.

“Ash, that’s mean!” I fretted underneath.

“It’s just a little fun!” He defended himself. “Look, I’ll put her down now.”

He dropped her through me.

“That’s not funny!” I snarled, launching myself at him. And it really was a *launch*. Without having to coordinate legs and feet I was able to move much faster. No wind resistance either. Brock caught Misty below us and I tackled Ash through several trees.

With an inarticulate yell he kicked me away. It didn’t hurt, I barely felt it as I went flying into the ground. Luckily I still had a natural orientation for where *up* is so I could find the surface again.

I came up behind a rock a few feet off from where I’d entered. Ash was hovering over that spot worriedly with Pikachu scolding him.

Well, he wanted to have a little fun.

Pikachu saw me coming but I guess he decided not to warn Ash. I hit him full throttle and we wrestled our way through trees, rocks, shrubs, and on one occasion a young cubone who angrily shook his bone club at us.

“Man, that was great!” Ash laughed as we separated. We were both laughing, grinning ear to ear and breathless.

“Gastly gastly.” The ghost pokemon came up to us again. They each took hold of us again and pulled us back to the tower. Instead of the entryway though they took us up to the top floor.

It was like night and day compared to the rest of the tower. Not a lick of dust anywhere. Everything was brightly colored and filled with toys. There was a carousel like the festival at Maiden’s Peak had, but smaller. Little slides, a rocking ponyta, balls, a swing, everything a child could ever want and more.

“Look at all this stuff!” Ash watched in wide-eyed amazement as the trio of ghosts began playing with everything. “I guess you guys must’ve really wanted someone to play with.”

“It, uh, looks that way.” I agreed. Gastly was playing on the swing with Pikachu. Gengar was standing on a ball and rolling around, managing to keep his balance quite well.
“Haunt haunt, haunter.” Haunter floated up and offered a stuffed teddiursa to me.

“But we can’t stay and play with you forever.” Ash frowned a little regretfully. “We have to get back to our bodies. We’ve got too much stuff to do to hang around as ghosts.”

The trio were saddened by it but they didn’t get aggressive. We went through the other floors of the tower towards the entry. The different rooms really made me wonder about the people who built this tower. Was it supposed to be someone’s home?

Misty and Brock must’ve gotten worried about us. We got there in time to see Brock holding up the chandelier so Misty could drag Ash out. My body and Pikachu’s was already lying prone a few feet away.

“Ash, Cal, please wake up.” She sniffled as she laid Ash out next to me.

“Uh-oh, we’d better get moving.” Ash ducked under me for his body.

I was a little worried about how to reattach but it was surprisingly intuitive. As soon as I was close enough to touch it felt like my soul or spirit was simply sucked back in.

Gaining full awareness of my body after existing as a spirit is interesting. My body felt heavy and clumsy. I was aware of every square inch of cloth. My backpack was curling my spine at an uncomfortable angle.

“Hey Misty.” Ash sat up first, readjusting faster I guess. I sat up a little more gingerly, clenching and unclenching my hands to test my fine motor control. Everything seemed to be in working order and wow, was I hungry!

This is taking a long time to get down. To summarize, Ash initially decided to give up catching a ghost pokemon in favor of a different strategy but Haunter decided he wanted to come with us. By unanimous vote we decided to camp well outside of Lavender town and had ourselves a late dinner.

There, that’s done. Tomorrow as we walk back I plan to talk to Ash about battling psychic types. The fact they’re bonded is a huge advantage but not insurmountable. Haunter should be capable of Smog and Confusion which would do a lot to limit their abilities. Ghost types naturally have some shielding against psychic types so Kadabra should have a hard time tracking him. Poison attacks to whittle him down, Confusion from different directions, if Ash keeps his wits about him he has a good chance of victory now.

No more strategizing. I need to get some sleep.

In retrospect, taking Haunter to a big gym battle right after catching him might have been a mistake. And maybe it would’ve been wiser to keep him in his pokeball until we’d arrived at the gym. Train with him a little maybe so we all knew what to expect. Sure, I gave Ash what tips I had for fighting psychics but some hands on experience could’ve only helped.

Haunter liked to blink in and out of visibility, but we’d learned on the walk back to Saffron city that he was always nearby and ready to jump out to scare you. We didn’t think anything of it when he went invisible before we entered the gym.

Sabrina seemed surprised to see us return. The little girl doll seemed happy. Ash challenged her to
a rematch then called out Haunter and…

Haunter didn’t show.

“He’d better come back and save us.” Misty fumed. I was sitting across the coffee table on the love seat, she and Brock were on the couch. A fourth doll of an older woman sat in the armchair at the end of the coffee table.

“He will. You know Ash. He’ll figure something out.” Brock reassured her.

We were sitting in a little room. The only furniture was the love seat, couch, armchair, and coffee table. A few bland paintings hung on the wall behind Brock and Misty but they were so flat and one dimensional I suspected they were actually stickers.

There were no doors or windows. Not that we could’ve used them.

Instead of shrinking us to doll size Sabrina had instead turned us into actual dolls. You’d think being made of plastic and cotton fluff would make it impossible to have a headache.

“He’s sure taking his sweet time!” Misty grumbled louder.

You’d be wrong.

“I am so sorry for my daughter’s actions.” The older woman apologized again.

This was Sabrina’s mother, turned into a doll years ago. She explained the whole story to us.

Both of her parents were psychics, though her father, the jogger we’d met, was mentally much stronger than the mother. Their daughter Sabrina was three when she began manifesting her powers and it was quickly revealed that she was much stronger than either of her parents.

“She grew obsessed with her newfound power, abandoning toys and dolls in favor of finding new applications for her abilities.” She told us sadly. “We tried to help her, turn her interest to other things, set limitations, but Sabrina eventually decided we were only holding her back. My husband got away but teleportation was never one of my gifts.”

“He comes back to visit me every day, but he has to be careful not to let Sabrina catch him. He can’t do transmutation so if she transforms him he’ll be just as trapped as me.” She continued.

“What about the doll? What part does it play?” Brock asked.

“That doll is actually a phantom hosting a split personality of Sabrina’s, specifically, the personality of herself before her powers began to overwhelm her. Happy, eager to make friends,” She sighed. She might’ve slumped if she was able to move. “That doll holds all her emotions, leaving only the cold, logical side of her mind in her body to control her actions.”

“That’s…frightening.” I tried to gulp. Lacking every bit of muscle control necessary, I failed.

“Oh, after a week or two she’ll get bored with playing with you three and she’ll turn you back to normal! She may erase your memory of what happened though.” She reassured us.

“That’s…worse.” Lugia, protect me. Erase my memories!? If I’d had my body I would’ve curled into a ball and had myself a good cry!

I can’t lose my memories again! I’ve barely worked any answers out! Sure I’ve got this journal log now but its not the same as real memories of these events. I’m not a good enough writer to convey
every sensation! I don’t want to lose any of this! Even being turned into a doll!

Above us, the roof came off the dollhouse. Sabrina and her doll looked inside. I imagine this is what it felt like to be face-to-face with Arceus, knowing you are small and helpless before the might of this god.

“Sabrina!” I’d never been so happy to hear Ash’s voice. “We’re gonna battle and you’re gonna let my friends go!”

“I knew he’d back.” Sabrina commented to herself. She replaced the roof of the dollhouse, all but cutting us off from the outside world.

“Think Ash can win this?” Misty asked, voice quavering. It made the plastic perfection of her smile creepier somehow.

“He can. He’ll win this.” I tried to interject as much confidence as I could into this statement. Surprisingly, it wasn’t that hard. I did believe Ash could win this.

All we had to do was wait for it.

The big toy box and doll house aren’t exactly in the same room as the gym arena. It’s actually behind the curtain at the far end where we’d first seen Sabrina sitting on her throne. I got a pretty good look as we were being carried here.

We could hear the fight, mostly, but it was hard to make sense out of. It sounded like Pikachu was fighting. Could he not find Haunter? Would my tips be helpful?

“How do you think it’s going?” Misty asked. We could hear something going on out there but it didn’t sound like a battle.

A sudden explosion caught us off guard. We would’ve jumped if we could move. There was a beat of silence afterwards in which we had time to fear the worst, then we felt it when Sabrina changed us back.

Oh it felt so good to have my body again. The table almost broke under our weight but we scrambled off. I bent to touch my toes at the first opportunity, luxuriating in the stretch of my muscles. Contrary to how I’d felt after the astral projection thing my body now felt energized, unstoppable! I wanted to run a mile! Climb a mountain! Swim an ocean!

“My, that feels nice.” Sabrina’s mother sighed, stretching her arms above her head. How long was she trapped as a doll? Years? All that time unable to move must’ve been like torture!

“Hey, look at that!” Misty brought our attention to Sabrina. She was laughing, no doll in sight, covered in soot and with tears in the corners of her eyes. Haunter was floating beside her, eyes bugging out of his head as he laughed right alongside her. Kadabra was rolling on the floor of the arena, utterly helpless with their bond as strong as it was. Sabrina’s father, Ash, and Pikachu were all standing at the other end of the arena, smiling and laughing too.

“Did we, uh, miss something?” I wondered.

Sabrina’s laughing was apparently the key for reuniting her emotions with her body. Ash gave Haunter to her, figuring they’d both be happier that way. Ash got his Marsh Badge and we left for the Pokemon Center for some well earned rest.

“This has, by far, been the strangest two days of my life.” Misty flopped down on her bed, freshly
showered and dressed in her pajamas.

“Stranger than a giant tentacruel tearing apart a resort?” Brock asked. He was still toweling off his hair.

“The tentacruel didn’t turn me into a doll!” She puffed out her cheeks. “What about you, Cal? Do you think the past couple of days have been the strangest?”

“Hm,” I gave the matter some serious thought.

Of what I can remember, without a doubt it was a yes. Astral projection and being turned into a doll were not things that happened on nice, boring days.

“Yeah, it’s been…lively, hasn’t it?” I chuckled sardonically. “I’m glad Sabrina’s taking a break from being a gym leader to get a better handle on her emotions though.”

“Yeah, you know, something about that bugs me.” Misty rolled over to frown at us.

“Huh? What does?” Ash was laying on the top bunk of the boys’ bed. Pikachu was dozing off on his stomach.

“Sabrina’s been the gym leader for four, almost five years, right?” We nodded. “And that whole time whenever someone lost to her she turned them into a doll for a few weeks?” Another, more uncomfortable, nod.

“So how come no one reported it to the Pokemon League?” She asked.

“That’s a good question.” Brock folded his arms. “I know the gym has a reputation for being crazy strong, almost as strong as the Viridian city gym, but that alone should’ve been enough to get the League’s attention. If they watched the battle tapes they’d see what happens to the challengers.”

“The tapes don’t have to be released unless a complaint is filed though.” Misty pointed out, surprising us. “Which just brings us back to why nobody ever complained before.”

“Um, Sabrina’s mother did say their memories got erased.” I reminded her. “After erasing the memories Sabrina could have, well, put a compulsion on them to not think about the time they were missing. And, maybe, to not come back to Saffron city.”

“Man, psychics are kinda scary when you think of it like that.” Ash pulled himself closer to the edge of the bed.


“Me neither. That just feels so sketchy!” Misty stuck out her tongue.

“Well, it’s all over now. No one else is getting turned into a doll ever again.” Brock heaved a weary sigh. “I say we get some sleep, do some shopping tomorrow, and head straight to the next city.”

“Oh yeah!” Ash perked up. “Where is the next nearest gym anyway?”

“Celadon city, the gym there awards the Rainbow Badge.” Brock informed him.

“Celadon, huh.” That actually reminded me of something.

“Cal?” Ash looked at me in concern.
“Oh, uh, I just…was thinking about Celadon University.” I coughed awkwardly. I shrank back in the desk chair.

“Is that where you want to go to school someday? Pokemon Professors have to attend school some time you know.” Misty teased me.

“But Cal’s on a pokemon journey!” Ash protested, nearly falling out of bed in his rush. “She even turned down that snobby prep school!”

“Sure, but university is different from prep school.” Brock hummed thoughtfully. “Mostly its adults who attend, but they accept anyone who can pass their entrance exam. Still, if you want we can stop at the university and take a tour.” He smiled at me.

“Um, that’s not really necessary, Brock. Really!” I fiddled with my hands. “Like you said it’s mostly adults and we’ll, we’ll be busy with Ash’s gym battle and all.”

“We can see it after the battle.” Misty sat up to assure me. “You can ask them a bunch of questions about the classes a Pokemon Professor has to take.”

“Er, yeah, there is that.” There wasn’t really a good way to refuse that.

Well, it’d be one day. An hour or two at the most. What’s the harm in that?

“Then it’s settled! Celadon city, here we come!” Brock nodded.

We turned in shortly after that. The others fell asleep quickly. I almost dozed off myself but I wanted to get this all down while it was fresh.

Goodnight Alakazam, wherever you are.

In the morning we started shopping for supplies. More food, more toilet paper, more pokemon medicine, things of that sort. Brock was good at finding deals and always chose the best brands. Ash lost interest in shopping quickly, preferring to look at the cool gear we couldn’t afford. I kept looking over my shoulder to make sure he hadn’t fallen behind or gotten separated, but Misty had him well in hand. I could tell she wasn’t too interested in shopping for supplies either but she treated it seriously and took it upon herself to make sure Ash and Pikachu didn’t wander off.

I checked my bank balance before we’d left the Pokemon Center. It wasn’t much after kicking in for supplies. Ash had more than me, even after the hot air balloon and donating his share. Still, I found myself pausing by a camera shop.

“See something you want, Cal?” Brock noticed me staring.

“I, uh, wanted a camera but I’m not sure I can afford one yet.” I shifted my weight side to side. “Do you mind if I just, um, check the prices real fast?”

“We’re not in any hurry. Let’s check it out.” He smiled and readjusted the bags we’d already gotten.

The store was packed with cameras and reels of film. They were mostly disposable cameras that I saw could hold a single reel of film. The example photos didn’t have very good quality though. Too bad, considering they were well in my price range.
“Anything I can help you with?” The store’s clerk walked up to us.

“O-Oh um, I,” My throat closed up. It took a second before I could continue speaking. “I want a camera? Uh,"

“My friend here wants a camera that’s good for taking detailed photos.” Brock came to my rescue. “We’re only looking for now.”

“Well, these disposable cameras aren’t so good for detail. They’re mainly for tourists. What you’re looking for is something more along these lines.” He led us over to a different wall. Half a dozen shelves were dedicated to different kinds of cameras. They were bigger than the flimsy disposable ones, easily the size of two of my fists. Some were even bigger and had accessories like a tripod or extendable scopes.

I didn’t want or need anything like that. Which was good considering the prices the on those things. Most of the remaining cameras were still out of my reach but I did find a few I could afford.

I’d need to do some battling to make up the money next time we stopped for supplies. It wasn’t fair to the others to splurge and not contribute fairly.

My pokedex can take pictures, even record video, but my pokedex is a secret. I want to be able to take photos of everything, especially the more breathtaking or unusual sights. If I’d had a camera during the butterfree migration I would have taken a picture of the shiny butterfree’s wing joints and of their fantastic displays!

But if I bought a camera I could forget about buying coffee.

But photos of my friends, our pokemon. The only picture I have of the past is of myself. I don’t know who my parents are or what they look like.

I want pictures of my friends.

I chose a camera that could take the detailed pictures I wanted. I’d have to go into town every so often to get the film developed and I’d need an address for them to send the pictures to but that was something I’d think about when the time came. I might just have them mailed ahead to the next Pokemon Center on our route. That would be the simplest solution.

I need to earn some money though. A contest, an event, even just a few battles with other trainers!

We finished up our supply shopping and started down the road to Celadon city. Ash and Misty almost restarted the bike argument until Brock and I separated them. He took Misty so I took Ash.

“This button changes the focus to make fine details easier to see.” I was explaining the various functions of my new camera. “If I twist the scope a little I can zoom in on far away stuff like that mountain.” I looked up further along the path.

“Hey, or like that phone stand!” Ash ran towards it.

It was probably put there so people could call for help if they got lost or stranded. It was even older than the phones I was getting used to seeing, there was no place to scan a trainer ID or pokedex. Coins only. It was like seeing a black and white tv.

“This is great! I totally forgot to call Professor Oak before we left!” Ash dug some spare change out of his pockets. “He’s gonna be stoked to hear about my latest badge!”
“Well, while you’re doing that how about I set us up some lunch for our break. I packed rice balls.” Brock offered temptingly.

“Oooh, sounds good! Cal, you coming?” Misty smiled.

“In a sec. I, uh, want to make sure Professor Oak got my report in.” I waved them off.

Ash put in the coins and rang the number in. We waited for a few seconds for the call to connect. Finally it did and we were greeted by the sight of Professor Oak and Ash’s krabby.

“Ash, I was wondering when you’d next call!” Professor Oak greeted us. “And Cal, I got your report this morning. I’d like to talk to you about it in a moment.”

“Oh, okay.” I agreed. Did I do something wrong? It was my first time filling out a research report. I might’ve missed something or made a mistake.

“Professor, we just left Saffron city and guess what?” Ash flipped open his jacket, revealing his four badges pinned on the inside. “I got the Marsh Badge! My fourth badge!”

“Hm, only the fourth badge eh?” We were both a little shocked by his absent dismissal. He noticed our looks and quickly corrected himself. “Gary has five badges already, though I should note that he chose to go after the Peace Badge from the Orno gym and then he went through Celadon city.” He paused to think for a moment. “Actually, come to think of it, I don’t think a rookie trainer has earned a Marsh Badge in quite some time. That’s rather impressive, Ash.”

“Gary’s already got five? How’s he moving that fast?” Ash slumped, not too reassured by what we’d heard.

“Oh his cheerleader squad drives him around.” I had to blink a few times when I saw Professor Oak roll his eyes.

“So he can move a lot faster than us.” I reasoned. “Well, uh, slow and steady wins the race, right?”

“Oh there’s something else I wanted to talk to you about, Ash.” Professor Oak grew serious again. “When are you going to send me another pokemon? Gary’s caught over fifty but I haven’t gotten a single one from you since you sent me Krabby here.”

“Fifty?” Ash repeated, discouraged.

“You’ve caught more than I have, remember? You even caught Haunter just a few days ago.” I reminded him.

“You caught a haunter? Really?” Professor Oak’s eyes lit up.

“Yeah, but I gave it to Sabrina.” He confirmed with a sigh. “Haunter was happier there and Sabrina was happier with it too.”

“I see,” Professor Oak visibly pouted before he got a hold of himself. “Oh, but did you scan it in your pokedex? And I’ll bet it’s physical characteristics were recorded as well!”

“Yeah, and I scanned gengar too but I didn’t catch it.” Ash pulled out his pokedex and scrolled to the right file. Professor Oak tried to read the screen through the video but had to give it up after a few minutes.

“Cal, be a dear and record the information and send it to me from your next Pokemon Center?” He
“Sure, Professor. No problem.” I promised.

“Alright then, now about your previous report.” He automatically reached around and seemed confused to realize he wasn’t at his desk. “Ah, one moment, let me go fetch it.”

Ash had to put a little more money in the machine but he said he didn’t mind.

“I’m back!” Professor Oak came sliding back into the room. He actually slid past the screen and had to do some quick correcting. “And might I say, Cal this is very professionally done. I’m especially impressed by your word choice and organization.”

“All right then, now about your previous report.” He automatically reached around and seemed confused to realize he wasn’t at his desk. “Ah, one moment, let me go fetch it.”

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“Ah, well, I do have a lot of practice writing, I guess.” I said without thinking.

“Young observations are very well written out and its good you referenced the news reports for your sources.” He continued. “Your section on the potential sub-psychic typing tentacruel may have was very interesting and you posed some interesting questions.”

“So, I did a good job?” My hand came up and twisted a lock of hair.

“A very good job!” He confirmed with a cheerful nod. “Which is why I wanted to talk to you about it!”

“So, I did a good job?” My hand came up and twisted a lock of hair.

“A very good job!” He confirmed with a cheerful nod. “Which is why I wanted to talk to you about it!”

“Cal, would you be against me using your preliminary report for the study on the giant tentacruel? I’d give you credit for your contribution of course and a tidy sum for it and any other research you care to pass along my way.” He offered.

“Are you serious?” My eyes must have been round as dinner plates.

“So she’d be a researcher like the people who work at your lab?” Ash’s eyes looked like they had stars in them.

“Not quite,” He corrected us. “I can’t give her field researcher status until she has at least one year’s experience as a trainer and passes a comprehensive exam, but I can credit her as a primary source for the work she does for me. It’ll certainly look good on your transcripts when you apply for college, young lady.”

“That’s very generous of you, sir—I mean, Professor, I—” My tongue tied itself in knots.

“And you’re heading to Celadon city next, aren’t you? It might be worth your time to stop in and take a tour of Celadon University! You know I spent some time there as a teacher before I became a Professor.” He laughed fondly, remembering good times. “You’re young yet so you’ve got plenty of time to decide where you want to go but it wouldn’t hurt to take a look around. I’ll send them a message to expect your arrival!”

“You don’t…You don’t have to go to any trouble, really.” My cheeks started burning.

“Nonsense, it would be no trouble at all!” He waved me off. He made an ‘oh’ sound and leaned in towards the screen. “And don’t worry, that message is not reliant on you saying yes to this proposal. You can keep sending me reports if you wish and I’ll keep giving you advice and critique, but I won’t steal another’s intellectual property.”

“I’m not worried about that, honestly.” I rushed to reassure him. “It’s just I…no one’s ever gone to such lengths before, for me I mean, and,” I didn’t have a reason to refuse. We were already going...
there to request a tour.

“Thank you, Professor Oak.” I took a deep breath. “I appreciate it, really. And feel free to use my reports however you like, I’ll send more when I can.” I added.

“Splendid!” He clapped his hands together. “That means I can start writing up the proposal for the board! Since the giant tentacruel caused such a ruckus the study is almost guaranteed to be accepted, so I’ll send the money to your account as soon as that happens. Shouldn’t take more than a week or so!”

“Ash, is there anything else you’d like to talk about?” It was nice that he held himself back from rushing to work to ask about Ash. I’d gotten so flustered by his offer that I’d completely forgotten Ash was standing right beside me.

He had a curiously blank look on his face. Maybe he didn’t understand everything we were talking about? I’ll explain it later if he asks. Maybe when I tell the others. He snapped himself out of it though.

“No, Professor, I think that’s everything.” He smiled weakly. “I’ll talk to you after I win my next badge, okay?”

“Looking forward to it, my boy. I’ll see you both soon!” Professor Oak waved and hung up on us.

“Um, Ash?” I asked, feeling oddly hesitant.

“C’mon, I’m hungry and if we don’t hurry the others will probably eat our share!” He turned on his heel and ran to the rock Brock had chosen.
You guys sure took your time.” Brock held up a lunch box as we walked up. “C’mon and dig in, they’re jelly filled!”

Are you okay, Ash? You look a little down?” Misty jumped down from the rock.

“I just found out Gary already has five badges and over fifty pokemon.” He groaned, slumping dramatically.

“Oh, I get it. You feel like you’re falling behind.” She smirked and nodded to herself. She clapped him on the back. “Well cheer up, unlike those other trainers you’re going to become a Pokemon Master your own way, right?” I shot her a quick smile over his shoulder. It was nice to see that she was beginning to accept Ash’s methods as being legitimate.

“Plus, Gary’s being driven around.” I reminded him. “So it’s really not fair to compare your rate of progress and, uh, with fifty pokemon I doubt he’s spent much time getting to know them.”

“Right, it’s quality not quantity.” Brock handed him a rice ball.

“I guess,” He didn’t look convinced. He did start eating so hopefully he didn’t feel too discouraged. “I definitely wanna catch more pokemon though.” He said around a mouthful of rice. He stopped chewing for a moment, staring at a bush across the road.

It rustled, in defiance of the still day we were having.

“It’s a pokemon!” He quickly scarfed down his food and pulled out his pokedex, ready to scan whatever popped out.

I saw white fur first, then a lanky limb.

“It’s a mankey!” I gasped, hastily averting my eyes to its snout instead of meeting it gaze for gaze. Was it mankeys or primapes who went ballistic at any eye contact? Both?

“Mankey: This Fighting Type pokemon is known for its fantastic footwork and terrible temper. Once it begins to Thrash it is almost impossible to stop.”

“Huh, I wonder what that means.” Ash frowned at the pokedex in his hands.

“Thrash is a move triggered by anger, it’s an uncontrolled physical attack.” I explained. “Basically it just starts wailing on whatever made it mad.”

“Maaan,” The mankey’s snout twitched. Slowly, it eased out of the bush and approached us. It jumped side to side, probably an attempt to keep us off balance in case we turned hostile. When none of us made any threatening moves it went right up to Brock and started sniffing at the rice balls.

“You want one, little guy?” Brock chuckled, keeping his voice low and soft. “Here, try one.” He offered it an open hand, wary of any snapping teeth.

“Maaaan,” Mankey seemed a little uncertain. It had probably never seen rice balls before. Just
because something *smelled* good didn’t mean it was good for eating.

“Pika pika chaa!” Pikachu darted up and held up his own rice ball, taking a nice big bite out of it to show Mankey it was safe.

Watching a wild pokemon up close like this was amazing. I could see the footwork the species was so famous for. It snatched up Brock’s rice ball and raced away almost too fast to keep track of. It didn’t go far, deciding to perch itself on another large rock where it could keep an eye on us and eat its treat.

“It likes it!” Misty looked delighted.

“I made them with my own special recipe, no artificial ingredients.” Brock boasted proudly.

“I’ve never caught a Fighting type before!” Ash put the pokedex away and reached for a free pokeball.

“Ash, you are going to *weaken* it first, aren’t you?” Misty challenged him.

“How stupid do you think I am?” He glared. “Just watch, Pikachu and I will catch Mankey no sweat!”

“Pika?” This seemed like news to Pikachu.

“C’mon, Pikachu, we’ve fought way tougher than a mankey. Remember kadabra?” He knelt down, eyes shining bright.

“Chuu,” Pikachu nodded reluctantly. “Pika pika pikachu.”

“Great!” Ash jumped back to his feet. “Mankey, prepare to be caught!”

“Maan?” It looked up, stuffing the rest of the rice ball in its mouth.

“Uh, Ash? I don’t think it liked that.” Misty edged back fearfully.

“Pikachu, Thunderbolt!” Ash didn’t show any sign of hearing her. He was standing tall and ready, sure in the victory ahead.

Too bad Mankey had already been putting that fancy footwork to use. It was inches away from Ash in the blink of an eye and then knocking him over before I could even realize what I saw. As soon as I processed what was happening I launched myself at the two, hoping to pry the angry pokemon off Ash before it could do too much damage.

Mankey didn’t *want* to be pried off. It howled in rage and scratched at whatever parts it could reach. Ash was protecting his face with his arms and his jacket protected most of his torso. It was a good thing Mankey wasn’t in a full out Thrash or actively using Scratch though.

“No, bad Mankey! Bad!” I tried to grab it under the armpits where it wouldn’t have much leverage. It lunged and howled at me, aiming to rake its claws across my face. I grit my teeth and shook the pokemon for all I was worth, forcing it to stop.

“Get it off, get it off!” Ash screamed, still protecting his face from Mankey’s flailing hind legs.

“I’m trying!” It wasn’t easy to keep my grip though, and I had a terrible feeling that the more I held Mankey back the *angrier* it got.
“Manmankey!” It twisted and managed to bite my wrist where the cuff of my jacket had slid up. I yelped and dropped it right on top of Ash.

“GAH! Geddit ‘ff!” His screams were muffled by Mankey’s fur.

“Sorry, sorry!” Aaagh, my wrist throbbed! That was my right hand too!

Before I could push past the pain and get another grip on Mankey it scuttled away, climbing the only tree in sight. We watched it scurry up to the top before it turned and began waving its trophy at us.

“It stole my hat!” Ash seethed.

“And bit Cal, don’t you think that’s a little more important?” Misty dropped to her knees beside me.

“It’s okay, it didn’t actually use Bite and it let go pretty quick.” Still, I checked my wrist carefully. It didn’t feel like anything was broken or torn. It all looked like surface damage. “Definitely needs disinfectant though.” Who knew what Mankey had in its mouth.

“Are you really okay? That looks like it hurts.” Ash leaned in for a better look.

“Yeah, it hurts, but not too bad.” I flexed my hand a little, managing to contain the wince. “Let me get my first aid kit and I’ll be good as new.”

“Let me,” Brock stepped behind me and helped me pull my backpack off. I have to admit it would’ve taken me longer to dig my first aid kit out with only one hand. No need to get blood on my clean clothes this way either.

“This might sting a bit.” He warned me as he picked up the spray. I did my best not to flinch and let him bandage me up. He did a good job though I would’ve used a bit more support to make using my hand easier.

“That Mankey.” Ash’s face turned red with the force of his glare. He whirled on the tree and started shaking his fist at the pokemon perched there. “Where do you get off biting someone like that?”

“It is a wild pokemon.” I reasoned. “These things happen. It’s why I have the first aid kit.”

“Yeah, yours is even better stocked than mine.” Brock noticed as he put it away. “You’ve even got a separate one for pokemon.”

“Gee, no wonder your bag is so much bigger than ours.” Misty curiously moved the flap to see what else was in my bag.

It’s true that my bag is bigger than theirs. Misty only has her red knapsack. I don’t know how she fits everything she needs in there. Ash’s looks like a school bag and its filled to bursting with his supplies. Brock’s bag is only a bit smaller than mine but it’s packed appropriately.

“Um, well, you never know,” I stammered trying to think of something to say.

“Cal?” Ash got my attention.

“Hm?”

He was looking between me and Mankey, conflicted. “Would you mind if I still caught Mankey?”
“I don’t mind.” I answered, unthinking.

“Wait, really? Even after it bit you?” Misty gaped at me.

“Sure?” I cocked my head to the side. “I mean, it was just doing what wild pokemon do. I don’t blame it.”

“Seriously Cal? That seems a little too forgiving.” She was about to say something else when three figures jumped out ahead of us on the road.

I’ll give you three guesses who it was, and the first two don’t count.

“Team Rocket!” Ash automatically grabbed Pikachu, ready for some net or grabby hand to pluck his pokemon out of his grip.

“Prepare for trouble!”
“And make it double!”
“To protect the world from devastation!”
“To unite all peoples within our nation!”
“To denounce the evils of truth and love!”
“To extend our reach to the stars above!”
“Jessie!”
“James!”
“Team Rocket, blast off at the speed of light!”
“Surrender now or prepare to fight!”
“Meowth, that’s right!”

Why do I even bother writing that every time?

“Can’t you see we’re a little busy right now? Scram!” Ash made sure Pikachu was safe in his arms though.

“That’s why it’s the perfect time to strike!” Jessie declared. “Hand over your pikachu, boy, and we’ll let you go free.”

“Not on your life!” He retorted.

“Yeah, not happening.” I brought out Cleffa’s pokeball. It had been a while since I used her in a battle. My wrist gave an unhappy twinge but I didn’t need to throw the pokeball to join the fight.

“Maan?” Team Rocket had thoroughly distracted us from the thieving Mankey. Mankey, however, had only grown more curious.

It jumped from the tree onto Jessie’s head.

“Pfft!” I clapped my hand over my mouth, pulling it away a second later with a wince.

“EEEEEEKK! James, Meowth, do something!” She pinwheeled her arms back and forth. Mankey wasn’t hurting her, just inspecting her. Up close.

Mankey must’ve gotten bored though because it jumped on James next. He screamed even higher than she did. I lost the fight against laughter and the others were already doubled over holding their sides.

“Get off, you stinking hairball!” James pried it loose and kicked it away harshly.
“Hey!” I sobered up quickly. “It wasn’t hurting you!”

“It was sniffing and messing up my hair!” He defended himself, still speaking two pitches higher than normal.

“Maan…Maaaaaan!” We all looked at Mankey.

We all looked at Primeape.

“Again!?” I turned on James furiously. “For the love of Darkrai, James, do you have a magic foot or something? You made a pokemon mad enough to evolve again!?”

“I didn’t mean to!” He squealed, flinching back.

“Don’t make eye contact!” I yelled to the others, putting my priorities back in order. “It’ll chase you to the ends of the earth if you do!”

“Feh, I’m not scared of a dirty, little hairball like that.” Jessie tossed her hair over her shoulder. “It’s hardly bigger than it was as a mankey.” She leveled a cold stare at it.

I took perhaps a bit too much pleasure in watching the disaster unfold. It wasn’t trying to do any serious damage, still not using an actual move, but Team Rocket would definitely be feeling the results of this attempted heist for the next few days.

“Man, this is going to make catching it even harder.” Ash muttered. “And, hey!” One hand he clamped to the top of his head, the other he pointed at Primeape. “It still has my hat!”

“We’ll get you a new one!” Misty tried to stop him.

“You can’t get me a new one of those!” He growled. “That’s a limited edition official Pokemon Expo hat! I had to send in, like, a million post cards to win that hat! They only made a hundred!”

“Err, wha?” It looked like a regular hat to me.

“I’m gonna catch that Primeape and get my hat back!” He boldly declared for all the world to hear.

The world included Primeape.

“Don’t look it in the eye!” We all took off running as fast as we could, hoping to lose it in the bluffs. It was pretty hopeless considering this was likely its territory but we didn’t have a whole lot of options. I, for one, was in no hurry to be bitten again. Primeape’s teeth were a good size bigger than Mankey’s.

“There’s a fork in the road! It can’t follow all of us!” Ash cried.

Brock was…not with us. But Primeape was still following us so hopefully Brock had just found a convenient hole to hide in. The fork was a two lane road so while Misty took one and Ash took the other I chose to scramble up the side of the cliff. My wrist didn’t like it but Primeape decided not to keep following me, too focused on Ash for that.

“Oh, Groudon!” I let go of the cliff face and took off after them.

It was the sound of battle that led me to Ash. I caught up to him as he was battling Primeape. Squirtle, Pikachu, Bulbasaur, and Charmander, he used them all in turns to weaken Primeape and keep it from being able to adapt. His pokemon moved between and around each other easily, following his commands. The only other place he could’ve fought like this was the St. Anne. Did
he really learn so much then or was he a natural?

“Charmander, finish it with Flamethrower!” The final attack. I kept my eyes open wide for the whole thing. A little streak of yellow darted between the fighters, Pikachu taking back Ash’s hat, and then Primeape crashed and burned.

“Go, pokeball!” I held my breath with Ash as the pokeball thrashed back and forth violently. Would Primeape escape and the battle continue?

Another shake, less violent than the last. One more.

_Click._

“I…I did it! I caught Primeape!” Ash whooped, picking up his new pokemon. “And you got my hat back, Pikachu! Thanks!” He happily replaced his prized hat upon his head.

I started clapping. It hurt, yeah, but an amazing battle _deserved_ some applause.

“Cal, did you see?” He waved his pokeball.

“I saw!” I confirmed, leaving off on the clapping. “That was a great battle, Ash.”

“Ha, we finally caught up to you twerps!” Team Rocket was panting. Jessie put on a decent façade of being unaffected by the run, but James had his hands on his knees for support and Meowth just flat out collapsed on the ground. “And now we’ll…we’ll be…Er, where’d the primeape go?” She looked around, afraid it would jump down and ravage her hair again.

“Why don’t you see for yourself?” Ash cheekily tossed his pokeball.

“PRIIIIIME!”

And so Team Rocket blasted off again.

“We got here a lot sooner than I thought we would.” Brock remarked as we entered the Celadon city Pokemon Center.

“Yeah, what with Primeape chasing us all over the place.” Misty yawned. “It’s not even dinner time yet but I’m already exhausted.”

“I say we get a bite to eat and turn in early tonight.” Brock nodded. “What about you guys?”

“I’m going to give my pokemon to Nurse Joy for a check-up first.” Ash started heading for the front desk. “I want to make sure everybody’s in top condition for our gym match tomorrow.”

“I’m glad he’s waiting until _tomorrow_.” Misty bent backwards to stretch out the kinks in her spine. “I think we all deserve a good rest.”

“Yeah,” I agreed with her. My wrist was throbbing in time with my heartbeat. I should check the bandages.

“Looks like we still have an hour until dinnertime.” Brock checked the Center schedule, helpfully posted on the wall for traveling trainers.
“Mm,” Humming, I looked over to the computers. They were all taken up by other trainers though. I could wait to see if one opened up but with dinnertime so close there wasn’t much point. “I’ll reserve a room for us.”

“I’m going to take a shower then.” Misty decided. “A nice shower, some good food, and then sleep!”

“I hear that.” I left them joking around with each other as I stepped up to the front desk.

“Hello, I’m Nurse Joy. How can I help you?” Ash was leaning against the counter and Pikachu was nowhere in sight. He must’ve already handed his pokemon over.

“My name is Cal Memo, I’d like to reserve a room for me and my friends tonight, if that’s okay.” I handed her my trainer ID.

“How many people?” She asked.

“Four, we don’t mind sharing a room.” I told her.

“Alright, that’ll be room A8. You can hand in your key in the morning or reserve the room again if you plan to stay another night.” She handed my ID back with a key.

“We get a key?” Ash leaned over my shoulder.

“Different Pokemon Centers sometimes have different standards.” Nurse Joy explained. “Unfortunate as the case may be, in a big city like this we sometimes have trouble with thieves and pickpockets, so people feel better when they can leave their belongings behind a locked door. I have a key that can open any door if there’s an emergency, but you can lock your room if you like.”

“Oh, well,” I took the key and made sure it was safe in my pocket. “I’ll be sure not to lose it then.”

“Thank you for your consideration.” A clip at her waist started beeping. “Oh, looks like your pokemon are done. I’ll be right back.” She closed out of her computer and walked into the back, returning a moment later with Pikachu and the rest of Ash’s pokemon. “Here you are, ready and rested for your battle tomorrow.”

“Great, thanks!” Ash put them back on his belt and we moved aside to allow Nurse Joy to continue working.

“There’s an hour until dinnertime.” I informed Ash. Misty must have left for her shower already and Brock had gone off somewhere too.

“Hm, a whole hour, huh?” He sighed. “Man, if we’d gotten here a little earlier we could’ve gone straight to the gym.”

“Well, rest is important too.” I chuckled. There wasn’t a whole lot we could do with less than an hour. We couldn’t get any real training in, the computers were used up.

Ash and I ended up going to our assigned room. Ash rolled up one of his socks into a ball and we passed the hour batting it back and forth to let Pikachu chase it. Poor little guy was wiped out by time the dinner bell rang.

“Hey guys, saved you a seat!” Brock waved us over in the cafeteria. Misty was freshly showered, still wearing a towel around her shoulders while her hair drip dried.
“So tomorrow’s plan is to hit the gym in the morning then the university in the afternoon, right?” Brock checked as soon as we sat down.

“Oh yeah!” My tray hit the table a little harder than necessary. “I, uh, forgot to mention Professor Oak wanted to talk to me too, during the call earlier, I mean.”

“Yeah? What did he say?” Brock prompted me.

“He’s, uh, very happy with my reports so far. Especially the one on the giant Tentacruel.” How to explain? I hardly understood it myself.

“Professor Oak is going to pay her to keep doing reports for him like a field researcher, but she can’t be an official one until she’s been a trainer for year.” Ash stuffed a chunk of meat in his mouth and continued, “He also sent a message to the university so they’d give us a good tour.”

“Whoa, really?” Misty leaned halfway across the table. “A message from the Pokemon Professor himself is sure something.”

“Ah, yeah.” I shrunk down a little.

“He also said she shouldn’t worry about it too much cuz’ she’s too young to think about university yet.” Ash talked with his mouth full.

“Mhm, I have lots of time to think about college and university. I don’t…I don’t wanna stop my journey yet.” It was the same way I’d felt at the prep school. Sure it would be an amazing opportunity, offer me even more resources than the prep school did, but the freedoms I’d have to give up for it wasn’t worth it.

“Right!” Ash pounded his fork against the table. “Cal doesn’t need to worry about school and homework when she’s on a pokemon journey! You can learn way more about pokemon from training them than from a classroom.”

“Some things, sure, but there’s also stuff you can only learn in a classroom.” Misty propped her head on her hand.

“Practical and theoretical knowledge are both important.” I reasoned before the two could start arguing. “I’m just more interested in the practical right now. Someday, when I’m older, I’ll focus more on theoretical knowledge.”

“Just so long as you’re doing what makes you happy.” Brock nodded along. “Now hurry up and eat, everybody. Ash is the only one who’s even made a dent in his food.”

“Ugh, and sprayed it across half the table.” Misty stuck her tongue out in disgust.

I have good friends.

The next morning we were up bright and early. I made sure to give the key back to Nurse Joy before we left. We figured we didn’t need more supplies just yet so we’d leave right after the tour and camp out again tonight.

Not that things actually worked out that way.

We got a little turned around at first trying to find the gym. The first person we asked thought we
were asking for the *exercise* gym. The Pokemon Gym was located a little further out so we had a bit of a walk ahead of us.

“Mm,” Misty took a deep breath and sighed. “Smell that? I’d heard this town was famous for their perfumes!”

“Huh?” I concentrated, taking a good sniff for myself.

And…nada.

“I, uh, don’t smell anything?” I frowned uncertainly.

“Let’s get a closer look then.” She chirped, moving towards one of the stores. A woman stood with a tray just outside, minding several small vials.

“Welcome to Grassy Fragrance, can I interest any of you in our perfumes?” She held up a vial labeled *Valley of Bluebells*.

“Oh, that smells heavenly!” Misty gushed. The bottle was open and airing freely. Curious, I leaned in and took a better sniff.

“hmm,” I got *something* that time. Flowers. I guess my sense of smell just isn’t that good.

“And such delicate beauties advertising these luxurious aromas!” Brock dropped down on one knee, hand over his heart.

“Yeesh, can you believe this, Pika—…Eh?” When I looked I noticed Pikachu had abandoned Ash’s shoulder for Misty’s and was enjoying another vial. This one was labeled *Daisy Dreams*. “Pikachu! Not you too!”

“What about you two? I’m sure we could find a perfume to make you feel beautiful, energetic, and soothe away all your worries!” The saleslady looked to me and Ash.

“I’ll pass.” He folded his arms. “I’m plenty energetic all on my own and perfumes stink anyway.”

“Erm, I don’t really…like them very much.” I stepped back. “I’ll pass too.”

The saleslady took exception to Ash’s opinion. I admit, he could’ve been a *little* more sensitive. Misty, Brock, and Pikachu were happy to go right inside and enjoy the smells while we were left on the sidewalk.

“Ugh, I can’t believe them! They’d rather waste time with that junk than go to the gym with me?” He shook his head. “At least you’re normal, Cal.”

“I just don’t have a good sense of smell, I guess.” Still, if we were heading for the gym. “Um, I think the Celadon Gym is this way. We should be able to see it soon.”

“Fifth badge, here I come!” Ash took off running which, naturally, meant so did I.

One thing’s for sure, I’ll never have to worry about my figure if I keep traveling with Ash.

“Is this the place?” It looked like a green house styled after either a gloom or vileplume. The restrictions of architecture made it hard to tell from the ground.

“Maybe they train grass types here.” I suggested.
“Grass types, huh? Alright, let’s go!” He bounded up the steps two at a time. I followed at a more sedate pace and saw the group of girls gathered at the entrance.

“Hold it!” One of them parked herself directly in Ash’s path. “You can’t come in here!”

“What? But…This is the Celadon city gym, right?” I couldn’t see his expression but I could imagine the wide eyed look of shock.

“It is.” The girl in charge crossed her arms. The others looked none too friendly either.

“Well I’m here to challenge the Gym Leader to a match so you have to let me in!” He argued.

“We don’t allow in anyone who insults perfume.” She declared with a haughty sniff.

“Wha?” Ash and I looked at each other, bamboozled. “But why?”

“Because,” She leaned in to make her point clearer. “We make that perfume here.”

The perfume store had called ahead of us and told the gym that if we arrived we weren’t to be let in.

“I’m, uh, almost certain that’s not legal.” I couldn’t remember off the top of my head but such discrimination wasn’t usually allowed under Pokemon League rules. Every gym had their own special rules and they could refuse challengers who didn’t meet those requirements but a rule about liking perfume?

They shut the door in our faces. I’m not sure if I was included in the ban or not but it’s not like I had any reason to go in there without Ash.

“What now?” Ash began to walk despondently away.

“Um, we could…go to a different gym.” I offered hesitantly.

“But that will take more time. Gary will probably have eight badges before I can even get my fifth!” He complained. “All because I insulted their stupid perfume!”

“If you’re talking about perfume, do you mean the perfume that gym sells?” We both stopped in our tracks.

That was a voice we were well familiar with, but we weren’t used to it coming from up a tree.

Team Rocket was strung up in the tree, dangling from the largest branch. Even Meowth was bound and trussed too tightly to get himself loose.

“I’ll tell you twerps what,” Jessie gave us an evil smirk. “If you get us down from here we’ll help you get into the gym to challenge the Leader.”

“I have several questions,” I raised my hand. “First, what’s in it for you? Second, why are you tied up in a tree? Why didn’t they just call the police? Aren’t you guys supposed to be wanted criminals?”

“We’re a bit far off from our usual turf, twerp.” She sniffed arrogantly. “They don’t know us here. They thought we were just common crooks.”

“Now what are you two waiting for? Get us down from here!” She pinwheeled her legs for a minute, getting nowhere.
“What do you think, Cal?” Ash whispered.

“How honestly?” I wanted to call the police. Let Officer Jenny handle them. Lock them away and throw away the key.

But…

But that’s not what I said.

“I still want to know what they’d get out of this. I don’t, I don’t think they’d help us out of the goodness of their hearts.”

“Oh, come now, what do you have to lose?” James wheedled.

“You need eight badges to qualify for the Pokemon League, don’t you? There’s not much time left before Indigo League takes place again.” Jessie pressed.

Ash’s face twisted. Three months had passed since we set out from Pallet town together. Five months remained before the next Indigo League tournament to choose this year’s Champion. And Ash had four badges. That wasn’t bad, considering we weren’t halfway through the allotted time and we were mostly on foot.

But on the other hand, he was right to be worried about it. A delay here, a delay there, and Ash could risk not qualifying in time and he’d have to start all over next year. Every badge was inscribed with the year it was won in, you couldn’t use the same set of badges to re-qualify.

Ultimately, I left the choice to Ash. I trust him to do what’s right and if he makes a mistake then I trust him to do everything in his power to fix it.

I trust him enough to help him get a Team of Pokemon Thieves out of a tree.

Chapter End Notes

She might regret that decision. Hope everyone’s having a good week! Please leave a comment!
The Fire

“I regret this immensely.” We were in a department store and Jessie of Team Rocket was trying to fashion my hair into a more masculine appearance.

The plan was for me and Ash to dress as moderately wealthy twins, gender swapped, with Team Rocket posing as our parents to sign us up for trainer classes at the gym. Ash only had to keep the act up long enough to reach the Gym Leader, Erika, and make a challenge in person.

The perfume rule was not an official rule, meaning that Erika would be forced by League rules to accept his challenge. The only real problem was getting Ash into the building to make said challenge.

“You don’t take very good care of your hair.” Jessie ignored me, teasing and tugging various strands. “Honestly, you have literally the dullest hairstyle in the world. Plain brown bob? Really?”

“Why can’t I just get a wig like Ash?” I carefully kept from groaning. Or whining. Team Rocket, at least these members, may not be all that competent but they were still vicious criminals. I shouldn’t show weakness in front of them.

“Wigs are harder to pull off than you think.” She huffed. Finally, she grabbed a brush and comb and started working with my hair. I couldn’t see what she was doing but I was confident Char could do a lot worse on her if I didn’t like it. “If the twerp had hair even an inch longer we’d style it into a cute pixie. As it is, we simply have to improvise.”

“Why not just cut mine then?” I questioned. She was surprisingly polite as she worked with my hair, not tugging too hard or scraping the comb against my scalp.

“Cut yours?” She sounded scandalized. Curious, I looked over my shoulder. She had the hand with her brush over her heart and an expression of utter horror on her face. “A woman’s hair is her very life, brat! You should treat yours with a little more respect!”

“Ah,” A moment to think that over. “So, no wigs and no cutting, how are you going to make my hair look like a boy’s?”

“Just watch and wait,” With that ominous giggle she got back to work.

She was quick about it at least. I didn’t recognize myself when I looked in the mirror twenty minutes later.
The boy staring back at me was a stranger. Brown hair had been smoothed back and away from the face, a few subtle bobby pins kept the illusion that the hair was shorter than it really was. A small, almost undetectable hint of make up had done something called ‘contouring’ to change the shape of my cheekbones and jaw. I was dressed in semi-formal attire. I didn’t have any figure to speak of so there was no need to hide that.

“Your own mother wouldn’t recognize you!” Jessie clapped her hands. “Now let’s see how James, Meowth, and the other twerp is making out.” She grabbed me by the shoulders and steered us to the next dressing room.

Ash, I recognized, if only because I’d spent the past few months in his company. He didn’t look too happy with the orange dress he had on or the blonde wig. Despite what Jessie had said earlier his wig looked fairly natural. If I didn’t know he had black hair I would’ve been fooled. The ringlets and curls were a little much though.

“…Cal?” He gave a double-take when he saw me.

“Hey, Ash.” I waved.

“Right.” Jessie clapped her hands once, sharply. “You two wait here a moment while we get changed. Think of alternate names you can answer to easily and give each other tips on body language.”

“Names?” Ash gulped. He clearly hadn’t expected this ruse to require so much forethought.

“Um, better keep things simple, I guess.” I tried to remember, did we introduce ourselves at either the perfume store or the gym doors? Ash might have but I didn’t talk to anyone much.

“My mom once told me that if I’d been born a girl she would’ve named me Ashley.” Ash revealed to me. “I’ll just go with that. What about you?”

It’s not like Cal was a very common name. By itself it didn’t seem very feminine. Still, better to be thorough.

“Uh, Calvin?” I shrugged. We were both just lengthening our names a little but that should make them easier to remember and answer to.

“Alright, how do I act like a girl?” He asked me.

That took a little thinking.

“Maybe, don’t gesticulate so much.” I saw he didn’t understand. “Don’t gesture with your hands so much. Try keeping them folded in front of you, like this.”

“Oh,” He tried it out. “And that means that you should move your hands more. You’re supposed to be a guy, so try sounding more confident too.”

“Can’t I be the strong, silent type?” I sighed. I scratched the back of my neck and put my hand on my hip, the way I’d seen Ash do when he was feeling sheepish.

“Yeah, that’s pretty good!” He nodded excitedly. “This’ll be a piece of cake!”

“Now, now, that doesn’t sound very ladylike.” Jessie scolded, stepping back into view. She was wearing traditional kantonese clothing.
“Oh,” He cleared his throat. The next words out of his mouth came out in a false soprano. “I’ll get those meanies!”

“Please…don’t talk like that.” My eye began twitching.

I need to stop and rest. Today has been…hectic, to say the least. I can barely keep my eyes open and my wrist is screaming at me.

My wrist might be getting infected. It’s red and hot to the touch. I put some extra disinfectant on and I took some antibiotics. My first aid kit really is well stocked. Weirdly enough I feel like I might encounter a few problems when I eventually need to restock.

It hurts to type so I’m doing this mostly left-handed. I’ll go back and edit out the typos at some later point. For now I just want to get this all down as quickly as possible.

As Ashley and Calvin, fraternal twins from a moderately wealthy family, we went to the Celadon gym.

“Good luck, sweeties! Mommy and Daddy love you!” Jessie put on a show of giving us big, slobbery kisses and waving a handkerchief as she left with James.

I remember how seeing Mrs. Ketchum with Ash felt. It made me homesick for something I can’t even remember.

This…did not inspire that feeling.

“Not a lot of boys join our classes here.” The lady at the help desk mentioned as she led us into the greenhouse portion of the gym. Some rooms were sectioned off with rarer or more specialized plants. One, I noticed, had several poisonous species. Another had plants from the jungles of Kalos.

It took me a minute to realize she was talking to me.

“…Ashley and I both like pokemon so we both wanted to take lessons.” I pitched my voice lower and hunched my shoulders defensively. Was that appropriately masculine? At least I managed to keep the stutter out of my voice.

Have I always had that speech impediment or just since losing my memories?

“Yeah!” Ash’s voice almost cracked and he had to cough nervously, using his hand to curl a strand of blonde hair in his fingers in a motion I recognized from myself. “We always do these kinds of things together!”

“That’s so sweet.” The lady giggled. “Well, Erika is right in here with the rest of our beginner class.” She pointed through the window of another closed off room.

Erika was the woman at the front of the group, holding up a board with movable picture slots. The one she was currently at had an omastar staring out at a sunset.

I didn’t fully understand the Pokemon Gym Class thing until later, when I was able to look it up. Apparently in larger towns and cities a Pokemon Gym will offer these special classes for people who want to work with pokemon but for one reason or another don’t want to or can’t go on a pokemon journey.
Gyms attract students who help with upkeep, taking care of the pokemon attached to the gym, and help with the day-to-day running of the place. In return, they get to learn about pokemon and earn a tidy wage, some gyms will even give trusted students baby pokemon raised in the gym as rewards for their dedication.

On top of acting as the Grass type gym for Kanto, the Celadon gym is also connected to Celadon University. Many rare plants are raised here, even a few endangered species. Here they can be studied in a controlled environment.

A lot of the student trainers are also students at the Celadon University, working towards degrees in agriculture or horticulture. It’s a very neat system.

Inside the room, Erika was giving a lesson or telling a story, presumably about the omastar. They’re rock/water types so I’m not sure what they have to do with a grass gym. We couldn’t hear anything until our guide opened the door and motioned us through.

“Erika, we have two new students for the Beginner class.” She announced. “This is Ashley and Calvin Moster.”

“New students are always welcome.” Erika put her picture slides to the side so she could greet us. “Everyone, let’s help Ashley and Calvin feel welcome.” She motioned for everyone to stand up.

I think Ash and I both had small panic attacks when we saw Brock, Misty, and Pikachu among the class.

“Excuse me, Miss Erika?” Misty held up her hand politely and waited for Erika to turn around and face her. “I was just wondering, how are we able to sit here with gloom like this? I’d always heard their strong smell kept people and other pokemon away but this gloom doesn’t smell bad at all.” She even lightly petted the gloom’s petals to highlight her point.

“Gloom only release a foul smell when they’re stressed or frightened.” Gallingly, the answer didn’t come out of Erika’s mouth.

“That’s exactly right, Calvin!” Erika smiled encouragingly at me before she turned to the class as a whole. “As Calvin just said, glooms won’t release that foul odor unless stressed or frightened, otherwise they have a fairly neutral scent. In fact, this gloom in particular once used its scent in order to save my life.”

“Really?” Misty’s eyes widened.

“Oh yes,” Erika bent down to pick up Gloom. “You see, when I was around five years old, I got separated from my parents in town and got lost. I ended up in an alley with a grimer in it and got cornered.” I winced in sympathy.

“I was so scared, too scared to run or cry for help.” She related. “When suddenly, I saw a gloom out of the corner of my eye. Gloom saw how scared I was and it rushed to protect me. It chased the grimer away, then led me back to the street and stayed with me until an Officer Jenny found me. Gloom’s been by my side ever since!”

“Wow, what a heart-wrenching story.” Brock sniffed, tenderly wiping his eyes with a handkerchief. “Yeah, too bad Ash and Cal aren’t here to hear it.” Misty sighed.

“We heard it.” Thankfully, this one was not on me. That one was all Ash.
There wasn’t any point in keeping the charade up. We were inside, face-to-face with Erika so Ash could deliver his challenge. Ash yanked his wig off, probably tearing out a few hairs from the grimace he pulled.

“I’m Ash, from Pallet town, and I’m here to challenge you to a Gym Battle!” He declared, remarkably unruffled. For her part Erika looked gobsmacked at this turn of events.

“I…accept.” She blinked. “But why did you sneak in here in disguise instead of just walking through the front door?”

“We tried that but they wouldn’t let us in!” He pointed at our guide, now looking extremely embarrassed.

“Sasha, is this true?” Erika frowned.

“Well, see, the thing is…He insulted our perfume!” She broke down quickly. “We work so hard to make it and he just blew it off like it was nothing!”

“Girls,” Erika dropped her face into her hand. Even Gloom looked disapproving. “Just because someone doesn’t like our perfume is no reason to refuse them entry into the gym.”

“Um, does that mean I can wash my face?” The make up itched. Come to think of it, so did my hair.

After a few minutes for Ash and I to change and wash up we were led to the main part of the building. The biggest portion of the green house was here, along with the arena.

“You know, Ash made a surprisingly cute girl.” Misty commented as we sat down at the bleachers. “I never would have recognized you two if Ash hadn’t blown your cover!”

“Mm,” There was nothing to say to that. Besides, there were far more important things to think about.

“Alright, this will be a three-on-three match, get two out of three wins and you’ll earn a Rainbow Badge. Substitutions will count as a withdrawal.” She held up one as an example. “Any objections?”

“None here!” Ash adjusted his hat and grabbed his first pokeball. “Ready when you are! Bulbasaur, I choose you!”

“Then I pick tangela!” Erika decided, throwing her own pokeball out.

Grass type versus grass type, but Ash had no idea what tangela were capable of. He was probably holding Charmander in reserve, a good strategy in a grass gym.

He briefly scanned tangela in his pokedex before he focused completely on the match.

“Bulbasaur, keep your distance and give it a Vine Whip!” He ordered.

“Hm,” Decent strategy, always good to be a little cautious.

“Tangela, use Rapid Spin to draw it in close!” But Erika knew a grass type’s greatest defenses were better used up close and she clearly knew how to draw her opponents in.

“Bulba!” Bulbasaur struggled to pull its vines free as tangela began to spin. They reached the end of their slack and Bulbasaur scrambled for something to hold onto. Bulbasaur could only use two
vines at a time though, so it had no way of securing itself and was drawn in.

“Now use Stun Spore!” I winced as the orange cloud was thrown directly into Bulbasaur’s face. It might not be as effective against a fellow grass type but that was still a lot of stun powder directly to the face. Internal paralysis set in almost immediately.

Ash pulled Bulbasaur back quickly once he realized. That would be either a trip to the Pokemon Center later or I’d look in my pokemon first aid kit for some Paralysis Heal. I had more Antidote than Paralysis Heal but I had a few of every kind available.

“Charmander, I choose you!” Erika’s face flickered into uncertainty. She covered it up quick and returned her tangela.

“Weepinbell, go! Use Razor Leaf!” She started out fast, already knowing this match up was bad for her.

After seeing Bulbasaur she probably didn’t expect Charmander. After all, most trainers only get one starter, if they have one at all. Ash was a little remarkable for having all three and none of them were given to him by Professor Oak.

That reminds me, I should talk to Professor Oak about Charmander’s origins. Bulbasaur and Squirtle were abandoned as well, but Charmander was actively abused by Damien. If nothing else I’d like Professor Oak to be aware of Damien’s character. I’ll make sure to mention that when I send him Haunter and Gengar’s stats.

“Charmander, Flamethrower!” I’d gotten wrapped up in my thoughts so Ash’s shout startled me.

“He might actually win.” One of the gym trainers groaned.

“Yeah, he’s better than he looks, that’s for sure.” I made sure to glare at that one. Then Misty caught my eye and we both grinned.

“Weepinbell, return!” Erika caught our attention again. “Alright Ash, I respect the dedication and determination it took for you to sneak your way into my gym, but you realize I can’t let you off that easy, right? Time for you to learn that type isn’t everything!” She reeled her arm back, pokeball firmly in her grasp. “Go, gloom!”

Gloom wasn’t happy and relaxed anymore. I was very glad the spectator seats were so far from the arena itself. Poor Charmander was hit by the stench full force.

“Oooh,” Misty winced in sympathy.

“Yeah,” I nodded. Ash had no choice but to pull Charmander out. That left him and Erika even. This last battle would decide everything.

“Pika!” Pikachu jumped from Misty’s lap and raced for Ash. “Pikapi!”

“Pikachu, you want to battle?” Ash kneeled down.

“Pika pikachu chu!” Pikachu nodded, as serious as I’d ever seen him.

“Alright, let’s win this!” Ash stood up, filled with new determination. I leaned forward eagerly, waiting to see how he’d get around gloom’s stench. Distance attacks like Thunderbolt would be good. Pikachu probably wouldn’t even have to get in close to finish it.
Unfortunately, before the last match could officially begin, a voice came from the rafters.

“Jeez, is that the gloom or your pokemon skills making that awful stench?” Jessie purred, a large vial in her hands. Perfume?

To all our surprise, Team Rocket jumped from the rafters and landed in the center of the arena. I caught the faint glimmer of hidden wires that allowed the jump but it was still fairly impressive.

“Prepare for trouble!” Jessie made her landing with poise.

“And make it double.” James landed beside her so they linked arms.

“To protect the world from devastation!”
“To unite all peoples within our nation!”
“To denounce the evils of truth and love!”
“To extend our reach to the stars above!”
“Jessie!”
“James!”
“Team Rocket, blasting off at the speed of light!”
“Surrender now or prepare to fight!”
“Meowth,” He landed on their linked arms and my blood went cold. Meowth had a Voltorb Class Detonator in his paws and a sickening smirk on his face. “That’s...right!”

I pulled Misty down, twisting us both so we fell beneath the bleachers just ahead of the blast. I didn’t waste time after the blast, even with my ears still ringing. I pulled Misty with me and army crawled out from under the bleachers.

The gym was ablaze. Team Rocket was nowhere to be seen but there was a new hole in the high ceiling and a crater where they’d been standing.

“Girls, save the pokemon and get out!” Erika shouted. With the ringing in my ears I barely understood it.

“Misty!” I had to yell to hear my own voice. I hadn’t been gentle pulling her into cover and she was shaking. I had to shake her shoulder to make her look at me. Shock, or getting close to it. Wordlessly, I pointed to an exeggcute and then at the exit. Once she gave me a little nod and scooped to pick up the pokemon I turned my attention to Ash and Brock, my next highest priorities.

Brock had called out geodude and was directing him to move some burning timber. Geodude wasn’t bothered by the flames and Brock was already searching for trapped pokemon. Ash had Pikachu, a bellsprout, and an oddish in his arms and was already making for an exit.

“Someone, over here!” One of the gym trainers yelled. “I can’t get them!”

“I’m here!” I ran over. Smoke was burning my eyes and lungs but I didn’t have time to find something to filter the smoke. The trainer was fussing over a door that led to a closed off room. The glass had shattered and the fire had spread inside but part of the roof had fallen in front of the door.

“Char, I need you!” She was at my side in a second. With Char to handle the burning part we were able to shift the rubble enough to open the door, letting out three weepinbell that the trainer quickly put inside pokeballs.

“Anyone else in here? Yell if you hear me!” She shouted into the room. Nothing answered.
“Help!” We both turned around. One of the younger trainers from the Beginner class was cornered by flames.

“Fearow, help us!” My lungs chose that moment to mutiny and I had to point to the trapped girl. Fearow understood me quickly and he flew over and grabbed her in his talons, then left through the hole in the roof to deposit her outside.

“Char cough cough!” Char unwrapped her scarf and pushed it at me and the gym trainer. Each of us holding one end over our mouths, we continued to the next closed room to look for trapped pokemon.

We each left with an armful of pokemon. Outside, a fire brigade had been formed. Trainers and students passed buckets to each other and a few were manning hoses. The siren of a firetruck was approaching but at that point the whole building was burning.

“Is that everyone?” I asked the gym trainer I’d escaped with.

“I don’t…I don’t know!” She cried. Now that we were out of the fire there were tear tracks washing away the soot on her cheeks.

“Char char!” Char pulled my pants leg, pointing to where the others were congregated. Ash and Misty had their water pokemon out and Brock was directing Geodude to throw dirt over the blaze.

“Cal, there you are!” Misty smiled when she saw me.

“Have any of you seen Gloom?” Erika came running up. She was limping hard. When none of us answered she turned back to the burning building, fear and determination shining equally in her eyes.

“You can’t go back in there!” Misty grabbed her arm. “You’re already hurt!”

“Gloom’s my best friend, my partner, I’m not leaving it!” She snapped, trying to shake Misty’s grip.

“I’ll go!” Ash took off.

And I, of course, took off after him.

“Ash! Cal!”

I think Ash and I both blame ourselves for what happened to the Celadon Gym. If we hadn’t relied on Team Rocket, if we’d just been more patient or tried to get in on our own, then they wouldn’t have gotten in so easily.

With their skill in disguise though, I can’t help but think they would have gotten in with or without us. We just served as a distraction for their true goals. All this destruction over a perfume formula!

I’m firmly with Ash on this one. Perfume is nothing but trouble.

Ash and I shared Char’s scarf as we ran back to the arena. Gloom wasn’t there.

“Where is it?” He cried, voice choked on a cough.

“Think, you’re a scared grass type! Where do you go to hide?” There was nowhere in the main arena room to hide in. Everything was bathed in flames. If Gloom was still in there then there wasn’t anything left to save.
“This way!” Ash led the way to the same closed room where Erika had been teaching the Beginning Class. Through the glass we saw Gloom, sitting with its hands over its eyes and crying.

“Gloom, it’s okay, we’ll get…you…” Ash went in first and hit a solid wall of stink. My stomach revolted at the smell and for a second there was a very real risk that I might just throw up. We both had to retreat behind the glass again to get away from it. “The scarf didn’t stop the smell!”

“We’d need something like a gas mask or a rebreather!” I hacked up a lung.

“Please Gloom, we’re here to help you!” He called out. “Hold your breath, Cal!”

“C’mon,” He picked up Gloom one-handed, using the other to keep the scarf over his mouth and nose as he held his breath.

But no one can hold their breath forever.

The scarf helped keep most of the smoke out but we were still bent over double coughing up our lungs for a full minute before we realized we couldn’t detect anything like that overpowering dirty underwear and rotten meat smell from before.

“Gloooom.” Gloom was smiling. It wasn’t crying or shaking anymore.

It knew we were here to help.

The building’s integrity was being damaged. Pieces of the ceiling were collapsing around us and we had to be careful.

But we got out. We got out with Gloom. We got to hand it over to Erika and watch her sob with relief at having her oldest and dearest friend safely returned to her.

It doesn’t make up for our part in things.

But it helps.
The Passion

We stayed and continued to do what we could to help until the fire was finally put out, thanks to the fire department. Everything smells like smoke and charcoal and we were all soot streaked by the end of it. The hour was late too, the sun had set without any of us noticing.

Mostly while the fire department did their job we kept the grass pokemon occupied. They’d all been deposited in part of the courtyard surrounding the gym. We made sure none of them wandered off or got stolen and tried to calm them down. Bulbasaur, Starmie, and Staryu all dehydrated themselves fighting the fire and had to be returned. More patients for the Pokemon Center.

Fearow was still with the little girl I’d had him save. He looked grateful when I pried her off and handed her to her parents. He declined to be returned right away, preferring to stand watch over the grass pokemon.

I gave Char her scarf back, a little more singed than when I’d taken it. I promised to have it washed when we went back to the Pokemon Center. I’ll have to remember to do that before we leave.

Erika’s burn was only first degree. Painful, yes, but nothing that absolutely required a hospital visit, which was her argument for staying until the flames were completely put out. She held tight to Gloom the whole time.

Since I was looking her way I happened to notice when Ash quietly separated himself from a group of bellsprouts to approach her.

I followed him.

“Erika, I’m sorry.” He bowed formally, I followed a half second behind. “If it weren’t for me, Team Rocket wouldn’t have snuck in and gotten your perfume formula.”

“If it weren’t for us.” I corrected him, softly but firmly. “I agreed to let them help sneak us in. I shouldn’t have.”

Erika looked down at us for a minute. I risked a glance up and saw her slowly move her gaze to Gloom, dozing off in her arms. Finally, she sighed.

“Neither of you could have imagined they’d do something like this.” She said. “It was Gloom and I who caught those three breaking in this morning and instead of informing the police I decided to simply ban them and have them hung from a tree instead. I thought they were mild crooks, not…”

She failed to find a word to describe them.

“Thank you both for coming forward about this.” She continued. “And, even more, thank you for going back to save Gloom when I couldn’t.”

“And you know.” The change in her tone had us both looking at her questioningly. A slow smirk grew on her face. “Just so you know, I think those Team Rocket guys will be pretty surprised when they find out what’s actually in that vial they took.”

“Why? What’s in it?” Ash asked.

“Essence of Gloom.” It was a small thing, a tiny bit of revenge in return for all the damage they’d done, but it was enough to make us all laugh.
“That said,” She dug around in her dress pocket. “I want the two of you to take these.”

She held out two Rainbow Badges.

“I…I don’t…understand.” She smiled softly at me.

“The most traditional way of earning a Badge is through battle, but it’s not the only way.” She explained. “Here at the Celadon Gym, we value empathy for each other above all else. Your honesty in telling me about this and your bravery and empathy when you went to save Gloom, tell me that you two are exactly the kinds of trainers the world needs more of. So please, take them.”

“Are you sure?” Ash accepted his hesitantly. I was surprised by the weight it had. It was so small, but dense.

“Everyone makes mistakes and I don’t believe you should be punished for yours.” She assured us.

After that, we were given a lift to the Pokemon Center. We gave our pokemon to be checked for smoke inhalation and other things, we were given another room key, then we all took showers and Nurse Joy offered to wash our clothes for us while we slept. I made sure to give her Char’s scarf too.

It was almost lunchtime before any of us woke up. Oddly enough, I’m one of the first awake. Brock was already gone when I got up but Misty and Ash are probably still asleep in our room. I’ll go back and get them for lunch in a minute.

For now, I’m curled up against the wall outside, typing this out. We should probably all go to the hospital and get checked out for smoke inhalation too, particularly Ash and I. It’s tempting to opt out though. I’m pretty sure my trainer insurance should cover it but I’m not one hundred percent certain and there’s a part of me that feels like this is something I can handle on my own.

I never did get my head wound checked out after the St. Anne thing. Ash and Misty forgot about it after I stopped bandaging it and I know it slipped Brock’s mind after the giant Tentacruel and then the Maiden’s Peak fiasco.

Ash and I should probably go but I don’t think I’ll insist unless Ash is still coughing today. That’s probably not a good attitude to take towards our health.

I have a Badge.

I’m not taking part in the Indigo League Tournament. I’m not going to go challenge other gyms. But I have a Badge. A Rainbow Badge.

For honesty and empathy.

I’m going to take this as a lesson. I can’t underestimate Team Rocket no matter how silly or incompetent they seem. I have to remember what happened at the St. Anne and here. They’re an organization with followers and equipment.

Beware Teams of Pokemon Thieves.

“Goodness, the things you kids run into.” Professor wiped the sweat from his brow as we wrapped up our story of yesterday’s events.
“Yeah,” Ash chuckled humorlessly. That expression of deadpan fatigue was odd to see on his face. “Anyway, we’re going to leave in a few minutes to go see Celadon University with Cal.”

“Um, I sent the stats on Haunter and Gengar, Professor.” I spoke up nervously. I’d also sent the inquiry about Damien. I wasn’t sure what Professor Oak could do about it but at least now he knew.

“Yes, I see it in my inbox. I’ll look over it in a few minutes. Do enjoy your tour of the university and I suppose I’ll see you at the next Pokemon Center you stop in!” He smiled, though I could see his hand twitching to open the file I’d sent. “Well, I won’t keep you! Just tell the people at the front desk who you are and they’ll speed things right along! Have a good day!” He hung up abruptly.

“He was sure in a hurry.” Ash blinked.

“Well, I guess he, uh, hasn’t had a chance to study any ghost pokemon yet.” I suggested blandly.

“Guys, are you finished with your call?” Misty walked up to us.

“Time to go see where the future Pokemon Professor will be going to school.” Brock said with a smile.

“Yeah…right.” Was it too late to suggest a trip to the hospital for a check up? Oh, and then we probably needed more supplies. And there wasn’t much time before the Indigo Tournament began so we should hurry along to Ash’s next gym battle too!

But despite my inner turmoil we soon found ourselves at Celadon University’s main entrance. It was a large, modern style building with plenty of open space. There was a map to show where everything was and it proudly displayed the admin office, our current destination. On impulse, I took one of the brochures that had a smaller version of the map with me.

“Wow, this place is huge.” Ash craned his neck around to look at everything. As we walked we passed by a class studying a blastoise. “Whoa, look at that.”

“Blastoise: The Water Gun Pokemon. The canons on its shell are capable of blasting jets of water stronger than a firehose. This pokemon is the final evolution of Squirtle.”

“Final evolution, huh.” He hummed thoughtfully for a moment before he pulled out Squirtle’s pokeball.

“Squirtle squirt?” Squirtle looked around. His eyes almost popped out of his head when he saw the blastoise.

“Blaaast,” The blastoise noticed us standing at the edge of the green. If I wasn’t mistaken it was making direct eye contact with Squirtle. “Blaas blaastoise.”

“Pardon me,” The teacher quickly walked up to us. “If you’re not too busy would you mind coming up here with your squirtle, young man? This is an evolutionary class and I think it would benefit them to see a squirtle and blastoise side by side.”

“Sure, I don’t mind.” Ash took one step then looked back at me. “Cal, is that okay with you?”

“Oh, oh yeah!” I waved him off.

“Prospective students?” One woman, around eighteen, asked us.
“Cal here wants to attend in a couple years so we’re here for a tour.” Brock explained, putting his hand on my head.

“Good luck with the entrance exam, kiddo.” She threw me a thumb’s up and went back to her notes.

The lecture wrapped up too quickly for my liking, and not just because I was stalling. Once the professor got going the subject was fascinating. He talked about the energy that went into evolution, transforming itself into mass, explaining how a pokemon could more than double in size without becoming skeletal thin as a side effect.

I began taking notes. I filled up four pages in my notebook! I wish I could’ve stayed to attend next week’s lecture about divergent evolution!

“I didn’t get half the stuff they were saying.” Misty commented as we continued towards the admin office.

“Ditto.” Brock scratched his head in confusion.

“Uh, mostly it was about how the Law of Conservation of Mass applies to evolution. They didn’t have a wartotle but Squirtle worked well as a comparison, I think.” I flipped back to the start of my notes. “See, Blastoise is many times bigger and heavier than Squirtle, but the Law of Conservation of Mass states that in a closed system, such as within a pokemon, mass can neither be created nor destroyed, but always stays constant. And on the surface evolution seems to break that law, but it doesn’t because of something called Evolution Energy.” I flipped to the next page.

“See, all pokemon, even those who are only one stage evolutions, have the ability to store Evolution Energy. They get that energy through different means, most pokemon gain it from training and fighting battles, others from happiness, loyalty, and still others can gain it from special items like Moonstones and Thunderstones.” I’d drawn a helpful little doodle of Pikachu turning into Raichu for that section.

“The biggest unanswered question though is where the pokemon store that energy until they have enough to evolve with.” It wasn’t a physical place, science had ruled that much out at least. “And come to think of it, why do one stage pokemon store Evolution Energy too? They can’t use it and it can’t be passed down genetically to their offspring, but it can be detected with specialized equipment.”

“Sheesh Cal, you’re making my head spin.” Ash groaned. Pikachu looked a little dizzy from trying to follow that.

“Oh, um, sorry.” I shuffled nervously.

“It’s not like we mind.” Misty elbowed him. “It’s good to see you so talkative! I think you just said more in one lecture than you usually do in a whole day!”

That only made me shrink back more.

“As much as we’d like you to keep talking about Evolution Energy,” Brock brought our attention to the building in front of us, proudly proclaimed as the Admin Office. “We’re here.”

“Hello, welcome to Celadon University. Can I help you kids?” The lady at the front desk nodded welcomingly.

“Um, I’m, that is,” Deep breath. Deeeep breath. “We’re here to ask for a tour of the university?”
My—My name is Cal Memo.” Phew.

“Cal Memo, we’ve been expecting you.” She smiled brightly. “Give me one moment to inform the dean.”

“Oh, okay?” The dean? Why?

“Yes, Dr. Rudon? It’s the girl Professor Oak told us about, Cal Memo? Yes, she’s here.” We waited, some of us more nervously than others. “Alright, the dean will see you now.”

Oh boy, we’re gonna meet the dean.

I was so nervous I almost couldn’t knock on the door. And for a horrible second I thought I hadn’t knocked hard enough and I’d have to do it again.

“Come in, come in!” The dean turned out to be a friendly soul. He was a little shorter than Brock, with thick spectacles and a head of rapidly thinning hair. He had lots of laugh lines around his eyes.

“I am Dr. Drake Rudon, Dean of Celadon University.” He shook my hand. “Please, sit down. We’ll be waiting a few minutes for your tour guide to arrive!”

“Now then, Ms. Memo, Professor Oak sent us a message telling us you’d be arriving soon.” He laughed. “He mentioned you’re interested in becoming a Pokemon Professor someday.”

“Oh, yes sir.” I humbly nodded. What else could I do? “But, uh, not just yet. I’m…I’ve only just started my pokemon journey so…”

“Ah, I understand, I understand.” He nodded sagely. “Why, I was twenty-two before I decided to pursue higher education.” He informed us. “You’ve got plenty of time to chase your dream, young one, don’t let anyone rush you.”

It sure felt like I was being rushed.

“And since there’s no rush you can take your time to learn all you like about our fine university before you decide to enroll!” He continued happily. “Let me see if I can’t answer a few of the more common questions first,” He cleared his throat.

“First off, our facilities are top notch!” He declared with pride. “People come from every region to attend our university, yes sir! We’re primarily a STEM school but we don’t shirk the arts, no sir, or sports for that matter!”

“We have on campus housing or,” He winked at me. “If you’re on-the-go a lot you can take online classes for a majority of our courses.”


“Well, as I said the online study works for most of our courses.” He bobbed his head. “But we pride ourselves in adjusting our courses for the individual student’s needs, and Ms. Memo here has an advantage in that she’s a known associate of the current Kanto Pokemon Professor, Samuel Oak. When a practical lesson is required then it would be a simple matter for Professor Oak or another Pokemon Professor to arrange a suitable substitution!” He beamed.

“So, for instance, a big part of working as a Pokemon Professor is breeding starter pokemon for prospective trainers!” He continued. “One of the practical lessons involved in that program just so happens to be an assignment to raise a starter pokemon from egg to final evolution! When it came
time for you to begin that portion of your study then Professor Oak could simply give you one of his eggs to raise and he would be in charge of monitoring your progress and making sure you are raising your pokemon to be as healthy and happy as it can be!”

“I see,” Brock hummed.

“Now I grant you, if you do choose the online study program it will be more difficult than if you simply attended classes in person.” He grew somber. “Most people aiming to be Pokemon Professors can’t make the cut and end up settling for Researcher or some other field. You would be held to much higher standards.”

“Um, would the…the Pokemon Professor Scholarship be applicable for online study?” I checked.

“Indeed it would!” He cheered right up. “Pokemon Professors are vital, you see, so we try to provide extra incentive for anyone aiming for that title! But, to ensure we don’t waste resources on people who will change their minds, we have very strict requirements.”

“First, anyone applying for the Pokemon Professor Scholarship must have personalized introductory letters from five Pokemon Professors and, to lessen the risk of nepotism, none of those Professors can be related to you.” He explained. “Second, to keep the scholarship you must maintain a 3.8 GPA for your entire enrollment here at C.U. Third, any criminal record will severely endanger your chances of earning the scholarship, though that is really judged on a case by case basis.”

“Wow, you weren’t kidding when you said the requirements were strict.” Misty gulped.

“Yes, but!” He stood up in excitement. “If you can manage all that the scholarship is yours! Tuition is waived if you agree to spend five years teaching at C.U. and it includes a stipend awarded every semester for personal experiments. We’ll also pay for room and board, matching your current living arrangements! You’ll have funding, resources, a support system, everything a young Pokemon Professor needs to spread her wings and fly!”

“U-Uh, wow.” I squeaked.

My attempts to become one with my chair were thankfully interrupted by a knock at the door.

“Oh, that must be your tour guide! Come in, come in!” Dr. Rudon called.

“Hello, Dr. Rudon.” A girl around sixteen or so stepped inside. “I’m told a prospective student needs a tour?”

“Yes, this is Cal Memo.” He surprised me by bounding around the desk and spinning me around, putting both hands on my shoulders. “She’s a future Pokemon Professor, with Professor Oak’s own seal of approval!”

“Ambition’s a pretty good thing to have.” She nodded approvingly. I noticed a somewhat familiar sparkle in her eye. “My name is Hailey Rudon, I’m here studying to be a Pokemon Lawyer.”

They were related.

“Alright!” She clapped her hands and turned on a heel to face us. We were standing outside the Admin Building now and she was smirking like the glameow who got the chatot. “First off, even if
you’re not planning to enroll yet or you haven’t fully settled on Celadon University as the university for you, let me be clear, this is the single best university in the world!”

“With you as a tour guide, how could it not be?” Brock sighed longingly.

“Thank you.” She put her hands on her hips. “But don’t take my word for it! Lots of the leaders of the Pokemon World studied here! Eighty-five percent of the current Pokemon Professors studied here, and half of those later came back to teach, including our own Professor Oak! On top of that, we’re top ranked when it comes to training Pokemon Doctors, Nurses, Breeders, Researchers, Lawyers, Officers, and so much more! There’s something for everyone here!”

“So what you’re saying is I could study as a Pokemon Breeder while you’re studying as a Lawyer,” He started to blush. “Maybe we could even be…study buddies!”

“Okay, that’s enough!” Misty grabbed him by the ear and pulled him back.

“Lawyers have a little overlap with almost all the fields, so that’s certainly possible.” Hailey continued, seeming not to notice Brock’s feelings on the matter.

“Now then, first stop on our whirlwind tour, the Major Arts Building!” She led us there at a half-jog. This building had lots of big windows and the walls were brilliantly painted with murals of legendary pokemon. “Right this way!”

“Here is where most of our Art Majors hang out!” She led us around. “Art History, Painting, Pottery, Color Theory, we got it all!”

“Next is our Literature Building!” This one had smaller windows, but lots of reading nooks. “It’s also connected to the campus library, so you’ll always have something new to read! Of all the programs housed in this building the most famous one is our Linguistics Course! How would you like to study ancient languages to figure out what long dead cultures thought about pokemon?” She teased us.

“And right next door is our History Building! You can understand why its so close to the Literature Building, right?” This one looked almost identical to the Literature Building, except that it had a tower with a bell and canon standing out front. “Ever felt like you were born in the wrong century? Then come on down!”

This continued. She even gave the dorm buildings and campus dining area the same enthusiastic introduction. She never ran out of energy.

“And last, but certainly not least,” She led us through to another part of campus, this one cordoned off by a wall. “Our STEM Section! As you can see it takes up half of the campus space! That just goes to show how important we feel it all is.”

“Uh, miss? What do you mean by stem?” Ash asked.

“STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math!” She explained happily, doing a little pose with each subject. “I’m a Humanities Major so I’m not that involved with it, but its definitely a big hit!”

“This is the Medical Wing, where our Doctors, Nurses, and Breeders are trained!” This building was styled after a hospital, mixed with some bits of a Pokemon Center.

“Do you mind if we take a closer look at the Breeder course?” Brock asked politely.
“Not at all! Let’s take a look!” She led us to a class in an amphitheater. The professor at the head of the class was discussingpokemon population numbers. “Breeder are right up there with Doctors and Nurses in our fair opinion, but unfortunately there just aren’t as many of them. Lots of pokemon suffer from human encroachment and pollution and large populations can be wiped out by disease or natural disasters and it’s thanks to dedicated Breeders that those same pokemon are saved from the brink of extinction!”

“Hello, Hailey, showing new students around?” The professor paused his presentation.

“Yep!” She replied with good cheer. “Just pretend we’re not even here! Go on!”

“Well, as I was saying, currently there are numerous programs dedicated to saving endangered pokemon.” He changed slides and showed an image of a lapras next to a line of data showing diet, natural habitat, behavior patterns, and egg groups. “The Lapras Protection Program is headquartered in the Orange Islands, and Breeders there are working in conjunction with Pokemon Nurses and Officers to protect lapras from poachers. With luck, in ten or twenty years the lapras will no longer be an endangered species.”

I hadn’t realized they were endangered. I thought they were plentiful out on the ocean. Even common.

I opened up my notebook and began taking notes. With luck that could help me narrow down what time I’m actually from.

“Moving right along!” She led us to the next building. “Here we have the Technologies Building! Future inventors and scientists, welcome! New breakthroughs are made every day! This very building is where Dr. Akihabara first got the idea to invent the Teleporter System now used round the world!”

“And here…Here is the moment I’m sure you’ve been waiting for all day!” She drew a deep breath, then threw her arms wide to showcase the next building. “Here is the Pokemon Studies Building!”

“Now, of course, all our other buildings also combine regular studies with pokemon studies, but here is where the real deal is! This is where future Pokemon Professors are made!” She threw both doors open and took us inside. “As you walk in you’ll see our Hall of Fame, Pokemon Professors dating back to the initial founding of the Pokemon League! I’m sure one day your picture will go up right alongside them!”

“Ye-yeah.” I coughed.

“If it has anything to do with pokemon, if you can dream it, you can study it to your heart’s content here!” She continued on like this, leading us to room after room, showing off all the marvels and the students and professors hard at work.

And my hands itched.

Evolution Studies, Move Studies, Biology, Anatomy, Behavioral Studies, Pokemon Technology, I filled page after page with notes.

Our departure was much less dramatic than our arrival. We stopped at a fast food restaurant and treated ourselves to cheeseburgers. I spent most of the meal going back over my notes and letting the others’ talk wash over me.

There’s so much that nobody knows about pokemon yet. I want to learn more and share it with the
rest of the world.

Was this something I wanted before? To study pokemon? To _be_ a Pokemon Professor?

Or did it grow? From the moment Misty asked me what my dream was. During all those times when I was researching online or writing these entries.

I’m in the past without any memories and my best theory is that I _chose_ this for some reason. Logic dictates that I came back in time for a reason, probably to prevent something bad from happening. But my memories? Why erase those? Why didn’t I make that first journal entry clearer? What am I here to do?

It’s not to be a Pokemon Professor, I know that much. But still…

I _want_ to.
The Case

Chapter Notes

This episode was actually one of my favorites when I was a kid. That's one of the best things about writing this story; That nostalgia welling up inside watching your childhood heroes. Let me know what you guys think in the comments!

Brock held my hand as we continued through Celadon City’s districts to continue our journey. It was both embarrassing and regretfully necessary as I kept getting distracted by my notes. After the third time I fell behind and the one time I almost stepped out onto traffic, Brock decided it was safer to keep a hold on me.

The others took it in good humor. They were happy for me, glad that I was making progress on my ‘dream.’

I want to tell them the truth about me. That’s another little desire of mine I’ve been trying to stifle. They’re all so amazing and supportive, such wonderful friends, and I want to tell them the truth about me.

But all I have for proof is this pokedex. Would it be enough?

I admit we’ve seen some crazy things on this journey but time travel might be a bit much. Ash, I think, would believe me without question. That’s just the kind of person he is. Brock and Misty though? Brock’s a little more open minded than Misty but who knows?

I think I’m working myself up to a decision but for now let’s focus on the rest of the day’s events.

“This is the biggest city I’ve ever been to. You can barely even see the sky for all these skyscrapers.” Misty frowned. She was keeping a tight hold on her bag too, maybe worried about pickpockets.

Celadon City is enormous. Frankly, it’s overwhelming. There’s so many people and so much noise, at the further reaches where the Celadon Gym and Celadon University was it wasn’t so bad, but in the heart of the city it was another matter.

I didn’t like it and part of the reason I had my notebook out was to block out the crowds around me. Probably not the smartest thing I’ve ever done.

“No kidding.” Brock had his own book out, but his was a guidebook and unlike me he was careful to keep looking up and keeping track of his surroundings. “This is the HopHopHop district, it’s the last one we need to pass through to leave the city.”

“HopHopHop district?” Even I looked up at that one.

“I’m not joking, that’s really the name.” He sounded like he couldn’t believe it either.

“Arnold!” We were all surprised by an older woman running up and pulling Ash into a firm embrace.
“I’ve been looking everywhere for you! You had me so worried!” She cried, tightening her hold despite Ash’s muffled protests.

“Um, ma’am, I think you, uh,” How to say this politely?

“That’s not your Arnold, that’s our friend, Ash!” Misty settled the matter neatly.

“Hm?” The lady blinked at us curiously and then took a second look at her captive. “EEP!”

“I’m so sorry for the mix-up!” She bowed profusely. “It’s just…you look like my son from behind and I—!” She cut herself off.

“Is your son missing?” Brock asked in concern. Having raised his brothers and siblings I didn’t doubt that this might be a sort of trigger for him.

The lady led us over to a small square and shared her story. Her son, Arnold, had gone missing three days ago. She’d gotten a call from his school that he never showed up for class and he never came home. She filed a report right away but the police hadn’t found anything yet. He was simply gone.

“Could he have run away to become a trainer?” Ash asked her.

“Arnold certainly likes pokemon, but he never talked to me about wanting to become a trainer. I’ve always made it clear that I’d support him in whatever goal he strives towards.” She wiped her eyes. “He didn’t have any problems at school, his grades were good and he had lots of friends, he isn’t a runaway!”

“We believe you.” Brock reassured her.

“He’s not the only child to go missing either.” She sighed deeply. “Over there, see?”

One of the walls was probably used by the community to post job listings or ads for yard sales. But it seemed that everyone had, by silent agreement, agreed to remove their posters to make more room for the new additions.

Over a dozen posters for missing kids.

“All of them over the course of this past week.” She turned away from it, new tears filling her eyes. “Us families of those kids, we’re all so worried doing everything we can to find them, but so far…”

My first thoughts went towards human trafficking. Not as popular as pokemon trafficking, but just as awful. But this many in one district over such a short period of time? That just screamed suspicious circumstances! No operation could remain a secret like that.

As I was thinking this an Officer Jenny pulled up in a motorcycle. With solemn remorse she began putting up another poster.

“Excuse me, Officer Jenny?” Ash’s eyes flashed with determination and he bounded right over. “Do you mind if we ask about these lost kids?”

“I have to get back to the investigation soon, but sure,” Officer Jenny sighed. It must’ve been hard on her having all these children disappearing out from under her watch.

“Do they have anything in common?” He asked as the rest of us joined him.

“Nothing we’ve found so far.” She sighed, leaning against her motorcycle. “They come from
different backgrounds, a couple are immigrants, two are from the countryside, they have different interests, and most of them attended different schools. The only thing they do have in common is that they all live in the HopHopHop district now.”

“Please, miss,” Brock fell to his knees, grasping her hand in his. “Allow us to aid in your investigation!”

“At the moment, I’ll take any help I can get.” She roughly pulled her hand free. “Since you’re not police officers maybe more people will be willing to talk to you. I’m heading to the Pokemon Center now to ask around.”

“Then that’s where we’re going too.” Ash nodded decisively.

“You seem pretty gung-ho about this.” Misty commented as we hurried to the nearest Pokemon Center.

“That lady back there,” He meant the sad mother back in the square. “She reminds me of my mom. I know she’d be real worried if I ever mysteriously vanished, so I want to help her find her son.”

“Plus, some of those kids were so young.” Brock grit his teeth. “If it was my own brothers and sisters missing I’d be using Onyx to tear the city apart to find them.”

I didn’t say anything. I wanted to find whoever was responsible and let Fearow carry them up beyond the reach of the tallest skyscraper. Then let them fall. Kidnappers were right up there with pokemon thieves and murderers in my books.

The Pokemon Center was busy when we got there. Lots of trainers just passing through and even more local trainers hanging out, swapping tips, looking worried.

“Mm,” I frowned. Lots of trainers were looking worried. Including some out of towners who probably hadn’t had the time to learn about any missing kids. Worried trainers in a Pokemon Center meant only one thing.

Sick and injured pokemon.

Officer Jenny was already going from group to group so we decided to see Nurse Joy first. We found her anxiously studying something on her screen. She was so distracted it took one of us clearing our throats before she even noticed we were standing there. “Oh!”

“I’m sorry, I’ve been rather distracted lately.” She got up and closed her laptop. “Is there anything I can help you with?”

“We were wondering if you heard anything about the missing kids.” Ash explained.

“Oh, I keep seeing that on the news.” She slumped a little. “I’m afraid I don’t know anything about them, though I admit I haven’t been paying much attention lately. I’ve been trying to solve my own little mystery.”

“What do you mean?” Misty asked.

“I don’t want to alarm you, but there’s some kind of new illness spreading through the local pokemon.” She informed us. “If at all possible you should keep your pokemon in their pokeballs to avoid getting them infected.”

“Infected?” Ash and Pikachu both looked alarmed.
“It’s not a serious illness, at least not yet.” She quickly reassured them. “But it sets in quickly and no treatment I’ve tried has managed to make any difference.” She looked to Pikachu, perhaps wondering how often he was out of his pokeball.

“Has your pikachu been out since you arrived in this district?” She asked us.

“Yeah. Pikachu doesn’t like going inside his pokeball.” Ash swallowed nervously.

“Then it’s likely he’s already come into contact with the illness and just hasn’t started showing symptoms yet.” She stood up. “Please, I beg you, allow me to examine your pikachu! Perhaps if I’m able to catch the disease in its earliest stages then I’ll be able to narrow down a cause.”

“You really think he might be infected already?” Ash held Pikachu closer.

“At the very least, he’s probably already come into contact with it, as I said.” Her tone softened. “No pokemon has died of it yet and it’s not a painful illness. So please,” She bowed deeply at the waist, as formal as it was possible to be without getting on the floor.

“Piiikaa.” Pikachu licked Ash’s cheek. “Pika, Pikapi.”

“…Alright, you can examine Pikachu.” With Ash’s agreement, we were led into an examination room. It was already occupied by several pokemon but none of them looked to be in any shape to protest intruders.

“The main symptom is extreme fatigue.” Nurse Joy explained. “These pokemon are the worse off, so I’ve been keeping them in here to constantly monitor their vitals.”

There was a charmander on one of the beds, hooked up to an IV and with something on its tail. It was a glass bubble with two tubes. One vented smoke and nitrogen, another fed oxygen. The charmander version of life support.

My hand closed around Char’s pokeball as if that would be enough to ward away any illness.

“I didn’t hear anything about any new disease before we got here. How long has this been going on?” Brock frowned deeply. He reached out to comfort the cubone lying forlorn on one of the beds but then must’ve thought better of it.

“The first cases showed up last week. At first I thought their trainers were just pushing them too hard,” She gently took Pikachu and set him down on a free bed. With rubber gloves she started feeling his cheek pouches. “But their pokemon didn’t recover. They’re tired and listless but have trouble sleeping. And when they can sleep the poor things are plagued with nightmares.”

“Shouldn’t there be some sort of quarantine in place?” I asked, the first time I’d found my voice in a while.

“Once I realized it was illness and not just over-training, I did put up a brief quarantine and examined the pokemon in every way I knew how.” She nodded and then put two cables up to Pikachu’s cheeks. “But no matter how much I looked I wasn’t able to find any trace of illness. I checked for parasites in their fur and bowels, I tested their saliva, blood, and urine. And in every pokemon I’ve examined, I’ve found nothing. All the tests say they should be perfectly healthy! But they’re not.”

“Pii…yaaaaawwnn…” Our eyes locked on Pikachu. “Pika?”

“Pikachu, how do you feel?” Ash leaned down.
“Pika, pika pikachu.” He rubbed his eyes.

“As I thought, he’s in the earliest stages.” Nurse joy took a seat.

“Nurse Joy, could I have a moment of—!” Officer Jenny looked surprised to find us all in here. “What’s wrong?”

“Pikachu, and all these other pokemon, they’re sick.” Ash gently picked up Pikachu and cradled him in his arms.

No physical trace of illness except for the fatigue. Characterized by insomnia and bad dreams? Either there was an angry darkrai about or a psychic pokemon was running amok.

“Um, pardon me but,” I forced myself to clear my throat loudly enough to get everyone’s attention. “If there’s, uh, no physical trace or evidence of bacteria, then the cause must not be physical. Do… uh, do either of you know if there’s either an, uh, an angry darkrai or upset psychic pokemon in this area?”

“A darkrai?” Ash automatically reached for his pokedex but Pikachu protested the movement.

“Darkrai is a legendary pokemon, they’re known to cause bad dreams in other pokemon when they’re upset.” I explained my reasoning. “Psychic pokemon do that too, but um, this isn’t a targeted attack since I doubt all these sick pokemon managed to upset the same psychic.”

“Well, I know there’s no darkrai registered for this area.” Officer Jenny crossed her arms. “I suppose its possible a new one could have moved to the area recently and hasn’t been noticed yet, but as legendaries they’re quite rare, isn’t that right?”

“Right. That’s why…That’s why I think it’s more likely to be a psychic pokemon instead.” Alakazam? No, no! Alakazam wouldn’t!

“What do you mean by saying this isn’t a targeted attack?” Misty asked me.

“It’s…more like a ripple or cascade affect.” How to explain? “Which means that, whatever psychic pokemon may be causing this, it probably doesn’t know.”

“Doesn’t know?” Officer Jenny focused intently on me. “Can you be sure of that? Because if this is some kind of attack then there’s going to be legal trouble for the pokemon and possible trainers involved.”

“I’m sure.” I projected as much confidence as I could. “If it were on purpose it wouldn’t be so widespread.” Actually, come to think of it. “It might…this might be a case of power incontinence. A psychic pokemon might have evolved recently and now it…doesn’t know how to control its new power, so psi waves ripple outward without any control and hits pokemon in the surrounding area.”

“If it’s psi waves causing the trouble,” She snapped her fingers. “Then I’ve got just the thing!”

The thing turned out to be a piece of equipment in her motorcycle. It was some sort of radar with a clunky antennae and a variety of knobs and buttons.

“This is a top of the line Psi Detector.” She held it up proudly. “Made by Sylph Co. They just came out of beta a few months ago. If there’s an angry or out of control psychic around, this will tell us how to find them.”
Top of the line? What kind of range could something like that even have? How accurate was it?

Maybe I’m just being a little too snobby over the technology. I still say it would’ve been faster to just find a nearby trainer with a psychic and ask them to track the psi waves.

“It’s getting something!” Officer Jenny was officially the happiest we’d ever seen her. It probably felt good to be making progress on at least one case.

We followed the radar to one of the taller skyscrapers. The strength of the signal didn’t change when we circled the building so we entered. Officer Jenny led us to the elevator, reasoning that if they passed a floor and the signal started to dip that would give us a better idea on where our target was.

But as we climbed the signal only grew stronger.

“Whoa!” We went all the way to the roof. It was almost like we’d left the city entirely and stumbled upon some country mansion. Yes, we could hear the traffic and crowd way down below, but it seemed much more removed up here.

It reminded me of Pokemon Tech, only even fancier. One of those millionaire’s houses? Ash was psyched to catch the culprit and he sprinted for the door, keeping low and ducking to the side so no one would see him from a window. He pressed his ear to the door and motioned for us to follow him.

There were people inside. I heard them as we drew close. We exchanged looks and I subtly tested the door handle.

“Locked.” I reported to Officer Jenny.

“If they’re involved in any of this I don’t want to give them a chance to hide anything.” She grimaced. “We’ll break the door down.”

Nodding, Ash and Brock positioned themselves at the door. Someone must have taught them proper technique at one point because they both aimed their mule kicks close to the handle and they leaned in with their full body weight. The doors slammed open.

“This is the police! Nobody move!” A flash of light and a growlithe was in the room with us, acting as crowd control.

We must have arrived in the middle of some sort of party. Everyone was dressed up in fancy clothes and jewelry. Some of them were carrying wine glasses.

But the most interesting part was that at the center of the room was a table with a drowzee and a hypno on it.

“I say, what is the meaning of this?” One fancily dressed man walked up to us. He was keeping a close eye on growlithe and had his hands fully visible.

“We are investigating the source of a psychic epidemic in pokemon as well as a serial kidnapper.” Officer Jenny stated brusquely. “We’ve traced powerful psi waves emerging from this point.”

“Psi waves? Do you mean from Drowzee and Hypno? How could they be involved in an epidemic?” He looked aghast at the very notion.

“Excuse me, sir?” I stepped forward. There was a soft brushing across my mind, so gentle it was
almost unnoticeable. Relaxing. “In the nearby Pokemon Center, pokemon by the dozens are suffering from extreme fatigue due to the ambient psi waves produced by your pokemon. Can you tell me if your Hypno recently evolved?”

“My word,” He reached for his pocket then thought better of it when he looked at growlithe. Slowly, making sure not to alarm the fire pokemon, he drew out a handkerchief to mop his brow. “Yes, Hypno evolved from a drowzee just last week.”

“Last week, the same as when the pokemon started getting sick and the kids started vanishing.” Misty cupped her chin thoughtfully.

“Please, feel free to search the whole premises but I swear to you I have nothing to do with the missing children!” He quickly defended himself. “I am Charles B. Rutenheimer, head of the Pokemon Lovers Club.”

“I have reason to believe the epidemic was not caused by malicious intent,” Though I noticed she didn’t mention anything about the kidnapping not being malicious. “If you don’t mind, I would like to search the premises, just as a formality.”

“Of course,” He bowed, first to her and then to her growlithe.

“You kids, wait here and ask a few more questions. I’ll be back in a few minutes.” She told us.

“Yes, Officer Jenny.” We agreed.

That settled, I walked up Drowzee and Hypno. Both of them met my eyes evenly. I dare say they even looked…surprised?

“Hello.” I nodded politely. “My name is Cal.”

“Young miss, you say these psi waves are making pokemon in the city ill?” Mr. Rutenheimer asked me.

“Yeah, even my Pikachu and we only got here today!” Ash grumbled, pulling off his backpack. Pikachu was curled up inside, sleeping but not peacefully. Every now and then he’d spark, which was the only reason Ash wasn’t carrying him directly in his arms.

“My word, how dreadful.” He looked truly sorry to hear it. “Please accept my humblest apologies. I’d never dream of hurting a pokemon intentionally! And if my Hypno has caused such problems it is fully on me as his trainer to take responsibility.”

“No pokemon have died yet so I don’t think there are any, uh, legal consequences just yet.” I coughed awkwardly. I turned back to the pokemon. “Hypno, can you feel the psi energy we’re talking about?”

“Hyyp,” He nodded, turning his pendulum over in his hands.

“And this started after you evolved, right?” I double checked. Another nod.

“Okay, so you and Drowzee don’t have any older psychic pokemon friends to teach this to you.” For a second, I closed my eyes and cleared my mind.

“Does your friend train psychic pokemon? Trainers with psychic pokemon are so rare in this area, I was quite fortunate to be given their eggs as part of a business deal a few years ago.” Clear my mind, turn the volume of my mental voice down low.
“Cal doesn’t have any psychic pokemon but she’s going to be a Pokemon Professor someday so she’s studied all types of pokemon, including psychics.” Misty distracted me.


‘Can you feel what I’m doing? Go ahead and examine it, I don’t mind.’

Two touches, distinct but roughly similar. And gentle.

“Is she speaking with them mind to mind? Is your friend a psychic?” I didn’t know that voice. Another of the rich people probably.

No, focus. Put up a fence, a wall of flame. The two touches almost retreated, thinking I’d changed my mind on their welcome.

‘It’s okay, it won’t hurt you.’ So long as they didn’t try to force their way in. But these two were well raised.

Around the outside of the wall of flame was the sound of wind and nothing else. Inside was another matter.

‘It doesn’t have to be a wall of fire. It can be whatever feels right for you, the important thing is that it keeps your energy contained until you decide to let it out again.’

Where did I learn this? Did Alakazam teach me? If I raised him, did we teach each other?

I opened my eyes.

“Cal, are you okay?” Brock’s hand was on my shoulder. I have no idea how long he’d been standing there without my notice.

“Huh? Yeah, um,” Everyone was staring at me. “I’m fine.”

“You looked like you were in a trance.” Misty’s eyes were as wide as dinner plates.

“Ah, not a trance.” I corrected her gently. “I was just, uh, showing them a mental trick to…to keep their energies from spilling out in waves like that.”

“Everything alright in here?” Officer Jenny came back at a jog. “My detector told me the psi waves just stopped.”

“Hypno didn’t mean to.” I rushed to explain. “There just weren’t any older psychics to teach him how to control it! He, uh, probably would have figured it out himself given a few more weeks but we probably don’t have that kind of time.”

“Mm, well, I’m sure so long as all the pokemon at the Center make a full recovery there won’t be any charges over this.” She sighed. “But that still leaves the case of the missing children unsolved.”

“Actually, I have an idea.” Misty raised her hand. “Cal, Hypno’s psi waves were affecting all the pokemon in the nearby area, right? So is it possible the psi waves could affect certain people too?”

“Err,” Yes. I was one such example myself. I don’t have any psychic ability but I do seem to be sensitive to psychic resonance. Perhaps through long exposure after raising a psychic pokemon?

None of the kids were reported to be psychics and that’s the sort of thing that usually pops up
young. But they didn’t have to have psychic ability if they were sensitive to it. If they didn’t know how to keep their energies contained than their natural psi energy would react with the waves produced by Hypno.

“Yes, that’s possible. But if so, then what happened to them? They didn’t get sick, they just vanished.” I thought aloud.

“Well, what if we got Hypno to do the same thing, but as a targeted attack on just one person? Then we follow that person to lead us to where all the kids are.” Misty grinned.

“That’s…risky.” To say the least. What if Hypno couldn’t undo it?

“Droowzeeee.” A three fingered hand grabbed my wrist.

“Hyyypno.” Hypno held up the pendulum.

Two touches on my mind, similar yet distinct. Assertion. Confidence. Determination. Trying, trying, trying to get through.

We didn’t have a bond. We couldn’t have a real, full conversation mind-to-mind, but these two were trying.

“I’m not afraid.” Still, Misty made it a point to hand her bag and trainer belt to Brock, just in case. The members of the Pokemon Fan Club got a chair for her so she could sit directly in front of Hypno.


Misty’s eyes began to close.

“Hypno, hypno, hypno,” Snap.

“Seel seel. Seel seel.” We startled as Misty began clapping. Before any us could react she was up and running for the door.

“After her!” Officer Jenny shouted.

“Ah, sir, could I borrow Hypno and Drowzee’s pokeballs?” I jogged in place.

“My dear, I’m coming with you!” Mr. Rutenheimer produced two pokeballs and we rushed to chase Misty. She had gone for the stairs, closely followed by Officer Jenny and Ash. Brock, Mr. Rutenheimer, and I opted for the elevator.

We had to chase Misty for a while. It led to some interesting observations. She seemed to have no awareness of herself as a human being, acting totally as a pokemon lost in the big city would. She was trying to find someplace without any humans, dodging traffic and people as she went. We had a few close calls until Officer Jenny radioed her fellow officers to cordon off the streets.

“Is that a…park?” Ash was panting for breath.

“Gladstone Memorial Park, it’s kept as a…good Ho-Oh…a nature reserve for…hah…pokemon!” Mr. Rutenheimer could barely keep up with us.

“People aren’t usually allowed in beyond the approved trails.” Officer Jenny continued for him. “See the fence?”
We saw the fence. It was a big, twelve foot chainlink fence with electricity running through it.

“Misty, stop!” Ash tried to put on a burst of speed to stop her.

“Seel seel. Seel seel.” Misty ran along the fence until she found a drain and crawled through.

“Looks like something cut these.” Brock made a visible effort not to double over as he caught his breath.

The drain bars were cut, rusted away in a manner that made me think of a water pokemon’s attack. Water and fire pokemon working together would be able to get through this.

“Darn it, that means trainers have been sneaking in here again!” Officer Jenny cursed. “I’ll have to get someone to guard this spot until we can get it repaired, but that’s for later. For now, we have to keep following her!”

We lost Misty through the trees but it didn’t take long for us to find clues. We found discarded shoes, a shirt, a hat, backpacks and books, signs of the other kids. We followed them to what must have been the center of the park.

“Magikarp. Magikarp.” A four year old girl was splashing in a puddle, genuinely acting like a magikarp.

“Caaaterpie. Caaaterpie.” A boy around eight or nine was nibbling on a leaf.

“Gloom. Gloom. Gloooom.” There was a ten year old girl acting like a gloom.

“Seel seel. Seel seel.” Misty was sitting by the water, clapping her hands.

“They’re all really acting like pokemon.” Officer Jenny’s jaw hung loose. It only took a moment for her to start laughing and crying in relief. “They’re here! They’re all here! Thank goodness!”

“Sir,” I nudged the gentleman.

“Oh yes, right!” He called out Drowzee and Hypno. “Drowzee, Hypno, please return these children to their right minds.”

“STOP RIGHT THERE!” A voice coming through a megaphone scared us all out of our wits. The kids scattered, running for hiding places as three shapes came circling down from the clouds.

James, Jessie, and Meowth on paragliders.
I wasn’t even surprised. We did all that running around to solve the twin mysteries and of course Team Rocket made their daily appearance. At this point it was just part of the regular routine, with one minor exception.

Ash and I hadn’t forgiven them for their part in the Celadon Gym fire.

“Prepare for troubleaaaAAAAHHHH!” Fearow’s gust threw them back and up.

“And make it dooooAAAAAHHH!” Pidgeott’s Wing Attack bent the frames of their paragliders.

“Now, finish’em with Gust!” Ash and I yelled in sync.

“Wow you two,” Brock stared in shock. “You sure handled that quickly.”

“Yeah, well, they deserve it.” Ash crossed his arms. I didn’t say anything to contradict him.

“Ahem,” Mr. Rutenheimer got our attention. “Drowzee, Hypno, if you would please?”

Of course then we had a dozen or so kids of varying ages suddenly waking up in a place they didn’t recognize, surrounded by strangers. The youngest ones couldn’t even look on Officer Jenny with relief. The little girl who’d thought she was a magikarp had screamed and clawed so fiercely that we couldn’t do anything to soothe her.

Pikachu woke up around then and allowed some of the more nervous kids to cuddle and pet him with good grace. Ash would pick him up for a breather whenever he noticed Pikachu’s cheeks sparking. I let out Cleffa to soothe the magikarp girl and Cleffa turned out to be really popular with the little kids. Then we just had to wait as Officer Jenny radioed in to her station and informed them that all the kids had been found and to please contact their parents.

We got to see the same lady who’d drawn our attention to the problem again. Her reunion with her son Arnold made the headache and wrist-pain worth it.

“I’m glad everything worked out okay.” Misty sighed as we gratefully passed the last child to their relieved parents. I was holding Cleffa now, counting my breaths to avoid tearing up in front of everyone.

“Yeah,”

“Oh Mary, I’m so glad you’re safe!” The mother of the magikarp girl was crying. The dad too, both just holding her even though she was still soaking wet and covered in mud.
None of the kids, Misty included, remembered what happened. They’d all need to be checked out at the hospital since they’d been following a pokemon’s diet as closely as they were capable of, but no one appeared to be seriously sick or hurt. Just extremely hungry.

The parents were crying as much as the kids and…drat!

“Clef?” Cleffa pawed her way up to my shoulder to wipe away my tears.

“I’m fine, I’m fine.” I assured her. Lord Arceus, and now my nose is running.

“Cal?” Ash turned his head.

“Just…a little emotional is all.” My cheeks burned. I turned away to give myself a little more privacy.

“Sometimes happy endings call for a few tears.” Brock spoke wisely.

I wonder if my parents will cry like this when I finally reunite with them.

We got a ride with some police officers back to the Pokemon Center. It was getting kind of late and we figured if we were still in town we might as well try to get a room at the Center.

Should’ve known the lobby would be filled to bursting with overjoyed trainers and their recovered pokemon.

“Nurse Joy, I’m glad that dark cloud has vanished from over your lovely head!” Brock gripped her hands in his.

“Can it!” Misty yanked him back by the ear.

“Yes, all the pokemon have made full recoveries.” Her face fell. “Well, almost all of them anyway.”

“Almost?” My mind jumped to the sick charmander first. It had been on life support when we left.

“Come see,” She invited us back to an observation room. There was only one patient inside, a lone psyduck holding its head and sighing as it stared blankly ahead. “This one is still in pain.”

“Um, ma’am? That’s a…a psyduck. They’re…always like that.” I tried to explain.

“Huh?” Ash wrinkled his nose. From his pocket came the pokedex. “Psyduck: The Water Fowl pokemon. This pokemon suffers from chronic headaches. When these headaches worsened this pokemon can sometimes exhibit strange powers.”

“Mhm,” I nodded along with what the pokedex said. “They have psychic abilities, not as much as a Psychic type but pretty strong.”

“Really? It doesn’t look like much.” Misty walked up to it. “Is there even anything going on behind those eyes?”

“Hm, chronic headaches,” Nurse Joy sighed thoughtfully. “No wonder the regular treatments weren’t working. The whole species suffers like this?”

“The headaches, um, go away after they evolve.” I reassured her.

“Hey!” Misty’s shout caught us all by surprise. Psyduck had shifted and lost its balance, nearly
toppling off the bed if Misty hadn’t dived to catch him. That was thirty pounds of unexpected
pokemon though, and it jostled Misty’s bag, causing an empty pokeball to roll out.

Psyduck saw it and jumped out of Misty’s arms, landing on the floor in front of the pokeball.

It…didn’t stick the landing.

Like watching a train wreck or a skarmary dive, there’s just some things you can’t look away from.
Psyduck catching itself by accident is just one of those things.

“What? No!” Misty grabbed the ball a second too late to prevent it from sealing shut. “I didn’t want
to catch you!”

“But Misty, it is a water pokemon.” Ash held up his pokedex as proof.

“But it…it’s…AGH!” She screamed in frustration.

We barely managed to get a room at the center and I made the mistake of trying to reassure Misty
that Psyduck could be a powerful teammate, especially after evolution. Psyduck itself might not be
well suited to battling but Golduck is another matter.

Now she’s determined to get Psyduck to evolve as quickly as possible. Hopefully she grows to
appreciate Psyduck for who he is.

I have top bunk tonight. Our stay in the city is turning out to be a little longer than we’d planned
on. Not that I have any complaints.

There’s more I could put down about today but I’ll leave it here. I guess I’ll still keep going back
and forth in my head without making a firm decision. Maybe once I have more information I can…

Do something. Choose something.

Tomorrow I have to find time to research amnesia cases caused by pokemon. I have to find out if
this is reversible.

Getting up early to use the computer might be easier if I could manage to wake up before anyone
else.

“Mmph,” The coffee machine in the lobby slowly filled up my cup. I leaned against the counter,
contemplating a brief two-minute nap.

Ding. Coffee was ready.

“Yikes, uh, forget something, Cal?” I mutely stared at Ash. He was…pointing at his head?

Coffee will help. Good, strong coffee.

“Cal, you’ve got a bit of a bedhead going on.” Misty informed me.

Ah, right. I didn’t brush my hair. Did I brush my teeth? I know I went to the bathroom.

Ugh, whatever. My hygiene stuff was at the top of my bag so it was a simple matter to reach back
and grope around for the hairbrush. I don’t care what Jessie of Team Rocket thinks, a plain bob is
just practical. It’s so easy to brush even while I’m drinking coffee!

“Alright, on to my next Gym Battle!” Ash whooped. Pikachu pumped his tiny fist from Ash’s shoulder.

“And I want to get some training in for Psyduck.” Misty gave her belt a quick glare. “How about some practice matches later on?”

“Hope you’re ready to lose!” He sure was cheerful. A deep sleeper, thankfully, but once he was up Ash Ketchum was up. As bright and energetic as the electric mouse on his shoulder.

These sleeping habits are going to kill me.

“So am I going to have to hold your hand to make sure you don’t wander into traffic?” Brock bumped shoulders with me.

“Nooo,” Though I might hold onto his hand anyway since the caffeine has yet to hit me.

“At least Cal didn’t try to use Water Gun on a car.” Ash smirked at Misty.

“I was hypnotized! You can’t mock someone for what they did while hypnotized!” She ground out.

“Mph,” I grabbed Brock’s hand and let him guide me down the street.

“Where is the next gym anyway? Brock?” Dear Palkia and Dialga, cities sure are loud. I don’t want to live in a city. I’ll just get a ranch like Professor Oak and live out in the country, studying pokemon and sleeping in until eight. Maybe even nine.

“Let’s see…” Brock stopped walking so he could flip through his guidebook with both hands. “Next nearest gym is the Fuchsia Gym. It’ll be quite a walk to get there. Good thing we’re stocked up.”

“The Fuchsia Gym, alright! I can’t wait to earn my sixth badge!” He had to make an effort not to start running but thankfully for my sleep deprived brain we were standing at a crosswalk and it wasn’t safe to cross. By time the lights changed his little burst of energy had dulled enough to continue walking.

I grabbed Brock’s hand again. It was just easier than trying to keep track of the cars, the other pedestrians, the shops that sometimes had people standing outside to attract customers, all yelling and honking and competing with each other to be heard.

Trying to block out all the sounds worked better when I had my notebook out. But that was buried somewhat deeper into my bag. I couldn’t get to it unless we stopped for a minute.

“Hm, it’s got to be around here somewhere.” Brock mumbled under his breath.

“Huh? What does?” I tugged on his hand when he didn’t hear me. “What are you looking for?”

“We’re going to be passing through a very special street on our way out of the city.” He grinned to himself, holding his guidebook to make sure I couldn’t see what he was looking at. “We should be there soon. It should be just around the corner now!”

“What?” Ash asked him just as we made that turn.

“Scissors Street.” We read off the big billboard.
It was store after store advertising pokemon breeder gear and accessories. Tools of the trade, books, food stores, salons, they had everything!

“Is this what Breeder Heaven looks like?” Misty wondered aloud.

“I guess that explains why you were excited to get here.” Ash chuckled. “Did you want to look at these shops?”

“Yes, and there’s one in particular I want to find.” He snapped his guidebook shut and continued down the street.

This street didn’t have car access, meaning it was safe for people to walk along at all times of the day. The stores themselves were pretty interesting. I saw some interesting books through a window and lots of places had posters advertising for various Pokemon Breeder Programs, including one for Lapras, I saw.

We passed some salons too. Important destinations for Pokemon Coordinators but I didn’t think they were that popular in Kanto. Some trainers were clearly just here to spoil their pokemon rather than preparing to compete. Those ribbons might look nice but they’d get tangled and knotted if that Beedrill moved its arms too much.

“Let’s see…Hmmm….” Brock kept scouting the area, twisting his neck around to make sure he didn’t miss whichever store he was looking for.

“Wow, look at that!” Misty walked right up to where a big poster was plastered. It featured an ekans and koffing dressed up… I’m not sure how to describe it. There were stars and sheets of fabric in a kind of dress for the ekans and… eye shadow? Some sort of color powder.

“This must be the latest style!” She went gaga over it. “It’s so cute!”

“Cute? Seems stupid to me.” Ash was keeping his voice down, maybe remembering how a similar comment got him preemptively banned from the Celadon gym, but he wasn’t quiet enough to avoid Misty hearing him.

“Hmph! That’s just because you have no fashion sense.” She put her hands on her hips haughtily.

The main thing about the poster that caught my eye was the logo. A pink R in a white bubble with a red background. It had to be a coincidence, right? Team Rocket was a criminal organization dedicated to stealing pokemon. They wouldn’t run a salon. They definitely wouldn’t run a salon and put their symbol down as the logo, right?

“That must be the salon!” Misty sure seemed excited though. The salon she led us to had a long line extending down the street from it.

“Salon de Roquette?” She read off the sign.

“I think that’s Unovan.” I commented idly.

A long time ago people in different regions used to speak different languages. That much is well known. Why everyone suddenly started speaking the same language, no one knows. The most common theory is that it was the work of Mew, wishing to foster better relations between all people. Still, now and then words from those past languages stick around. Some people study those languages so they can learn about ancient civilizations. Since nothing else came to mind I guess that’s not an avenue of research I ever took.
“Oh! I see it!” Brock cried out, taking off down the street. “The store I’ve always dreamed of visiting!”

“Brock, wait up!” We called after him.

This salon was far more humble than Salon de Roquette. The logo was a sleeping vulpix and the name of the store was simply Susie’s. Brock was hovering outside the door, one shaking hand stuck extended over the handle.

“Well, are we going in or not?” Ash pushed past him.

“How does that feel, Chancey?” A young woman, maybe in her early twenties, was massaging a chancey at one of the tables.

“Chancey chan chancey!” Chancey certainly seemed happy with her massage.

Brock was frozen in place, staring at the woman. He didn’t seem to be in his now normal state of infatuation though. This was different. More awkward and nervous.

Behind us, the bell suspended over the door rang. “Chancey darling, I’m here for you!” The man? The person who walked in was a tad androgynous and from the wardrobe and make-up I guessed it was a purposeful affect.

“Chancey!” Chancey bounced off the table, fur gleaming shiny and smooth. She seemed full of energy, even more so than the chancey normally seen at Pokemon Centers.

“You look divine, darling!” Chancey’s trainer welcomed her back and together they exited the store.

“May I help the next customer?” The woman approached us, using a towel to wipe massage oil off her hands.

“Oh, we’re just sorta kinda browsing.” Ash answered uncertainly.

“Oooh, look at this vulpix!” Misty gasped. Behind the curtain was a vulpix fast asleep on a fancy chair, identical to the logo of this salon.

“Vulpix, like those grave pokemon in Unova?” Ash checked with me.

“In Johto.” I corrected.

“This one’s so gorgeous, those flowing tails, that soft and silky fur.” Misty bent down.

“Ah, wait! Please don’t touch her!” The woman started forward.

“Misty!” I grabbed her hands before she could make contact with Vulpix.

“I was just going to pet it.” She pouted.

“I’m sorry, but Vulpix doesn’t like to be touched by strangers.” The woman sighed in relief. Looking down, I noticed Vulpix had one eye cracked open and she didn’t look particularly pleased with how close Misty and I were.

“Oh, sorry.” Misty laughed nervously as we stepped back.

“Susie?” Brock stepped forward, standing straight with his arms locked at his sides. “Mmm-My
name is Brock Harrison and I want to breed like you!” He grimaced, eyes going wide. “I-I mean I want to be a Breeder like you!”

“Oh!” She smiled at him. “I’m flattered you’d choose me as your model, Brock.”

“Is she really that great a Breeder?” Ash asked the question that I was thinking.

“Have you been living under a rock?” Brock rounded on him, making me doubly glad I’d kept my mouth shut. “Susie Hanbourne is the three time champion of the International Pokemon Breeders Contest! She’s also been voted as Pokemon Lovers Monthly’s Top Breeder, four years running!”

“On top of that, this vulpix is a champion in the Contest Arena, single-handedly winning more than a dozen ribbons for her trainer!” He positioned himself over the antsy pokemon. “Take note of that gleaming coat, the silkiness of her tails, the—!” FWOOSH! “The…strength of her…flamethrower.”

“I’m terribly sorry about that, she can be a bit testy around strangers.” Susie bowed apologetically. “Please, let me make it up to you. Why don’t I treat you all to lunch?”

“Lunch?” Ash pounced.

Susie handled tea and snacks for us while Brock dished out some food for Pikachu. “So you’re all traveling together on your pokemon journeys?”

“That’s right.” Ash kept one eye on the snacks even when he was talking.

“Getting to travel with friends must be nice. It was just me and my pokemon during my journey.” She commented. “Do you plan to stay in Celadon city long?”

“Actually we’re planning to leave later today, but Brock really wanted to visit this place and meet you.” Misty smirked. She changed tracks quickly though. “Ooh, by the way, do you know anything about that new trend going around? I saw some of their advertisements, the pokemon looked so cute!”

“New? Oh, you must meant the Salon de Roquette’s signature style.” Her shoulders slumped.

“Their really tacky style.” I looked back to Ash and saw he’d stuffed half a muffin in his mouth.

“They’re part of a new line of thought among stylists, that a pokemon’s outer appearance is best enhanced through props and make up.” Susie explained, not seeming to mind Ash’s poor manners.

“Vul?” Our conversation faltered as Vulpix jumped onto the bench with Pikachu, sniffing curiously at his dish. Pikachu wasn’t stingy with his food and happily offered some. “Vul!”

“Oh wow,” Susie breathed. “I’ve never seen Vulpix eat food that I haven’t prepared myself before!”

“That’s Brock’s personal recipe!” Misty was quick to hype. “He makes the food for all our pokemon! Mine love it a lot more than the store bought brands, that’s for sure!”

Susie laughed, relaxing in her chair. “I see. You know, it was pokemon nutrition that first got me interested in Breeder work.”

“I’m honored that Vulpix likes my food!” Tears streamed down Brock’s face. “I’m not worthy!”

“It’s clear you’re very talented too. If you make all of Pikachu’s meals that certainly explains his
gorgeous coat and shiny cheek pouches.” She continued.

“Yeah, and Pikachu doesn’t need any goofy dresses or make up to look good.” Ash put his hands on his hips, almost elbowing me in the ribs.

“Pikachu looks good now but a few accessories would really make him irresistible.” Misty countered.

Sensing a storm brewing, I shuffled closer to Brock.

“Pikachu’s perfect the way he is! It’s what’s on the inside that counts!” Ash started strong.

“I never said the inside wasn’t important but you should keep the outside in mind too!” And Misty rose to the challenge with aplomb.

“Geez, this is as bad as the bike fight.” Brock muttered, hopefully too low for either of them to hear.

“Bike fight? Do they fight like this often?” Susie leaned in closer, eyes locked onto the train wreck in front of us.

He sighed and nodded, “Unfortunately.”

“If you like their fashion so much why don’t you take Psyduck there?” Ash threw up his arms.

“That’s a great idea!” Misty stood up, calling out Psyduck. Her double-take at his appearance made it clear she was rethinking her stance. She rallied fast, shaking any doubt out of her head.

“We’ll go to that salon and Psyduck will end up even cuter than Pikachu!”

“Pfft, yeah right! We’ll see who gets the last quack!” He had to lean against the table to catch his breath.

“You’ll see!” Misty had made up her mind though. There was no way she’d back down from any kind of challenge from Ash.

I am so glad I didn’t get caught up in that.

“I wonder if I haven’t been giving the outside enough attention.” Susie’s sigh could be heard over the ringing of the doorbell. “Ever since that new salon opened up I’ve been questioning my own methods.”

“Susie, you mustn’t doubt yourself!” Brock stood up, almost knocking his chair to the floor. “You have to stand up for what you believe in! Defend it with all your might!”

“Yeah!” Ash pumped his fist.

“But…How?” She blinked at them.

“That other salon makes a lot of style without substance, right? Then we’ll just have to give them substance with style!” Brock declared.

“Ah, so uh, how can we help?” I furrowed my brows.
We could help by advertising a series of Pokemon Health Lectures for Susie to give. Brock was our hype man, drawing in customers and explaining what each lecture would be about. Ash and I brought the pokemon power, allowing Susie to demonstrate various techniques for the audience.

Different pokemon require different massage techniques. Giving a pikachu a massage should generally focus on the cheek pouches, where they store their electricity. Charmanders should be given back massages, focusing heavily on the shoulders, especially as they get closer to evolving. A bulbasaur carries most of its tension in the neck.

As she walked us through the different techniques she also talked about other things. How to check for parasites and what to do if you found some. A pikachu with lice was a nightmare waiting to happen and anything burrowing into a bulbasaur’s seed could be fatal.

Lots of it was stuff I already knew but I didn’t know I knew. Like with the pokemon facts back at Pokemon Tech, I didn’t know I had this information until I suddenly needed it.

That just makes the odd gaps in my knowledge even more curious though. As far as I can figure only personal memories were taken but there are still things that blindside me but everyone else seems fully aware of.

I didn’t recognize the magazines Brock mentioned, but they’re apparently famous? Maybe they go out of business somewhere between now and whenever I’ll be born.

I’ve gotten off track. I already know where this line of thought leads me. There’s no point speculating because the only way I’ll ever know for sure is to get my memories back and I still don’t know if that’s even possible. I just need ten minutes alone with a computer, is that too much ask?

Susie’s lectures were proving popular. Brock filled every spare inch of space with customers and Susie herself was in her element, calmly demonstrating everything with Ash and I as her volunteers. At the moment I had Cleffa in my arms. She was bubbling over with energy after her turn on the massage table.

“After a battle a pokemon should be given a firm deep muscle massage.” Susie explained, showing the different points of interest on Pikachu as she talked.

“PSYPSPYPSYPSYSYPSYPSY!” Myself and a lot of other people jumped at the sudden caterwauling. People shifted to make room for the extremely distressed psyduck trying to get through.

“Psyduck?” Ash recognized him first. “What’s wrong?”

“PSYPSPYPSYPSY!” He kept crying, clutching his head like it was going to explode.

“Did something happen to Misty?” I knelt down beside him, offering a hand in comfort.

“Psy!” He nodded, tugging on my hand to lead me out the door.

“Let’s go!” Ash barreled past me. He even picked up Psyduck so we wouldn’t have to wait for him to waddle. Behind us I heard the crowd murmuring in concern but I paid them no mind. I had a friend in trouble to save.
Psyduck led us to Salon de Roquette.

Interesting fact: Roquette is Unovan for Rocket.

Second interesting fact: Team Rocket is surprisingly good at face paint.

Misty had been tied to a chair with Team Rocket flanking either side. They’d done something to her clothes, adding accessories, a jacket, and buttons, but it was her face that really caught the eye.

I was suddenly very disappointed that my camera was in my bag back at Susie’s.

“What took you guys so long?” Misty didn’t seem upset, actually managing to joke around despite her position as a hostage.

“Misty…your face…” Ash’s cheeks puffed out in a clear attempt to hold back gales of laughter. Brock beside him didn’t look much better.

“It, um, it’s not…” My kingdom for a camera!

Ash quickly smothered his amusement. “Let Misty go, Team Rocket!”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to wait your turn. We’re not finished with her make-over just yet.” Jessie smirked.

“We’re conducting some important beauty research.” James nodded, flicking one of Misty’s buns.

“Beauty reseach?” Susie’s voice shocked us all. She and Vulpix, along with most of the crowd from her store, had followed us. “All you’re doing is obscuring a pokemon’s natural beauty! A true Pokemon Breeder works with pokemon to bring out the best of them from the inside out!”

“Please, what would some nobody know about Breeding?” James flicked his hair.

Maybe I shouldn’t be so worried about not recognizing Susie after all.

“You don’t know anything about Breeding either!” Meowth snapped, swiping ineffectively at them. “Remember this whole salon business was a scam! We bring in customers and make up dopey fashions for them to pay us hundreds for, then when a trainer brings in a rare pokemon we steal it! Why is that so hard for you to remember?”

“Oh fine, it was nice while it lasted.” Jessie sighed, forlorn. She gave us a wicked smile. “How about a trade then? This twerpy girl for your pikachu?”

“There’s no way we’re letting you take Pikachu!” Pikachu jumped from Ash’s shoulders, ready to fight.

“If it’s a fight you’re after then you’ve got it!” Brock pulled out a pokeball.

“Cleffa,” I let her jump out of my arms, looking as fierce as a baby fairy pokemon possibly could.

“Then come one, come all to Team Rocket’s fabulous new battleground!” James held up a remote. Smoke enveloped the room and the sound of grinding gears filled the air.

When the smoke cleared the salon was gone, replaced with a battleground that gave Team Rocket the high ground and kept Misty well out of reach of any rescue attempts.

Team Rocket themselves were halfway up the stairs, dressed in radically different outfits. James
was in a wine red dress and a wig. Jessie was dressed like a prince. They were both posed in the most dramatic position possible.

Which could only mean one thing.

“Dialga give me patience.” I groaned.
“To protect the world from boring fashions!”
“To dress all peoples with flash and passion!”
“To give your pokemon pretty faces!”
“To extend our style to outer spaces!”
“Jessie!”
“James!”
“Salon de Roquette, when it comes to chic we know what’s right,”
“Surrender to taste or prepare to fight.”

“We’ve really got to fight on this?” Ash asked with a groan.

“Ekans! Koffing! Take center stage!” I should’ve put it together from seeing their poster earlier. A koffing and ekans, paired together even with that ridiculous fashion in the way? I feel kinda dumb for not realizing it sooner.

“Cleffa, use Charm!” My offhand held her pokeball, just in case I needed to call her back.

“Clef-clef-FA!” Cleffa giggled, illusory hearts surrounding her.

“D’aww!” Meowth sighed. Ekans and Koffing’s eyes softened as she danced in place, so eager and excited.

“Geodude, Seismic Toss!” Brock capitalized on the opening I’d made. Geodude swept Ekans up and tossed it back to the ground with ease.

“Ek…Ekaaansss.” It collapsed, too distracted by Cleffa’s charm to try breaking the fall.

“Koffing-cutie, hit them with a Sludge makeover!” James called.

“Koff…” It whimpered, eyes locking onto Cleffa.

I smirked. “Cleffa, Pound!”

“Clef-FA!” She could sound surprisingly fierce when she wanted to. She hit Koffing like a tidal wave, knocking it back onto the stairs. A blunt attack wouldn’t do much damage to Koffing thanks to their rubbery skin but it did bounce it closer to Ekans.

And that was all the opening Ash needed.

“Pikachu, give’em a Thunderbolt!” He yelled.

I braced for the flash. Once I blinked away the spots I checked on the enemy pokemon and Team Rocket, expecting them to either be twitching on the ground or blasting off into the sky.

Ekans and Koffing were unharmed.

“Wha? How?” Ash looked at me with wide eyes.

“See? Our fashions are beautiful and functional!” Jessie held up a saber. “Now Ekans, Koffing,
forget about how cute that cleffa is and attack!"

“Cleffa, dodge!” Charm wouldn’t work again in such quick succession.

“Vulpix,” There was a streak of red positioning itself firmly in front of Cleffa. To my left, Susie appeared.

“Fire Spin.” With one cold utterance the entire world lit aflame. A raging tornado of heat that blew onto Ekans, Koffing, and didn’t stop there. Up the stairs it went.

I had just enough time to fear for Misty’s very life before the Fire Spin stopped, gone as quickly as it had come.

With Team Rocket nowhere in sight.

“Whoa,” I wasn’t sure if it was Ash or me who said it.

“Guys!” Misty shouted, still in the chair at the top of the stairs, unhurt except for some stray ash coloring her hair. “Aren’t you forgetting something? Hurry up and untie me!”

“Psyyyy!” Psyduck burst into tears of joy, waddling up the stairs as quickly as he could.

“And Psyduck, how could you just run away and leave me like that, huh?” Misty stopped him cold.

“Ahh, Misty? Actually, he uh, he’s the one who got us.” I explained.

“He did?” She looked him over again. He was now standing by the chair, fiddling nervously with his hands and looking up at her with a hopeful expression. Finally, her features softened. “Thank you, Psyduck.”

“Cleeeefff,” Cleffa pulled on my pants leg and I kneeled to pick her up.

“You did great today, Cleffa.” I smoothed down her fur. “Your Pound looked even stronger than usual, and I think your Charm has gotten more effective too.”

“Cleffa!” She giggled.

“Everything looks to be wrapping up here, why don’t we go back to Susie’s?” Brock suggested. He’d returned Geodude while I’d been occupied and Ash had untied Misty. She hadn’t returned Psyduck yet, choosing to shower him in affection first.

“The three of you battle well together. Your teamwork was quite impressive.” Susie praised us as we reentered her shop.

“Oh please, you’re making me blush!” Brock laughed a little too loudly. He really did blush at that and coughed into his fist.

“I was impressed by your vulpix.” Misty declared. “That had to be the strongest fire attack I’ve ever seen!”

“Vulpix and I have been partners for years now.” She smiled for a moment before something occurred to her.

“Ahh, uh, Misty?” She was still wearing Team Rocket’s…style. Where was my bag?
I grabbed it and dug for the camera. *Found it!*

“Yeah, Cal?” She turned towards me, unknowing. Before she could react I lifted the camera, aimed, and took the shot.

“Cal, what was that for?” She grimaced, rubbing spots out of her eyes.

“**PFFFFTHAAHAAHAHAAHAAAAA!**” Ash broke down in tears. “Your face! Look at your face!”

“Wha?” Misty turned towards one of the mirrors set up around the salon. I saw the very moment when she fully took in what Team Rocket had done to her.

I snapped another shot.

“Caaaalll…” Her voice was more growl than words.

“I couldn’t resist! I’m only human!” I edged back, trying to keep the smile off my face.

“Give me that camera!”

She chased me around the massage tables, trying to corner me. I happily sprinted and vaulted over the tables while she had to take longer rounding them. It was easy to keep two or three tables between us, even when she angrily ordered Psyduck to help.

Eventually *she* was panting on the floor and *I* was feeling the burn. Psyduck had collapsed some time ago and Susie was giving him a massage. The others were talking, content to watch us playfight.

“You’d better not show that to anyone.” Misty conceded with a sour look.

“I won’t.” I promised.

But I will have it printed and put in an album.

“The four of you are leaving soon, right?” Susie checked in after we’d rested a little. Misty was still wiping her face of all the paint, leaving angry red spots where she’d scrubbed too hard.

“Yeah, we’re off to Fuchsia city for my next Gym Battle!” Ash and Pikachu pumped their fists.

“In that case,” She picked up Vulpix and walked over to Brock. “I have a favor to ask of you.”

“Anything, just name it!” He agreed enthusiastically.

“Please take Vulpix with you on your journey.” She requested.

“What? But isn’t Vulpix your prized partner?” He stumbled over his words.

“That’s true, and I love her dearly,” She nodded, looking down at the pokémon in her arms. “But today has helped me make up my mind. I’m going to do some traveling and further my education as a Pokémon Breeder. But Vulpix gets bored when I’m so focused on studying and I know she misses having battles now and then. So please, take her with you for the time being.” She offered a pokéball in one hand.

“I…I would be honored, Susie.” Brock accepted it solemnly. With shaking hands, he returned Vulpix. “I promise I’ll take good care of her until she’s safely returned to you.”
“Thank you, Brock. And here,” She pulled out a slip of paper. “This is my email so you can get in touch with me.”

“O-Oh! Here, I’ll give you mine too!” He scrambled for something to write with.

We didn’t stay long after that. We had our supplies, Brock had Vulpix, and it was time to get moving. Susie had some packing to do before she left but she saw us off on the road that led out of Celadon city. An actual paved road this time, which was an interesting change of pace.

“I can’t believe the Susie Hanbourne entrusted me with her partner.” Brock lovingly caressed the pokeball in his grasp.

“I can’t believe Cal would take a photo of me with that ridiculous paint!” Misty groused.

“Ah, for prosperity!” A burst of giggles threatened to overtake me. “I won’t show anyone, promise!”

“I can’t believe you actually thought Team Rocket’s fashions were good. Yuck.” Ash blew a raspberry at us.

“A lot happened since we entered Celadon city.” Brock changed pace to walk between Ash and Misty, cutting off the start of another argument.

“The Celadon Gym fire, the missing kids, the sick pokemon, and Susie’s salon, that is a lot.” Misty commented mildly. Behind the others’ backs, Ash and I exchanged glances.

“But now we’re on the road to the Fuchsia Gym!” Ash continued loudly.

“It’ll take us about a week to get there.” Brock finally put Vulpix’s pokeball on his belt.

“That gives us time to get some training in. I’m still determined to get Psyduck to evolve as quickly as possible!” Misty clenched her fists.

“Hm, I’d like to work with Magikarp some more too.” We didn’t pass many bodies of water so I hadn’t gotten to work with him much since we left the coast.

“You know guys, it’s actually getting kinda late.” Brock noticed, head tilted towards the sky. Sure enough, above us the clouds were slowly tinting pinks and oranges. “We might wanna stop and make camp for the night.”

“And dinner!” Ash gasped, positively horrified that a meal was almost late.

We went off to the side of the road and cleared a little area of rocks and twigs. There weren’t many trees so the wood pickings were slim. Ash let his pokemon out first and we all decided to follow his example.

“Everybody, this is Vulpix. She’ll be traveling with us from now on.” Brock handled the introductions. In moments Vulpix was swarmed by curious and eager pokemon.

Fearow flew off to do some hunting. Char helpfully provided her tail as a light for the fire as Brock got cooking. The other pokemon stretched out and played together while we finished getting set up for the night.

I came back from digging the latrine to find Ash at the bottom of a pokemon pile.

“Uh, need any help there?” I stifled the giggles.
“Avenge~ me~.” One forlorn hand reached out to the sky from beneath the pile.

“Everyone, dinner’s ready!” Brock’s voice was like a siren call. All at once the pokemon jumped off Ash and ran to collect their dinner.

“You should’ve gotten a picture of that!” Misty smirked.

“Mm, too bad.” I agreed. Maybe I could start a series. The Funny Shenanigans Series.

“Hey you guys, how come you never let Goldeen or Magikarp out when we camp like this?” Ash sat up facing us.

“Because they’re aquatic pokemon, duh!” Misty rolled her eyes.

“What she means is, they’re the kind of pokemon that, well, can’t be out of the water for long.” I clarified. “At best, it would make them sick. At worse,” I decided to leave that part unsaid.

“Oh,” His eyes were wide under the brim of his cap. “That stinks. I bet they’d love to play with everyone. Next time, we should try to make camp near some water.”

“Yeah, Starmie and Staryu would like that too. Just because they can be out of water doesn’t mean they like it all that much.” Misty sighed and put her hands on her hips.

“Curry’s ready!” Brock called.

The pokemon all had their own bowls of food. I’ll never understand how Brock found the time to blend unique combinations for individual pokemon. They all seemed happy with it though.

Our curry was much the same. Ash liked it extra spicy and Misty preferred hers mild. Brock was somewhere in the middle and I would eat pretty much anything, though I admit the spicier blends upset my stomach a little.

Tonight I got the spicy curry with Ash so half the reason I’m still awake is because of tummy troubles.

I’ve written a lot, haven’t I? I should wrap this up, get some sleep.

Goodnight, Alakazam. I hope you’re as warm and well fed as I am right now.

The next day we continued following the road. Misty initially wanted Psyduck out with us as we walked but the day quickly grew too hot to keep a water pokemon out for long. Over the asphalt we could see lines of heat and there was no breeze to cool us off.

“Man, this heat is the worst.” Ash groaned, fanning himself with his hat before deciding it helped better when he wore it.

“Mmf,” I surrendered to the inevitable and took off my backpack so I could shrug off my jacket. I tied it around my waist and shouldered my bag again.

“Oh, that reminds me,” Brock gasped. “How’s the wrist?”

“Err,” To be honest, I’d mostly forgotten about it. It was still sore but the redness was mostly gone. I’m pretty sure it isn’t infected. “It’s fine.”
“Chan! Chan! Hitmonchan!” Where was that…?

Up the road came a hitmonchan, throwing practice punches left and right as it jogged.

“Wow, a hitmonchan! In person!” Ash grinned, already lifting his pokedex.

“Hitmonchan: The Punchy Pokemon. This pokemon packs an incredibly fast punch.”

“Oh, I just gotta catch it!” He danced in place. “Pikachu, are you ready for this?”

“Pi?” Pikachu stiffened. “Pika pikachu!”

“It’ll be fine! I know you’re strong enough to take on that hitmonchan!” He reassured him. “I’ll even teach you my secret punch if that’ll make you feel better.”

“Since when is Ash a boxing expert?” Misty quipped as Ash began tutoring Pikachu in how to throw a punch.

“That’s…surprisingly good form.” He kept his wrist straight and didn’t make the mistake of tucking his thumb under his fingers.

How many fistfights has Ash gotten into?

“Alright, let’s do this!” Ash belted out his challenge. The hitmonchan had noticed us, more specifically it had noticed Pikachu stepping up to the plate with two tiny fists raised.

“Ah, maybe setting Pikachu against hitmonchan in a, uh, boxing match isn’t the best idea.” I almost covered my eyes.

“It’ll be fine, you’ll see! I’ve taught Pikachu my secret punching technique!” There was a fire in Ash’s eye.

Secret punch or no, small mouse pokemon against big fighting type in a boxing match? Winner is big fighting type, every time.

“Ah, yep, that’s…That’s what I figured.” My shoulders slumped as Pikachu was instantly knocked for a loop.

“Hey now, what’s going on over here?” A man in work out clothes jogged up to us. “Hitmonchan, no sparring without me!”

“Excuse me, sir? Does this hitmonchan belong to you?” Misty asked politely.

“Indeed it does!” He might’ve gone on to say more but a girl jumped out from behind a tree, surprising us all.

“Rebecca? What are you doing here?” Thus identified, she planted her feet firmly in front of the hitmonchan’s trainer.

“Daddy, it’s time to come home.” She stated, hands clenched into fists at her side. “You haven’t been home in weeks and the last time was just so Mom could do your laundry! Come. Home.”

“I’m training to win the P-1 Grand Prix!” He wouldn’t meet her eyes. “I’ll come home after I become the P-1 Champion. C’mon, Hitmonchan.”

“Hitmon,” He and his pokemon left. All the fight seemed to drain out of the girl as he walked
“I’m…sorry you had to see that.” She sighed, turning towards us.

“Please, don’t trouble yourself with our opinions!” In a flash, Brock was at her side, offering a comforting hand and a winning smile. “Only tell us what we can do to help!”

“Help?” She faltered.

“What was he talking about? The Grand Prix thing?” Ash asked.

“It’s a tournament for Fighting type pokemon.” She explained with a deep sigh. “Fighting types are my dad’s favorites and he’s always wanted to win the tournament but lately he’s just been obsessed with it. He doesn’t come home anymore, he quit his job, it’s….It’s just been hard to deal with.”

She looked at us, studying us. She took in our travel worn clothes and our backpacks, the trainer belts at our waists.

“You four are trainers, right? Do any of you have Fighting pokemon?” She asked us.


“Please, I beg you, enter the P-1 Grand Prix!” She bowed deep at the waist. “Enter and defeat my father!”

“Wait. You want me to **beat** your dad?” Ash’s jaw dropped.

“I see,” Brock cupped his chin. “You think that Ash defeating him in this tournament will shock him to his senses so he’ll go home with you.”

“I hope so because I’ve tried just about everything else.” Rebecca sighed, still holding herself in that bow. “Things are so bad at home Mom’s considering a divorce and I don’t want to lose my father over this! I don’t want my little brothers to lose our father over this! So, please?”

“Sure, I’ll enter the tournament and I’ll make sure your dad goes home, even if Primeape and I have to kick him the whole way there!” Ash thumped his fist against his chest.

“Thank you!” She finally looked up, a teary eyed smile beaming up at us.

As it turned out we had two days until the Grand Prix tournament. An extra day in town wasn’t too bad. She invited us to her house for dinner and then we retired to the Pokemon Center for the night. Her family was nice, though her mother looked more than a little stressed by the situation at home. Her younger brothers were eight years old, twins, and didn’t understand why their dad refused to come home.

Frankly, I don’t get it either. He could train for the tournament without abandoning his family like that. I don’t think Brock is taking this very well either. Maybe it reminds him too much of his own family situation. He calls home whenever we stop at a Pokemon Center but I know he has to be worried about his brothers and sisters. Not sure how he feels about his dad.

I don’t understand Mr. Simmons. How he can leave his family behind for this one tournament. It’s not like he had to embark on a journey to see it come true, it’s held in his own hometown!

And his family depended on him. Mrs. Simmons has had to work double shifts to pay for everything and she looked **exhausted**. Brock did most of the cooking and tidying up afterwards just
to let her get some rest.

I don’t get it. I don’t get any of this. If I knew where my family was—!

But I don’t. And I’m doing everything I can to find my way back to them somehow.

Did I choose to leave them? Choose to forget them? Do they think I abandoned them? Did I abandon them?

I don’t know. I don’t know anything.

Tomorrow we’re all going to get some training in and enjoy the free time we unexpectedly have. The day after, Ash takes place in the P-1 Grand Prix.

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Ash was gone when I woke up. I should be used to that, considering I’m usually either last or second to last but today it was strange because both Brock and Misty are still asleep.

Why is it whenever we stop at a Pokemon Center I seem to wake up earlier and faster than the others but when we’re on the road I’m practically a zombie until we’ve had breakfast? Is it the beds?

No, don’t get distracted. If I know Ash he’s likely getting an early start on his training with Primeape. I’ll look for him later. For now, there’s no one using the computers and I might have an hour or so before Brock and Misty wake up.

First things first. Can amnesia cases caused by Psychic pokemon be cured?

The answer is…inconclusive.

Five tabs open dedicated to five separate studies on the subject. The answer to my question seemed to be “It depends”?

Depends on how long it’s been since the memories were taken. How many memories? What kind of pokemon? Potential relationship to said pokemon.

That did help narrow down my search. It seemed most cases were either temporary ones, memories filtering back steadily after initial event, or partial cases where only the memory of the event itself was taken.

In which case, the memories almost never returned.

The articles seem certain that the memories are still there. Inside me but dormant. That explains why I’ve still got my muscle memory and technical knowledge, only losing personal knowledge. But cases like mine usually don’t last this long, not totally. It’s apparently incredibly difficult to erase someone’s entire memory long term.

According to these articles I should be able to remember some things after several months post event. The only other case like mine was caused by a vengeful gallade repeatedly erasing memories prior to the event to ensure its target would never remember the past. The gallade was able to keep this up for several years before a trainer with a xatu realized what was really going on.

Could Alakazam be erasing any newly returned memories?
No, not without me feeling the resonance. We’re bonded and I seem somewhat sensitive to psychic resonance. If Alakazam was repeatedly erasing my memories I’d be able to feel it.

Could he prevent any memories from resurfacing at all?

That’s a tricky question to answer.

A full case of amnesia like mine isn’t supposed to last forever but there might be a way of manually suppressing memories so they never resurface. In fact I’m sure there is.

Now if only I could find some data to back that up.

The studies on the subject aren’t as far along as I’d like. Then again I guess people aren’t exactly lining up to volunteer for this kind of study. Almost all the articles urge anyone who believes they’re suffering from pokemon related amnesia to contact their local Pokemon Center to be put in touch with a Pokemon Professor.

If Sabrina hadn’t been so…unstable I might consider contacting her or her father. As psychics themselves they’d certainly know something on the subject.

“This should not be this hard.” I grumbled at the screen, mocking me with the happy picture of a Mr. Mime.

Nothing. Nothing. Oh look, more nothing! And for a change of pace, nothing!

“Alakazam, if you can hear me, please talk to me!” I projected as loud as I could. Any psychic within a mile had to have heard that.

I waited…Nothing.

“I don’t know what I’m doing, what I’m looking for. All I have is this pokedex and you.” I continued, hoping to somehow get through. “Did you take my memories? Why? And why are we in the past? Please, just tell me SOMETHING!”

…Nothing.

I dropped my face into my hands, pressing the heels of my palms against my eyes to forestall any tears. Alakazam wouldn’t or couldn’t answer, fine. That didn’t change anything.

It doesn’t change anything. I’m still going to keep looking for answers.

I just don’t know how yet.

“Hey, are you almost done with the computer?” I nearly swallowed my tongue at the unexpected arrival of a fellow trainer.

“O-Oh, um, yeah. Sorry!” I quickly closed out all the tabs and stumbled out of the chair. My face was flushed, I could feel it.

“No worries. Sorry if I startled you.” The boy laughed nervously.

He sat down and opened a new tab. I meant to leave, maybe check on my friends since a lot more than an hour had passed, but I caught sight of his search.

How to spot early warning signs of ear infections in pikachu.
“If the insides look red and the pokemon has been scratching more frequently or complains of headaches, those are good signs.” I winced and tried not to berate myself. Why did I always just offer up information like this?

“Huh, that’s just what this page says.” The boy chuckled. He was on a page from the official Pokemon Center website. “I’m Ritchie, by the way.”

“Cal.” I cleared my throat. “So, uh, your pikachu?”

“Yeah, Nurse Joy is taking care of him now.” His expression softened. “I wish I’d realized what the problem was before we left Fuchsia city. By the way, how’d you know? Has one of your pokemon gotten an ear infection too?”

“Erm, no, I just…Study a lot.” I fidgeted, looking around the room. “It’s good to…you know, be prepared if your pokemon get sick.”

“I’m realizing that now.” He laughed, scratching the back of his head. “Are you just passing through town too?”

“Mhm, we’re actually on our way to Fuchsia city.” His eyes actually went wide at that.

“No way! Are you taking the Gym challenge too?” He asked excitedly, reminding me of Ash.

“Ah, no, not me.” I put my hands up between us. “My friend, Ash, is. He’s going to be in the Indigo Plateau Conference at the end of the year.”

“Me too, guess we’ll see each other again there!” He grinned.

“Would Ritchie Farfield please come collect your pokemon?” Nurse Joy’s voice poured in through the speakers.

“Sparky must be all better now!” He jumped up from the computer, forgetting to close out his tabs. “It was nice meeting with you, Cal, but we’ve got to keep moving! We’re heading to the Celadon Gym next!”

“Ah, well, uh, good luck.” I guess he hadn’t heard about the fire yet.

I took another look at his tabs and closed them out for him.

Time to go find Brock and Misty, maybe track down Ash too.

I wonder if Ash knows how to catch the early warning signs of an ear infection.

Chapter End Notes

Cal does some digging and meets a fellow trainer. Still no answers but the search continues!
“Misty? Brock?” I slid the door to our room open slowly.

“Morning, Cal. You’re up early.” Misty yawned, only now sitting up in bed. Brock was already gone.

“It’s, uh, almost ten now.” I informed her. “They stop serving breakfast at ten thirty.”

“Dang, I can’t believe I slept so late!” She tossed the blankets off and rushed to grab her bag. “I’m going to take a quick shower, go save some blueberry muffins for me.”

“Will do.” I stepped aside as she barreled past.

Breakfast muffins gathered, I found a seat at one of the tables and turned my notebook to a clean page. First I started writing down common illnesses for the pokemon we had, then I went into more generalized illnesses that all pokemon were vulnerable to and how they manifested in different types.

“Hard at work already?” Misty dropped into the seat across from me. She hadn’t stopped to dry her hair, but she was dressed and happily took the muffins I’d saved for her.

“Mhm,” I nodded somewhat absently.

“So Ash and Brock are already gone. Any idea where they went?” She asked.

“Ah, Ash was already gone when I woke up. I spent some time on the computers, then when I went to wake you for breakfast Brock was gone.” I fidgeted with my pencil for a second.

“Hmph, figures the only time Ash wakes up early is for training.” She chuckled, shaking her head. “Brock’s probably topping off our supplies or looking for Ash himself. Any plans for today?”

“Um, I was, uh, gonna ask if there’s a good place to train water pokemon nearby.” Magikarp needed the extra attention.

“I bet Nurse Joy would know!” She finished off her muffin and stood up with her tray. “Ready to go?”

“Mhm.” I made a small note to go over illnesses with the others when we had the time.

We found Nurse Joy in the physical therapy room helping a machamp stretch out its legs. “A good place for water pokemon? I’m afraid all this town has is a stream just up past Volki’s place. You
can find Volki’s by following the tree line.”

“Thanks, Nurse Joy.” We both bowed politely and went to grab our things.

“You’re bringing your whole bag?” Misty eyed me curiously. She was only grabbing a few things out of hers.

“Ah, well, never know when you might need it.” I shrugged. Truth be told I didn’t like the idea of not having all my supplies handy. What if one of us or our pokemon got hurt? What if we needed a change of clothes? Got hungry? What if the water wasn’t good for drinking?

I realize it’s probably not that big a deal since we’ll be right next to town but it still felt needlessly risky to leave our supplies behind. I didn’t even like that Misty was leaving most of hers here, despite the fact we’d booked this room for two nights. What if someone came in and stole her supplies? The guys had left their stuff too!

Volki’s place was farmland and easy enough to find. We followed the trees along the edge of the property until we found the stream.

“Not much, is it?” Misty put her hands on her hips.

“Better than nothing.” I knelt down and dipped my hand. The current wasn’t strong at all and the water looked clean.

“True.” She sighed. “Alright, no more wasting time! Psyduck, come on out!”

I decided to move a little downstream before calling out Magikarp. Wouldn’t want to interfere with each other’s training. “Hey there, Magikarp.”

“Karp karp karp magikarp.” He splashed in the water, failing around half in a panic until he realized the current wasn’t strong enough to overwhelm him.

“I figured we could do some one on one training. You okay with that?” Always best to check, right? Magikarp seemed happy.

“Okay.” Checking the trees for peepers, I quickly changed into the full body swimsuit I preferred. I clipped my belt on over it before I waded into the stream, wincing at the chill.

“Karp karp?” Magikarp swam near me, constantly struggling to stay in one place.

“It’s a little chilly for humans, but I’ll be fine.” I assured him. “Now, let’s see how you swim. Can you do a circle around me?”

Well, it wasn’t exactly a circle. Or an oval, really. He gained and lost ground, struggling too hard or not enough.

The stream only came just past my waist at its deepest, so I didn’t have to worry about swimming, but I wondered if I’d looked anything like a magikarp in the water before Misty taught me how to swim.

“Magikarp? Let me try something.” I put my hands on either side of him. “Okay, try to follow the motion of my hands, see if that makes a difference.”

Upstream came furious swears and a loud splash. I did my best to ignore it as I gently eased Magikarp into something a little more graceful. “No, don’t splash. Just relax and go with it. What
do you think? Better or worse?”

“Karp karp,” His voice wavered, nervous and unsure.

“Wanna try a little longer?” He nodded.

“Okay, now I’m going to let go. Keep trying to hold that style I showed you.” Warning given, I released my hold.

Immediately his swim became more frantic but he didn’t devolve completely into the thrashing he’d had before. After a minute he found a rhythm and proceeded to circle me much more smoothly.

“Good, you’re getting it!” I praised.

It’s really quite fascinating. Do all magikarp need to be taught to swim or is this a consequence of being hatched and raised in a tank by that salesman? Do older magikarp teach them or was it something they had to learn on their own? Nature’s way of culling the herd.

“PSYDUCK!” Half furious, half panicked. My hand came down to my belt, wrapping first around Char’s ball before moving to Fearow’s.

“PSYPSYPSYPSYPSY!” Psyduck was being swept downstream.

Bemused, I took three steps to the left and caught him as he floated towards me.

“Thanks, Cal.” Misty ran down the bank to us. “I can’t believe there’s a water pokemon that can’t swim.”

“Ah, well, it’s a good thing he has a good teacher then.” I laughed nervously.

She paused at that, blinking at me like I’d said something unexpected. Had I? She shook it off quickly though and took Psyduck back upstream.

“Karp karp magikarp.” Magikarp looked up at me. He had to push against the current to stay in place but he wasn’t floundering or splashing anywhere near as much as when we first started.

And come to think of it. “Did you get bigger?” I hefted him out of the water, testing the weight. “I could swear you’ve definitely gotten bigger.”

“Hey Cal, want to battle?” I looked up.

At some point Misty had changed into her swimsuit too. Psyduck was bobbing beside her, still clearly uncertain about this ‘water’ thing but doing his best anyway.

“Uh, battle?” I cocked my head to the side.

“Yeah, we’ve been training for a few hours now,” She pointed overhead where the sun had definitely changed positions. “So how about we wrap things up with a battle, my Psyduck versus your Magikarp?”

“Sounds good.” Something inside relaxed.
I think I like battles.

“Alright Magikarp, are you ready?” I checked. Magikarp looked as determined as a magikarp possibly could. I waited for Misty to meet my eyes.

“Magikarp, use Tackle!” Magikarp burst forward. Not especially fast but with remarkable improvement.


To his credit he responded quickly. But not quick enough. Magikarp grazed him, sending him spinning through the water.

“Follow up with Flail!” I didn’t have to stop and wonder if Magikarp already knew that move. He knew Splash and Flail just added more strength. The Tackle was just to get Magikarp close first.

“Psyduck, use Scratch!” Misty ordered. The billed pokemon did his best, raking claws against Magikarp’s scales.

“Hold on, Magikarp! Tackle again!” I encouraged.

“Karp!” He hit Psyduck with all the force he could muster, enduring the Scratches scraping against his scales.

“Now Flail!” Magikarp twisted automatically, bringing his tail to bear.

Right against Psyduck’s head.

My stomach dropped to my knees. A rushing torrent pounded against my mind as Psyduck’s eyes lit aglow.

“Magikarp, *dive!*” Stupid. *Stupid!* I should’ve specified to aim for Psyduck’s body, not his head!

“Yes! Psyduck use Psychic!” Misty had clearly been hoping for this.

My one saving grace is that Psyduck is not a very good psychic. He has no practice, no finesse, and he was slow.

Could Magikarp hear me under the water? One way to find out.

“Tackle and pull him under!” Magikarp’s red scales made him easy to keep track of. As Psyduck began lifting the entire stream, Magikarp burst forward and hit solidly against his stomach. “Flail!”

Psyduck was having a hard time lifting the water while enduring Magikarp’s attacks. Psychic is a good, versatile move but it’s biggest weakness is that it’s not *intuitive*. Psyduck had to *think* about what he wanted it to do and he was both inexperienced and extremely distracted. Misty herself didn’t have much, if any, experience with this move either.

Psyduck went under and Psychic went nuts. He was managing to keep the area of effect from Misty and I but the rest of the stream rocked with new currents and rapids.

“Psyduck, get away from him! Lift him with Psychic!” Misty tried, hands outstretched uselessly.

“Keep Flailing, don’t let him get a grip on you!” I yelled.

“SCRATCH!” Seeing her previous strategy not working, Misty shouted as loud as she could.
The water stopped frothing. Psyduck’s arm raked out, actually cutting through Magikarp’s scales. Blood began to trickle through the water.

“Magikarp?” (Blood drawn) How serious was it? Should I Return him? (Savage growls surrounding me)

“Karp karp!” Focus, I clenched my fist until something stung and my wrist protested.

“If you’re good to go, use Tackle!” Give him the choice. Give him the option.

I forced my aching hand open and rested it on his pokeball. Psyduck’s eyes had stopped glowing. He was thrashing in the water, trying to right himself. Magikarp’s tackle hit him hard enough to fling him into the air.

He landed in the water face first. I waited.

He bobbed to the surface, limp and drifting with the current. Unconscious.

“Psyduck, Return.” Misty’s aggrieved look faded into fond resignation. “Good battle, Cal.”

“Um….Yeah.” I coughed, trying to cover up that I was shaking.

“Karp?” Magikarp looked at me questioningly. I found the strength of will for a smile.

“Good job, Magikarp. You won!” I beamed.

“Magi-Magikarp?” His eyes went wide before he began to flail with joy. “Karp karp, magikarp! Magi-magi-!” His scales began to glow.

“Cal?” Misty gasped. I stared, transfixed. Magikarp was definitely getting bigger.

“Magi-gi-gi…GYAAAAAAAA!” Gyarados roared.

“EEP!” Misty scrambled to shore to avoid being crushed by a flailing tail. Magikarp-Gyarados didn’t seem to notice his evolution right away.

I should’ve moved. I should’ve grabbed his pokeball and Returned him until he calmed down.

Instead, I stood frozen. My legs were cemented to the river bottom. My hands were shaky and useless. Gyarados towered over head.

I couldn’t move.

Arceus, let me speak.

“Gya-Gyarados!” I tried to get his attention. He was really too big for the stream, blocking the flow and causing water to spill out over the banks. His happy flailing was fast turning into a Thrash.

“GYARADOS, STOP!” I screamed, straining my throat in the process.

He froze in place. I was drenched head to toe. It seemed to take him a second to figure out something had changed. The treetops that lined the stream were now at eye level.

Slowly, he craned his neck downward. He tilted his head as he studied me, his trainer.

“You evolved.” My voice cracked. I roughly cleared my throat and tried again, putting on a shaky
smile and a half-hysterical laugh. “You evolved! I’m so proud of you!”

He might have been gigantic and not know his own strength but he was still my pokemon.

I don’t ever want one of my pokemon to feel like I’m afraid of them.

“You were amazing in that battle, Gyarados!” I forced my limbs to move. I took two steps forward and lifted one arm invitingly. He stretched out and lowered his head until I could stroke his crest. His eyes rolled back in pleasure and his happy rumble vibrated through my whole body.

“Look at how big you are now.” Once I pushed the worst of the fear away I found true pride bubbling in my chest. “You won that battle all on your own and look at you now! The others are going to be so excited for you!”

“GYAAAA!” He roared happily.

“Alright, I’m going to Return you now.” I nodded to myself. “I’ll bring you back out later to show everyone else. Sound good?”

For the record, I didn’t fully think that action through. Gyarados’ large body had been acting as a sort of dam for most of the stream. Once he re-entered the pokeball however, the water took the easiest path available.

Directly over me.

“Cal? Cal?” Misty waded in to help. Our battle and Gyarados’ thrashing had churned up a lot of mud. Mud that was now in my hair and mouth!

“Blegh!” I gagged, coming close to throwing up entirely.

“I can’t believe that happened.” Misty’s curiously wavering tone caught my attention. She noticed my look and continued, “I mean, I know you’ve had Magikarp longer than I’ve had Psyduck but you actually got it to evolve! It’s a Gyarados now!”

“Erm, yeah?” She already knew magikarp evolve into gyarados.

“Nothing, it’s nothing.” She pulled me onto the bank.

“…Psyduck did really well.” I said after a long moment of silence.

“I really thought I had you when his psychic abilities activated.” She smirked. “The look on your face!”

“Heh,” I chuckled lightly. “I should’ve warned Magikarp not to aim for the head.”

“You still pulled through. You never lost your cool.” She praised me.

“Ah, well,” I looked away. “I, uh, was panicking on the inside. Especially when Psyduck landed that last Scratch? I was worried Magikarp had been hurt.”

“Oh yeah,” She winced in apology. “I didn’t think Psyduck’s Scratch was that strong.”

“If you keep working with him, then, I’m sure he’ll evolve soon too.” I assured her.

“We’ve still got a long way to go though.” She sighed, but with a soft smile. “I admit I wasn’t sure about training Psyduck at first but if anyone could train that airhead to be a great water pokemon
“Psyduck’s going to be really powerful.” I nodded in agreement.

This time the silence didn’t feel awkward. It was just a pause in the conversation. We sat and waited for our clothes to dry, enjoying the afternoon sun and gentle breeze.

“You know, I really like these girl days, Cal.” Misty said out of nowhere.

“Mhm,” I grinned.

I meant to run my hand through my hair to see how bad the mud was but when I lifted it the palm stung.

Four little crescent shaped cuts sat in the palm of my hand.

We didn’t get any more training done that day. We just sat in comfortable silence. Somehow it never got awkward. When we were dry enough we changed back into our regular clothes and headed back to town.

We got there too late for lunch and two hours before dinner would be served. I told Misty I wanted to work on a report for Professor Oak and she’s decided to do a little walking around. Maybe she’ll find the guys.

My Gyarados evolved after the battle was over. He won. True, the battle against the tentacool wasn’t exactly a loss but back then Magikarp was working with a team and I don’t know if he ever knocked out any of those tentacool. So this was his first win.

He evolved, either from joy or pride. Hard to say for sure. Meanwhile, James’ Magikarp evolved after being kicked and insulted. It evolved from rage. My current theory is that it’s the strength of the emotion, not the emotion itself, that acts as the final trigger for evolution in this species.

Professor Oak doesn’t really study evolution but he could probably forward my findings to someone who does.

I looked at my bank account a few minutes ago.

It’s…a lot better than I remember it being.

I don’t feel too stressed about contributing to our supplies now. I’m thinking of finding a pharmacy or apothecary to top off my first aid kits. The human one is definitely getting more of a work out than the other. I bet I could even afford a super potion now.

I don’t feel like doing that right now though. I don’t really want to go into town and interact with a bunch of people or deal with the crowds. This town’s a lot smaller than Celadon city but I don’t have my friends to buffer me either. I wonder if Misty’s found the guys yet.

I could use the computers and try to do a little more research but…what’s the point? My research on amnesia caused by pokemon has already revealed my case to be unique. There hasn’t been enough research on the topic to tell me anything of use. And I can’t narrow down when I come from without my memories.

And I can’t figure out what my mission is supposed to be without my memories.
So here I am typing away on my pokedex instead. Maybe I could go outside and work with a
different pokemon for a while. Fearow might like the chance to get some hunting in. He likes
Brock’s pokechow just fine but he seems to get a special kind of satisfaction from hunting his own
food, though I know it makes the others kind of uncomfortable to see it.

Might as well let everyone out to meet Gyarados. I can’t remember off the top of my head how
well they do out of water. Let me check that real quick.

Okay, so Gyarados can spend several hours at a time out of water without any ill effects as they
have a minor tertiary typing as Flying. Flying gyarados.

The article on my pokedex claims that most gyarados never learn how to fly or at least never
exhibit the ability. What does it take to teach them, I wonder. Could Fearow teach Gyarados how
to fly?

Outside, a fair distance from any buildings, I brought out my pokemon.

“Char?” Char looked around, tail flicking. She had one clawed hand on her scarf as she checked for
enemies. I saw the very moment where her eyes fell on Gyarados. “Ch-Char!”

“Easy, Char, this is Magikarp! He evolved!” I said soothingly. Gyarados reared majestically,
showing off his beautiful scales and fins.

“Feeaa Fearow.” Fearow sniffed, taking flight to be on level with Gyarados.

“Cleffa clef!” Cleffa had no wariness as she jumped, climbing up Gyarados until she could grab a
barbel. She giggled as Gyarados playfully swung her back and forth.

“Chaar charman.” Char let go of her scarf.

“We’re all becoming pretty powerful.” I put my hands on my hips, ignoring the momentary sting.

“Gyaaa,” Gyarados shifted until he could lay flat out, providing his body as a playground for
Cleffa. The baby pokemon took advantage immediately, cooing over his fins and giggling to
herself.

“Feeaarr,” Fearow whistled, gaining my attention. He flew back and forth between the edge of
town and the Pokemon Center, clearly asking for permission.

“Don’t be out too far past sundown and don’t take anything from the farms around here!” I cupped
my hands over my mouth to yell at him. “Be careful!”

“Fearow!” He took off, creating a burst of wind I felt even on the ground. Maybe I’ll ask him for a
ride tomorrow. I’d like to see all this gorgeous scenery from up high.

Char decided to do some sunbathing, smiling happily as she dozed off. Gyarados was still
entertaining Cleffa.

“Caaall! Caaall!” I jumped, turning to see who was calling me. Ash, Misty, and Brock were
running up to me. Ash and Brock looked like they’d taken a dust bath. Pikachu himself was more
brown than yellow.

“Is that Gyarados? Misty told us he evolved!” Ash stopped beside me, eyes locked on Gyarados.

“He looks good.” Brock complimented me.
“Ah, you think?” I chuckled nervously.

“You know, I’m gonna let everyone out to see Gyarados too!” Ash decided. He took off all his pokeballs and threw them in the air. “C’mon out, everybody!” In a flash there was Bulbasaur, Charmander, Squirtle, Pidgeotto, and Primeape. Pikachu jumped down to join the others, leaving dusty pawprints on Ash’s shoulders.

“We could all let our pokemon out to play.” Brock suggested. He pulled out Onix, Geodude, Zubat, and Vulpix.

“Starmie, Staryu, come out and play!” Misty tossed their pokeballs into the air.


“Psyduck had a hard day of training and battling, so I’m going to let Nurse Joy look him over first.” She waved dismissively. “You should be doing the same thing with Primeape!”

“You and I should probably get cleaned up while we’re at it.” Brock ran a hand through his hair, dislodging some dust.

“Erm, why are you guys so, uh,” I flicked my hand over them.

“We were teaching Primeape how to use Seismic Toss.” Brock grimaced.

Primeape looked fairly dusty too. And more than a little tired.

Ash returned Primeape and he and Brock left to get cleaned up. I stayed outside to keep an eye on the pokemon.

Cleffa got tired of playing after a while and came to nap with me. I let her sleep in my lap while I wrote up a report on Gyarados’ evolution. Fearow got back from hunting. He had some blood on his talons but had already eaten his prey before returning.

The others came back out and since it was getting late we gave everyone their dinner and Returned them. We ate dinner inside the Pokemon Center and spent the last couple of hours before light’s out just telling each other how our days went.

Tomorrow is the P-1 Grand Prix Tournament. That should be pretty interesting. It doesn’t start until noon so I should be able to sleep in a little, if Ash’s excitement doesn’t get the best of him.

Time for bed.
This did not want to be written. It was a slog from start to finish. But it's done, edited, and now it's out there for public consumption. Chew it up, spit it out, then tell me what you think!

The P-1 Grand Prix had a specialized stadium. Registration was the day of and every contestant had to be inspected by Nurse Joy prior to approval to make sure the pokemon were in good shape for the tournament. I got the impression that some Fighting types had hidden injuries for previous tournaments.

Primeape was cleared quickly and Ash was led off to the room the competitors would wait in. Meanwhile the rest of us, including Rebecca, had to buy tickets for seats in the stands.

Sitting down with people on all sides, ribbing and jostling each other, calling for popcorn and hotdogs and drinks, staring down at a darkened stadium ring, something seemed…familiar.

The crowd was all one big noise and it was almost impossible to make out any clear words except from those closest to me.

And yet,

“500 on the meditite!”

“Four to one odds, place your bets! Place your bets!”

“…He’s scared.”

“Cal?” I jumped, accidentally elbowing the man on my right.

“Mm?” I pressed my lips together, focusing on Misty.

She held Pikachu in her lap and she leaned towards me. “Are you okay? You looked upset.” She trailed off, waiting for me to offer an explanation.

“Ah, um,” Think, think, think! “Just…a little disappointed it’s all Kanto raised contestants? I was hoping to see Fighting types from around the world, so, uh…yeah.”

“That’s because this is the Kanto Stage Competition.” Rebecca leaned over Misty to tell us. “Right now, P-1 Grand Prix Tournaments are being held in all the regions and the winners of each one will meet up somewhere to decide who is this year’s Ultimate Grand Prix Champion.”

“O-Oh, I see,” I coughed.

“LADIES AND GENTLEMEEEEEEEN~!” The speakers crackled to life. “WELCOME TO THE EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL P-1 GRAND PRIX TOURNAMENT, KANTO STAGE!”

“It’s starting.” Rebecca sat up straight. In the ring below contestants were being lifted from an
underground chamber. Rebecca’s dad stood out in the crowd but Ash was easy to find. He was searching the whole crowd trying to find us until Misty stood up and waved.

“FOR YOUR VIEWING PLEASURE, ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE,” A spotlight suddenly shown on Rebecca’s dad. “THE FAN FAVORITE TO WIN, ANTHONY LEE AND HIS HITMONCHAN!” Lights came up on a few other contestants. “VERSUS RETURNING CHALLENGERS, INCLUDING LAST YEAR’S FINALIST, GIIIIAANNTT!”

A large man in a trench coat with a hitmonlee standing beside him. His features were obscured by his hat and high collar.

The announcer continued, introducing several other returning challengers with their pokemon. Mostly Machokes and Machamps with them. One person had a Machop with them.

“And finally, a NEW CHALLENGER MAKES HIS P-1 DEBUT! ASH KETCHUM WITH HIS PRRRRIIIIMEAAAAAPPE!” Ash waved to us while Primeape just snorted angrily.

“NOW, LET’S GET READY TO RRRRUUUUUUUUUUMMBLLLLLEEEE!”

Ding ding!

First round, right off the bat, Ash and Primeape against Victor Grunge and his Machop. In some ways it could be a good warm up, Machop being the only non-evolved competitor in the tournament.

But if this guy had competed before then he knew he’d be up against fully evolved pokemon and he entered anyway. He had to be confident in Machop’s strength.

It’s nice to see someone else who doesn’t have such an evolutionary mindset.

Up here with the crowd roaring around us we couldn’t hear what commands the competitors gave their pokemon. We could see Ash’s face though and his expression didn’t inspire confidence. Primeape launched itself forward with a Mega Kick that Machop easily blocked and we all winced as Primeape was given a devastating bombardment of Karate Chop attacks.

“I was afraid of this.” Brock hissed. He saw me looking and continued, “Primeape still isn’t listening to Ash.”

I winced, turning back to the fight. Fighting types are known for having strict codes of honor and plenty of pride. You had to earn their respect and that could sometimes be a hard fought battle.

Ash was gripping the arena rings, saying something we couldn’t make out over the roar of the crowd. Whatever it was it was clear Primeape wasn’t listening as it launched into a Mega Kick again. This time the Machop caught his foot and began winding up for a Seismic Toss.

“Oh no!” Misty gasped beside me, almost squeezing Pikachu too hard. He wisely decided to move from her lap to mine.

“C’mon,” I bit my lip. Primeape went flying. The rules didn’t include loss by Ring Out so that at least wasn’t a concern.

But a bad fall could seriously hurt an—Ash was moving!

Ash dived under Primeape and broke his fall.
If I didn’t have Pikachu’s warm weight on my lap I would’ve jumped to my feet. I did pull my hands away, one going to my belt and the other fisted by my face.

Even the crowd grew hushed, waiting for Ash to pick himself back up again.

He didn’t look hurt, didn’t move like he was anything worse than shaken. He was even smiling at Primeape, probably reassuring him.

He was fine.

But he might not….I can’t figure out how to convey this. If I had done something like that (and realistically, I probably would) then I would’ve been badly bruised. At best. A broken rib would not have been out of the question.

It wasn’t easy to force the tension out of my frame but I managed. I used my left hand to scratch Pikachu under the chin while I kept my right on my trainer belt.

Honestly, I have no idea what calling out one of my pokemon would do but there’s something reassuring of just knowing they’re there. One, two, three, four.

That’s probably a coping mechanism, like a security blanket but less embarrassing. I’d been doing it for as long as I can remember so it’s probably a well established habit from before I lost my memory.

I pulled my focus back to the fight. It was easy to see the change that had come between them. Now Primeape wasn’t wildly attacking without thought of strategy. Ash even whipped up a clever maneuver to use the stadium lights to blind Machop so Primeape could land a devastating Mega Kick.

“Well, would you look at that?” Misty chuckled. “Primeape’s actually listening to Ash now.”

“Mhm,” I nodded, smiling back at her.

They won and kept winning. He made it all the way to the semi finals where he faced a Machamp and Primeape still came up a winner. Ash had a place in the finals.

The next match was between Anthony and the mysterious Giant. Hitmonchan vs. Hitmonlee.

“IT’S A BATTLE FOR THE AGES FOLKS! THE PUNCHING CHAMP VERSUS THE KICKING FIEND! WHO WILL EMERGE VICTORIOUS AND PROCEED TO THE FINALS OF THIS, THE KANTO REGION P-1 GRAND PRIX!” We were on the edge of our seats.

Anthony was a skilled trainer and Hitmonchan was top notch. They’re teamwork was amazing too. They’d been knocking out opponents left and right all day.

I have my suspicions now about what really happened but at the time it came as a total surprise. The fight started off well but suddenly Hitmonchan stopped dodging. Hitmonlee showed no mercy, landing kick after kick until Hitmonchan was battered and bruised.

“Oh no!” Rebecca jumped to her feet, trying to get around me and Misty to reach the aisle. “Stop! Stop the fight!”

“Rebecca!” Misty cried. We both got up to follow her. I had to shove Pikachu into Misty’s arms and wrap my arms around Rebecca’s waist to keep her from climbing into the ring.
“AAANNND TRAINER ANTHONY HAS THROWN IN THE TOWEL! THE WINNER IS GIANT AND HIS HITMONLEE!” The announcer startled us.

“Hiiit….chan!” Hitmonchan tore himself from the arena floor. He limped to the edge of the ring and gratefully slipped between the ropes into Anthony’s arms.

“You did good, Hitmonchan. Took it like a champ.” He was saying, reassuring his pokemon as he checked over the bruises. From the way Hitmonchan flinched I’d wager he had a couple cracked ribs.

“Oh, Daddy.” Rebecca seemed calm enough so I let her go run to her father.

He turned to look at her, squeezing Hitmonchan’s shoulder one last time.

“Rebecca, I have never been so scared in my entire life!” He grabbed her by the shoulders. “Trying to run between two fighting pokemon? You’re lucky your friend stopped you! Hitmonlee wasn’t pulling any punches! You could’ve been seriously hurt!”

“I…I just…” Her eyes welled up with tears. Anthony cut her off, pulling her into a hug and holding her like he…

Like he never wanted to let her go.

Is my dad anything like Anthony? I mean, I’d hate if he was the kind of person to let his work come before his family but…Would he be this worried? This relieved if I was in danger and I came out okay? Anthony had thrown in the towel and sacrificed his dream the very instant his daughter had been put in harm’s way.

“Guys, is everything okay?” Ash and Primeape came running over. Blearily, I heard the announcer state that there would be a brief intermission before the final round.

“Oh, it won’t be for long, twerp.” You might as well have injected my spine with molten lava. It still would’ve been cooler than the burning resentment I felt upon hearing that word.

“No way! You guys? Again?” Ash growled.

‘Giant’ turned out to be Team Rocket. Specifically, it was Jessie sitting on James’ shoulders while wearing a big trench coat. And James was…Well.

“Uh, are you…okay?” I asked hesitantly. His entire face and neck were red. If he’d been doing this since the tournament started, without breaks or anything, then he had to be exhausted.

“Quiet, twerpette!” Jessie leveled an imperious finger at me. “Prepare for trouble!”

“And make it…double.” James panted for air.

“To protect the world from devastation!” Jessie shifted, nearly causing James’ knees to buckle under the pressure.

“To unite all…hah…peoples within our…nation.” He struggled to stay upright.

“To denounce the evils of truth and love!” I exchanged looks with Ash.

“To extend…extend our reach..to…stars,” He swayed, nearly throwing Jessie off balance.

“Jessie!” She sang, still not giving any notice to her friend’s struggles.
“James,” He whimpered.

“Team Rocket, blasting off at the speed of light!” She threw her hands up dramatically.

“Prepare to…prepare to….hhhhnggg!” I winced in sympathy as he dropped to his knees.

“At least finish the motto!” Jessie scoffed, climbing up. “Well, you get the picture! And with this last round we’re going to take that championship belt!”

“Why?” I asked, looking between her and James who was still trying to catch his breath on the floor.

“Because we’re gonna sell it, see? And make a lotta cash, see?” Meowth came from around the ring.

“Uh-huh,” I eyed them suspiciously. “Where did you get the hitmonlee from?”

I absolutely refused to believe they’d had a pokemon like that and never used it against us.

‘Giant’ was supposedly a recurring challenger in this tournament, right? So where was the real one?

“LADIES AND GENTLEMEEEEEN!” The announcer broke up our stand off. “IT IS TIME FOR THE FINAL ROUND OF THIS YEAR’S KANTO REGION P-1 GRAND PRIX! WOULD THE CONTESTANTS PLEASE GO TO THEIR CORNERS?”

Where is the real Giant? We all gathered at Ash’s corner, waiting for the fight to start, but the more I thought about it the more worried I got.

Everyone was focusing on the ring and the match ahead. None of them noticed me stepping back towards the stands.

If I was going to knock someone out and stash them away somewhere, where would I put them? A closet or a bathroom would be ideal. Particularly without a teleporting pokemon.

I checked the handle of the first closet I found. The speakers announced the start of the fight. I was officially on a time limit. I needed to find Hitmonlee’s real trainer before Team Rocket got away with it.

Nothing but cleaning supplies. I shut the door and raced for the bathrooms.

Nothing in the women’s room except for one lady fixing her make up. The men’s room was just around the corner from there. I flung the door open and swept the room with a glance.

One of the stall doors was locked.

“Pardon me, is there a man called Giant in here?” I called.

“MMF! MMF!” The locked stall had muffled sounds coming from it. Whoever it was even managed to kick the door, shaking the whole stall.

“Hold on, I’ll get you out!” Inside the stall was a man in only his underclothes, tied to the toilet with a gag in his mouth. Just one glance at the knots told me I wouldn’t be untying them in good time.

I had my bag on me. I always have my bag on me. Which meant I also had the survival knife
hidden in an inner pouch.

I had to pause as I pulled it out.

I didn’t know I had a knife until I suddenly needed it. It’s not a small knife either. It was easily five inches with a serrated side and a wicked curve. Equally good for cutting plant fibers as for skinning pelts.

“MMF!” Giant gave an impatient grunt, forcing me to push off the realization until later.

“Hold still.” I showed him the knife and then got to work on the gag. It cut easily and from there I turned to the ropes.

“Two crooks and a meowth stole my hitmonlee!” He told me as I sawed at the ropes.

“I know.” I told him flatly. “They’re competing in the finals right now. If we don’t hurry there’s a good chance they’ll escape with your pokemon.”

One rope down, the one connecting him to the toilet. He was a big guy and there wasn’t a whole lot of room for me to wriggle around to his wrists.

We both heard the crowd go wild. I tightened my grip on my knife, sawing faster until he could rip through the ropes himself.

“C’mon!” We ran back to the arena.

Hitmonlee was diving with a flying kick at Primeape. I found Team Rocket and put a hand on Char’s pokeball.

Primeape dodged the kick, grabbing Hitmonlee by the leg and a shoulder. The perfect position for a Seismic Toss. Hitmonlee came flying down hard enough that we felt the vibrations from the top of the stands.

“AND THE WINNER IS ASH KETCHUM AND PRRRIIIIIIIMEAAAAAAPE!” The crowd really went wild then. I couldn’t hear my own thoughts over the roar.

“Those are the guys that stole my pokemon!” Giant snarled beside me, scowling down at Team Rocket.

“Right,” I enlarged Char’s pokeball as we jogged down the stairs.

We…didn’t reach Team Rocket.

Because Team Rocket suddenly spontaneously combusted and flew into the air, through the roof, and blasted off into the distance.

“What…What just happened?” Giant asked beside me.

“Oh, I…Uh…no clue.” I shook my head.

“Cal! There you are!” Misty waved me down. “Where’d you run off to?”

“Oh, um,” I stepped to the side and gestured to Giant. “Found Hitmonlee’s real trainer.”

“Giant!” Anthony’s eyes lit up in recognition. “I didn’t recognize you without your trench coat and hat! I think this is the first time I’ve seen your face!”
“I usually prefer to enter these tournaments anonymously.” Giant tsked. We rounded the ring to Team Rocket’s corner and found his stolen clothes and Hitmonlee’s pokeball.

The MC of the tournament came down and heard our story about Team Rocket, then they moved right along to awarding Ash his P-1 Championship belt and his ticket to enter the Ultimate Grand Prix in three months.

Ash was frowning at the ticket as we left the stadium.

“Something wrong, Ash?” Brock noticed too.

“It’s just…This tournament was really cool and a lot of fun,” He started with a wince. “But it’s being held in Sinnoh this year and that’s way too far to go, compete, and get back in time for the Indigo Conference.”

“Prime!?” Primeape gasped in shock, clutching the championship belt around his waist. “Prime prime prrrimeape?”

“You really want to compete, huh Primeape?” Ash frowned, worried.

“Priiiime,” He nodded sadly, fingering the belt.

Ash stopped walking and looked down at the ticket again. He looked sad and worried but… determined too. He steeled his expression and looked up to Anthony.

“Mr. Simmons,” He clenched his fists. “You’re going to go home now right? And stop neglecting your family?”

“Yes,” Anthony nodded seriously. His eyes darted to Rebecca. “I never should have let the tournament matter more than my family.”

“Oh Daddy,” She hugged him.

“Then, if you really feel that way,” Ash took a deep breath. “Do you still want to compete in the Ultimate Grand Prix?”

“What? Ash, you can’t be serious! Look, the ticket is even printed out with Primeape listed as your competing pokemon!” Misty pointed out.

“Yeah, but it doesn’t have my name.” He held it up for her to see.

“Prime?” Primeape fidgeted nervously.

“It’s not that I want to say goodbye.” Ash reassured him. “But if this is something you really want, to be the strongest Fighting type there is, then I say go for it! I’d never want to stand in the way of someone’s dreams!”

“Lad, no,” He shook his head. “Ash, are you sure about this?”

“I know you’ll take good care of him and train him well. So, would you help my Primeape become the Ultimate Grand Prix Champion?” He bowed formally.

Anthony looked to his daughter first. Asking for permission? After months of neglecting his family over one tournament he seemed hesitant to start training for another.

“So long as you go back to your job and spend more time at home too,” Rebecca nodded with an
indulgent smile. “Primeape, I’ll be counting on you to make sure my dad doesn’t get too obsessed with training again.”

“PRIME!” He waved both fists in the air.

“Then, here.” Ash handed over the ticket and Primeape’s pokeball.

“Goodbye Primeape,” His eyes were dry but his voice was choked. “I’ll always be proud to know I knew a real P-1 Champion!”

We’re on the road to Fuchsia village again. We’re supposed to reach another town tomorrow then another day or two of travel and we’ll reach Fuchsia.

I’ve looked over my whole entry for today, adding in whatever little details I can remember. Today I’ve got two special tidbits about myself to over analyze. Joy.

First: At one point in time I’ve attended a fighting tournament with a meditate competing. A scared one. I’m almost sure that the last voice I remember hearing was Alakazam’s.

Second: I have a survival knife and know how to use it.

It’s not like I’m squeamish about blood or eating pokemon. I know there are vegetarians who will only eat imitation meat and some people who will only eat humane meat and even some people who avoid any and all pokemon products. But I’m not one of them.

I’ll eat whatever’s put in front of me.

In my hypothetical past in a war-torn region, did I have to hunt to survive? Now that I’m aware of that knife I feel like I know how to use it. Like I could list, step by step, the best ways to separate a pokemon’s pelt to get to the meat.

It’s making me both hungry and nauseous.

I’m not about to debate with myself over the ethics of pokemon meat. I don’t think I could ever bring myself to eat a type of pokemon I’ve raised or one that belongs to a trainer. If it ever came down to it I think I’ll just forage for whatever edible plants are around and leave the hunting for a last resort.

Ugh, it’s late. I’ve reburied the knife in that hidden pouch. I’m tempted to take everything out and check for any more surprises but it’s dark and using my pokedex for light is risky. I’ll have to do a full inventory some other time. I should have done it when I first woke up but I was too panicked from waking up with no memory to look too closely beyond the basics.

Time for bed.

I hope that I wasn’t the type to gamble on scared pokemon.

The next day we got a late start. There was no particular reason, it just felt like a lazy day. I even had time to fully wake up before we got on the move and we were walking slowly the whole way there. As a result, it was nearing dusk when we finally hit the outskirts of Gringey City.
There was a noticeable drop in air quality but it was the water that convinced me this wasn’t a good place to be.

“Ick,” I stuck my tongue out. Mistake, as the smell of grimer was thick enough to taste. Would it be possible to convince everyone to just push on out of town instead of staying at the Pokemon Center?

“Where are all the people?” Ash asked.

“Gringey city doesn’t have very many.” Misty had Brock’s guidebook today. “Says here this place is mostly automated factories. The few people who do live here just maintain them.”

“Perfect place for grimer.” I muttered, eyeing the water suspiciously.

“Piii…kaa…” I looked down.

Pikachu was shuffling along on the ground instead of riding Ash’s shoulders. His cheeks were sparking and his tail dragged on the ground. He didn’t even seem to notice we’d stopped at first. He just shuffled along until he nearly collided with Ash’s legs.


I took three big steps back.

“AAAAAAAAAAHHHH!” Ash fell to the side. His hair stuck up in every direction but he didn’t look hurt. “What was…that for?”

“I don’t think he meant to.” I knelt down, making sure to stay out of Pikachu’s reach. “I think Pikachu is sick.”

“What?” Ash pushed himself onto his knees. “Why didn’t you say anything, Pikachu?”

“Piiika pikachuu,” His ears folded back.

“Mm,” Ash’s brows creased. “You didn’t want to slow us down? Is that what you’re saying?” Pikachu nodded.

You know, it’s kind of impressive that Ash can understand his pokemon so well. Especially Pikachu. Almost makes you wonder if he doesn’t have some latent psychic ability.

“We should hurry to the Pokemon Center. Nurse Joy will be able to help.” Brock decided.

“Right,” Ash nodded decisively. Also decisively, he reached out to pull Pikachu into his arms.

I almost fell in the water with how quickly I tried to scramble backwards.

“Okay…that…didn’t work.” Ash smelled a little crispy this time.

“Piii,” Pikachu whined, entire body flinching back like he expected to be punished.

“It’s okay, buddy.” Ash smiled, even as he winced and pulled off his backpack. “I still have those rubber gloves from when we first set out. I’ll just use those.”

“Rubber gloves?” Brock repeated, cocking his head curiously.
“Ash and Pikachu didn’t, um, get along at first, exactly.” I coughed awkwardly.

Hard to believe they’d come this far.

Ash had to be careful as he cradled Pikachu. The shock didn’t reach through his clothes, only activating with skin contact, but Pikachu kept fidgeting like he couldn’t get comfortable.

We rushed to the Pokemon Center.

“Nurse Joy? Hello?” There was no one at the front desk but there was a bell with a sign. Ring for service.

I rang the bell. We waited.

I rang the bell again. Paused.

Ring ring. Ring ring. Ring ring. Ringringringringringringring—!

“Coming~” A tired voice yawned. From out the back came Nurse Joy, rubbing sleep from her eyes and with her apron undone. “Don’t you kids know how late it is?”

“Sorry,” Ash said reflexively. “But my Pikachu is really sick!”

“Oh?” She leaned against the counter, studying Pikachu before she shrugged dismissively. “Just a cold. Nothing to worry about.”

What kind of Pokemon Center is this?

“A cold.” Ash repeated numbly. “Miss…You wouldn’t happen to be the oddball of your family, would you?”

“Ahahahahah~” She yawned again. “Enough joking around. Let’s get your Pikachu situated for the night. Do you mind if I borrow your gloves? I’d have to wake Chancey to get one of the electric-type gurneys.”

“Oh, sure.” Ash set Pikachu on the counter so he could take them off.

“Alright, now then,” She was at least professional as she picked up Pikachu. For all that she was odd for a Pokemon Nurse she at least seemed to know what she was doing.

But that’s when the lights went out.

“On Earth?” She gasped as we were plunged into darkness. Without thinking, my hand found Char’s pokeball.

“Cha-char!” She came out readily, her tail flame providing light to see by.

“A power outage?” Misty reached for my hand.

“Oh…no.” Nurse Joy looked pale in the fire light. She spun on her heel and darted to the back. After a moment’s pause we followed her through the hallways to the Intensive Care Unit.
“Whoa, what happened to all these pokemon?” Ash hissed in sympathy. They were all on life support machines. None of them looked in good shape.

“They’re all rescues from a Pokemon trafficking operation!” Nurse Joy fretted. She put Pikachu down on a free bed and rushed to the first machine, flipping open a panel and pushing the buttons inside. With a low hum the machine came to life and I could see the growlithe inside breathe easier.

She kept talking as she went from machine to machine. “It took hours for us to stabilize these pokemon and their conditions are still fragile! What a time for the power to go out!”

“Isn’t there a backup generator?” I questioned her.

“There was,” She grimaced, standing up from one machine with a spearow inside. “But two days ago I went to inspect it and found that it was choked up with some sort of ooze. It’s still awaiting repairs!”

Ooze?

Grimer.
The Problem

I hate to admit it but Gringey city is the first city I’ve felt really confident in. Not comfortable, with the threat of the grimer and the unknown timer we were working under I couldn’t make myself relax. But I felt confident. I knew what needed to be done to fix this. Get to the police station, speak to Officer Jenny, find Power Plant, either fix the plant itself or find and commandeer another back-up generator for the Pokemon Center. Keep an eye out for grimer and muk.

It was…familiar.

The city was quiet, empty save for our group. Even Pikachu had been left behind with Nurse Joy. I had my hand on Char’s pokeball as we walked and I eyed sewer entrances as we approached and passed them, wary of ambush.

A Psychic type would’ve been really handy here. They could sense and react to violent intent much faster than anything else. A Dark type might’ve been nice too.

“I see the police station!” Misty brightened a little. We hurried down the street and looked through the windows.

There was an Officer Jenny working by flashlight at a breaker box. When she heard us tapping at the window she shined the light in our faces. “Kids?”

“Do you kids need something?” She opened the door to ask us.

“Actually we’re here to ask if you need something, fair Officer Jenny!” Brock fell to one knee, hand over his heart. “We’ve traveled through these dark, lonely streets, drawn by the beacon of your lovely presence to—!”

“Alright, I’ve heard enough!” Misty grabbed him by the ear and yanked. “Save it for when there aren’t lives in danger.”

“Lives in danger? What do you mean?” She grew alarmed.

“We came from the…the Pokemon Center,” I cleared my throat. “There’s lots of pokemon in intensive care but their backup generator is in need of repair and, uh, with this black-out,” I trailed off.

“Right, the pokemon from that rescue operation.” She hissed, adjusting her hat. “I tried getting hold of the people at the Power Plant already but didn’t get a response. I didn’t know the Pokemon Center’s backup generator was on the fritz.”
“We’re heading to the Power Plant next to see what’s going on. Can you give us directions?” Ash asked.

“I appreciate good trainers like you stepping forward.” She smiled at us. “You can actually see the Power Plant from here. See those four big smokestacks? That’s the place.”

“Ah, Officer, ma’am,” I gulped. “Nurse Joy said her generator was, uh, clogged up with ooze and with this area being so, well, polluted.” Focus, deep breath. “Any estimate on the size of the local grimer population?”

She winced, this time pinching the bridge of her nose in pain. “I wish I could give you some reassurance.”

“The grimer population has been getting worrisome lately. There’s been some tentative plans to start cleaning up the area but no real progress yet.” She admitted.

“Wait a sec.” Misty held up her hands. “Grimer? Those are pokémon, right? Why is lots of them being around a problem?”

**Grimer: The Sludge Pokémon. They are born in areas with high concentrations of pollution and will drive out other pokémon and people from what they see as their territory.** Ash had his pokedex out.

“All the pollution here gave rise to a high grimer count, maybe a few muk too.” I grimaced, casting around the streets for anything moving.

*Something rustled the bushes. Heading towards us.*

I pretended not to see it. I still had one hand on Char’s pokeball. “The ooze Nurse Joy talked about was probably the first stage to the grimer attempting to run out the people and pokémon in this area. They’re smart enough to know we like our electricity.”

“That’s a worrisome theory. For our sakes I hope you’re wrong.” Officer Jenny frowned seriously. “Regardless, that doesn’t change what needs to be done now. You kids get to the Power Plant and see if there’s anything that can be done there. I’ll head to the Pokemon Center and prepare to defend it. Stay together and don’t go into the sewers.”

“Right.” From the corner of my eye I saw the bush nearest us rustle.

Carefully, I took Char’s pokeball off my belt and thumbed the release.

“Chaa….chaa~.” Everyone turned towards the bushes in disbelief. Another rustle and then Pikachu stumbled free of the branches, panting for air and still sparking at the cheeks.

“Pikachu, what are you doing here?” Ash gasped and dropped to his knees. “Buddy, you’re sick, you should’ve stayed with Nurse Joy!”

“Chuu chuu! Pika Pikachu, pikapi!” He shook his head hard enough to twist his ears.

“Afraid? What?” Ash blinked, uncomprehending. “Why would you be afraid of us not coming back for you?”

“Pikachu was worried we’d leave him behind?” Misty held a hand over her mouth.

“Pikachu, buddy,” Ash leaned down until Pikachu met his eyes. “That’d never happen. But if it
makes you feel better you can come to the Power Plant with us. Just promise you’ll take it easy, ok?"

“Pikapi!” Pikachu was so overjoyed and relieved that he launched himself forward to give Ash a 10,000 watt hug.

Mentally patting myself on the back for having the good sense to not stand too close, I swept the area with a glance to make sure nothing else was sneaking up on us.

Pikachu kept up gamely and didn’t complain. Nurse Joy still had Ash’s rubber gloves so he had to walk instead of ride. It didn’t take long for us to reach the Power Plant though. Soon it was looming directly overhead.

“Eck, it’s even uglier up close.” I muttered under my breath. Frankly the whole city is ugly. It’s no wonder no one wants to live here.

“What was that, Cal?” Misty looked over her shoulder at me.

“Nnn, nothing.” I smiled bashfully.

“Jeez, this place gives me the creeps.” She complained as we walked inside. “Everything looks abandoned.”

“Mn, too clean.” I shook my head. Not enough dust, all the windows and furniture was intact. There was even a fake potted plant sitting in the corner.

“Where do you think the people are?” Ash walked up to the front desk and looked down as if someone might be crouched under it.

“This map shows the main control room!” Misty pointed to the poster on the wall. “Sound like a good place to start?”

We started down the hallway. It branched off a few times but we ignored the other rooms and facilities. The only light came from the overhead lights occasionally flickering and Pikachu’s cheek pouches. It was tempting to pull Char out for the extra light, particularly as every new corner looked like a prime spot for an ambush, but I restrained myself to thumbing the release on her ball.

“This is just like those horror movies.” Misty whined to herself, reaching out to grab my hand with both of hers. Without thinking, I redirected her grab to my off-hand as I scanned the hall behind us.

“I’m sure it’s not that bad.” Brock forced a laugh.

“Yeah, Misty, do you want me to break out the mask again?” Ash’s smirked impishly.

“Don’t you dare, Ash Ketchum!” Her grip tightened, forcing me to wince. She eased off quickly though.

“You should take this more seriously!” She scolded after she’d calmed down a little and we’d continued. “Nurse Joy, Officer Jenny, and Cal have been treating this as serious since we got here. You could stand to be a…aaahh…” She stiffened, pale skin growing paler under the sparse lighting.

“Misty?” While the boys expressed concern I turned my head so fast I almost got whiplash. Nothing in the direction she was staring.
Behind her? My hand unclipped Char’s ball from my belt.

The hairs on my arms were prickly. I brushed the pokeball and felt a static shock.

That’s not a sign of grimer presence.

“I heard something.” She whimpered, moving closer to me. Immediately I focused more on sound.

“There’s nothing there, Misty.” I could hear Ash rolling his eyes. “Look, it’s okay if you’re a chicken. You and Cal can go wait outside. Me and Brock are brave enough to handle things.”

“Pardon?” I looked over my shoulder, tired of this weird trend of them believing I’m more timid than I really am.

I mean, sure, I get tongue tied talking to people but when have I ever come off as cowardly?

I never got the chance to ask them about that. I was a tad distracted by the shape hovering behind Ash.

I reacted without thought. I dropped Misty’s hand and called out Char even as I lunged forward to pull Ash behind me.

In a flash Char stood between us and the magnemite.

“Oh, thank Mew.” I sighed with relief. “Just a magnemite.”

“And that’s a relief?” Misty asked incredulously. “What if it was this thing that caused the power outage?”

“Magnemite wouldn’t do that, Misty.” I assured her. “They like electricity, feed off it. Turning the power off wouldn’t do them any favors.”

It’s a power plant, why didn’t I consider that there’d be electric pokemon running around? Magnemite and magneton wouldn’t even be bothered by the pollution like animal pokemon would be.

“So what’s it doing here then?” Ash asked me. Now that it was clear the other pokemon wasn’t hostile Char had relaxed, fiddling with her tail as the magnemite flew past her and down to Pikachu.

Pikachu’s cheeks sparked. Magnemite’s faceplate turned red.

“Oh.” I didn’t know if I should laugh or cringe.

“What? What’s it want with Pikachu, Cal?” Ash shook my shoulder. Magnemite was flying in a slow circle around Pikachu, revolving around him the same way electrons revolve around a nucleus.

“It’s blushing like it’s in love or something,” Misty noticed.

“I don’t get it. Magnemite’s an inorganic pokemon, so why is it attracted to Pikachu? They don’t even experience attraction the same way an organic pokemon does.” Brock scratched his head.

“It, uh, must be the electricity.” I coughed awkwardly. “Pikachu’s sick so he keeps sparking, that must be affecting his magnetic field. And a magnetic field is what inorganic electric types look for in potential mates sooo,” I trailed off, waving vaguely at our little Romeo.
“He’s just following Pikachu around like a streaker or something.” Ash crossed his arms.

“Ash, you mean a stalker.” Brock corrected brusquely.

“Chaa…chaa…” Pikachu didn’t seem to fond of the attention. He backed away from Magnemite and leaned up against Ash’s pant leg.

“Hey, cut it out!” Ash took his hat off and used it to fend off Magnemite. “Pikachu doesn’t want to mate with you so stop it!”

A little ruder than I would have done it but Magnemite didn’t seem to take offense. Suit rejected, it backed off into the shadows without a fuss.

Or it might’ve just been trying to get away from the grimer.

“Ugh! What’s that smell?” Everyone clenched their noses shut. The background odor of smog and oil had now been joined by something only a little better than Gloom’s stench. A smell that was somehow slimy and stung every nose hair at the same time.

A sound that can only be described as schlorp came from above.

Vents.

“Char, the vents!” I yelped, backing away from the opening just as the first grimer dropped through. One was followed by two, then three, four, five, Muk.

“Grimer’s grandpa?” Misty gagged.

“That’s a muk!” My voice came out funny with my nose pinched shut.

The wave of grimer surged forward. Too many to fight. Char’s fire would be effective but I didn’t see a water sprinkler system and I couldn’t remember where any exits were.

“Run!” Char laid down cover fire to give us time to bolt. I pulled Misty for the first few steps before I reached behind me with Char’s pokeball to return her.

“Muk: The evolved form of grimer. Use extreme caution around this pokemon as its slimy form contains poison strong enough to kill a human adult.”

“Put your dex away and run!” I clapped my hand on his shoulder and shoved him ahead of me. We could hear them following us, the chills-inducing schlock of their steps.

I was trying to remember alternate exits when we rounded a corner and ran straight into two workers.

“What are you kids doing here?” One of them reached out to steady Brock.

“Hi, I’m Brock, this is Ash, Misty, Cal,” He started.

“No time! Muk incoming!” I shoved Ash and Misty forward again.

“This way! The main control room!” One of the workers took off to lead us there. Every inch of my being cringed at the idea of trapping myself in a room with one exit but I couldn’t leave the others to fend for themselves. I followed everyone in and we slammed the door closed behind us.
“What the heck happened here?” Ash turned, demanding. “This blackout is a disaster and a lot of pokemon are gonna die at the Pokemon Center if we don’t get the power back on!”

“If we could, we would!” One of the workers snapped. “Those grimer have clogged up the seawater intake valve! The water can’t get in, which means we can’t boil it to turn the turbines, which means no power!”

“Then we fight them off.” I steeled my nerves. The grimer outside were quiet. Too quiet. Nervously, I eyed the vents.

“Fire or electricity work best on them, but we might choke ourselves out with a fire.” I grit my teeth.

“So we use electricity then.” Ash clenched his fists. “Pikachu, do you think you’re up for it?”

“Pii...ka!” He gave an effort to stand tall even while he fought to catch his breath. What a time for Pikachu to have a cold!

“Char and Charmander can be kept on standby for now, if one of us draws their attention then—!” SCHLOP!

The door shuddered in place.

SCHLOP! SCHLOP!

Brock and I rushed to reinforce it.

“They’re ramming the door!” He gasped. The lock broke and disengaged on one strong hit and we started moving forward every time they slammed into the door. Ash and Misty did their best to support us.

“Beat the Muk and we should—!” SCHLOP! “Scare the grimer off!” SCHLOP! SCHLOP!

SCHLOP!

We fell forward, half crushed under the door as it finally broke free of its hinges. We fought to our feet as the wave of grimer rushed in. The Muk oozed in through the door at the rear.

“Alright Pikachu, give’em a Thunderbolt!” Ash called. Pikachu answered.

One grimer fell, two, three, but there were plenty still between Pikachu and Muk. I could hear more of them in the hall behind them too.

I brought up Char’s pokeball. Worse came to worse we had better odds of surviving a fire than we did poison. We had water types after all.

But there’d be no returning the power at that point.

The vent was above us and the clang it gave as the covering fell out had my heart juddering in place. For a terrible moment I expected grimer to fall on us from above. I was already mentally writing off the pokemon at the Pokemon Center when I realized it was Magnemite.

“The Magnemite and Magneton!” The workers cheered behind us.

“MaaagneMITE!” “MaaaagneTON!”
I had to shield my eyes. Electricity arced through the air, making every hair on my body stand on end. I relished the static, listening as one by one our enemies fell.

“Our little stalker brought some friends!” Brock laughed beside me. I risked peeking to see the mageneton herding the grimer away. I was happy enough with just that but then the lights flickered on.

“The intake valve must be clear!” One of the workers ran to the monitors, checking everything. “Power’s returning! The whole city should have power again in five minutes!”

“Uh, guys? The magneton didn’t chase away all of them!” Misty warned us.

Muk was still holding his ground.

“Pikachu, you ready to finish this?” Ash stood up, breathing shallowly.

“Pii…kaa…CHUU!” A Thunderbolt with everything Pikachu could put into it slammed directly into Muk. Muk flinched, held in place by the shock, but it didn’t fall like the grimer did.

“That’s some tough sludge.” Ash huffed.

Luckily for us, Magnemite was here to help.

It was enough, barely. Muk fainted under their combined assault just as Pikachu’s power ran out. Ash didn’t waste any time before throwing an empty pokeball. We all watched Muk be pulled inside and waited.

The pokeball rocked back and forth, release button flashing. None of us dared breathe until we heard it click.

“It worked.” He was stunned for a moment. “Yeah! It worked!”

“Great catch, Ash.” I congratulated him.

You know, it’s too bad Magnemite wasn’t interested in sticking around after Pikachu’s magnetic field went back to normal. I would’ve been happy to add it to my team!

Muk was caught, the grimer had run off, and power was soon restored to the city. The workers gave us a lift back to the Pokemon Center where Nurse Joy and Officer Jenny met us. From scattered bits of sludge and some burn marks I could tell they’d had a battle of their own. But the pokemon in the ICU were all safe and recovering from their terrible ordeal.

“We can’t thank you trainers enough for the assistance you gave us today.” Officer Jenny saluted us.

“Well you can start by cleaning up your ocean a little.” Misty put her hands on her hips. “Something needs to be done or those grimer will just come back and start trouble all over again.”

“I think with this latest incident we’ll finally be able to start some clean-up projects around here.” She smirked. “Might even be able to bring this town back to life!”

“There is something you could do for us if you don’t mind.” Ash raised his hand.
“Yes?” Nurse Joy looked at him curiously.

Ash pulled out Muk’s pokeball. “Can you let me use your transporter to send this to Professor Oak, please?”

I’m glad to put Gringey city behind us. Now we’re in the mountain range we need to cross to reach the Fuchsia gym. It’ll probably be a few days before we get there.

We were up most of the night and now we’re trying to catch up on some sleep before we do anything. The sun is up and the others are all asleep.

And, naturally, I can’t get a wink.

In an hour or so the alarm Brock set up will go off and we’ll head out. Four and a half hours of sleep isn’t much but hopefully it’ll be enough to keep everyone’s sleep schedules from getting too messed up.

Everyone else’s sleep schedules anyway. Since I can’t sleep.

At all.

I might be a little upset about that.

Just get through today. And tonight? No typing. Just sleep.

I’m finally feeling kind of tired. Maybe I can get a little sleep after all.

Goodnight, Alakazam. I hope you’re getting more rest than I am.

It has been three days since my last entry. I’ve tried to get a little more rest but I’m not sure I’ve been successful. I end up staring up at the stars for a few hours every night. On average I think I get about five hours of sleep.

It’s official, I have insomnia.

Okay, now seriously, the next time we’re in a town I have to remember to buy some coffee. I can’t begin to count the number of times I’ve written that in this journal and I still haven’t gotten my own supply. I’m not hurting so bad for cash anymore so I have no excuse to not buy myself a supply of coffee!

Note to self: BUY COFFEE!!!!!!

There, maybe I’ll remember this time.

We’re not in a town though. We’re still a way’s off from Fuchsia. Today has been kind of weird. Not too weird compared to our standard for it, but weird enough for me. On the bright side I have some interesting notes for Professor Oak to read the next time we hit a Pokemon Center.

It started this morning as we walked along a forest path.

“We’ve traveled pretty far by now.” Brock hummed thoughtfully as we walked beneath the canopy.
“And seen some wild places!” Misty agreed, laughing. “How much further to Fuchsia city anyway?”

“Let me see,” We paused as Brock pulled out his map. “According to this Fuchsia city is just on the other side of the mountain.”

“Erm,” I looked around at the mountain range we were in. “Which one?”

“I’m not sure.” He grimaced. “Could be this way, or that one,” He traced different paths with his finger. “I think I lost track.” He finally admitted.

My kingdom for a compass.

“Don’t tell me we’re lost again!” Misty slapped her face.

“Alright, I won’t tell you.” Brock inched back from her.

“Four pokemon trainers and none of us can manage to read a map?” She sighed.

“Cal hasn’t tried leading us yet.” Ash pointed out.

“Um, I don’t know how to read a map either.” I knew what the legend was for, I could calculate distance and figuring out east from west was just looking up to see where the sun was. But actually following the map? It wasn’t like it had any useful landmarks on it. The path we were on wasn’t even marked on the map!

How did I get around before I lost my memories? Did I just wander aimlessly? Did I even travel at all? Beyond the trainer gear there’s no reason to think I was on any kind of journey before coming to the past.

“There’s a road not far from here.” Brock tapped the map. “Why don’t we—!” BOOM!

I widened my stance to ride out the earthquake. Trees shuddered in place and the others fell on their hands and knees. When everything was still again they all climbed back to their feet.

“Was that an earthquake?” Misty wondered.

“Earthquakes aren’t usually accompanied by explosions.” I frowned.

“Sounded like it came from the road. Let’s go.” Brock started off, leading us towards what promised to be another weird day.

In moments we stood on the rise above the road, watching a caravan of trucks drive past. I knelt to watch them, taking note of the resources they were carrying. Building materials mostly, heavy duty stuff.

“Are they building something out here?” I asked the others.

“Not that I’m aware of.” Brock shrugged.

Then, pandemonium. Something happened to the trucks up front. Looked like the ground caved in under them. It all happened too fast for the trucks behind them to stop. Metal tore and people screamed as the trucks piled up on top of each other, spilling their materials.

“We gotta help those guys!” Ash gasped, jumping down to the road.
“Holy Darkrai!” I cursed, standing up to follow him. “Ash, wait up! There might be pit traps!”

Team Rocket’s work? These trucks weren’t transporting pokemon though so that wasn’t likely.

“Again and again why!?!” One man climbed out of his truck and fell to the ground, pounding it with his fist as he cried. “Curse you, why!?”


“Okay!? Do I look okay to you, boy?” He had a hardhat on his head, dark shadows under his eyes, and a beard hovering somewhere between scruffy and wild-man in nature.

“Just look!” He cast his arm over the trucks where people, other men and women in hard hats and work clothes, clumsily climbed from the wreckage. “Look at what the diglett have done! How will we ever finish the Gaiva dam now?”

“The wha?” I wrinkled my nose in confusion.

“The Gaiva dam! The Gaiva dam, girl!” He turned on me, bloodshot eyes twitching. “A dam to provide pokemon-free power to Fuchsia city and we’re here to build it but those cursed diglett keep sabotaging the construction!”

He pointed off to one side, away from the road. Little brown nubs pierced the earth, looking around in curiosity before ducking back inside, poking their heads out again a moment later.

Diglett, the mole pokemon.

“Aw, they look so cute!” Misty clasped her hands together.

“CUTE!?” The foreman scowled. “There is nothing cute about those pests! Always and forever they interfere with my work and I won’t have it anymore!” He straightened up, still scowling.

“I have sent out a call to summon every trainer in the area to help relocate these diglett! The company I work for has even authorized a reward! One week’s stay at a spa resort, free of charge!” He showed us a pamphlet for something that reminded me of Nastina’s resort.

He was being surprisingly ethical about it though. He claimed to want to relocate the diglett, not exterminate them and he wanted to build a dam to provide pokemon-free power.

Electricity that, like the power plant in Gringey city, doesn’t require electrical pokemon to operate it. Pokemon-free power is supposed to be cruelty free and, except for when it causes massive pollution like Gringey city, that’s mostly true.

But a dam in the middle of the mountains? The confirmation that Fuchsia city was nearby was nice but what good would a dam do in the mountains? I hadn’t seen any major rivers on Brock’s map.
Okay, just reminding everyone that this will be the last update for a month. I'm taking the month of October to build up my buffer again and try to de-stress. I hope you can all be patient with me!

“Diglett, diglett,” Ash pulled out his pokedex and scanned the pokemon. “Diglett: The Mole Pokemon. These pokemon create intricate tunnel systems and lines of upturned earth mark their paths on the surface.”

“Say,” The foreman leaned forward. “You four are trainers, aren’t you? Have you come to answer my call?” He asked desperately.

Before any of us knew how to answer we heard a car’s engine coming in hot. Over the horizon came a red sports car followed by three city buses, all pulling to a stop just short of the massive truck pileup.

The sports car had a boy with auburn hair standing on the hood with a gaggle of cheerleaders in the seats.

“The answer to your prayers has arrived!” Gary Oak announced, still posing on the hood of his car. He chuckled and continued, “Oh yeah, and I brought some back-up trainers in these buses.”

“Gary?” Ash recognized him too.

“Ash?” Gary looked surprised to see him. “And Cal too, fancy that! And here I thought only expert trainers were invited to the party.”

“I’m Gary Oak,” He jumped down in front of the foreman. “I’m the number one trainer from Pallet town. Ashy-boy is number four.”

“Four!?” Ash seethed. “I’m way better than that!”

“Feh!” He scoffed. “You might be number four from Pallet, but you’re still dead last in my books. Say Cal, changed your mind about joining my fan club yet? You look like you could use a break from traveling with Ashy-boy there.”

“No.” I turned away from him. Guys like that feed on attention. Ash and Gary could have it out if they wanted but in the meantime I decided to answer my personal questions about the dam. I found a worker sitting down near the totaled trucks and walked over.

“U-Um, excuse me?” I cleared my throat nervously, fiddling with my fingers.

“Yeah, kid?” She looked up curiously. “You one of the trainers here to help with our diglett problem?”

“Erm, sorta.” I coughed. “I just…Can I ask about the dam? Please? I just don’t understand how a dam can work without water.”
“There’s plenty of water here kid, just most of it is underground.” She tapped a foot in emphasis. “See, these mountains form a natural bowl. A little extra demolition and it’ll hold water just fine.”

“Then we got the Gaiva dam here.” She gestured over the construction. “Once it’s finished we’ll redirect the Fuchsia river this way with explosives and the dam will make that great, big bowl fill up.”

“But…” I looked around at the forest. “What about all the plants? The pokemon?”

“They’ll be relocated to other mountains in the area. A big survey got done earlier this year to make sure their ecosystems can handle it.” She assured me. “I know, kinda seems odd that we’re building a pokemon-free dam by pushing out the pokemon ‘round here, don’t it?”

“Is Pokemon-free power really so…uh, vital in this area?” I asked my next question.

“I’m no expert on stuff like that.” She shrugged, shaking her brown hair free of her hard hat. “All I know is there ain’t a lot of electric types around here and for some reason the people in the city decided a dam was better than just importing some. Goes right over my head. I’m from Sinnoh.”

“Ah,” I wonder what the cost for housing and feeding enough electric pokemon to power a city was. Could the cost really be so much more than this dam? The relocation efforts for the native pokemon? At what point did this become a sunk cost fallacy?

“I think the other trainers are getting a briefing from the boss, kid. Better get moving.” She nodded over my shoulder. Everyone was gathering around the foreman as he stood on a large crate, a banner with a crossed out diglett fluttered in the air behind him. I jogged over to the others just as he started speaking.

“Trainers! Thank you for taking time from your training to help us in our hour of need!” He began. “This,” He slapped the banner. “Is Diglett! The single greatest parasitic bug pokemon of this century!”

“Diglett aren’t bug pokemon. They’re ground types.” Two voices rang out in stereo.

One of them was mine. The other,

“Feh, so at least someone here knows what’s what.” Was Gary. Thankfully he went back to correcting the foreman, letting me sink back into my friends.

“At eight inches and two pounds, they’re hardly qualified to be the greatest anything of this century.” He smirked.

He went on to give a basic rundown of the species. Their evolution, their habitat, their diet, their common move sets.

“Wow, somebody’s been doing their homework.” Ash sounded oddly impressed.

“Well, somebody had to. It certainly wasn’t going to be you!” Gary sneered.

Ash crumpled, cheeks flushing in embarrassment. I patted his back and Pikachu nuzzled his cheek.

And at Gary? I scowled.
I detest bullies.

Someone gives him a genuine compliment and he cuts them down? I like Professor Oak just fine but his grandson is another matter. What does he have to be so arrogant about?

And he hurts Ash.

I don’t know the full story but there’s definitely history between them. Not just growing up in the same town but something else.

For whatever reason Ash wants, no, he needs Gary to acknowledge him as a trainer. And Gary knows it. And he uses it to cut Ash down at every opportunity. Even when Ash isn’t there!

And Ash? Other than his arrogance I’ve never heard Ash insult Gary before. He’s always worried about catching up to Gary. Worried about falling behind.

Is this what a rivalry is like? It feels toxic.

Ash shouldn’t have to define himself by anyone else’s achievements. No one should.

I don’t know how to tell him that though. I think he’d just be humiliated if I even try. I guess all I can do is praise him for the things he’s good at. Try to build up his self-esteem without letting him get as arrogant as Gary.

I’d better get back to the main story. It’s late and I need to get some sleep tonight.

Gary finished off his tutorial and there was a crash behind us as one of the buses sank through the ground.

“Diglett, diglett, diglett~!” And there were the little perpetrators.

“There they are! Trainers, get them!” The foreman cried.

“Stand back and watch a pro at work!” Gary jumped forward. His cheerleaders lined up behind him.

“Gary doesn’t dig those diglett! Hey no! Gary doesn’t dig those diglett! Let’s go!” They were cheering.

I was embarrassed on their behalf and hoped to any gods willing to hear me that no one had heard him offer me a spot on his squad.

“Alright, let’s show these amateurs how it’s done!” He pulled out a pokeball, polished to a high shine, and gave it a kiss before letting it fly.

Which only made it funnier when it opened a crack and then sealed back shut.

“What the…?” His face twisted in confusion.

“Diglett! Dig dig diglett!” A little diglett popped up from under the pokeball and helpfully brought it back and laid it at Gary’s feet.
“Um, thanks?” He bemusedly accepted his pokeball back.

“Okay, let’s try this again! For real this time!” He shook himself off and chose a different pokeball. His cheerleaders took up their cheer again and this time he kissed the pokeball three times before throwing it.

It opened, there was a flash of light, then it sealed shut again.

The same diglett from before popped up and returned the pokeball.

“Hm,” I twirled my fingers in my hair as I watched trainer after trainer try to summon their pokemon. To no avail.

“Uh, Ash?” He was standing close to Gary so I had to walk over to him. “Could I have a word with you and Pikachu? Just for a moment?”

“Sure, Cal.” He and Pikachu faced me. Gary, I noticed, was looking our way.

“Pikachu, do you know why the other pokemon aren’t coming out to battle?” Without a psychic to translate the next best thing was to get the pokemon that was always out of his pokeball and his trainer to translate.

“Pika pika pikachu pika-pikachu!” He chattered away, throwing in lots of little gestures at the diglett, the forest, and the trainers.

“Mm, Ash?” I checked to see if he’d got all that.

“I think he said the diglett asked the other pokemon not to battle here.” He frowned, equally confused.

“Pika pika chaa!” Pikachu nodded sagely.

“O-kay,” I hummed, thinking. I don’t think it’s ever been fully confirmed how much pokemon can hear from inside their pokeballs. They can hear orders prior to being released but they aren’t supposed to be fully aware of the outside world.

But pokemon communication isn’t strictly verbal. There was something sub-audible that humans couldn’t pick up on. Maybe that’s what they used.

“Do you know why?” I looked back to Pikachu.

“Chuu chu pikachu, pii-ka!” He gestured to the forest and the dam, then made little wiggling motions with his paws.

“They…” Ash’s face scrunched up as he did his best to understand. “Don’t want the dam built because…water?”

“Once the dam is built they intend to flood the valley.” I explained. “It would displace the local pokemon to other mountains and valleys instead.”

“But…this is their home!” Ash looked stricken.

“That’s the way of nature, Ashy-boy.” Gary sauntered over, not even pretending he hadn’t been eavesdropping. “Species get pushed out all the time! The Gaiva company is following all the laws, it’s all legal.”
“It’s still wrong.” Ash ground his teeth. “It’s like the tentacool again!”

“Hopefully we can avoid the fifty-story dugtrio.” I grimaced, imagining the devastation such a pokemon would be capable of.

“The what?” Gary’s eyes went wide.

“You, uh, didn’t hear about the giant tentacruel in Porta Vista?” Hadn’t he been there for that beauty contest? Or had he gone home with the rest of the pallet tour group?

“No, wait,” I held up a hand to forestall anymore questions. “That’s not important right now.” No way would Team Rocket be dumb enough to try the same thing, right?

“There’s gotta be a better way than wrecking these pokemon’s homes.” Ash asserted.

“Mhm,” I nodded. “There is. I talked to a worker earlier. Fuchsia city could just buy some electric pokemon to provide power but they, uh, decided the dam would be cheaper? Or maybe easier to maintain? I have no idea how to calculate the cost but the diglett are making the dam very expensive.” I pointed over to the wrecked supplies.

“Yeah, this project’s a flop.” Gary ran a hand through his hair. “The pokemon won’t battle so it’s a waste of time for me to be here. I’ve got better things to do. Later, losers.”

“Wow, he’s annoying.” I muttered under my breath.

“Girls, wait! Phone numbers? Emails? Addresses? Anything!” Brock came into view, chasing the cheerleading squad as they loaded into the car with Gary. The girl at the wheel waved cheekily as they drove off.

“Well, Brock’s struck out again for umpteenth time.” Misty sighed, holding up her hands in a what can you do motion. “Most of the other trainers are leaving too. What do you guys want to do?”

“Cal says the city can just get some electric pokemon so they don’t need the dam.” Ash told the others.

“Enough electric pokemon to humanely power a city, housing and feeding them, possibly breeding them, that’s not cheap.” Brock frowned, putting away his little notebook.

“Neither is this.” To the side I saw the foreman whacking a mallet against the ground while sobbing.

“Gotta admit, I’m glad the diglett aren’t going to lose their homes.” Misty grinned. “So since we’re not helping the construction company, why don’t we look around and keep going?”

“Kinda late to keep traveling.” Brock looked overhead. “I can’t believe we’ve eaten up most of the day already. Let’s pick a spot to make camp and I’ll whip us up an early dinner.”

“Yeah, that sounds great! And we can do some training too!” Ash whooped.

We found a spot out of the way of the construction effort. Misty left to dig a latrine and came back at a dead sprint to tell us about the hot spring she found. The guys seemed excited about it too, though not to the same extent. We decided to check it out after we’d eaten.

A couple hours of letting our pokemon run around and calling it ‘training’ we had dinner and changed into swimsuits for the hot spring. I left the one-piece crumpled at the bottom of my bag,
donning my wet-suit instead.

“This is nice.” I sighed, relaxing into the water. It was hot without being uncomfortable, easing knots of tension in my back and shoulders.

“You said it.” Misty lounged beside me.

Up above the sky turned to pinks and reds, fading to shades of purple and finally black as the stars came out. None of us moved and we didn’t talk much. It was just a peaceful kind of night.

I would’ve been content if the day had ended there.

“Diglett, diglett, diglett~! Diglett, diglett, diglett~!” A little line of mole heads paraded past, carrying cuttings from some trees and bushes.

“What do you think they’re doing?” Ash stood up, shedding water as he went. He didn’t wait for an answer before climbing out and grabbing his clothes. With a resigned huff I got up and started putting my shoes back on.

Another benefit to a wet-suit, I don’t need to change back into normal clothes to be appropriate.

We watched them thread through the trees, choosing new cuttings and even cutting through the construction site. I noticed the foreman following us but I only readjusted my bag strap and continued on.

Over a small peak came a wondrous sight. Terraces of saplings and sprouts maintained by dugtrio and diglett.

“Wow,” As the others murmured their appreciation I dug through my bag for my camera. I really hope these come out well. It’s a full moon and clear skies so hopefully they’ll be okay? Maybe I can come back in the morning to take a few more shots just in case.

“This is fascinating!” After I finished taking pictures I pulled out my notebook. The poor lighting did me no favors but I had to get this down.

A colony of dugtrio and their pre-evolution diglett have engaged in what appears to be terrace farming with a focus on root vegetables and oak trees. Known staples of their diet. The dugtrio till the earth while the diglett collect cuttings of their preferred food for planting. They move in near sync, leading me to believe this is a behavior that has gone on for generations. Older teaching the younger perhaps? It is too well organized to be a manifestation of instinct.

I am unable to pick out a leader among them just yet due to poor lighting. These pokemon are weakened by heat and sunlight so I’m not surprised they get the majority of their work done in the evenings. I see a creek at the far end of the valley but no irrigation system, primitive or otherwise. How do they water their crops?

They are planting oak trees primarily—

“Cal, are you listening?” My hand jolted over the paper. Good thing I write in pencil.

“Err, sorry. What did you say?” I smiled awkwardly, fiddling with the pencil in my hands.

“The foreman said he’s going to stop construction!” Ash beamed, not seeming mad for my inattention.
“That’s great!” I grinned back.

“If you think that’s great then wait til you get a load of this!” Meowth’s voice came from the tree tops.

Team Rocket jumped from the branches, landing in awkward seeming poses.

“Prepare for trouble!”
“And make it double!”
“To protect the world from devastation!”
“To unite all peoples within our nation!”
“To denounce the beauty of truth and love!”
“To extend our reach to the stars above!”
“Jessie!”
“James!”
“Meowth, give it a rest.” I stared at the sudden ending.

“We’ve got a surprise for you twerps!” Jessie recovered with a cruel smirk as she played with her pokeball. “Allow me to present, for the first time anywhere, Arbok!”

I dropped my notebook and pencil, smoothing into a battle stance as Arbok took the field.

“And in his big debut,” I got a sickening feeling in my gut watching James’ sneer. “Weezing!”

“We can handle this. Right, Pikachu?” Ash didn’t falter, though I saw him scanning both pokemon with his pokedex.

“You’re not fighting alone.” I chose Char.

“Pikachu, Thunderbolt!” Ash jabbed his hand forward like he was the one launching the attack.

“Arbok, dive underground!” Jessie used Eka—Arbok’s rarely seen Dig ability.

“Weezing, follow him!” I bit my tongue on a curse.

Wait…Underground. In Diglett territory.

Once the thought had a moment to process I straightened out of my battle stance. Already I could hear the diglett’s song, now joined by the dugtrio.

“Cal?” Ash sent me a worried look.

I held up my hand, showing three fingers. Slowly, I bent one down. Then another.

My timing was a little off. Arbok and Weezing were shoved back out of the hole before I got the final finger down.

“Never invade a diglett’s tunnel.” I nodded sagely.

“Diglett dig, diglett dig,” “Trio trio trio.” “Diglett dig, diglett dig,” “Trio trio trio.”

A wave of earth was pushed up by the colony. They swept up Team Rocket, pokemon and all, and dragged them to the dam. Wordlessly, we watched as they crashed into it and hundreds of pounds of steel came crashing down.

“Think they’re okay?” Ash winced.
“Probably?” Brock shrugged, sounding just as uncertain. Okay or not I don’t really care.

“Fight’s over, Char.” I smiled at my charmander as I returned her. Here and there I saw little trails of upturned earth as the colony went back to their farming.

It’s morning now and I’m back at the diglett farm. We’ll be moving on soon but I wanted some daylight pictures of the terraces before we left. The diglett and dugtrio aren’t working the land anymore though. They don’t like working in direct sunlight for long. They’re probably asleep in their dens by now.

I’ve got the pictures. With the description of the former Gaiva dam construction site I’m sure Professor Oak will be able to find this place if he ever wants to. Though maybe a Professor who specializes in pokemon behavior would be more interested.

I don’t want to keep the others waiting for long.

“Diglett?” I almost dropped my pokedex as a curious head popped out of the ground by my feet.

“Hello there.” I knelt down so I wouldn’t seem quite so big and intimidating. “I’m sorry, am I disturbing you?”

“Dig? Diglett!” It sounded happy enough, snorting adorably.

“Cal! You ready?”

I managed to drop my pokedex into my bag before Ash got too close. I don’t think he saw anything but the fact my pokedex is sitting at the top of my bag is nerve wracking. All anyone has to do is open the zipper and they’ll see it.

Would it really be so terrible to let them see? I mean, the worst they could do is just not believe me.

Or they’ll think I’m crazy. Or just making stuff up for attention. They might even be offended by me keeping it a secret in the first place.

Ash would believe me. I just know he would, the same way I know the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. That’s the way life is. Birds fly, bugs crawl, water flows downhill, and Ash would believe me.

Pikachu would believe me too I think. He’d trust me so long as Ash trusts me, even if he doesn’t understand.

Brock and Misty? Well…I don’t know. I think I might have to convince them. Show them the pokedex.

But there are no time stamps on any of the articles. Besides the articles of Porygon there’s no evidence of when they were written and Porygon doesn’t even exist yet! Is this pokedex sufficiently advanced to come across as ‘future technology?’

Mine has a lot of features that Ash’s doesn’t, plus the design is all different. About the only thing they have in common is that they’re red. Someone like Professor Oak would be able to tell in a
single look that it’s too advanced for its time.

So, I show them the pokedex and convince them I’m from the future and I’ve lost my memories and I’m trying to find a way back. Then what?

They…go on as normal? We continue our journey together and I no longer stay up until three a.m. trying to write these entries? I could talk to them without having to lie?

I’d have to admit the truth about the lies I’ve told. I’m not from Viridian, not that I know of. I’m not aiming to be a Pokemon Professor.

I’m not. It’s something that’s grown inside me and I enjoy but my priority has to be my memories and getting home.

I’m…shaking. I shouldn’t be. I’ll have to go back and fix those typos.

Sweet Mew, why am I so anxious!?
Okay, I had a good month this October and I've built up my buffer again! Today we've got an extra special chapter too! I hope you guys enjoy and thank you for being so patient with me! The weekly updates will now resume every Sunday!

I’m just going to accept my fate as an insomniac. I’m never going to get a good night’s sleep again. I wish I could keep this to a short all-is-well entry but we found the Fuchsia gym today. My second-least-favorite gym.

Ash won his Soul badge. That makes six. Just two more to go! A lot of good things happened today!

And some bad things. Some aggravating things. Some things that make it difficult to think of sleeping.

This morning I was on edge. The near panic attack I’d given myself was still on my mind. It didn’t help that I was trying very hard to seem normal.

“Cal, are you sure you’re feeling alright?” Brock put his wrist on my forehead to check my temperature.

“Yeah, just…didn’t sleep all that, uh,” I resisted the urge to clear my throat. They already thought I was sick.

“Why don’t we stop for a break? It’s no good to push yourself when you’re tired.” Misty suggested, pointing to the little waterfall we were passing.

“Yeah, a break sounds good!” Ash jumped on it, steering me towards a rock to sit on. “You can’t go getting sick on a pokemon journey, Cal!”

“I’m not sick! Really!” I protested, though I did let him sit me down.

“Gah! Psyduck!” One of Misty’s pokeballs lit up as Psyduck released himself. “You’re supposed to stay in your pokeball unless I call you!” She stomped her foot.

“Psy?” He looked around and spied the water. “Psypsy!”

“Soaking your head in cold water will just make your headache worse!” She warned. To no avail as he happily held his head under the water to drink.

“Ugh, just dealing with him gives me a headache.” She slumped down beside me.

“You’re doing really well with him though.” I offered consolingly.

“Yeah, I guess.” She sighed unconvincingly.

“We’re getting close to the Fuchsia gym, right Brock?” Ash sat straight down on the dirt. Pikachu
jumped from his shoulders and darted over to get a drink of water with Psyduck.

“Yep. Guidebook says the Fuchsia gym is unique in that it’s not technically within the town limits.” Brock opened to the page he’d bookmarked. “There’s also no roads leading to it. I guess part of the challenge is just finding the place.”

“Kinda weird if you ask me.” Misty huffed. “Gyms need challengers and making yourself harder to get to is just going to discourage them.”

“Well I’m not discouraged! I’m gonna find the Fuchsia gym and challenge the Gym Leader and I’m gonna win! Right, Pikachu?” Ash declared boldly.

“Pi-ka!” Pikachu gave a cute little fist bump.

I did my best to pull myself together as we kept moving. I should be able to handle this without worrying everyone!

We weren’t walking long before we came to a deep ravine with a rapid river at the bottom. Considering the way our last ravine cross ended I wasn’t too keen on stepping onto the split log that served as a bridge.

“Watch your step guys,” Ash was on hands and knees as he shuffled across. At the back of the group, so was I. “One wrong move and it’s the end of our pokemon journey.”

“Mhm.” I gulped, hands already unsteady from a sleepless night grew only worse with sweat.

“Being a little dramatic, you two?” Misty put her hands on her hips.

“Cal and Brock got washed away last time we crossed one of these!” Ash argued.

“And, uh, this is…” I gulped again before continuing, “A longer fall.”

“Pika, pikapi!” Pikachu stood straight up on Ash’s head.

On the other side, through the trees, we saw a mansion.

When I saw it… I saw it. Not as it stood before me but as it stood in another time. A little run down, the trees had been thinned, a proper bridge added. Broken windows were boarded up. Graffiti lined the walls. Lines of clothes hung everywhere and cooking fires dotted the courtyard.

Then I blinked and everything was normal.

And I had a headache.

I withheld a hiss of pain as it pulsed behind my eyes. I double checked my every step until I was safely on solid ground again.

I know this place. I know this place. Did I live here? The clothes lines and cooking fires made it seem like lots of people lived here. But why?

“There’s no road.” Ash noticed as we stepped up to the front gate.

No road, hard to find, deep ravine on one side with an easily destroyed bridge, highly defensible.
“Think this is the gym?” Ash continued, unaware of the mental assessment I was running.

“Let’s find someone and ask.” Brock stepped towards the door.

I hesitated at the gate. I’ve had déjà vu before. Things and even people have seemed familiar but I’ve never had such a clear flash of memory before.

Clear but fading. And for the life of me I couldn’t remember any people or pokemon in that vision. Signs of habitation but nothing alive.

*(Something white and stained fluttering on a line.)*

I couldn’t remember what any of the graffiti said. I couldn’t remember anything really distinctive. No details, just broad strokes.

“Hello? Anyone home?” Ash called as we stepped into the entry way.

“Hmm-ACK!” Misty shrieked. Instantly we whirled towards the wall she’d been leaning against.

“Misty!” Ash cried, whole body tensing in fear and shock.

“It’s okay! It’s…okay.” I rushed to reassure them, reaching out to the wall. A light tap and sure enough it gave a hollow thunk in response. It only took a firm nudge to swing the hidden door open and reveal Misty within a hidden room.

“Ow.” She rubbed her backside.

“A hidden door? What kinda place is this?” Ash frowned. He had one hand on the door, swinging it back and forth to look at both sides.

“This place is…” My mind went blank. Whatever I was going to say next wouldn’t come. “Uh,”

“Veno?” The trilling voice distracted everyone from my blank expression.

“Eep!” Misty jumped to her feet, using me as a shield against the bug pokemon.

“*Vennonat:* The bug pokemon. Their compound eyes act as radars to see in the dark.” Ash’s pokedex reported.

“Um, they also, uh, exude poison in their fur so,” I cleared my throat. “Try not to touch it.” I suggested.

“Maybe this venonat belongs to the Gym Leader!” Ash beamed.

“Veno? Vennonat!” The venonat jumped up and down once and then turned back down the hall it came from.

“I guess we should follow it.” Brock shrugged.

“Right! Let’s go!” Ash took his place at the lead.

He started rounding the corner when my whole body tensed hard enough to make my back pop. There was something around that corner that was dangerous. I didn’t know what, only that my arms were already moving forward and yanking Ash back before my mind had a prayer of understanding.
“Gak! Cal, what?” Ash’s shirt choked him as I pulled him back.

“Wait, just…wait!” My body tingled with nerves. What was I afraid of? What’s in this hall that’s so dangerous that I didn’t want Ash going first?

My eyes went to the floor.

The panels were all perfectly identical but that didn’t seem to matter. I already knew where the voltorb were.

From Ash’s bag I dug out the rubber gloves and donned them. With deft fingers, like I’d done this a million times before, I found an invisible seam in the floor and flipped open one of the panels.

“Vooooltorb?” The electric pokemon’s eyes widened in surprise, electricity arcing off its body.

“What’s that?” Ash pulled out his pokedex. “Voltorb: This electric pokemon prefers power plants. It is capable of strong electric attacks and is famous for using the move Self-Destruct when angered.”

“How did you know it was there?” Brock asked me as I stepped back from the potentially combustive pokemon.

“I, um, I just knew?” I fiddled with the gloves. “It just… Oh Arceus what can I say? What can I say?

“It’s like something from an action movie!” Misty pounded her fist into her other palm. “Hidden doors, voltorb in the floor, I’m sure I saw this kind of thing in that Brad Van Darn movie a few months ago.”

“Maybe they’re fans?” Ash was still rubbing his neck. I suppressed a twinge of guilt at the red mark left there but that was preferable to an extra crispy Ash. Voltorb might only have shocked Ash if he’d triggered the trap, but then again Voltorb might have Self-Destructed instead.

I definitely know this place. Well enough that I have reflexes to keep people from running into traps.

That flash of memory showed the mansion as being both rundown and lived in. The memory isn’t as clear as I’d like but the state of decay didn’t seem new. The graffiti looked old and worn, the paint had faded.

Clothes hung on lines in the courtyard. A bridge that was easily collapsed and the trees in the surrounding area had been thinned. No one could sneak up on that place and likewise the mansion itself couldn’t be hidden but it could be defended.

Disorganized, definitely not a military installation. It was more like a refugee camp.

If I grew up in a war-torn version of Kanto then it’s possible my family ended up as refugees. I could’ve lived here.

There’d been something on one of the lines that caught my eye. Something white and stained. Long and fluttering. A dress maybe?

That doesn’t feel right but I don’t know what else to think. I’m so fucking tired!
…I shouldn’t curse like that. Even in a private journal. It’s crude.

…But it’s also heartfelt. I’m not going to erase it. I am tired. Exhausted. And here I am writing about it instead of sleeping. I should close my pokedex and go to sleep.

But what if I wake up tomorrow and don’t remember anything?

Ha, I feel like I’ve stumbled upon the source of my insomnia. I woke up a few months ago and had nothing, not even my name. What if it happens again?

What if I forget Ash and Pikachu and Misty and Brock? What if I forget Professor Oak’s kindness and Mrs. Ketchum’s nostalgic touch? What if I forget Char’s timid strength or Fearow’s pride or Cleffa’s sweet disposition or Gyarados’ joy?

What if I forget them the way I forgot my parents?

I don’t know if Legendaries really hear us when we invoke them. Still, if you can hear this Mew, most powerful, most gentle, of Psychics, can you protect me? Can you help me keep my mind my own?

I have to sleep. I have to. And I don’t want to be afraid every time I close my eyes.

I’ll write the rest tomorrow. I have to trust that I’ll still remember it.

Resolute, I closed my pokedex and tucked it away safe in my bag. The others slept on, unknowing of my turmoil. I burrowed into my sleeping bag.

Deep breaths. In, count to ten, out, count to five. In, ten, out, five. Bit by bit the tension eased out of my body. My eyelids weighed like lead.

I’m thankful I don’t dream.

I managed some decent sleep last night. I’m just…I’m just going to ignore how I ended the last entry. I just…don’t know what I’m supposed to do about it. I don’t have anyone I can talk to about it and I’m not going to spend half a chapter going back and forth over whether I should tell the others or not.

I’m eleven, probably. At least according to my pokedex. I’m a kid. I should be enjoying my pokemon journey and figuring out who I want to be when I grow up. Not stumbling blind without any idea who I am now.

Life’s not fair. Okay. Just keep moving forward.

So, I stopped Ash from stepping into a voltorb trap.

“How are we supposed to get over there without stepping on a voltorb?” Ash groaned, running a hand through his hair and nearly causing his hat to fall off.

“Um,” I think I can pick out where they all were. “Follow me,”

Step, step, move left a little, step, step, make sure the others are matching my moves precisely. I
found it was easier if I didn’t think too hard about it and just let muscle memory carry me.

“Vennonat nat!” Vennonat bounced on its feet when we got close to it. It turned down the hall to a set of stairs.

“Up there, I guess?” I huffed, finally removing the rubber gloves and returning them to Ash.

“Vennonat!” Vennonat called as we reached the next floor.

“Think there are anymore booby traps?” Misty eyed the floor nervously.

“Mm, I don’t know.” I shrugged but took point. I studied the floor, walls, and ceiling as we went.

I can’t say what caught my attention but I stopped so completely that my momentum almost carried me forward anyway. I looked straight ahead, at open air.

Then I knocked on it.

“Whoa!” Ash’s eyes went big and wide as he flattened his hand against it.

“An invisible wall?” Brock reached over to tap it.

“Just high quality polycarbonate.” I shook my head. Even rubbing my hand against it left no residue.

“Pol-what?” Ash creased his brows.

“It’s like glass, but much stronger.” I explained, now following the plane of false glass to see it covered the entire passageway, no way through. “And this is such high quality that it appears invisible.”

“This place gives me the creeps.” Misty huffed. “I say we backtrack and find another way than following that bug pokemon into more traps.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Ash sighed, moving to lead us back to the stairs.

Thunk!

And walked smackdab into another glass wall.

“Where’d this one come from?” Misty pressed against it, likely hoping she’d be able to move it out of place. Now that I knew where to look I could see the part of the ceiling that slid away to let the glass fall into place. The more impressive part was that we hadn’t heard it.

“Now we’re trapped.” Brock realized.

My hand found my belt, counting pokeballs. Fearow and Gyarados were at a disadvantage in these tight corners. Char and Cleffa would be my go-tos. I wrapped my fingers around Char’s ball.

“There’s gotta be a way out of here. Another exit?” Ash straightened up. He walked over to the window, an old style one with bars of wood letting sunlight in.

That was the side with the ravine. That was the side with the…

“Ash, don’t!” Too late, the wall was falling away, designed to drop as someone leaned against it. And Ash fell with it.
“Fearow!” I was at the edge in under a second, Fearow flashing into existence in the air outside.

“Ash?” I looked down. Far, far below the rapids ran deep. If he’d hit the water I’d need Gyarados to find him.

“Dow-Down here!” His shaky voice reached me.

The wall was on a hinge and he was still clinging to the window. His eyes were big around with shock and I could see him trembling.

“Feeaa!” Fearow flapped, reminding me he was here.

“Hey Fearow,” I sighed, sinking slowly to my knees. “Can you please bring Ash back up here? Thank you.”

“Row!” He backed up and then did a quick flyby to grab Ash by his backpack. Another quick circuit brought him back close enough for us to pull Ash through.

“Thank you, Fearow! Remind me later tonight to give you an extra special preening.” I rubbed his beak in thanks before returning him.

“This place is nuts!” Ash growled, recovering from his ordeal.

“Hey!” He jumped up, pointing. The other wall had creaked open just enough for Venonat to poke its head through. Ash wasn’t going to take that lying down. He was running at it before most of us even processed the pokemon’s appearance.

“Ash, wait!” I jumped up after him. Through the hidden door into a dojo sty—down!

I grabbed Ash by the shoulders and shoved us both down. Something cut across my skin and I moved, angling my body to better shield his. My hand went down between us for Char’s pokeball.

*What’s attacking us? Human or pokemon? What weapons is it using? I didn’t hear gunfire.*

“Oh dear Darkrai, please forgive me!” A woman’s voice, mid-to-late teenager. I twisted to face her, still keeping myself between her and Ash. Stinging lines and fresh blood oozed down my shoulder and back.

“Char, I need you!” I felt a little safer with a pokemon to help us.

“Ash, Cal? Oh gods!” Misty shrieked. She and Brock came through the swinging door. I didn’t take my eyes off the woman.

Spring pink short-kimono. Long hair pulled up. As soon as I’d moved to face her she’d gone into the full dogeza.

“Cal, you’re bleeding!” Ash sat up and grabbed my shoulder, above the first wound.

“Yeah,” My throat clenched.

She was apologizing which implied—it was an accident?

*We could’ve been killed on accident!*?

What did she even hit me with? Trusting Char to keep watch, I craned my neck back to look for the weapons. Throwing stars, a half dozen of them. A few were embedded in the wall but the ones that
had fresh blood on them were on the ground.

“Please accept my most humble apologies!” She spoke again. “I swear to you I meant no harm! I only meant to indulge in a bit of showmanship and pin the boy to the wall by his clothes! It was not my intention to draw blood!”

“And yet, draw blood you did, Aya.” Where once was empty space now stood a man. The appearance of another stranger did nothing to help my blood pressure. “Do you see now why a ninja’s weapons must stay sheathed?”

“Yes, brother.” If possible her dogeza grew deeper. “I am sorry.”

“Please allow me to make right my sister’s misdeeds.” The man turned towards me. “May I treat your wounds?”

“Chaaar.” Char hissed as he moved to step closer. I couldn’t see her face but I could imagine the Leer she was using. Her claws were splayed threateningly and her tail was lashing in fury. She was as mad as I’d ever seen.

“Char,” I took a deep breath, regretted it as a stinging line just under the back of my neck flared. “It’s okay. It was an accident. He’s not going to hurt me.”

“Char char charman mana man char!” She roared and stamped her foot. She was waving her claws at the man and woman both. Her other hand gripped her scarf.

“Char,” I tried again. My blood felt slimy on my skin. I shivered as it dripped down my back. My shirt and jacket were going to be stained. “I’m okay, look! I’m fi—!”

“CHAR!” She whirled on me. “CHAR CHARMAN! Char manman char, man man…MELEON!”

Her scales went white as light burst from every pore. Standing almost a foot taller with her new horn and elongated snout. Her claws now longer and razor sharp. Even her tail flame was more robust.

And she was still so angry.

“Charmeleon charmeleon cha mel!” She roared, flickers of flame appearing between her teeth.

“CHAR!” I snapped, as much to shock her out of it as to get her attention.

She stopped but she was still seething with rage. She clenched and unclenched her fists, her tail swished powerfully behind her.

“You’re mad. That’s okay.” I didn’t look at the strangers or at my friends. I didn’t pay attention to the stinging lines on my shoulder and back. “I’m mad too.”

Because for the sake of showmanship someone risked hurting my friend.

“Char, there’s no one to fight right now. These people aren’t enemies, just strangers who made a mistake and who want to make it right. They. Won’t. Hurt. Me.” I stressed each word. Poured as much confidence and calm as I could into my tone. Then I opened my arms, ignoring the angry sting in my right arm. “Please come here. It’s okay now.”

Evolved from sheer rage or not, she was still my Char. She wrapped me up in a big strong hug. She couldn’t quite curl in my lap anymore but she was still careful with her claws and tail.
“Thank you for trying to protect me.” I murmured against her skull, feeling her shake. “Look at you, so brave and strong now. Where’d my timid little charmander go, eh? You’re gorgeous!”

Gorgeous or not though she was probably not going to like watching me get stitches. Which I suspected I needed. Soon.

The man introduced himself as Koga, leader of both the Fuchsia Gym and an ancient clan of ninja dedicated to protecting Kanto. He was trained to handle wounds and he took me and Char to another room to fix me up. The one above my shoulder blades bled freely and he glued that one shut. The cut on my shoulder was deeper and required stitches.

“I must say, you are very stoic for one so young.” He commented as he pulled the needle through my flesh.

“Mm,” I grunted. He’d given me a local anesthetic first so I only felt the tugging but I still hated the sensation. It was nice to not have to do this myself though.

“Meeel,” Char blew hot air at him. I rubbed along her snout and up to her horn to calm her.

“I apologize for my sister’s behavior. I assure you she will be duly punished.” He continued. Only twelve stitches needed and he was done.

“Are these dissolvable or will I have to remove them?” I asked, checking over his work.

“They will need to be removed.” He answered, giving me an odd look.

He’d pulled down the collar of my shirt to tend my back but the shirt and jacket were a lost cause. I grabbed a new shirt with my left arm and he turned around to give me privacy as I took the old one off. He’d brought along a bucket of water and a rag to wash the blood off with so at least I didn’t have to deal with tacky dried blood for the rest of the day.

Char continued watching him. She didn’t trust him and frankly neither did I. I was glad to have her at my side, especially with my right arm partially numb.

Good bye black tank top and green jacket. Those and my camo pants were what I’d first woken up in and I was sad to see them go. I chose a brown button up since I figured it would be easier on my arm.

The only other jacket I had was the thick winter coat. It’s summer. I’d faint from heat exhaustion if I wore that.

I’ll get a new light jacket in town. For now, I’ll just deal with chilly arms.

We got back to the dojo to see Ash and Bulbasaur defeating Aya and Venonat. Bulbasaur got Venonat with a Leech Seed, forcing her to call Venonat back and declare defeat.

“Cal!” His eyes, previously narrowed in a pout, now widened happily as we walked in.

“Are you okay?” His eyes were drawn to the bandages my short sleeves didn’t cover.

“Yeah, it’s not that bad.” I waved him off.

“I apologize again for the injury done to you.” Aya bowed sharply at the waist, fully perpendicular to the floor.

“Yeah, um,” I drifted off. I wasn’t ready to forgive her for throwing live weapons at kids.
But she was sorry and it was an accident. I didn’t want her to tear herself apart over it.

“Just…no more throwing things at people? Please?” I requested with a sigh.

“Mel.” Char huffed, clearly no more eager to extend an olive branch than I was. I rubbed the crest of her horn to remind her that I was fine. We weren’t in danger.

Koga was impressed by Ash beating Aya and he accepted Ash’s stony faced challenge. It worried me that Ash wasn’t his usual boisterous self but could I really expect otherwise? He’d seen a friend get hurt protecting him. I doubt anyone would’ve been able to drum up some enthusiasm after that.

So Koga and Ash squared off for the fate of his sixth Gym Badge.

That’s where the action really starts.
The Herd

Chapter Notes

Ugh, this chapter. You know, when I was writing this I initially forgot to save my progress before I quit for the night. And then my computer reset in the middle of the night. I opened it up the next morning and felt my soul die a little. I hate having to re-write things! UGH! On the plus side, I am now SUPER paranoid about making sure I save after every writing session. So...silver linings, I guess.

“This will be a two-on-two battle, with no substitutions. For this battle, I choose Venonat!” Is this a poison or a bug type gym? I feel like I should probably have checked beforehand.

“Go, Pidgeotto!” Interesting choice, I thought as I joined Misty and Brock at the far wall. This room didn’t offer a lot of maneuverability but Pidgeotto was a good deal faster than Venonat which should have made up the difference.

Except this Venonat had a lot more experience than Aya’s. It began to glow before the match had even begun and between one blink and the next Venomoth was hovering in the air.

“Whoa,” Ash blinked, reaching for his pokedex as he always did for a new pokemon. “Venomoth: This pokemon produces various spores in its wings and spreads them by flapping.”

Ash realized the danger almost the same time I did. “Pidgeotto, use Gust!”

“Stun Spore, Venomoth!” Koga was ready though. And in these quarters, with no open windows to channel the dust out, there was nothing Pidgeotto could do. Pidgeotto’s Gust only caused the Stun Spore to rebound off the walls and ceiling directly back into his face. Internal paralysis set in immediately.

“Pidgeotto, return!” I winced with Ash. “Go, Charmander!”

“Mm,” My lips quirked up into a smile. Charmander wasn’t looking our way so he hadn’t noticed Char yet. That would be interesting.

“Venomoth, use Stun Spore again!” Koga was frowning. Caught by surprise by Ash having a charmander and a bulbasaur? Venomoth was at a disadvantage now.

“Charmander, Flamethrower!” The powder lit up like a dream, waves of heat washing over those of us in the spectator’s section. Char was with me so I didn’t spare even a moment to be worried the fire would reach us. I simply enjoyed the show.

Venomoth cried out in pain as the fires licked at its wings. I knew that hadn’t been Ash’s intention but he’d as good as crippled Venomoth. Bug type wings are fragile and if Koga was any kind of decent trainer he’d return Venomoth while he still could.

One for one, they were tied. This last battle would decide everything. What pokemon would Koga send out next?

The returning ache in my arm and back meant nothing in the face of a good battle. If I’d been
sitting I would have been at the edge of my seat.

I also would have fallen off when Team Rocket crashed through the floor above in full kabuki gear.

“Prepare for trouble,” They both had big umbrellas masking them. Jessie’s voice came from the left.

“And make it double,” Now they both moved the umbrellas aside to reveal their kabuki makeup.

“To protect the world from devastation!” Jessie spoke with the intonations of a proper kabuki actor.

“To unite all people within our nations,” They moved to stand back to back, pulling exaggerated expressions.

“Jessie!”

“James!”

“Team Rocket,” Now they stood straight, holding their umbrellas out in formal salute. “Blast off at the speed of light!”

“Surrender now or prepare,” I could not believe what I was seeing. “Prepare to fight!”

“Meowth, that’s right!” At least Meowth looked normal.

For a meowth walking on two legs and speaking human anyway.

Team Rocket then proved that neither had received any real training in kabuki theater by promptly eating hardwood when they tried to move.

I’m still grudgingly impressed by their ability to disguise themselves. And how quickly they can don or remove a costume.

“I’ve heard of Team Rocket. They are pokemon thieves, are they not?” Koga frowned. I saw him return Venomoth and pull out another pokeball.

“Yes. Char?” I checked. Her tail was already flaring higher as she stepped forward.

“Pikachu, Charmander, are you ready?” Ash braced himself.

“Arbok!” “Weezing!”

No dirt for Arbok to Dig through. The number of pokemon might cause some confusion on the battlefield, especially as Koga and Aya both sent forward more venonats. Char hadn’t had time to relearn her strength.

“What? Five on two? I don’t like those odds.” Despite her words Jessie had a wicked smirk on her face.

“So let’s change them!” James threw something. A white pellet that expanded as he released it from his hand.

White webbing shot forward, hitting Char smack in the face and covering the other pokemon head to toe. Char’s furious scream was muffled with her mouth stuck shut.
They had a formula for something similar to spinarak webbing. And since Char’s furious flailing wasn’t burning it that meant they’d somehow improved on the composition.

“Char, calm down!” I grabbed her shoulders, careful to keep from touching the webbing. It looked like it dried on impact but I wasn’t willing to trust it just yet. “We’ll get it off. I promise.”

“Charmander, Pikachu, can you two do any attacks like this?” Ash checked with his pokemon. Charmander could open his mouth a little but not wide enough for an effective Flamethrower. Pikachu’s cheek pouches were completely covered with web and he had one paw stuck to his chest. He couldn’t even run like that.

“Everyone, we’ll have to retreat for now!” Koga slapped part of the wall near my head and a rope descended from the ceiling. I knew what was coming and wrapped my good arm under Char’s armpits to carry her.

Voltorb fell from the ceiling and converged on the intruders. Even though I knew what would happen next I still stopped for a moment to watch the scene unfold.

“What are these things?” Jessie frowned, unimpressed.

“Dunno. They look kinda like beach balls.” Meowth even picked one up!

Only James seemed to realize what danger they were in.

“Those are voltorb!” He screeched.

In unison, the voltorb all used Self-Destruct.

“This way!” Koga opened a secret passage to some stairs. Brock grabbed Charmander and Ash had Pikachu. I got to struggle with an armful of fifty pound fire-type with only one good arm.

At the end of the passage I adjusted my weight to compensate for the slant. Char had stopped struggling in the passage and decided now was a good time to sulk as I inspected the webbing on her.

“We should have time to regroup here.” Aya sighed, holding her venonat closely. It still looked pretty wiped from Bulbasaur’s Leech Seed.

“Why is this room all crooked?” Misty asked, almost overbalancing as she frowned up at the ceiling.

“Its meant to confuse intruders and make it easier to defend.” My voice came in unison with Koga’s. I could feel him staring at me.

“Char, can you bring your tail over? Thank you.” I studiously avoided eye contact as I tried to use her tail flame to burn away some webbing.

“This stuff doesn’t come off easy.” Ash was trying to pry it off by hand. He was probably lucky Pikachu couldn’t launch an electric attack with his pouches covered up. Arceus knows I’d love to launch a Thunderbolt at anyone who pulled my hair.

“Doesn’t respond much to fire either.” I grunted, releasing Char’s tail. “Might be water soluble.”

“What?” Ash gave up on his task to stare at me.

“She means this stuff might dissolve in water.” Brock helpfully explained.
“Staryu has enough control of her Water Gun that she could get it off without hurting anybody.” Misty offered. Charmander ducked behind Ash at her words, leaving her to shrug apologetically.

“Char?” I looked at her. Her poor scarf was covered in the stuff too. That had better wash out.

As a Charmeleon her life force was no longer tied directly to her flame. It was still a useful indicator of health and mood, but it wouldn’t kill her to go out.

But there’s no way I’m going to order my fire-type to stand still under a barrage of water, no matter how gentle.

“MMmehm.” She couldn’t open her mouth but she could nod fiercely and march right up to Misty.

“Okay, c’mon out Staryu!” There was a flash of light but it didn’t come from the ball in her hands and it didn’t form into Staryu.

“Psyyyy,” We all stared.

“Psyduck!” Misty went beet red. “You. Are not. Staryu! Go back in your pokeball!”

“Psy?” He tilted his head.

“Arrgh, we don’t have time for this!” Misty grabbed her own head.

“That’s right. You don’t.” A curse on my tongue, I turned and saw Team Rocket standing in the doorway. The secret passage was behind us and with the room’s slant our position should have been perfect for an ambush.

If we’d had any battle ready pokemon out anyway.

James had bundled up all the voltorb. I’m…I’m almost ashamed to realize this in hindsight but…

I hadn’t expected them to come out unscathed.

I didn’t want them to die. I don’t hate them enough for that. But a dozen voltorb all using Self-Destruct at once at close range? They should’ve had severe electrical burns, damage from smoke inhalation, a concussion from the blast, something.

But these voltorb hadn’t been trained to go all out on humans. They’d been trained to give a minor shock and a big smoke screen. Painful, but mostly just inconvenient.

Now they were all bundled up on James’s back. Their Self-Destruct must have left them stunned long enough for Team Rocket to throw more of that webbing at them.

I was not letting them leave with those pokemon.

My hand wrapped around Cleffa’s pokeball.

“Agh, we don’t have time for this! Psyduck, use Scratch!” Misty commanded. Psyduck wasn’t that fast in the water.

He was slower on land.

Arbok didn’t even wait for a proper command. He just snapped his jaw around Psyduck’s head, no blood drawn, no venom, no pressure, and tossed him back.
Psyduck landed on his head.

I couldn’t have held back my smirk if I’d tried. A glance to the left showed Misty with the same expression.

“PSYPY PSY PSY PSY PSY PSY PSY psyyy,” An electric current hummed in the air, a breeze without wind making every hair on my neck stand up and take notice.

“Psyduck, use Disable and then Psychic!” He knows Disable? I watched as Team Rocket, pokemon and all, were paralyzed by the attack. A sensation like a broom sweeping over me caught my attention. Before our eyes the webbing on our pokemon and the vortorb began to disintegrate.

It's a shame I couldn’t save a sample to send to Professor Oak. I’m sure he would’ve been interested in a formula that improves on natural spinarak webbing.

Psyduck sent Team Rocket flying. The roof had a new hole in it and we could hear their screams petering off. Sunlight poured in and for a moment we all basked in the glow.

“I must say Miss, that is one impressive pokemon.” Koga knelt to examine Psyduck who had again clamped his hands to his head and was staring vacantly into the distance. “Even for its species I believe that was a rather powerful attack.”

“We’ve been working on it since I caught him.” Misty boasted. “He’s a pain sometimes, but I’m proud to be his trainer.”

Koga stood back up and studied the new skylight. Finally he turned back to Ash. “I will have to contact someone for repairs, but I believe we still have unfinished business.”

“Oh yeah! I still have to win a Soul Badge!” Ash’s previous bad mood was completely gone. I was glad, though I could feel my new wounds aching.

I’m going to have to either go to a hospital in a couple weeks or pull these stitches out myself. I’m not looking forward to either of those options. At least the one across my shoulder blades shouldn’t pose me any problems if I sleep on my left and be careful bending over.

We relocated to the courtyard for their final battle. Ash and Charmander took the field and waited for Koga to call his final pokemon.

“Golbat, I choose you!” The battle began.

Further away I couldn’t hear what Ash’s pokedex had to say about Golbat. The courtyard didn’t have a clearly defined line between battlefield and spectator area so we had to keep our distance.

The battle began.

“Golbat use Wing Attack!” Golbat became a blur. More than once Charmander stumbled as he was clipped by Golbat’s wings. He couldn’t keep up with that kind of speed.

“Use Ember!” Ash yelled. Charmander obeyed without hesitation, opening his mouth and shooting, spinning to try to catch Golbat in the line of fire.

He struck Golbat’s wing. Golbat’s wings were more durable though. That wasn’t the end of the fight like it had been for Venemoth and Koga wasn’t ready to admit defeat.

“Now use Screech!” My hands clamped over my ears as soon as I processed his words. Not a
moment too soon as Golbat opened its mouth wide. Even with my hands up my vision went double and my sense of balance took a sharp nosedive. Char didn’t look any happier than I was and she couldn’t cover her own ears.

But as bad as it was for us it was even worse for Charmander, caught in the brunt of it. It’s amazing he even heard Ash’s commands.

“Flamethrower!” Charmander spun again, more from dizziness than because he was trying to lock onto Golbat. The fire was coming towards us and I had to let go of my ears and pull Brock down by his collar to avoid the two of us getting roasted.

“Thanks,” He panted, still holding his hands over his ears. I could barely hear him over the Screech but thankfully for my eardrums Charmander managed to hit Golbat.

“Now finish it with Fire Spin!” I whirled back to the fight.

“Since when can Charmander…?” I trailed off, watching the tornado of flames envelop his opponent.

“He’s been working with me and Vulpix a lot lately.” Brock chuckled, referencing the time of day when we stopped to make camp and then went our separate ways to train our pokemon.

But for Charmander to be capable of Fire Spin! I thought that move was too advanced for that species! What I saw before me wasn’t as powerful as what Vulpix could do but it was a solid attack and Golbat fell to the ground as soon as it dispersed.

“Golbat, return.” The fight was over.

Ash won.

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“Six down, two to go.” He kept opening his jacket to look at the badges pinned to the inside.

“Mhm,” I smiled. We were making camp now, edging around Fuchsia city on our way to our next destination. There was a Safari Zone somewhere nearby that Ash wanted to visit. I didn’t know what a Safari Zone was and was too afraid to ask. I was sort of hoping to get an explanation when we got there.

“Charmander did really well with that Fire Spin.” I commented as I built up the campfire.

“Yeah, we worked real hard on it!” Ash kept beaming. He had gathered most of the firewood for the night. Brock was lounging against a tree and mixing up pokechow for dinner and Misty was still off getting water from the stream.

“Char was really cool too! When she evolved into Charmeleon!” That seemed to remind him of something and he pulled out his pokedex.

“Charmeleon: The Flame Pokemon. This pokemon has a very powerful tail and will often finish off opponents with its sharp claws.”

“Hey, Ash?” A thought occurred to me.

“Yeah?” He looked away from whatever the pokedex was showing him.

“Yeah?” I fumbled for a way to say this without sounding rude. “Even with…pokemon you’ve seen before, you scan them or look them up, and…just, how come?”
“I guess,” He looked skywards for a second. “Because I like to see what other people think of them. I think all pokemon are really cool and lots of people think different things about them. Like how sailors fear Gyarados but Misty said yours almost squished you and you’re not afraid of it. And Misty thinks tentacool and tentacruel are cute but most other people don’t.”

“Different perspectives.” I nodded thoughtfully.

“Yeah! Do you know any stuff like that?” His eyes lit up.

“Well, um, lots of places have special ties to specific pokemon. Like in the Orange Islands Lugia is seen as a benevolent protector and a mediator, but in Johto Lugia is seen as a vengeful deity.” I put some focus back into building the fire. We’d need it for Brock to cook dinner tonight.

Maybe I’ll put my sleeping bag closer to the fire tonight. My bare arms feel kind of chilly.

“Is there more than one?” Ash asked curiously.

“Hm, I think so.” The Orange Islands and Johto were a fair distance apart. And Lugia was a Mid-Legendary so it wasn’t unreasonable that there were other members of the species.

“Alright, preparation complete!” We both looked over at Brock. All the bowls were filled with pokechow. “Isn’t Misty back with the water yet? I can’t start dinner without it.”

“I’ll go find her.” I volunteered.

“Hey wait,” Ash grabbed my left arm to stop me. “You got hurt today, I’ll go find her. She’s probably just staring at her reflection or something dumb like that.”

“Er, I’m fine, really. I don’t mind looking for her.” I tried to reassure him.

“Nope, injured parties stay at camp.” Brock declared decisively. Ash bounced up and took off towards the stream without giving me another opportunity to protest.

“I really am fine.” I repeated. I’d had a hard time convincing Char to go back in her pokeball. I didn’t need the others to be hovering over me too.

“I believe you.” Brock pulled out the pot and set up the tripod. “But that doesn’t change the fact you’re hurt. It’s okay to take things easy for a few days.”

“I guess,” Fetching Misty and water wasn’t exactly strenuous.

Still, if I had no more chores for the moment. I stood up, brushing the dirt off my pants before I began releasing pokemon.

Cleffa bent over her food happily. Char sniffed my arm first, checking that I hadn’t bled through the bandages, then she sat down to eat.

“Fearow, I owe you a special preening. Do you want to eat first or later?” I looked up at my second biggest pokemon. If the stream was a little bigger we would’ve camped near it and released our water pokemon too.

Fearow thought it over. He was slowly moving from hunting for most of his meals to eating Brock’s food, but he seems to gain special satisfaction from his own kills.

Finally he extended his neck, allowing me to run my fingers through his feathers.
There wasn’t much dirt to pick out but just running my fingers through his feathers was soothing. I imagine it’s like having someone do the same with your hair. He churrs when he gets really relaxed.

I’d panicked when I called him earlier. I’d been on edge. I’d…

Expected the traps to be a lot deadlier than they were.

I was glad to be facing away from Brock as I took a shuddering breath. I could hear Ash and Misty sniping at each other as they came back.

Maybe this is something that comes from growing up in a war zone. Everything feels a lot more dangerous. Much more life or death.

I focused on Fearow’s feathers. Wonderfully healthy browns, each a slightly different shade blending together. Running my hands through his feathers is…familiar. Soothing, not just to him.

We had dinner and broke off for two hours to train our pokemon. I worked with Char but Cleffa wanted to stay out. From the way she was staring starry eyed at Char I feel it won’t be long before she evolves too. I hope I make her happy enough.

I’m all caught up. We’re getting close to that Safari Zone place. Ash keeps going on and on about the pokemon you can catch there. I guess we’ll see.

The morning after that we were getting close. We walked along footpaths and what I seriously suspected were pokemon paths. They certainly weren’t on the map.

“The trees are thinning up ahead.” Brock noticed.

“This must be it!” Ash ran ahead, the rest of us hurrying behind him. We came to wide open plains with fences far in the distance.

At our feet the ground began to tremble. My hand went to my belt and I scanned the area. Either there was something underground or…

A herd of tauros was running nearby.

It didn’t look like a stampede and they weren’t running in our direction. They were just running for the sake of running. I breathed a sigh of relief but didn’t take my hand off my belt. If they changed direction I didn’t want to be caught by surprise.

“Wow, look at’em go!” Ash laughed. A small smirk pulled at my lips as I saw him reach for his pokedex. “Tauros: the Bull Pokemon. These are an all-male species, considered to be the counterpart of miltank. Their powerful Tackles are capable of denting steel.”

“Alright, I’m gonna catch one! Pikachu!” We all looked.

Pikachu had pulled his little bedroll out of Ash’s backpack and was fake-snoring for all he was worth.

“Ah, um,” I covered my mouth to smother a burst of laughter.

“Ash, don’t you think Pikachu is a little outnumbered here?” Misty put her hands on her hips.

“I knew that!” His cheeks went a little pink. “Alright, Charmander, I choose you!”
Charmander didn’t seem intimidated by the number of prospective opponents. If anything he seemed eager.

But before he could launch an attack a growlithe came out of nowhere and Tackled him to the ground.

“A growlithe?” Ash gasped. “Charmander, get free and use Flamethrower!”

Growlithe met the attack with one of his own. The two were evenly matched. Neither could gain an advantage.

“Maybe Squirtle instead.” Ash frowned, returning Charmander.

“I know you lot aren’t trying to rustle our pokemon!” We all jumped as a girl on a ponyta galloped towards us. Right before she would have run us over she came to a stop.

“Your pokemon? Isn’t this the Safari Zone?” Ash blanched.

I winced deeply. We’re gonna get accused of trying to steal pokemon, aren’t we?

“Safari Zone? No way, pardner.” She narrowed her eyes. “The Safari Zone’s out to the west of here. This here’s the Big P Pokemon Ranch and Reserve.”

“Ah, I’m so sorry!” Ash bowed to the waist, the rest of us following suit.

“Uh, we’re all sorry, ma’am.” I added nervously.

“Indeed,” Aaaaannnd, there went Brock. On bent knee at her ponyta’s side, one hand over his heart and the other clutching one of hers. “So sorry to have troubled such a ravenous beauty as you!”

“I’ve got him.” Misty sighed. In one well-practiced motion she grabbed Brock by the ear and dragged him back.

“Well,” The girl blinked in confusion before shaking her head. “If’n you lot are sorry then I guess I can let this slide. But next time be more careful. C’mon, I’ll lead you lot through.” She gently shook Ponyta’s reins to make her turn.

“By the way,” She looked over her shoulder. “My name’s Lara Laramie, nice to meetcha.”

“Laramie,” Brock repeated. “You mean you’re part of the family that runs this place?”

“You betcha.” She sat up straighter. “In fact I’m the oldest, meaning that someday I’m gonna take over this whole ranch, continuing the proud Laramie tradition.”

“Amazing.” At least he was being sensible for now. He saw the rest of us giving him curious looks and explained. “Breeders the world over love Laramie bred pokemon. They’re raised in their natural habitat and they’re a little stronger and healthier than the average pokemon. You’re lucky if you get a Laramie raised pokemon.”

“I’m Ash Ketchum, from Pallet town. These are my friends, Cal, Misty, and Brock.” Ash waved a hand over us as we started walking.

Lara led us through the paddock. As we got closer to the fences we started seeing more people, all crowded around with groups of various pokemon. Nidorina and nidoran, tauros, sandslash, and raticate from what I could see.
“Is there, uh, some sort of census being done?” I cleared my throat.

“Yep.” She confirmed cheerfully. “Checkin’ on population numbers and such. At this time of year most of the eggs have hatched, but the baby pokemon are in a different paddock this year. We’re just countin’ these ones to mind our Ps and Qs so to speak.”

“Makes sense.” I murmured.

“Hey Lara, I’ve got a question.” Ash announced.

“Yeah?” She twisted on Ponyta’s back to see him.

“How come you’re not getting burned?” He was staring where their bodies met.

“Ponyta flames won’t burn a person they trust.” I supplied without meaning to. When the others looked at me I ducked my head down and continued. “Uh, lots of pokemon have…effects like that. It’s not really, uh-understood how yet.”

“That’s pretty neat.” Ash hummed thoughtfully, maybe thinking of other pokemon who might have similar abilities.

“And spot on too.” Lara rubbed Ponyta’s neck. “I’ve raised this Ponyta since she hatched but she gave me a few good burns when we were first gettin’ to know each other. But now we’re like two peas in a pod!”

“That’s cool.” I wish I’d been paying more attention to what Ash was about to do. Unfortunately, I was just as surprised as anyone else when he reached out to try to pet Ponyta.

And got burned for his troubles.

“Ow, ow, ow, ow!” He hissed as Squirtle let a gentle stream of water fall over his hand.

“Let me see,” I got on my knees and gently turned his hand over. “Okay, just some first degree burns. No biggie. I’ve got some burn salve in my kit.”

“Sorry ‘bout that, pardner. Ponyta don’t let strangers pet’em.” Lara winced, having dismounted while we tended to Ash’s hand.

“It’s fine.” Still, I could tell he was disappointed.

I was applying the burn salve when a rumbling reached our ears. It sounded like the tauros rampaging past us again, but the ground wasn’t shaking this time.

“Is it the tauros?” Misty squeaked, climbing onto the fence.

“Nope, that sound can only be…” Lara trailed off, turning towards the approaching dust cloud.

“Dodrio!” I gasped, jumping to my feet and dropping the jar of burn salve.

A flock of them running free and wild. Their legs and many heads were just blurs so it was impossible to see where one bird ended and another began.

Except one of them had a rider.

“Howdy, Lara.”
The Race

“Dodrio: This pokemon runs faster than it can fly. It’s three heads symbolize joy, anger, and sorrow.” I barely paid attention to the pokedex entry. I was too distracted looking each head in the eye, taking it in turns so none of the heads would feel left out.

“Hello Dario.” Lara nodded in my peripheral. “Gettin’ in some last minute practice before the race tomorrow?”

“We don’t need practice.” Dario, the rider I’d barely acknowledged, boasted. “Dodrio and I are a shoe-in. But best of luck.”

And then he was gone. His Dodrio definitely had some impressive speed and Dario himself was pretty good. Neither he nor Lara had a saddle, just the reins to hold onto.

“There’s going to be a race tomorrow, Lara?” Misty asked. She frowned after the quickly vanishing dodrio flock. “Who was that guy anyway? He sounded like a jerk.”

“That was Dario, one of our ranch hands.” She sighed. “He’s got a big head on him but he’s got a fine touch with those dodrio.” She brightened.

“And yeah, there’s a big ol’ race tomorrow! Held every five years!” She explained excitedly. “Trainers ride their pokemon through an obstacle course and whoever wins becomes an honorary member of the Laramie clan!”

“Wow,” Ash breathed, wide eyed. “And can anybody enter?” I was interested in the answer too. Sure with the money Professor Oak gave me I wasn’t worried about providing my share of the travel funds anymore but a little extra wouldn’t be amiss.

“Sure ‘nuff.” She nodded. “But it’s gotta be a land-based pokemon and you gotta stay on it for the whole race. Them’s the only rules.”

“Oh, land based?” Ah, I guess Fearow wouldn’t qualify then. I could potentially enter Gyarados but that would depend on the terrain. I wonder if we’re allowed to know what the track is like before the race begins.

“Aw man.” Ash slumped, he was just as out of luck as me.

“I could enter with Onix.” Brock realized.

“Starmie and I could enter too, she’s actually pretty fast on land.” Misty realized.

“Aw, cheer up, fellas.” Lara chuckled at me and Ash. “Even if ya can’t enter the race you can still have fun at the party tonight. You can all come as my guests!”

“Wow, really?” Ash perked right up.

Parties are kind of like festivals but without the rides or yukata. Lots of good food and games though. Ash bought himself some kind of pastry cut in the shape of a magikarp. Some of the booths were informational, teaching people about the different kinds of pokemon the ranch raised.

“C’mon, Cal. You don’t want to get separated, do you?” Brock held onto my elbow and pulled me away from a booth about dodrio.
“Er, sorry.” I smiled bashfully.

“Come on, Ms. Professor. Don’t you ever take time off from studying?” Misty teased me as we rejoined the group.

“Good luck in the race tomorrow, Lara!” One of the booth managers called.

“Thank you! I’ll do my best!” Lara promised. She’d been getting calls of encouragement since the party began.

“Do you guys want to play any games?” Ash asked around a mouthful of pastry.

“Lara! Lara!” Someone was yelling behind us. We turned around to find Dario pushing himself through the crowd. He sagged with relief when he reached us.

“Lara, something’s got the tauros spooked! They’re going wild!” He reported, panting.

“Oh no!” Lara’s features hardened. Growlithe at her side was starting to look a lot less cuddly. She put two fingers to her lips and whistled, sharp and piercing, before she took off running in the direction Dario had come from.

Naturally, the rest of us followed.

Ponyta met Lara near the edge of the party, deftly dodging guests and other ranch hands. Lara leaped onto her back easily and off they went in the direction of the tauros paddock.

“Ponyta sure is fast.” Ash panted beside me.

“Yeah,” I measured my breathing, lengthened my stride. The tauros paddock wasn’t far from the festivities. Could some party-goers have wandered by and agitated them? Would the tauros run this way if they got loose?

We heard Growlithe’s yips and barks before we got there. He was sectioning out the tauros, stopping them from attacking each other. Once they weren’t bumping into each other they started calming down.

Lara and Ponyta were easy to see thanks to Ponyta’s mane. She was watching Growlithe’s progress, one hand wrapped loosely in the reins and the other petting Ponyta’s neck.

Something flashed in the shadows cast by firelight. I couldn’t identify any more than that before it darted at Ponyta’s legs and she reared up!

“Lara!” We cried.

She hit the fence as she fell. Ponyta continued tossing herself back and forth, lashing out with powerful forelegs at whatever had spooked her. Lara rolled far enough to be safe from lashing hooves but she wasn’t getting up. It would be a miracle if she hadn’t broken anything.

“Don’t move!” I barked sharply as I slid to her side. Her face was twisted into a grimace of pain and she was clutching her left arm.

“Ponyta, calm down!” Ash went for the scared pokemon. I trusted him to handle that while I made sure Lara’s injuries weren’t serious.

“Let me see,” I forced my voice to soften as I firmly moved her hand. A dark bruise was already on its way to forming. “Probably just a fracture, clean break at the worst. I could splint it now if you
“Ugh, not… not right now.” I watched her swallow some of the pain. Her eyes were locked on Ash and Ponyta.

He had her by the reins and was trying to pull her down on all fours. He was talking, voice calm and smooth. Ponyta’s eyes were bugged out but slowly she began to calm.

“He’s good.” Lara breathed.

“Mhm,” I smiled at that.

Turns out that on a ranch as big as the Big P Pokemon Ranch there’s usually a doctor on staff. Granted, he was a Pokemon Doctor, but setting a human bone isn’t all that different from setting a tauros bone. The four of us got shuffled to the dining room to wait while Lara’s parents and the doctor dealt with her arm.

“Hey, guys.” Lara stepped into the room about half an hour later.

“Hey, Lara. How’s the arm?” Brock asked kindly.

“Painkillers are kickin’ in.” She shrugged, glaring down at the sling for a moment. “But I won’t be racing tomorrow, that’s for sure.”

“That’s terrible.” Misty winced in sympathy. “That means you have to wait five more years to show everyone how well you trained Ponyta?”

“Maybe, maybe not.” She eyed Ash speculatively.

“Huh? What do you mean?” He blinked.

“Ash, I ain’t ever seen someone approach Ponyta so fearlessly when she gets skittish like that. Least not anyone but me.” She explained. “Most everyone else is afraid of getting burned!”

“But, I just…” He waved his hand vaguely.

“That’s why I got a favor to ask of ya.” She bowed as deeply as she could with the sling. “Please, take my place as Ponyta’s rider in the race tomorrow!”

“But! But I can’t!” He protested in a knee-jerk response. “She won’t let me ride her!”

“But if she’s willing, would you? Please?” Lara looked up at him.

How could Ash say no when a friend asked for something like that? Of course he said yes. So a few minutes later we were outside explaining things to Ponyta in the hopes that she’d be willing to trust Ash enough to not burn him.

After one more minor burn, Ponyta agreed to let Ash ride her. His first attempt ended… somewhat badly, I’ll admit. Lara had a hard time demonstrating with her broken arm. Still, Ash was more or less comfortable by the time we had to turn in.

“This here’s the basic map of racetrack.” Before bed, Lara pulled out a map and rolled it out over the kitchen table. The sheer amount of land the Big P ranch covered was impressive.

“There’s a water portion?” I mumbled curiously as I traced the route. Sheer cliffs after that, yeah, but Gyarados should be able to handle those. “Hmm,”
“Thinking of entering with Gyarados?” Brock read my mind.

“You’ve got a gyarados?” Lara gasped.

“Er, yeah. Raised him from a…a magikarp, and well,” I shrugged.

“Oh,” She looked uncomfortable. “I’m sorry, hun. But gyarados are banned from the Big P Race.”


“Few years back two competitors entered with gyarados,” She started, “One of’em wasn’t well trained at all, and it left the track and started tearing up the fields and downed a silo before the trainer managed to return it. The other gyarados attacked the other competitors, one poor guy got thrown off his doduo and nearly broke his neck. Since then gyarados has been on the list of pokemon banned from entering the race.” She finished apologetically.

“Ah…well then,” Guess I wouldn’t be entering after all.

“Well that stinks.” Misty fumed. “Trust some lousy trainers to ruin it for the rest of them!”

“It’s fine, really.” I rushed to reassure them. “I’ll…I’ll cheer you on from the stands!”

“Pika pika chu pikachu!” Pikachu jumped off Ash’s shoulder onto the table.

“What’s that, Pikachu?” Ash cocked his head curiously.

“Chu chu Pikachu!” With that he jumped from the table to Ash’s lap and pulled out one of Ash’s pokeballs. Another short hop back up to the table and Squirtle had joined the group gathering.

Pikachu started chattering to him quickly, the two pokemon having a rushed conversation before they both turned to Ash hopefully.

“Pika, pikapi?” Pikachu tapped the map and then jumped onto Squirtle’s back. “Pika!”

“You…want to enter the race too? Riding Squirtle?” Ash gaped at them.

“Is that allowed?” Misty raised her eyebrow skeptically.

“Well, there ain’t no rules against it.” Lara shrugged. “Nothing says a pokemon can’t be a rider if they want to. Pikachu just has to stay on Squirtle for the whole race.”

The image was just…too precious for words. I covered my mouth and tried to suppress my giggle fit.

Well, Lara got us all set up in a couple of their guest rooms. This is the second time Misty and I have shared a bed. Geez, Cerulean city seems so far away. Hard to believe we’ve come so far and there’s still so much farther to go.

I’d better get some sleep. We’re up bright and early for everyone to enter the race tomorrow.

Goodnight, Alakazam. I hope you’re having as much fun as I am.

People on ranches get up even earlier than trainers on a pokemon journey.

No one warned me of this.
At least there is coffee.

“I don’t know how you can drink it straight from the pot like that.” Lara had allowed me to brew a pot just for myself and pour it into my canteen. I’d obviously removed the filter ahead of time, though I’d briefly considered the benefits of coffee flavored water.

“Mmmm,” I sighed, enjoying the warmth from the cup and the buzz the caffeine gave as it hit my veins.

“WELCOME LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, TO THE POKEMON CHALLENGE RACE, SPONSORED BY THE LARAMIE CLAN!” The announcer began. The crowd went wild in response and I was terribly aware of the fact Lara and I were standing right by the race track.

“OUR CONTESTANTS WILL RIDE THEIR POKEMON OVER RUGGED TERRAIN TO CLAIM THEIR PRIZE!” A big screen lit up with the four portions of the race. “RACERS, TO THE STARTING LINE PLEASE!”

“There they are!” Lara jumped up, waving her good arm to catch everyone’s attention. Pikachu and Squirtle looked adorable.

Click. FLASH! That’s one for the future scrapbook.

And…was that someone standing on top of an electrode?

I took a picture of that too. It’s not every day you see the phrase ‘Survival of the Fittest’ in action. I was honestly curious on how he planned to ride an electrode in a race.

“Good luck, you guys!” Lara called, still waving as much as she was able. I knew it must have stung to not be the one on Ponyta’s back.

I saw Ash’s lips move and Ponyta’s mane flared wildly but I couldn’t hear what he said over the roar of the crowd. Still, my chest welled up in anticipation. I almost wanted to put down my coffee so I could have a better grip on my camera.


“GET SET!” The whole crowd was holding its breath.

“GOOOOOOOOOOO!”

They were off like a shot. Even though I wasn’t competing I still felt the rush in my veins. Through the jubilation I did notice something a little funny though.

Last night Ash was clumsy on Ponyta’s back, sitting heavy and holding his knees awkwardly.

Now? I could only get a good look on the screen and it wasn’t a close shot but I swear he looked like a natural. If I didn’t know any better I’d say he’d been riding pokemon all his life.

“Look at him go.” Lara breathed beside me, the same way she had last night.

“Yeah, it’s…” I didn’t finish. I didn’t know how.

The rest of the crowd didn’t seem to notice what we did though.

“AND DODRIO AND IT’S RIDER PULL AHEAD OF THE PACK! THEY’LL WIN THIS
RACE IN A **LANDSLIDE** IF THEY MANAGE TO KEEP THIS PACE!” I noticed Lara tensing at the commentator’s words.

“Dodrio *can’t* keep up this pace.” I assured her. “It’s sprinting now, and they can’t maintain that speed for long. Pulling out that hard at the gate is going to cost him later.”

“You think so?” She bit her lip.

“Mhm,” I nodded, turning back to the cameras. Too bad I couldn’t follow the race from above; I bet I could get some great shots like that. I’d have to settle for taking Ash’s picture when he stood in the winner’s circle.

There wasn’t a doubt in my mind that he was going to win this race.

The screen split, one camera following Dodrio and the other following the rest of the pack. Misty and Brock were doing well, middle of the pack. Poor Pikachu and Squirtle were dead last.

“Well, gotta admire their determination, right?” Lara chuckled when I pointed them out.

“**HOLD ON FOLKS! LOOKS LIKE SOMETHING’S GOTTEN INTO THE TAUROS! IT’S GOING WILD!**” Shocked, we re-focused on the racers. Ash was already ahead of the tauros, which was good as it was bucking madly, almost throwing its rider at several points. On one kick it collided with a nidorina.

“**OH NO! NIDORINA DIDN’T LIKE THAT! NOW BOTH POKEMON ARE BATTLIN,** **IGNORING THEIR TRAINERS!”** Indeed, both trainers were forced to jump off their pokemon to avoid getting caught up in the fight. **“THESE POKEMON NEED MORE TRAINING.”** The announcer concluded.

“They’re both from our stock.” Lara told me, frowning. “That nidorina is only two years old and hasn’t had a trainer all that long but that tauros was in the last race and he’s usually gentle as anything.”

“Hmm,” Now I was frowning. Pikachu and Squirtle were skirting the edges of the fight now. I sighed in relief as they were able to get away without being dragged in.

“**THE RACERS ARE COMING UP TO THE FORTY DEGREE CLIMB! A TRUE TEST OF ENDURANCE!”** The cameras left the battling pokemon. Dodrio was slowing down, I was glad to see. Brock and Onix pulled ahead of Misty but Ash was now fourth in place and *gaining*.

“He’s pacing her well.” Lara noted. Her good hand was clenching her sling, knuckles going white. None of that emotion showed in her face though. Her expression was steely determination, urging Ponyta on from a distance.

They crested the small *mountain* and began the descent. It would be easy for a pokemon to overbalance on a dead run. Dodrio and Ponyta both had the advantage here. Dodrio’s claws provided excellent traction on uneven terrain and Ponyta’s body type and hooves kept her from losing her balance.

“I DON’T **BELIEVE THIS! LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, NOT ONLY IS ELECTRODE STILL IN THIS RACE BUT IT LOOKS LIKE IT MIGHT TAKE THE LEAD!”** Say *what?*

“Bu…But how?” I gaped at the screen.

I have no idea how that trainer was balancing like that. His legs were almost more of a blur than...
his pokemon was.

He passed Dario and Dodrio. He was gaining the lead. One foot, then two.

Then he crashed through the ground and Dodrio leaped over the hole and continued, back in first place.

“ROTTEN LUCK! LOOKS LIKE A TRAGIC ACCIDENT HAS KNOCKED ELECTRODE AND ITS TRAINER OUT OF THE RACE!” But something worse was about to happen.

Electrode’s body was flashing!

“No.” I dropped the camera. Later, I’d be glad for the strap tying it around my neck. At the time, I didn’t care. I don’t know how I avoided dropping the coffee.

“AH WELL, BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME! NOW OUR COMPETITORS—” Another tauros passed Electrode. Then a nidoking. Electrode kept flashing and its trainer was scrambling away, out of the hole.

Out of the blast zone.

“No, no, no, no!” Too far, nothing I could do, no way to warn him.

Ponyta was leaping over the hole, touching down on the other side, pleasepleaseplease—BANG!

“It Self-Destructed!?” Lara almost screamed.

“The fall must’ve…it must’ve…stunned it. Instinct,” My heart was in my throat. I couldn’t see Ash through the cloud of dust.

Arceus, please!

“THE SMOKE IS CLEARING! LOOKS LIKE EVERYONE’S OKAY!” I slumped against the railing. “BUT OUR RACERS DON’T LOOK TOO HOT! MOST OF THEM HAVE BEEN THROWN OFF THEIR POKEMON BUT INJURIES DON’T LOOK TOO SEVERE. WE’LL HAVE MEDICS AT THEIR LOCATION IN MOMENTS!”

Good to know but I still kept my eyes on Ash. He hadn’t fallen off Ponyta somehow. Ponyta wasn’t unconscious either. If she was her mane and tail would have dimmed. She was likely stunned. But Ash? He still wasn’t moving.

That’s when Squirtle and Pikachu caught up to them.

Letting the whole crowd see the moment Pikachu got Ash and Ponyta with a low-volt Thundershock attack.

“I DON’T BELIEVE IT FOLKS! IT LOOKS LIKE PONYTA AND HER RIDER, ASH KETCHUM, ARE STILL IN THIS RACE!”

“By great Ho-Oh himself, I can’t believe Ash still has a shot at this.” Lara stared at the screen. Ash was catching up to the rest of the racers now. The water portion was next.

“That’s Ash for you.” I cracked a grin.

There were stepping stones for the racers to use but they clearly weren’t up to holding the bigger pokemon. Nidoking took a dip and Onix opted to stop full out. Brock jumping off his head
cemented their decision to drop out of the race. Misty and Starmie on the other hand blasted through the water easily. Ash and Ponyta took it like a champ. Lara was a damn fine trainer if her fire-type didn’t balk at having to cross a lake.

Squirtle seemed to enjoy this leg of the race too. It was kind of cute that he and Pikachu were still in this thing.

“IT’S THE LAST LEG OF THE RACE PEOPLE! BUT FIRST, WE’VE SET OUT DISHES OF POKEMON CHOW FOR OUR COMPETITORS! EACH POKEMON MUST EAT A FULL DISH BEFORE CONTINUING!” The cliffs. Metal trays and troughs had been set out for all the competitors. Dario, Ash, Misty, and Pikachu and Squirtle were the only remaining competitors.

And Dario was having a little trouble coordinating the three heads of Dodrio.

“Mm,” I winced sympathetically. “Guess he couldn’t separate the food without getting down from Dodrio, huh?”

“Between you and me? I’ve always hating helping out in the Doduo and Dodrio areas come feeding time.” Lara confided. “It’s always one hell of a mess.”

Here come Ash and Ponyta! They stopped at a trough and Ponyta fell to eating quickly. Misty and Starmie stopped too. There came Squirtle and Pikachu who were dividing up the food to share.

Black smog started to fill the screen.

“SORRY LADIES AND GENTS! LOOKS LIKE WE’RE HAVING SOME TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES!” The announcer sounded a little flummoxed. “HOPEFULLY OUR CAMERA CREWS CAN GET THE PICTURE BACK SOON!”

“This doesn’t look good, does it?” Lara looked at me.

“Ah, no.” I took a sip of my coffee. Lukewarm.

We couldn’t see anything through the smoke. The longer it went on the more certain I grew that this was enemy action. Team Rocket more than likely.

The accidents, Lara’s arm, this smoke, could it all be coincidence? Just a rash of bad luck?

I took another drink, trying to mask the dawning fear and rage. Say Team Rocket was involved; What did they stand to gain?

Lara had her eyes glued to the big screen. She didn’t notice me studying her and her broken arm.

The Big P Ranch was pretty famous according to Brock. Lots of strong pokemon to steal. But the fact of the matter is that one big haul is eye catching. Bigger risk for a one time reward. And why interfere with the race instead of using the distraction it provided to make off with the pokemon?

Lara’s words from earlier came back to me. “The winner of the race becomes an honorary member of the Laramie Clan.”

With access to their records, I’d bet. A little creative editing and it would be easy for some pokemon to go missing. One or two every few months probably wouldn’t be that suspicious and the operation could go on for years before being discovered.

But Team Rocket would need an in. My hand came to rest on my belt, counting pokeballs.
Besides Ash and Misty the only other competitor left was Dario. I hadn’t gotten the best impression of him when we’d met but was he really the type to cut a deal with criminals for the sake of getting a better job for himself?

He’d been the one to tell us the tauros herd was going berserk. I glared at my cup rather than glare at Lara’s arm. If he was in league with Team Rocket then he was directly responsible for her injury.

What if she’d fallen a different way? What if she’d cracked her head on that fence instead of just her arm?

“LOOKS LIKE WE’VE GOT THE PICTURE BACK, EVERYBODY!” The crowd’s cheering drew me out of my contemplation. On screen Dario and Dodrio were sprinting through the final leg of the race. “HERE COMES DODRIO AND ITS RIDER, DARIO! THEY’RE ENTERING THE STADIUM FOR THE FINAL LAP NOW!”

“BUT THIS RACE ISN’T OVER YET FOLKS BECAUSE HERE COMES PONYTA AND HER RIDER, ASH!” Yes!

“C’mon, c’mon!” Lara clenched her fists beside me. I fumbled for my camera, ready for that photo finish.

“DODRIO’S STILL IN THE LEAD BUT PONYTA’S GAINING FAST!” Dodrio couldn’t keep up that sprint for much longer. Ash was pulling up alongside Dario now.

Ponyta fell back. She lost rhythm, falling a body-length behind Dodrio and shaking her head. I’d missed whatever caused it but I didn’t miss what happened next.

Ponyta’s body flashed white! Her mane and tail grew longer, wilder. A horn grew from her forehead.

“OH! I CAN’T BELIEVE IT, FOLKS! PONYTA’S EVOLVING INTO RAPIDASH! THE RACING POKEMON CAPABLE OF SPEEDS OVER 150 MILES PER HOUR AND SHE’S READY TO SHOW US ALL! SHE’S GAINING ON DODRIO, THEY’RE SIDE-BY-SIDE, NECK-AND-NECK!” He continued his fast paced monologue. I left my coffee on the rails and settled myself in for the picture. It probably wouldn’t turn out very good but I at least wanted to try.

“THEY’RE COMING DOWN TO THE WIRE AAAAANND—!!!!” Flash!

I straightened up, listening to the crowd cheer as the commentator announced Ash’s victory!

“He did it! She did it! They won!” Lara whooped, jumping up and down so much she was at risk of upsetting her sling. I’m sure it must have hurt but it didn’t look like she cared one whit about that. She was so overwhelmed that she vaulted over the railing and ran to meet Rapidash before her parents could walk over with the trophy.

I downed the rest of my coffee and followed at a more sedate pace.

Still, happy as I was, I couldn’t ignore Dario’s seething rage at the side. And it didn’t escape my notice that Misty, Pikachu, and Squirtle weren’t back yet.

Ash didn’t look worried. I had to take that to mean our friends were okay. I tried to settle my nerves even as Dario raced off rather than accept his second place prize.
I got some good pictures of Ash, Rapidash, and Lara. I got another good picture watching Ash accept the certificate that formally named him an honorary member of the Laramie Clan, though he predictably refused an offer of employment.

“Cal!” Misty rolled up on Starmie, Pikachu and Squirtle riding with her. Brock and the other racers were returning too. “You’ll never guess what we found out!” She challenged.

“Hmm,” I made a show of thinking about it. “Did Dario hire Team Rocket to interfere with the race so he could win?” Their poleaxed expressions were captured in my next photo.

I’m running out of memory in my camera. I’ll get them developed in the next town, get them sent ahead to the next Pokemon Center after that. I’ll have to remember to buy a photo album or a scrap book to put them in.

We’ll probably hit the Safari Zone in a day or two. After that I’ll need to take out my stitches. We’ll get to Ash’s next gym battle and we’ll keep going and eventually Ash will compete in the Indigo Plateau.

But for now, I’ll just enjoy celebrating Ash’s victory with my friends.
The Guns

Chapter Notes

The Kangaskhan Kid was not my favorite episode. I dunno, Tommy's parents always rubbed me the wrong way.

We left the Big P Pokemon Ranch in high spirits. Lara gave us directions and even though Ash turned down their job offer her parents still offered to top off our supplies. For free even!

“Think this is the place?” Brock gestured grandly. All around us wild pokemon went about their lives with no fear of the humans in their midst.

“Ah, maybe we should, uh, find the Safari Caretaker’s Post? Like Lara said?” I suggested nervously. “We don’t wanna get accused of poaching pokemon after all.”

“Lara said the Safari Zone was only half a day’s journey from their ranch! This has gotta be the place!” Ash argued. “Just look at all these pokemon!”

“Er, yeah, but…” We get accused of doing the wrong thing a lot. And most of the time we were the ones in the wrong, even if we didn’t know it at the time.

“Look, a Chancey!” He stopped and pointed. We could see her ear frills over a bush. “This is our chance! Get it?” He laughed, pulling out a pokeball and directing Pikachu forward.

“Hold it right there!” The chancey turned out to be an Officer Jenny wearing a chancey-hat.

An Officer Jenny aiming a hunting rifle right at us.

The blood all rushed from my head. The rifle gleamed menacingly in the sunlight. It was aiming at us, no, aiming at Ash!

_Have to get out of here. Have to get away! Call Fearow and—!

No, no, don’t panic. Breathe. I forced my eyes up jerkily, focusing on Officer Jenny’s face. Made myself breathe again.

My hand was on my belt, on Fearow’s pokeball. I had no memory of putting it there.

“You all had better come with me.” She pointed the gun down, replaced the safety, and suddenly the world expanded. It wouldn’t take much time for her to lift and cock it again. She wasn’t looking at me, nobody was. I could call out Char, take the gun before she could react, and then—!

And then…And then?

No, she’s a police officer. I’m not going to attack a police officer. She turned her back and was leading us somewhere, showing us her back.

I’m so glad the others were too focused on Officer Jenny to pay me any attention. I had no idea how pale I must’ve been but given how bad my hands were shaking I didn’t doubt I looked bad. I
took the time spent walking to Officer Jenny’s command tent to count my breaths and calm down. That was actually a worse reaction than with the tank. I need to get a hold of myself. Control my reactions.

With my stomach writhing I forced myself to let go of my belt. It’s going to be a long day.

Long…does not begin to cover it.

“No.” Everyone stared at me.

“I’m sorry but Papa isn’t—!” The woman tried.

“Is he injured or sick?” I narrowed my eyes at her. At them.

“I’m afraid—” I cut them off again.

“We are not carrying you.” I stepped forward and spent a quick moment being grateful that the man was short enough for me to look down on him. “We offered to help you find your son, a son you abandoned for five years!”

“It was an accident! We tried to find little Tommy but—!” He leaned back, sweat beading on his brow.

“Not very hard apparently, considering his location has been common knowledge for this Reserve for years!” He looked unnerved. Good.

“Being honest,” Officer Jenny cleared her throat to get our attention. “While I admire that you wish to reunite with your son, as an officer of the law I can’t ignore the reckless child endangerment and abandonment you perpetrated. I’m all for helping you find Tommo and if he agrees I have no problem with allowing you to get to know each other, but you will not be regaining custody.”

“What? But…we’re his parents!” The woman cried.

“You dropped your baby in the jungle and then didn’t look for him for more than, what? A week?” I snapped.

Officer Jenny told us more as we traveled to the kangaskhan stomping grounds. Apparently she was the one who discovered Tommo four and a half years ago. By then the kangaskhan had already adopted him as one of their own and she couldn’t get him away from them without inciting the whole herd to destroy everything in their path to get him back.

Still, she’d done everything she could after that so Tommo would be happy and healthy. She visited him everyday, gave him his shots, told him about humans and civilization. After a year of no one coming for him she’d arranged everything legally.

Fiona Jenny was and still is Tommo’s legal guardian. Every few months a social worker and a pokemon expert come in to make sure Tommo’s being treated well and is safe and she has fulfilled all those obligations and more. She’s been his mother in all but name.

Her plan is that once he’s old enough she’ll help him get his Trainer License. Hopefully by then he’ll be interested in the world outside the Reserve and he’ll be willing to explore.
When Mr. and Mrs. Dron told us of how they’d been separated I…I saw red. They dropped their baby. They abandoned their baby! For five years! And yes, for a good portion of that they’d believed their son was dead but that doesn’t excuse everything.

**WHO HOLDS A BABY OUTSIDE THE WINDOW OF A HELICOPTER!??!!**

Ugh, I don’t even want to remember most of today. The only highlights were getting to watch the kangaskhan herd and getting to see a baby kangaskhan up close. I got a good picture of the little tyke and of Tommo himself.

Dealing with the Drons did not put me in a good mood. *First,* was their sob story about losing their son which was bad enough on its own. They could’ve been absolutely perfect people from that point on and my impression of them would not have changed.

But then they tried to get us to carry them on a palanquin. Through the jungle. After we’d (Admittedly the others more than myself) graciously offered to help reunite them with Tommo.

That was when I lost my temper. I think the others are still surprised by my reaction. I’m not though. I know I’m sensitive about the subject of parents.

Tommo’s more forgiving than I am. So long as the Drons avoid jail time he’s willing to allow them to visit regularly and get to know them. With Officer Jenny supervising, of course.

Considering Mr. Dron tried to forcibly take Tommo back to the city with them I think that’s a tad generous.

Still, if getting to know them is what Tommo wants then I hope it goes well. I don’t trust them as far as I could throw them but…Agh!

I’m still so aggravated and it’s been hours!

To summarize: We found Tommo and the kangaskhan, Team Rocket showed up with a big Kangaskhan-Mech and tried to steal them, we stopped them with the help (As reluctant as I am to admit it) of the Drons, who crashed their helicopter into the Mech in order to destroy it. There was a brief moment when we thought they were dead but they climbed out of the wreck virtually unharmed. Team Rocket went blasting off again and we all went back to Officer Jenny’s command tent.

Officer Jenny is taking the Drons into town tomorrow to start legal action. I’m not sure what’s involved there. She offered to drop us off at the Safari Zone Caretaker Post tomorrow on the way there. At least we won’t be accused of poaching pokemon again, hopefully.

I might still be too aggravated to sleep but I’ve got to try. I could stay up longer actually transcribing everything that happened but most of it would probably just be complaints about the Drons and then I’d really be too mad to sleep.

If I get my memories back I hope that my parents don’t turn out to be anything like the Drons. Of all the parents I’ve seen since waking up in the past, I hope mine were like Mrs. Ketchum. I hope they were nice and supportive and loved me the way it’s so obvious she loves Ash. I hope they were like that.

I wonder if Alakazam knows. I wonder if he’d tell me.

“Cal, you mind helping me out a little?” Brock waved me over to the camp kitchen set where he
was preparing breakfast.

“Ah, sure.” I’d been planning to walk a bit and try to prepare myself for sharing a vehicle with the Drons but I could spend that time with Brock instead. “What do you need?”

“Mind watching these? When they’re golden brown you can flip them over.” He set me in front of the griddle where a batch of pancakes sizzled.

“How are you holding up?” He asked once we were both set to our tasks.

“Mm?” I hummed questioningly. How long does it take pancakes to cook?

“With Mr. and Mrs. Dron?” He asked me seriously.

“Oh,” I looked back to the griddle. I didn’t know what to say.

“You felt pretty strongly about them yesterday.” He said after it became clear I wasn’t going to say anything else.

“…I don’t—!” I cut myself off with a huff and flipped one of the pancakes. It was easier than I thought it would be, considering I can’t remember if I’ve ever made these before. I tried to think of how I wanted to continue while I flipped the rest. “They’re not…good parents, I think. They just…they didn’t look for him, not really.”

And as soon as I said it I realized that was the part that bothered me the most. The fact they hadn’t looked. They found his parachute and then just gave him up for dead. They didn’t look.

“Hm,” Brock didn’t say anything in response for a while. The first batch of pancakes finished up and I started the second with the batter he’d prepared. At one point Ash and Misty had walked in, I’d seen them do a quick double-take and then they’d beat tracks to leave again. Still not sure why.

“What are your parents like? If you don’t mind me asking?” His tone was calm, almost casual. The question still made me flinch.

What could I say? The longer I stayed quiet the more suspicious I became. I had to say something. But I didn’t want to lie. I think I’m getting tired of lying.

“They’re…not in the picture. Either of them.” I settled on. I busied myself flipping pancakes so I wouldn’t have to look at him. “I don’t even know what they look like.”

Ow. My throat felt hot and tight when I said that.

I don’t wanna cry. Calm down, breathe. Same as yesterday, focus on the here and now.

Brock didn’t say anything until breakfast was ready but the silence wasn’t bad or awkward. It felt more like understanding and that might’ve been worse. Because I didn’t lie but I wasn’t honest either.

Today’s looking to be just as terrible as yesterday. Hopefully actually getting to the Safari Zone will cheer me up a little. As it is I have to wrap this up before the Drons finally finish their food.

Who the heck carries fine china and a full tea set with them? They had four different forks and didn’t even use most of them! Why are these people so weird!?
“So this is the Safari Zone.” Ash put his hands on his hips as we looked over the massive fence and the small cabin by the gates.

The signs all said Safari Zone on them so we were reasonably confident that we were finally in the right place.

Ash started shaking. We looked at him in a mix of confusion and concern until he suddenly belted out a massive laugh and cheer. He ran to the door of the cabin, with us following behind him, bemused.

Then the door swung open and a man with two pistols stepped into view, leveling them at our heads.

I am…tired…of people swinging guns in my friends’ faces.

“Who’s making all this racket?” The man glared.

“Sorry, sir.” Ash gulped. “I was just excited that we finally got here. This is…the Safari Zone, right?”

“Hmph.” He holstered his guns and I sighed with relief. I kept my own hand on my belt, ready to summon Char at a moment’s notice.

“Feh, trainers.” He spat the word like a curse, then continued, “I’m Kaiser, the Warden and Caretaker of the Safari Zone. Get your butts in here.” He stepped back into the cabin.

Step into an enclosed space with an armed man? I could name a hundred other things I’d rather be doing but I still followed everyone else inside.

The cabin itself was welcoming. Homey. Carved keepsakes and picture frames adorned the shelves and walls. There was a vid-phone in one corner and a teleporter machine beside that. There was a hunting rifle on the wall behind the counter next to a cork-board labeled Banned Trainers. The ammo was probably stored under the counter. He was already behind the counter and there weren’t any other large pieces of furniture to use as cover. If this erupted into a shootout my priorities would be to disable him as quickly as possible and keep myself and my friends alive.

No, no! I scolded myself and tried to keep my expression neutral. Don’t think like that. It won’t become a shootout.

Even telling myself that though, I took in the room again. A door to the rest of the cabin was behind the counter. If I could push Kaiser back into it that would give us time to get out. Once outside I’d call Gyarados. He was so large and his scales so thick that standard ammunition didn’t have much affect but I’d still probably want to do what I can to take the hunting rifle out of play before that, either by damaging it with Char or taking it for myself.

It kept playing out in my head. What if this? What if that? Introducing new variables to expand on the master plan. None of the others had ever been in a shootout before. (Have I been in a shootout before?)

Kaiser started reaching under the counter.

I moved ahead of Brock and Misty, one hand on Char’s ball, thumbing the release. There was any
number of harmless things he could’ve been storing under there but that didn’t stop the bone chilling certainty that he was reaching for another gun or more ammo.

Next to Ash I was standing close enough to see both Kaiser’s hands. One was on the counter itself and as soon as it moved to the holster on his left I’d be ready with Char. The other slowly came out from under the counter.

With a box of green and brown pokeballs and a collapsible fishing rod.

Tension didn’t bleed out of my frame, but I did loosen my grip a little.

“Wow! Safari Balls!” Ash gasped, reaching out to take the case. Kaiser’s hand _moved_—!

I hit the barrel of the pistol and forced his hand _up_ so any shot would go wide. If he had time to recover his superior frame would allow him to overpower me. So he wouldn’t _get_ that time. My other hand came up so fast I might have torn one of my stitches, Char’s pokeball enlarged.

We both froze. He still had one hand free to grab another gun and given a moment he could overpower the grip I had on his right. But I was holding Char’s pokeball at chest height, in perfect view. He had to know the risk he was running here. He didn’t know what pokemon I had or what order they sat in on my belt. He had no way of knowing how big or how dangerous or how _bulletproof_ anything I pulled out would be.

And for a minute, for _one_ minute, I wasn’t Cal Memo, pokemon trainer with a deep secret and self-confidence issues.

For a minute I was someone else.

“Don’t…aim your gun at us.” I met stony eyes glare for glare.

“Don’t give me reason to then.” But he nodded and leaned back, his other hand coming up and away from his other gun. I let go of his right hand and took a step back, lowering Char’s pokeball a few inches but not putting it away.

“Cal?” It was Ash’s voice, Ash’s hand on my shoulder, that brought me back to the present.

Back to the past.

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Here are the things I know about myself.

Facts:
1) My name is Cal.
2) I am eleven years old.
3) I have amnesia.
4) I am well-versed in first aid for both humans and pokemon.
5) I have a strong knowledge base of pokemon but certain aspects of everyday life surprise and confuse me. (Millionaires, celebrities, etc)
6) I am from the future.
7) I’m afraid of guns.

I probably come from a region at war. I am likely a refugee. I don’t even know if I _have_ parents or if that longing in my heart is just me wishing for something I’ve never had.

I am familiar, dreadfully so, with people aiming guns at me. I have _reflexes_ for dangerous
scenarios.

Why am I in the past? Did I consent to having my memory erased or did Alakazam do it against my will? How can I get back?

Do I even want to?

If I assume all this was a willing risk I took, then that means it had to be done for a reason, right?
I’m here to do something. Or stop something.

Until or unless I get my memories back there’s no way to know for sure. I just have to continue as I have been up to now.

Great Dialga and Sweet Celebi, what am I here to do?

Back to the past.

I had no idea how to explain myself. Didn’t know how to even start.

Still, I couldn’t say nothing. Not with all of them looking at me with so much concern.

“I…don’t like guns.” My voice came out hoarse. I spared a moment to clear my throat before continuing, “And I especially don’t like it when they’re aimed at my friends.”

“Neither do I.” Brock nodded, looking from me to Kaiser.

“As Warden and Caretaker of the Safari Zone I have to be prepared to defend myself and the pokemon here with my life.” Then he grimaced. “But yeah, I can cut back on the intimidation act a bit.” He turned stony eyes to me.

“You realize how dangerous what you just did was?” His eyes narrowed dangerously.

“Yes.” I huffed. I could’ve followed that up with ‘Do you realize how close you came to being charbroiled by my charmeleon?’ But I bit my tongue.

“Allow me to explain the rules of the Safari Zone.” He mercifully changed the subject and brought our attention back to the case and rod. “In the Safari Zone you are only permitted to use the special Safari Balls and Rod. Using any other item will result in you being banned from the Safari Zone for life. Each group gets a set of thirty Safari Balls, split them up however you like. We clear?”

“Crystal, sir.” Ash nodded seriously.

“Good.” Kaiser grumbled.

There were still a couple formalities to take care of before Kaiser would open the gates. First he had to use our licenses to register us in the Safari Zone’s databanks. We’d have to register all the pokemon we caught when we were done too. I guess that helped keep track of the population numbers and made sure no one was smuggling out more pokemon.

While Kaiser was in the back doing that, we took the chance to spread out and explore the cabin.

“I’m going to call Professor Oak.” Ash announced, thumbing at the vid-phone in the corner. He and Pikachu walked over and booted the machine up.

Brock was admiring the wooden carvings. Lots of different pokemon mostly. Misty was walking
along the walls looking at the pictures.

“Since you’re at the Safari Zone make sure you catch lots of pokemon, understood?” Professor Oak’s raised voice caught my attention.

“R-right.” Ash coughed. “Will do, Professor!”

“Hey, he’s got a picture of a dratini over here!” Misty’s shocked gasp spooked all of us. Pikachu almost fell off Ash’s shoulder.

“Dratini?” Curiosity piqued, I walked over to better view the picture she meant. It was a picture of Kaiser himself, maybe a decade or two younger, next to a dratini.

“DON’T TOUCH THAT!” For the third time in two minutes, I jumped. Kaiser vaulted over the counter so he could rip the picture off the wall and hold it to his chest that much faster. “There is no dratini in the Safari Zone!”

Yeah, that was less than convincing.

But he didn’t leave us any room for argument. He stormed back to the other room and slammed the door behind him.

“Ah, Kaiser,” Professor Oak sighed tiredly. “All these years and still as protective as ever.”

“What’s the big deal? I mean, I know dratini is a super rare pokemon.” He held up his hands to forestall any attempt for someone to interrupt him. “But why did he react like that?”

“Because thirty years ago, there was dratini in the Safari Zone. Or at least a dratini.” He rubbed his temples and shook his head sadly. “But word got out and people came from around the country to try to catch dratini for themselves. And in the process they almost destroyed the Safari Zone.”

“Well that stinks.” Misty put her hands on her hips.

“Mm, I did hear a rumor about dratini in the Safari Zone, but I assumed it was just a rumor.” Brock admitted.

We divided up the Safari Balls. Seven for each of us with two left over. In the end we decided to give Ash the other two since Professor Oak had such high expectations of him.

“But I get the rod!” Misty swept it into her hands. “I’ll bet there’s some good water pokemon here! Wouldn’t it be great to have a little poliwag? Goldeen or seaking maybe! Oh, and I’d love a marill or azurill!”

“Uh, I think poliwags are, uh, more common in Johto?” Not to say they couldn’t be found in Kanto but they preferred large lakes and Kanto didn’t have a lot of those.

“A girl can dream!” Misty sighed, still hugging the Safari Rod to her chest.

“Alright, let’s get moving.” Kaiser returned our licenses and we filed out of the cabin for the big gates.

“This is gonna be great!” Ash was almost vibrating in intensity.

“Pika pika!” Pikachu clung to his shoulder, ears twitching.

“Hold everything!” Three voices I am slowly learning to despise called out to us from atop the
“Hey, get down from there!” Kaiser shouted angrily.

“Prepare for trouble!” Jessie ignored him.
“And make it double!” They struck matching poses.
“To protect the world from devastation!” Kaiser’s hands twitched towards his holsters. My heart kicked up into high gear.

“To unite all peoples within—!” BANG! “GAH!”

“Final warning: Get. Down.” Kaiser held the smoking pistol in place.

Only when Team Rocket pulled a really dumb move with a parachute did I realize that I had Char’s pokeball in hand again. Not on my belt, not simply thumbing the release, but actively in my hand and ready to go.

It took an enormous effort of will to put her ball back on my belt without calling her out. If it came down to a fight I was going to have to rely on Cleffa because I officially couldn’t trust myself with my more dangerous pokemon. Cleffa would have a hard time killing someone even if I did order her to attack a human.

It was hard to change my lineup without attracting anyone’s attention while Team Rocket delivered their stupid challenge but I managed it. Now Cleffa’s ball was first in line. With luck if I pull a ball on reflex again it will be hers. I’ll put them back in order after we leave this place with its gun-crazy warden.

“Alright, let’s get moving! We’ve got to catch more pokemon than Team Rocket!” Ash darted through the gates while Kaiser led Team Rocket to the cabin to get them a set of Safari Balls.

“Mm, I don’t like this.” I looked over my shoulder. “They’ve got to be up to some trick.”

“Well whatever it is I’m sure we can handle it.” He declared confidently.

“Hey, look!” Brock brought our attention to a herd of tauros running nearby. They would be passing right by us in seconds.

In a flash he and Ash whipped out two Safari Balls and each caught one of the passing tauros.

“Yeah, we caught a tauros!” Ash flashed his victory pose.

Two down, twenty-eight to go.
“Let’s see what else there is to catch!” His first capture only fueled the flames. Even I got a little excited, putting Kaiser’s guns and his willingness to use them behind me. Everywhere we looked there were pokemon ready to be caught.

“Look!” Ash hissed, grabbing me by the shoulder and pointing through the foliage where a rhyhorn was calmly grazing. We shared grins as he readied another Safari Ball.

Then out of nowhere came another tauros.

“What the?” Ash reclaimed the Safari Ball as the rhyhorn charged off, having noticed us.

“Too bad, I guess everyone gets a little unlucky now and then.” Brock shrugged helplessly.

“Eh, I’m not worried. And it’s kinda funny, right? What are the odds of another tauros just running in the way of a capture like that?” He joked.

“Err,” I looked around, scanning the landscape for good vantage points. The tauros herd hadn’t run off like we’d thought. They were settled close by. Several of them were looking this way and lashing their tails.

“C’mon, let’s keep going!” Ash pushed us.

It’s not like Ash was the only one targeted. Brock saw a graveler he would’ve liked and wound up with a tauros. Misty tried to hit a marill and got a tauros. Finally I decided to try my luck and spotted a paras I wouldn’t mind training and got hit by a tauros too!

“Okay, this is getting ridiculous!” Misty stomped her foot. “It’s like they’re trying to get caught!”

“I, uh, think they are.” I looked around until I spotted the much-reduced herd.

“What do you mean, Cal?” Ash frowned at me. He’d used up five Safari Balls and only had tauros to show for it.

“Um, I can’t be sure but,” I waved at the herd. “That herd has been following us. I think they want to be captured too.”

“Hmm,” Brock scratched his chin. “You know, tauros are pretty famous for being herd pokemon. They don’t do as well on their own and they hate being separated. Maybe since we caught those first two all the others decided they didn’t want to be separated so they’re aiming to get the whole herd caught.”

“What? But that would take up—!” He started counting the herd. “That would take up all our Safari Balls!”

“The whole herd’s like this?” Misty frowned. “They really don’t want to be separated from their family, huh?”

“Piika, pikachu.” Pikachu nodded, ears low.

“The more we catch the worse it gets.” I realized. “The more determined they get to be caught.”

“Oh…” Ash brought out one of the used Safari Balls. “Maybe we can just release the tauros and
try for different pokemon?"

“That could work.” Brock raised his eyebrows in surprise. Quickly we all inspected the Safari Balls we’d used.

“Hey, do you guys see what I see?” Misty’s voice wavered.

“Well, if you see an empty spot where a release button should be then,” Brock didn’t finish. He didn’t have to.

“There’s…no way to release and re-use the Safari Balls.” I said out loud.

“I don’t get it!” Ash pulled at his hair. “Why would they forget to put in a release button?”

“Er, I think I know.” I lifted my hand uncertainly. Once I had their attention I continued. “See, it’s possible that a trainer could come here to catch pokemon, leave, then release the pokemon from the Safari Balls and then re-catch them with normal pokeballs. Since the rules of the Safari Zone mean we can’t get more Safari Balls but can revisit this place. That hypothetical trainer could come back with the newly emptied Safari Balls he already has and…”

“That’s….That’s just—!” He cut himself off with a scowl.

“Right, Kaiser used our licenses to register each Safari Ball to one of us.” Brock nodded with a sour look. “And he doesn’t seem the understanding type.”

We all stood in silence, contemplating the predicament we found ourselves in.

“Ooh, I have an idea!” Misty lit up excitedly. “Let’s use the Rod!” She held it up.

“Right! The tauros can’t interfere with our captures if we’re catching aquatic pokemon!” Brock smirked.

Misty was ecstatic of course. She led us to the big river right away and dug around in her bag for her tackle box.

“Behold!” She opened it, revealing a collection of pokemon shaped lures.

“They’re cute.” I smiled at the little psyduck.

“These are my secret weapons!” She boasted, holding the box aloft. She held up a finger and then moved the lures around until she found a specific one, hiding it in the palm of her hand. “And this lure is by far my greatest! No pokemon can resist it!” She opened her hand.

“It’s you!” We gasped.

Indeed, a tiny Misty-lure sat in the palm of her hand. It smiled up at us.

“Geez Misty,” Ash gave her a sidelong look. “I knew you were vain but this is something else.”

“Watch and be amazed!” She attached the lure to the Safari Rod and tossed it out on the water.

“…Nothing’s happening.” Ash complained after a few seconds.

“Be patient.” She snapped at him. “Fishing takes time! And be quiet too, before you scare away all the water pokemon.”
“They only have to look at that dumb lure to get scared off.” He rolled his eyes. Brock and I took three big steps back. Pikachu jumped off Ash and came to sit by my feet.

“Alright Ash Ketchum, that is—ACK!” The Rod was almost pulled out of her grip. She had to push back hard on her heels to avoid getting dunked. “I got a bite! Help me reel it in!”

“Right!” I jumped to grab her waist. Brock and Ash came around to grab on and together we heaved. Whatever it was felt big.

Big enough, as it turned out, to be a gyarados.

“GAH! Throw it back! Throw it back!” Misty screamed.

Luckily for us this gyarados wasn’t angry at us. It spat out the Misty-lure and then ducked back into the water. In moments we couldn’t even see its shadow anymore.

“Kids! Hey, kids!” Before we could fully process the gyarados in the river Kaiser came running up tangled in the arms of a robot.

(Tangled in the arms of a robot. I really just typed that sentence with my own two hands. What even?)

“Get this pfft thing off!” He screamed, struggling against its hold.

“How’d you get tangled up in this thing?” Brock dumped a rubbery arm to the ground.

“Those Team Rocket stooges are more dangerous than I gave them credit for.” Kaiser grit his teeth. His hands patted his empty holsters and ice flooded my veins.

Please Jirachi, tell me Team Rocket doesn’t have guns.

“They’re heading for the Dragon Valley.” He turned eastward, where the river flowed from. He shook in place before bowing his head in resignation. “They’re going after Dratini.”

“Wha? You mean there really is a dratini here?” Ash’s jaw dropped.

“We should hurry.” I said. Everyone else exchanged looks and nodded.

And like that we were off. The tauros herd followed at a distance but none of us had any interest in catching the pokemon we were passing. We were more concerned with following the river.

“…and we’ll use the Team Rocket Super Electric Bomb to bring them all up at once!” We heard Meowth from around the bend. We were on opposite sides of the river bank.

“Team Rocket, whatever happened to a fair challenge?” Ash demanded.

“We’re bad guys, twerp!” Jessie stuck out her tongue. “Bad guys don’t play fair.” With that she swiped the bomb from Meowth and armed it, tossing it into the water.

“No!” Kaiser jumped in after it.

I saw Ash moving and knew, even as Misty tried to stop him, what his plan was.

“Gyarados!” I called, throwing his pokeball into the air. Looking left, Ash and I caught each other’s eyes and we jumped into the water.
Gyarados blasted us past Kaiser in no time. We held onto his crest and looked for the bomb.

Underwater everything was distorted. The shadows of other pokémon fled from Gyarados. Water weeds swayed in the current. Where was the bomb?

We swam along the river bottom. It didn’t have any really bright colors or flashing lights on it. Judging distance was useless underwater.

How long had we been under? My chest was starting to ache. Thirty seconds? Forty? How much time did we have before detonation?

“MMM!” Ash reached over and grabbed my shoulder. I followed his other hand and saw the bomb lying half-covered in silt. He pushed off Gyarados’ scales to grab it and was swimming back when another shadow overtook him.

I looked up and saw a long sinewy body. With the poor lighting I could just barely tell it wasn’t another gyarados but nothing more than that. If we hadn’t been underwater I would’ve screamed Ash’s name as it swam towards him.

With a light kick to his chin I directed Gyarados back to the surface, following Ash who’d been swept up by the mystery pokémon.

The last of my air exploded out all at once as soon as we breached the water. Even with watery vision I still swept the surrounding area looking for…!

There!

“Ash,” I croaked.

Above me he rode on the back of a dragonair. He rode this semi-legendary pokémon as easily as he rode Rapidash. Like it was easy. Like it was natural. And he still had the bomb!

“Hey, Team Rocket!” He grinned wickedly. “You can take this back!”

“No, don’t throw it over—EEP!” Jessie screamed as it landed at her feet. My own grin was as wicked as Ash’s when it went off. Team Rocket blasted off once again.

Misty and Brock were cheering on the shore. Kaiser had made it back to the surface, I noted with some relief. It’s difficult to be wary of a man who would risk his life to save a pokémon. Dragonair started coming down so I directed Gyarados to shore.

“Dragonair,” Kaiser stood at the edge of the water. He and Dragonair locked eyes.

Whatever passed between them, I can’t say. But tears welled up in their eyes and they embraced like old friends.

“So that Dragonair was the dratini Kaiser met thirty years ago?” Ash spoke softly, not wanting to disturb the pair.

“I guess so.” I nodded.

“Then that Dratini must be Dragonair’s baby!” Misty gushed, elbowing me and pointing to the little Dratini by its mother’s side.

“Guess that’s the circle of life.” Brock concluded.

“Taur…taur…” Confused, we all turned around and saw the herd of tauros watching us.
“Oh, you guys.” Ash blinked. For a minute he didn’t say anything else, just looked at the tauros and then back over to Kaiser and Dragonair’s reunion. Finally, he looked at us.

“Would you guys mind if we caught the rest of the tauros? I don’t want to separate them.”

Which is how Ash wound up with thirty tauros under his name. I hope Professor Oak is happy. He did want Ash to catch more pokemon after all. Though I’ve got a feeling he won’t make that mistake again.

Although we told Professor Oak what had happened we decided to keep Dragonair and Dratini’s existence a secret from everyone else. None of us wanted the Safari Zone to be devastated again. There’s a risk Team Rocket could tell someone but for some reason I think they’ll keep quiet too. It would probably reflect badly on them that they keep following a group of kids around instead of doing their jobs.

Funny to think of it that way.

We’ve left the Safari Zone and we’re back on course towards Ash’s seventh badge. In a day or two we should hit Statsburg. I have to get my stitches removed when we do. They’re both healing nicely, shouldn’t scar too bad.

Still so much left to do. And I haven’t made any progress on either my memories or getting back to the future. I still don’t know what I came back here to do either.

Well, I’ll figure it out eventually. For now, I’m going to try to get some sleep. It’ll be another long day tomorrow.

Goodnight, Alakazam.

“Hel-lo~, Civilization!” Misty threw her arms wide to embrace the city we now walked through.

“Dramatic much?” Brock choked on a giggle.

“We’ve been in the wilderness and jungle for over a week, sue me!” Her smile belied her rough tone. She spun on her heel and walked backwards so she could face us. “C’mon, aren’t you guys glad for the change in pace too?”

“I’m glad for a chance to eat some hotdogs.” Ash admitted. “What about you, Pikachu?”

“Pi-pika!” He chirped.

“How about we grab a bite to eat after we stop in at the Pokemon Center?” Brock suggested. “I admit, I’d like a deep dish pizza myself.”

“Mm, or a cheeseburger! What do you want, Cal?” She looked at me.

“I’m good with anything, really.” All those options sounded good.

“Huh, what’s that?” Ash started running. The three of us exchanged bemused looks before we took off after him. He didn’t go far though, just to the end of the street where the view of the water wasn’t blocked by buildings.

“Wow, I can’t believe it’s finished already!” Brock gasped.

“Er, the bridge?” I asked hesitantly.
“My guidebook says it’s still under construction, but it looks done to me.” He answered absently. “That means we don’t have to buy passage on a ship to get to Sunnytown.”

“Really? That’s great!” Ash pumped his fist in the air.

“Hm,” That was one long bridge.

“Yeah, especially since we don’t have the best of luck with ships.” Misty grimaced.

We all took a moment to remember every time we’d been late to catch a ship or the time when we got stranded at the bottom of the ocean. The time we accidentally stole a speedboat and the time we stole another speedboat to save people from tentacool.

“Uh, all in favor of using the bridge?” I held up my hand.

“Aye!” A chorus of three voices and one ‘Chu!’ answered me.

“So do you guys want to take the bridge to Sunnytown now or should we stay in this town for the day?” Brock asked.

“Sunnytown!” Ash and Misty cheered together.

My shoulder throbbed as I readjusted my bag. The sleeves of my t-shirt covered the bandages, just barely. The others had probably forgotten and if they hadn’t they certainly didn’t know how long stitches were supposed to stay in.

Still, one more day wouldn’t hurt.

Thoughts of food were temporarily forgotten as we raced each other to the bridge. Running just for the sake of it. My back and shoulder hurt worse for it but I put the pain out of my mind. It wouldn’t hamper me that much.

There was a little guard post at the foot of the bridge. Some sort of toll maybe?

“Admiring the bridge, kids?” He tipped his cap to us.

“Yeah! We wanna go to Sunnytown!” Ash bobbed his head excitedly.

“Ooh,” The guardsman winced. “Sorry kids, but the bridge isn’t finished and, even if it was, it’s still ten miles long.” We all blinked in shock.

“’Scuse me!” A girl on a bike passed us by.

“The bike path’s done though,” He nodded to the girl. “While walking you wouldn’t be able to get to the other side before nightfall, you could use bikes to get there much faster.”

“Oh, if only we had bikes.” Hearing the B-word, Brock and I took three steps back even as I internally prayed.

Please not the Bike Argument. Not the Bike Argument. It’s been weeks since they brought up the Bike Argument!

“Hear that, Ash?” Misty leaned into his personal space. “We could cross the bridge if we had bikes. A bike would sure be convenient right now, wouldn’t it?”

“I…I guess…” He was very studiously not looking her in the eye.
“Okay, everybody,” Brock, luckily for us all, chose to interject. “Let’s just hit the Pokemon Center and come up with a plan. Okay? Okay.”

And then we had the bad luck to pass by a bike shop on the way to the Pokemon Center.

“Holy—!” Ash pressed his face into the window. “That’s how much bikes cost?”

One bike cost about as much as renting the hot air balloon had. That was...a frankly ridiculous amount of money. One we could not afford for all four of us.

“Ah, let’s just, um, go to the Pokemon Center.” I gently pulled Ash away from the window.

They were serving cheeseburgers for lunch at the Pokemon Center. So at least we managed to get some greasy food in our system before we settled in the break room to think of our next move.

It’s not like the bridge was our only option for getting to Sunnytown. Yeah, it was the next town on our route to Ash’s next gym battle but we could easily buy four tickets on a barge.

It just meant we’d have to get on a boat again. The only time I can remember a boat ride not ending badly was the boat that took us to Maiden’s Peak. And that was only after we fought a giant Tentacruel. One time out of a half-dozen others did not instill a whole lot of confidence.

Besides, we knew the bridge was there. The bridge was there and that alone meant everyone wanted to cross it. It was one of those things to do just to say you did. Bragging rights.

“Anyone think of anything?” Ash sighed.

“...No.” We groaned.

“Pardon me,” Ash, Misty, and I were sitting on the small pink couch with our back to the person who’d just walked up. Brock however, had a perfect view of the Nurse Joy who’d approached us. “Are the four of you busy right now?”

A blur of movement shoved Ash into me and the two of us collapsed down the side. Ash’s chin hit my sternum hard enough to almost knock the breath out of me. Added pressure kept us pinned down.

“Not at all! Anything you need! Any time! Just say the word and I’m there!” Brock was...above me? I coughed, losing another precious gasp of air that I could not take back! Ash groaned, shifted, and groaned again as a new point of pressure drove his arm trapped between us into my stomach.

“Ger’ff!” He spasmed, trying to buck Brock off.

“Owowowow!” The cut across my shoulder blades stung sharply. My right arm was caught between my body and the back of the couch so I tried waving my left to get Brock’s attention so he’d get off us!

“Wherever there is a pokemon, or a lovely lady such as yourself in need! I will be there!” Was he still going?

“Put a cork in it, Romeo!” Misty grabbed his ear and yanked him off.

Ash popped up as soon as the pressure was gone, inhaling a lungful of air. I stayed where I was, enjoying the sensation of not being squished into a pancake.

“Oh my, are you alright?” Nurse Joy looked over the edge of the couch at us.
“Mmf, uh, yeah.” I sat up gingerly.

“What did you need help with?” Ash asked once he’d caught his breath.

“I need someone who can go to Sunnytown for me and deliver this medicine.” She showed us over to the counter and pulled out a packet. “There’s a pokemon there in desperate need of it, but I have too many pokemon here in need of constant observation to make the trip myself.”

“We’d love to help!” Misty burst out excitedly. She simmered down quickly though. “But…only the bike path is open and we don’t have bikes.”

“There are a few bikes that belong to the Pokemon Center.” She assured us. “You can either bring them back or leave them at the Sunnytown Pokemon Center when you’re done. Please, I’d really appreciate this.” She bowed.

“Sure thing, Nurse Joy!” Ash took the packet from the desk. “We’ll make sure this medicine is delivered safely! You can count on us.”

“Thank you so much for your help.”

The bikes were in the shed behind the Pokemon Center. There were three bikes total, two of them were single seaters.

“I guess we’ll have to take the tandem bike.” Brock frowned thoughtfully.

“Dibs on a single!” Ash and Misty cried.

“Ah, I guess we’ll share?” I looked nervously to Brock.

“Fine by me.” So we had the medicine and we had the bikes. I don’t know if I’ve ever ridden a bike before but a tandem bike would’ve tripped me up regardless. Brock and I had to pedal in sync and balancing was hard to do.

It was tiring too. My thighs didn’t like this kind of strain and it was weirdly difficult on my triceps too. I think Brock might’ve been providing most of the muscle to be honest.

We passed the guardsman and entered the bike path. Now it was a ten mile bike ride plus however much further the Sunnytown Pokemon Center was.

As much fun as the wind in my hair was I still winced when I estimated how long it would take to reach our destination.

And how sore I was going to be.

“Rest stop ahead!” Misty announced, taking one hand off the handlebars to point ahead at a little pavilion set up so bikers could rest.

Grateful for the rest, we jumped off our bikes and sat on the benches. There was a vending machine we all got some soda or juice from and a water fountain with disposable cups for pokemon. Pikachu got his own little cup while we hydrated.

“Aaahh, nothing like a good bike ride.” Misty giggled. “Now this is the way to travel.”

“Mm,” Agree to disagree there. Biking might be faster but if I needed to get somewhere fast I’d just ride Fearow.
Still, the distance we’d traveled was impressive. That had been three, maybe three and a half miles? And didn’t take any longer than ten minutes. Brock and I slowed the pace somewhat.

“Alright, everyone ready to go?” Brock checked with us. Reluctantly, I retook my place at the front of our shared bike.

“Wooooooo!” “Ha-ha, yeah!” “Yeeeeeaaaahh!”

People? Coming from the other side of the bridge. They were coming in fast on their own bikes. Some waving chains, one carried a banner, another popped a wheelie to the delight of his friends.

“A bicycle gang.” Brock frowned.

“Gang?” I repeated, dread moving like ice through my veins. Unbidden, my hand crept down to Char’s pokeball.

“Lookie what we have here!” The biker in the lead had flaming red hair and his bike was decorated to look like a zapdos. “Don’t ya know there’s a toll to cross this here bridge?”

“Awful rude of ya to try crossing without a proper introduction.” A girl with dark green hair wheeled up beside him.

“Uh, hi there! How are you doing?” Ash scratched the back of his head.

“Nice to meet you!” Misty waved.

“The pleasure is all ours.” Brock nodded, sitting down behind me.

“HOLD IT!” The boy with red hair planted his bike firmly in front of Ash. A cocky grin spread across his face. “When we say an introduction what we really mean is a Pokemon battle! We clear?”

“Heh, well if it’s a battle you want!” Just like that all signs of nerves left him. There was a battle to fight.

With Ash focused on the leader of the gang I took it upon myself to watch the rest of them. They arrayed themselves behind their leader. Or leaders, considering the girl with dark green hair was standing at the front with the redhead. Not counting the leaders only two others had trainer belts but a shrunken pokeball could easily fit in a pocket so I couldn’t trust that.

“Go, Golem!”

“Squirtle, I choose you!”
The Fight

Chapter Notes

I’m a day late with this update but yesterday was kinda crazy for me. I didn’t get home until almost 11pm and I was in no mood to go online. Sorry, folks! But here it is now!

The two trainers and two pokemon squared off. Above us the clouds were coming together, growing darker.

“Squirtle, use Watergun!” The battle begins.

“Dodge it, Golem!” The redhaired boy cried. Golems aren’t really built for dodging though. It couldn’t move fast enough to avoid the blast of water. It flailed a little under the spray before withdrawing into its rocky shell and rolling.

Which, conveniently, also put most of the biker gang in a direct line for a soaking.

I was almost disappointed that Squirtle had enough control to greatly reduce the strength of his watergun in the split second before it hit the crowd of bikers.

It occurs to me that…I didn’t like those bikers. As soon as Brock called them a ‘gang’ I was ready to defend us. I was ready for something to defend against.

Would a war-torn region have roaming gangs to deal with? If law enforcement and infrastructure was suitably damaged they could probably gain a lot of traction. It’s possible I’ve dealt with gangs in the past and that’s why I have that reaction.

For someone who gets nervous talking to new people I sure do have a lot of fight-or-flight minded tendencies. That’s probably something I should get a better handle on but…

But what if I need those reactions? What if that reflex to reach for my belt saves our lives someday? Our group is being stalked by members of a criminal organization! Granted, they’re only semi-competent but the few other members we’ve run into have been much more professional and we have no idea how big the organization is.

We’ve been nearly killed by their actions. The St. Anne, the Giant Tentacruel, the Celadon Gym Bombing. People could’ve died in those. People likely did die during the Giant Tentacruel incident. I could probably look that up the next time I’m at a computer but I don’t want to know. We stopped the fighting. That’s enough for me.

Kaiser had been too free with his guns but he turned out to be an alright guy. Admirable even. That doesn’t excuse him aiming a loaded gun at a ten year old.

My reaction surprised the others. Fair enough. They’ve grown up in peace and happiness and I…I clearly haven’t.
I don’t think Pokemon journeys are supposed to be this dangerous. Misty has made a point of commenting on how strange or crazy certain events had been and she is the only one of us to have been on a journey before we met. I wonder how long she was wandering before we met?

I don’t know where I’m going with this. It helps to get it written down though. Now it can stop running in circles through my head. Someday I’ll have all the answers I need but for now I’ll just reason and theorize and try to be a good friend.

….Oh.

Well, I can’t sleep. It’s been two days. I never even finished telling what happened with the bikers and the bridge.

I’ve slept maybe six hours since then. This is not sustainable. I’d like to just skip past this and finish the bikers and bridge story but…

But what if I forget?

I’m starting to really hate this anxiety.

I stopped the last entry because I just realized that if I go back to the future I’m never going to see Ash, Pikachu, Misty, or Brock again. Maybe as old people, depending on how far into the future I’m from. But not as my friends.

I’m just going to vanish without them ever knowing what happened to me. If I don’t tell them the truth then it’ll be like I disappeared. Like I left because something bad happened or because I just didn’t care. I don’t know which one’s worse!

And I’ll miss them. Ash’s optimism and determination, his easy kindness and enthusiasm for everything! Pikachu is practically an extension of him now! And growing so strong! Misty’s always willing to listen and confide in me and she was so patient when she taught me to swim. I’ll miss our girl days. And Brock’s simple confidence, his amazing cooking, the way he always asks if there’s something bothering me and acts like the big brother of the group.

And I’m….I’m going to have to say goodbye to them. For the sake of something I don’t even remember.

Dear Ho-Oh, why is nothing ever easy?

Everything I’ve been able to piece together about my past has been bad. What if there’s nothing to go back to?

Is that why I’m here? To escape my future?

“Golem, use your Tackle attack!” The gang leader yelled. Golem started turning, picking up speed.

“Squirtle, dodge and use Bubblebeam!” Squirtle jumped left, but not fast enough. Golem clipped him going past and Squirtle spun off from the force of the blow. Luckily it looked like Golem had a hard time making quick turns.
And stopping.

“Watergun, again!” Ash changed up his strategy. Squirtle was able to recover before Golem came to a complete stop and with the full force of the Watergun he kept rolling, unable to stop himself.

Squirtle’s Watergun pinned him to the railing. I would’ve thought it would give way beneath Golem’s weight but the bridge constructors had used some really good materials. Steel maybe?

Squirtle couldn’t keep up the Watergun forever but he didn’t need to. This wasn’t the best battlefield for a Golem to begin with. No dirt to use in attacks, lots of water around, too many people to avoid.

“Grr,” And it seemed the gang leader knew it. “Golem, return!”

“Way to go, Ash!” Misty cheered for him.

“Don’t celebrate just yet.” The girl who’d been by the gang leader’s side stepped forward to take his place. “One of you still has to battle me. Go, Cloyster!”

“A Water type!” Misty kicked the stand on her bike. “Ash, I’m taking this one!”

“Oh, okay.” He shrugged, recalling Squirtle.

“You did pretty good out there.” I nodded respectfully as he joined me and Brock.

“Yeah, I know!” He put his arms behind his back. “I am going to be a Pokemon Master, you know.”

“Mhm,” We focused on Misty’s match, waiting to see who she’d send out.

“Alright, Star—EEE!” Her battle cry broke off into a shriek of outrage when Psyduck let himself out of his pokeball.

For a pokemon as absent minded as he is, he does have an impressively strong will.

Misty looked sorely tempted to forcibly return him in favor of a different pokemon, but after a tense moment of her glaring daggers at him she sighed and put away the other pokeball.

“Fine! Go, Psyduck.” The last she groaned, pinching the bridge of her nose.

“Go and use Scratch!” I winced. Not an effective move against something like Cloyster.

“Withdraw!” The second-in-command yelled. Cloyster had the cockiest look imaginable on its face before it closed itself off from Psyduck’s ineffective—as expected—attack.

“Give it a Headbutt!” Psyduck wheeled back and crashed his head against Cloyster’s shell.

“Ha, do you really think something like that will be able to break through Cloyster’s defense?” The other girl cackled.

“Nope.” I didn’t even need to see her face to know she was smirking. “But it will give Psyduck one heck of a headache.”

“Yikes,” Brock rubbed his own head as Psyduck shook. The hairs on my neck were standing on end. There was a tension in the air that reminded me of the sky just before a storm hit.
Above us, the clouds continued to darken.

“Pssyyyy,” Psyduck hissed, rubbing his temples in pain.

“Kinda brutal.” Ash agreed.

I chose to say nothing. As far as I was concerned the biker gang had it coming.

“Psyduck,” Misty was already assured of her victory. “Use Confusion!”

Cloyster rose in the air. The seam where its shell closed up almost opened, probably more from surprise than any specific effort from Psyduck.

“Wha?” The other girl was certainly surprised but she rallied quickly. “Cloyster, use Spike Canon!”

Ranged attack versus a psychic pokemon that already had his opponent in his grip? Not a good move.

The spiked bits of calcium were stopped mid-air. Then, without Misty having to order it, Psyduck turned them back on Cloyster, aiming for the seam and wedging them in to reach the fleshy bits inside.

“I can’t…believe this.” She couldn’t take her eyes off her pokemon, now forced open and bleeding slightly because of its own attack.

….And then Team Rocket showed up on unicycles. Jessie and James were dressed up like gangsters. Meowth was dressed like the ringleader in a circus, complete with whip. They did their motto while riding around us performing tricks. And they were both apparently part of this same bike gang at different points in their lives. Jessie was nicknamed Chainer Jess for her habit of swinging a chain while riding. James was nicknamed Little Jim because he was the only one in the gang who used training wheels.

You know, I feel like our pokemon journey would be almost normal if only Team Rocket wasn’t involved.

Must be nice being a trainer not stalked by semi-incompetent criminals.

I barely even reacted when Jessie and James convinced the bike gang to, well, gang up on us. I had Char’s pokeball in hand already when we heard the wail of approaching sirens.

“It’s the cops! Beat it!” The gangsters sprinted for their bikes, taking off as fast as they could pedal. Two patrol cars gave chase but with the actual road portion of the bridge unfinished they couldn’t catch the bikers.

“Well, you lot didn’t take off with the rest of the gang.” Officer Jenny pulled up alongside us on her motorcycle. “Are you trainers?”

“Ah, indeed we are, Officer!” Brock fell to bended knee. “Humble trainers, always on call for beautiful women such as yourself!”

“Can it!” Misty slapped the back of his head.

“Let me see your IDs.” Officer Jenny was unmoved by our antics. We all dug out our licenses and gave them over for her to review.

“Alright, so you’re not part of that bike gang.” Her shoulders relaxed as she passed them back to
us. “Sorry to be rude but you can never be too careful. Those guys have been causing a lot of trouble since the bridge went up.”

“Uhm, how bad? If you don’t mind?” I asked cautiously.

“Their favorite thing to do is harass other bikers, particularly if they aren’t trainers, and scare them off the bridge. Those who are trainers get forced into battles and if they lose the gangsters take all their supplies.” She explained.

“What!?” Ash gripped the straps of his bag protectively.

“They won’t be as much of a problem as soon as the bridge is finished because our patrol cars will be able to respond much more quickly.” She assured us. “But for now, it’s probably safer to cross back to Stratsburg.”

“We can’t do that, Officer Jenny!” Ash shook his head. “The Nurse Joy at the Stratsburg Center asked us to deliver medicine to the Sunnytown Center! They need it bad!”

“I see,” She nodded. “Right then, I’ll provide a police escort so those gangsters won’t harass you again. Let’s get that medicine to Sunnytown asap!”

Kssshhht! “Come in, Officer Jenny. Come in.” Kssshhht!

We all looked at the radio clipped to her waist.

“This is Officer Jenny. Report.” She snapped into the speaker.

“Bike Gang successfully evaded our patrol cars, but there’s just been word of a hijacker back in Stratsburg.”

“You’re kidding me!” She groaned. “Fine. On my way.” She gave us an apologetic look. “Sorry, I have to take care of that. Do you think you can cross the bridge on your own?”

“We can handle it, you go catch that hijacker.” We nodded seriously.

“Be careful out there.” She turned her motorcycle around and started speeding back the way we’d came.

“We’d better get moving.” Brock settled on beside me. The wind started to pick up, spreading goosebumps over my arms.

The storm was about to hit.

“Not good.” Misty grit her teeth as we pedaled on. In seconds we were soaked to the bone. I had to risk taking my hand off the handlebars so I could brush my bangs out of my eyes. I’m due for a haircut soon.

Crrrrkrkrk!

“Do you guys hear that?” Ash looked over his shoulder.

“Up ahead!” Misty cried. A section of the bridge was moving up like a ramp.

BWOOOO!

“There’s a ship! It must be taking shelter from the storm!” Brock panted behind me.
“We can make it!” Ash sure sounded confident.

“Are you nuts? That’s a long fall into icy water if we don’t make the jump!” She faltered in her pedaling.

“We can make it!” He repeated.

“Palkia willing.” Still, I doubled down and pedaled harder. We had to at least try.

We crested the ramp and I knew in my gut we didn’t have the kind of speed or height to make it. Luckily for us, Team Rocket attempted the jump at the same time we did.

“We’ll bounce!” I think Ash took some vindictive glee from the idea as we crashed into Team Rocket. We almost crashed right after touching down on the other side but we somehow kept our balance. Our hearts pounding in our chests and our knuckles white from how tightly gripped the handlebars.

“Oh sweet Mew, I can’t believe we—!” I broke off my breathless laugh as I caught sight of the bike gang waiting for us.

“Get out of our way! We’ve got medicine for a sick pokemon here and you’re not going to stop us any more!” Ash scowled tersely.

“Wha? Medicine?” The leader gaped at us. “That’s why you risked jumping the bridge in this storm?”

“Yeah! And you’re still delaying us! Move!” He waved impatiently. If these guys didn’t move fast I was going to bring out Gyarados. Not to really hurt them but I imagine facing an angry Gyarados in this kind of weather would make anyone think twice.

“…Gang,” We all reached for our belts, waiting to hear what his order would be. “Let’s give’em an escort to the Pokemon Center in style!”

Thieving and harassment are apparently okay but leaving a sick pokemon to suffer? Nope. They’re standards worked for us this time but I know as soon as we leave they’ll go right back to doing what they always do.

And why were they still hanging around?

“In honor of your amazing stunt, we’ll call you Awesome Ash!” The leader declared.

“Mighty Misty!” The second-in-command added.

“You can call me ‘Honey!’”

“Geeze,” I sighed quietly.

“Sure is strange to have them in here without them causing trouble.” Nurse Joy came up beside me. She smiled when she saw she had my attention. “Shellder is going to be just fine now, it just needs to rest.”

“That’s good.” One load off my mind.

“And you’ll be Cool Cal!” I twitched.
“No.” I turned away from them and went to the front desk so we could sign in for a room.

“Calm Cal!” Another suggested.

Oh I felt anything but calm.

Nurse Joy hesitantly followed me and started bringing up the register. I passed my Trainer License over the counter. Behind me a furious debate raged on over what nickname I should have.

“Alright, I’m ready to go!” Ash jumped up from the breakfast table.

“Aww,” Misty leaned over the table, pushing away the trays. “Goodbye, Civilization.”

“Um,” I hesitantly raised a hand.

“As much as I hate to leave the lovely Nurse Joy, the adventure must continue.” Brock chuckled. He collected the trays and started to stand.

“Er, guys?” My cheeks were starting to flush. “Guys, I-I need,”

“What’s wrong?” Ash focused on me.

“Mm,” Now everyone was looking at me. Even Pikachu jumped onto the table to better stare.

“My, ah, shoulder? I have to get the stitches taken out today.” I explained.

Plus buy a new jacket. I do not have enough long sleeved shirts.

“Oh my gosh, I can’t believe we forgot!” Misty pulled my sleeve up to reveal the bandaging. A pause to restock my bandages would be useful too.

“You got stitches? Why didn’t you tell us? I thought it wasn’t that bad since you and Koga came back so fast!” Ash almost lunged across the table.

“Pi-Pika.” Pikachu jumped onto my lap, nuzzling my shirt comfortingly.

“Uh, well, it’s really not that bad.” I explained. I scratched behind Pikachu’s ears while I tried to make my voice work. “Only nine stitches, that’s hardly anything. It, uh, won’t take long for a doctor to remove them.” Or I could do it myself with the scissors and tweezers in my kit but that churned my stomach to contemplate.

“Is it going to scar?” Misty made motions like she was going to unwrap the bandages but I stopped her.

“Probably, yeah. It won’t be bad though,” The one on my back would leave a bigger scar. It’s probably a good thing I’m not tanning like everyone else is. The sunburns can be a pain but the scars don’t stand out too much.

“Cal,” Brock’s tone was imploring. “You have to tell us when you’re hurt and how bad it is. Hiding an injury won’t do anyone any favors.”

“But I didn’t hide it!” That came out more defensive than I would’ve liked. “You all saw me get hurt. You knew it was there.”
“But we didn’t know it was bad enough to need stitches.” Misty scolded.

“But…” It wasn’t that serious. Not even enough to impair my arm like Primeape’s bite had back when it was a Mankey.

“We thought it was just a little cut, not something like that.” Ash’s expression was a cross between guilt and…something else. Something angry.

“It’s not. That. Bad!” I finally snapped, sending Pikachu fleeing back to the table. Glad to be sitting in the aisle seat, I stood up and grabbed my bag. “I checked them regularly to make sure there wasn’t any infection, I kept the wound covered and didn’t strain it, I did everything right!”

“I’m going to get them removed now, don’t worry about it. Meet back here in an hour or so, okay?” Without meeting anyone’s eyes, I left the cafeteria and raced outside.

Alone and with yesterday’s storm completely gone, I shivered.

I haven’t been alone like that since I first woke up in the forest outside Pallet. Ever since meeting Ash I’ve always had someone nearby, except for an hour or two here and there when we were all busy with our own things.

I wasn’t even really alone this time, middle of a city and all. Plenty of people around. I got directions to the nearby hospital and started walking.

People were talking on every side. Cars beeped and honked and blew exhaust everywhere. Everything was fast paced moving, moving, moving until you could just about scream at it.

Walking into the hospital lobby was a relief. The air was cooler, the people quieter, and everything moved at a much more sedate pace that didn’t leave me rubbernecking trying to keep track of it all. I stood in front of the door for a moment just to catch my breath.

Then I went to the front desk to tell them why I was here.

I didn’t anticipate a waiting time. I should have, I saw those other people sitting in the lobby. With so many people around I didn’t feel safe pulling out my pokedex either but I wanted to write, so I grabbed my notebook.

I’ve prefaced everything with a reminder to rip these pages out and dispose of them later. I’ll toss them in the fire after everyone goes to sleep.

For now I’m just waiting to be called. Hopefully it won’t take too long. The others were mad enough without making them wait for me on top of it.

Mad. At me. Why?

They knew I was injured. I didn’t hide it. We all get dings and nicks from roughing it in the woods everyday and none of the others make a big deal about those. So is it the severity? The fact that it required stitches?

I don’t think they remember that I got cut across my back too. I don’t think I’ll be reminding them.

Was I really supposed to tell them about the stitches? What for? They couldn’t do anything for it. It was my responsibility to keep clean and not strain it and I did all that! Heck, the first couple days after it happened they all refused to let me do any of the heavier chores! I was taking it easy!
I don’t want them mad at me though. I don’t want to be defensive around them.

What I’d give to have someone I could ask for advice.

…I do have someone I could ask for advice!

In ten seconds flat I was in front of a public phone waiting and hoping that Professor Oak was available.

“Hello? Oh, Cal! I’m glad you called.” He smiled warmly. “I just got off the phone with Ash, Misty, and Brock.”

“O-Oh, uh,” The blood rushed to my cheeks. “Really?”

“Yes,” His smile fell into a more serious expression. “Cal, is there something wrong? The other three called from the Sunnytown Pokemon Center and, while they didn’t give me the details, they said they’d managed to upset you. If there’s anything you’d like to talk about you know I’m always happy to answer a call.”

“Er, thank you, Professor.” I gulped. They called him because…they upset me? “I guess we, sort of, had a fight?” Not that I really understood it. “See, I’m at the hospital right now,”

I studied my toes more than I looked him in the eye. I was still trying to work through what the fight had been about. It was so stupid but I didn’t understand!

“I see,” He hummed after I finished my halting explanation. “Sounds to me like the others were hurt because they thought you didn’t trust them enough to confide in them, meanwhile you were hurt because to you it seemed they were overreacting to something that happened a while ago and didn’t trust in you to mind your own limits. Am I understanding that correctly?”

“I…believe so.” When he said I didn’t trust them something sharp cut through my chest.

“Well first, let me assure you,” He smiled warmly, “This fight isn’t as serious as it probably feels right now. You’re all a remarkably close group of friends, this fight just proves it!” He chuckled.

“Second, in the future it might be wise to make clear how serious the injury is and what needs to be done for it to heal properly. I sincerely hope it never becomes necessary and none of you ever get injured again, but making this a rule for the whole group should prevent this fight from ever repeating.” I nodded jerkily, thinking.

We don’t really have any group rules. We all help with the chores and cleaning up the campsites. Sure, Misty and Ash sometimes get caught up in fighting over who’s turn it is but Brock and I are usually good at keeping track. Other than that we’d never implemented any hard rules.

I guess this will be Rule 1.

“Furthermore,” I jumped, refocusing on what the Professor was saying. “After you get your stitches taken care of, the four of you should sit down and talk to one another. Good communication is the only way any relationship stays healthy.”

“Ah, yes sir.” I winced slightly.

“Cal Memo? Is there a Cal Memo in the room?”

“Oh, uh, sorry, Professor. I have to go.” I nearly fumbled the phone.
“Alright, run along then. And remember my advice.” He waved through the camera.

“I will! Thank you, bye!” I hung up and ran to the nurse by the big doors. “Um, Ma’am? I’m Cal Memo.”

“Here to have stitches examined? Right this way please.”

Okay. First, handle my stitches. Then, deal with my friends.

And try to ignore the stabs of guilt every time I open my mouth.
This chapter did NOT want to get written. A total slog all the way through. But it's done now, thankfully. Enjoy!

They were waiting for me.

Why did my eyes have to start watering? That isn’t going to help my reputation as the “delicate” one.

I blinked them away quickly, focusing on one point so I wouldn’t start crying in a hospital lobby.

“Um, hey.” I gave an awkward half-wave. Moving my arm felt weird with it still mostly numb. The doctor insisted on an anesthetic injection which takes longer to wear off than a cream.

Ash stepped forward for a hug immediately. That helped. Holding him and being held and Pikachu rubbing his cheeks against mine and giving me little static shocks. All of that helped.

Outside we found a little park and benches to sit ourselves on. Then Ash thrust a jacket into my arms.

“This…Uh, this is…?” A much lighter shade of green than my old one. Like a green apple. In fact it had two little red apple patches sewn on over the pockets. The hood had a little brown stem with a leaf on top that reminded me of a turtwig.

“We couldn’t find one that was exactly like your old one but I remembered green is your favorite color so we went with this one. Do you like it?” Misty checked with me.

“It’s cute, I like it.” I nodded dumbly. “When…When did I tell you my favorite color?”

“You didn’t.” She stuck her tongue out. “But I noticed when we went swimsuit shopping that you preferred the ones with green on them and your old jacket was green too.”

“Consider this our apology. We didn’t mean to upset you. We’re sorry.” Brock bowed and handed me a packet.

I took a moment to read the headline.

Another moment to process.

Read the first passage.

Processing…

“Aaaaaanndd…I think we’ve lost her.” Misty’s expectant tone brought me out of the spiral.

But this was Professor Oak’s Study On The Taming Process of Capture, With And Without The Pokeball! The full report! Twelve pages all about pokemon behavioral habits after meeting humans. The only thing better than this would’ve been the whole journal!
This was their apology?

“I’m… I’m sorry. I didn’t get you guys anything.” My cheeks were turning red again I just knew it.

“Uh, I did call Professor Oak for… for advice. I, I should’ve told you guys about the stitches I just… didn’t think of it. I swear I wasn’t trying to hide it! I don’t know why I thought you guys would already know!”

“Cal, it’s okay.” Brock rubbed my back soothingly. “We all sorta messed up back at the Pokemon Center.”

“So what did Professor Oak say?” Ash asked curiously.

“Oh, uh, basically what we’re doing now? Just sit down and talk about it.” Oh yeah! “And he said we should make it a rule to, uh, to basically tell each other when we’re hurt and how bad it is so this doesn’t happen again.”

“A rule, huh.” Brock muttered, scratching his chin.

So now we have rules. We sat on the bench and just kept talking, clearing the air. In the end everyone proposed a rule to avoid conflicts in the future. Rule 1 was mine.

Rule 2 is Don’t go through each other’s things without permission, proposed by Misty.

Rule 3 is No making fun of anyone’s goals or dreams, proposed by Ash.

Rule 4 is Do your fair share for the group, proposed by Brock.

All things that might provoke more fights if we aren’t careful. I certainly never want to be as angry/confused as I was earlier.

If just fighting them is painful how hard will it be to say goodbye?

We left Sunnytown behind us two hours before lunch. We only stopped long enough to down a few sandwiches before we kept moving since we’d already lost a good chunk of the day. I made sure to inform the others that my cuts, both of them, were healing nicely and no, they weren’t badly sore.

They took the reminder of the second cut better than expected. Brock looked like he wanted me to take off my shirt so he could take a look at it but he just sourly nodded instead. Uncomfortable with asking a girl to take off her clothes probably. I’m writing that off as a teenage boy thing for now.

The clouds started gathering a little while after we started walking again.

“I don’t like the looks of that.” Misty grumbled, staring angrily at the darkening sky.

“It is the season for it.” Brock sighed. “We really should buy umbrellas or rain coats or something.”

“Think the next city is nearby?” Ash asked him.

“Matcha city is still twenty miles away.” He answered with a head shake.

“Matcha city?” The name caught my attention.

“Yeah. You’ve heard of it, Cal?” He turned away from the sky to look at me.
“Ah, actually…” I live in a world before Porygon, but how much before? Could the cyber pokemon already be in development?

“Cal?” How could I find out though? If it’s still in developed or not even started then I’d have no reason to know anything about the Porygon project. It would be beyond suspicious to ask about it!

“Hey!” Ash elbowed me to drag my attention back to the others. “Seriously, what’s up? Something about that Matcha place?”

“It’s the…home of Professor Akihabara.” I coughed awkwardly. “He invented the teleporter system.”

“Oh, I think I remember Hailey mentioning that during the tour!” Misty pounded her fist into her palm. “He’s a pretty big shot in the Pokemon Scientist world, huh?”

“Mhm,” I nodded.

“So do you want to stop at his lab and talk to him while we’re there?” Brock offered. “My guide book doesn’t mention him but I’ll bet we could find something out at the Pokemon Center there.”

“I wouldn’t…want to impose. I admit I’d,” Honest. Be honest. “I’d love the chance to talk to him but I wouldn’t want to bother him in the middle of his research.”

A droplet fell on my nose. Another landed on the dirt by my feet. The rain began to pour.

The rain began to pour.

I put up the hood of my new jacket as we ran, hoping to find some shelter. The road we were on was well traveled and hopefully that meant there’d be something we could wait out the rain in.

“Look! Up ahead!” Ash spotted it through the downpour first. A big mansion standing alone in the field by the road.

“Mansion in the middle of nowhere? Sounds creepy to me.” Misty grumbled, though given the way she was starting to shake I think it was more of a token protest than anything.

“Who cares? I just want out of this rain!” Ash led the way, barreling through the doors into the foyer.

We didn’t stop to knock and slammed the doors behind us. I slid down the hood of my jacket and looked around while the others rung out their hair and clothes.

“House of Imite?” I read from the sign above the stage.

“This looks like an old timey theatre.” Brock noticed.

“Then we can wait out the rain in here. Thank goodness,” Misty sighed, putting her hair back up now it was mostly dry.

“Pika?” Ash gasped as Pikachu jumped off his shoulder and circled around another pikachu to face it! “Pika!”

“Hm, odd.” I muttered, watching the two dance and pull poses mirroring each other.

“What is? I think it’s cute that Pikachu met a little friend.” Misty giggled beside me.
“Well, usually when pikachu meet each other they shake tails the way humans shake hands.” But these two weren’t doing that.

For good reason as it turned out.

“C’mon, c’mon little guy.” Misty knelt down to try luring the pikachu towards her. “Don’t worry, we’re friends!”

“Piiida,” The strange ‘pikachu’ turned towards us, revealing its face for the first time.

“Gah!” Misty jumped back and almost ran into me. “What’s wrong with it?”

“Is it a shiny pikachu?” Brock leaned forward though he didn’t sound too confident in that.

“Nope, it’s a ditto.” I chuckled. “Must be a young one if it hasn’t gotten the hang of changing its face.”

“Ditto,” Ash echoed.

“Ditto: The Transformation pokemon. This pokemon can rearrange the cells of its body to match any other pokemon.”

“Oh, Ash!” I quickly grabbed his hand when I saw it reach for where he kept empty pokeballs. “Could I—? I mean, would you mind if, uh, I…?”

“You want to catch it?” He blinked.

“Well, it’s just,” I was surprised myself, putting myself forward like that.

A ditto would be an amazing catch though. I could study a much wider range of pokemon with a ditto’s help. Their DNA was unstable and absolutely unique in the whole pokemon world.

It’s only a hypothesis but I believe studying ditto might help discover links between pokemon and evolution energy. Ditto are one-stage evolution pokemon but their DNA is even more unstable than evolution-capable pokemon and, like all pokemon, they are capable of storing evolution energy. It would be interesting to see if that energy was in any way expended when the ditto Transformed into different pokemon, taking advantage of the same rule that evolution energy appears to break in the first place.

Or is it a matter of level? The energy not expended but has to reach a certain threshold for certain abilities. Young ditto often have trouble changing their face, are they otherwise limited in their transformation capabilities?

I’m getting off track. I’ll move the scientific speculation to my ‘public’ journal tomorrow.

“As a…future Pokemon Professor,” My mind scrambled to keep up with the excuses flowing from my mouth. “Ditto would be an, uh, invaluable research aid and,”

“And the secrets of Ditto’s amazing Transformation ability could unlock secrets of all pokemon!”

Not…exactly what I was thinking. Not far removed either.

But it hadn’t been me who said it.

I turned on my heel and saw myself. Pale skin, brown hair and green eyes. A big bag on her shoulders and four pokeballs on her hip.
The only thing that didn’t match was the jacket. Her pockets didn’t have little apples sewn over them. With the hood down I couldn’t see if it had a little twig and leaf either.

But otherwise…

“Surprised ya, didn’t I?” Seeing that sly smirk on my face was certainly an experience. “My name is Duplica, that’s my Ditto, and welcome,” She gave a shallow performer’s bow. “To the House of Imite.”

“Imite? Like imitation?” Ash questioned.

“Dirrr,” The little Ditto dropped the Transformation and rushed to its trainer’s side.

“You got it.” That kind of casual confidence was odd to see on ‘my’ face. Seeing her collected poise and easy stance caused something an awful lot like envy to bubble up inside me.

I tried to shake it off. Dressed like me or not I shouldn’t think that way. I have no way of knowing what my personality was like before my memories were lost so for all I know I’ve always been this awkward, shy butterfly.

“I’m, er, sorry for…trying to catch your Ditto.” I bowed quickly.

“Hey, it’s no problem. Kinda flattering to be honest.” She rubbed her nose. “It’s nice to know there are other people out there who recognize the greatness of Dittos.”

“Greatness? Says here all they can do is use Transform.” Ash quirked a confused brow at his pokedex before looking up again.

“Ah, that’s…a little misleading, actually.” I considered for a moment. By traditional definition Transformation is Ditto’s only move.

But not the only move they could use.

“How about a battle? I’ll show you just how great a Ditto can be.” Duplica smirked at Ash.

Which is how we found ourselves on the big stage. Duplica was still disguised as me which made things a little disconcerting. Sure, Ash and I have practice battles fairly regularly whenever we stop for the evening but standing on the sidelines and watching ‘myself’ battle made something in my head break.

“Bulbasaur, I choose you!” I shook my head and refocused on the battle about to begin.

“I’ll be using my Ditto, of course!” Duplica’s smirk sharpened. Brock started the match and—!

“Ditto, Transform!” This time I watched closely as Ditto shimmered and changed shape. Without realizing it I found myself taking notes.

Ditto’s gelatinous form gains an iridescent shimmer when ordered to use Transform. Similar to an Evolution Event the entire body glows before the shape begins to shift. Every body part appears to change in sync, no discernible lag. The glow begins to dim then flashes before completely vanishing, leaving a ‘bulbasaur’ on the stage. Other than eyes and mouth the Transformation is complete, no flaws in the disguise. The eyes and mouth are still identical in composition to Ditto’s true form, likely due to inexperience/age.

“Bulbasaur, use Razor Leaf!” My pen slashed across the paper as I was surprised by Ash’s voice.
I’d completely forgotten that a battle was taking place!

“Ditto, use Vine Whip to restrain Bulbasaur!” Duplica remained cool and cocky. With good reason, as Ditto’s vines wrapped around Bulbasaur’s front legs and bulb to suspend him in the air.

“See now? Your Bulbasaur can’t do anything from this position.” She taunted him.

Well, I could see a few ways Ash could wriggle out of this one. One of the vines was wrapped around his bulb but his mouth was free and bulbasaur have strong jaws. Biting the vines would more than likely startle Ditto into either loosening or dropping him completely. Bulbasaur could use Vine Whip to tie up the other vines and either rely on leverage to send Ditto flying or hold him in place for a Tackle. If the Tackle didn’t finish it off a Razor Leaf would.

But Ash…didn’t do that. He Returned Bulbasaur. Conceded defeat.

Why give up so easily? There wasn’t a reason to.

While Misty and Brock were politely congratulating Duplica I stared at Ash. He was still holding Bulbasaur’s pokeball with a pinched expression on his face. Looking at the curtains?

Curtains partially torn by Bulbasaur’s Razor Leaf.

That’s why Ash didn’t try to break free to continue the battle. He saw the damage one attack did and he knew Duplica had already made her point. There wasn’t any reason to continue but there was a good reason to stop. He didn’t want to damage the set more than he already had.

A theater stage isn’t exactly a battle arena. There’s all sorts of things that could be broken by a stray attack and there isn’t all that much space either.

In Ash’s mind Duplica probably ‘won’ when she restrained Bulbasaur, even for just a moment. She’d proven her point about Ditto.

I can’t be sure that’s what he was thinking but it’s my best bet.

After the battle Duplica showed us the costume room. She’s even faster than Jessie and James when it comes to costume changes. She ditched my clothes for a Nurse Joy and an Officer Jenny disguise all within two minutes, then another quick change left her in what I can only assume is her ‘regular’ outfit.

Her hair is light blue. She was using wigs for the other disguises. I thought Jessie and James said wigs were difficult to get right? They sure fussed over ‘Ashley’s’ wig long enough.

“Do you put on plays with all these costumes?” Misty asked, waving a hand around.

“No, no, I’m not an actress!” She laughed, grinning cheekily. “I’m an entertainer plain and simple! Specifically, I imitate people and pokemon!”

“And that’s…entertaining?” Didn’t seem all that exciting to me.

“Oh yeah, my show was a big hit! I used the money I inherited from my parents to build this theater so I could live out my dream!” She explained. “This is a common road so there’s plenty of foot traffic and I give’em a place to take a load off and take in a show! The crowd loved it!”

“Then where’s that crowd now?” Ash muttered sourly, a touch louder than he’d meant to I’d guess. Still, Duplica’s enthusiasm wilted.
“Well, I had to close up shop for a bit.” She put on a shaky smile. “See,” She gave her Ditto a fond rub.

“This little guy’s my pride and joy, but it hasn’t gotten the hang of Transformation yet. It still can’t change it’s face.” She sighed but a quick hug reassured Ditto. “So I decided to take a little time off from performing to help Ditto get it’s act together.”

“Cal, you said Ditto couldn’t change its face because it’s too young, right?” Misty put me on the spot.

“Uh, err, well,” Duplica moved right in front of me.

“Hey yeah, Miss Future Pokemon Professor, any tips or advice on how to raise this Ditto to be the best it can be?” Her grin took on a challenging edge.

“I, um, I’ve never…ah, raised a ditto before but…” I swallowed. Deep breaths. Deeeeep breaths. “I know that ditto often have trouble with Transformations while they’re young or inexperienced. I don’t…I don’t really know how to fix that except for, uh, more practice?”

“Yeah, that’s what I figured too.” She nodded.

“It looked like the conversation was finally drawing Ash out of his slump. His expression smoothed out into something more thoughtful but before anything else could be said or done we all heard a noise coming from the theater room.

“Oh, maybe more guests arrived!” Duplica’s eyes widened. “C’mon, Ditto.” She scooped up her pokemon and we followed her out of the costume room.

Our eyes were drawn to the stage by the spotlights dancing around over the curtain. By some unseen signal the curtain started to part, revealing…

Honestly, do I even have to write it? Who else other than Arceus Cursed Team Rocket! I am not writing their stupid motto today.

“They’re pokemon thieves!” I warned Duplica as I stepped up beside her.

“Oh relax, won’t you? We’re not here for Pikachu today.” Jessie wagged her finger at me.

“We’re here for somethin’ even better!” Meowth pounced, the blatantly animal-like action proving unexpected enough that I couldn’t react fast enough to stop him from snatching Ditto right out of Duplica’s hands.

Funny, isn’t it? He walks and talks like a human so well that it honestly surprises me when he acts like a regular meowth. You could almost forget that it isn’t some kind of costume.

“Ditto!” Duplica cried, trying to surge over the lip of the stage after her partner.

“Weezing, Smokescreen!” My hand fell to Fearow’s pokeball on instinct. Tight, enclosed space plus big bird does not equal acceptable collateral damages.

I breathed out a slow steady stream of air so I wouldn’t break out in a coughing fit like the others.
Counting down from thirty I kept my burning eyes peeled for any difference in the fog.

28…Duplica leaning against the stage, coughing. Ash beside me. Misty and Brock two steps behind me. 23… Window slamming shut. Entry and exit point for Team Rocket? Somewhere backstage. 16… Running out of air, smog thinning. I could make out the stage and the overhead lights.

I got to 11 before my air ran out. By then the Smokescreen had cleared enough that I didn’t start coughing but my eyes were watering.

“They took…” She broke off, coughing. “Ditto! They took Ditto!”

“We’ll find them!” Ash’s voice came out huskier than usual.

“I heard a window shut.” I told the others. Together we went backstage and found the window they’d used. The bottom had a small circle cut out of the glass.

“I can’t see them!” Duplica bit her lip.

“We can send Zubat, Pidgeotto, and Fearow out to search for them.” Brock suggested, pulling out Zubat’s pokeball.

So we did. Fearow and Pidgeotto naturally buzzed each other with their wings for a minute before we managed to tell them what to look for. Basically anything with Team Rocket themselves, their logo, or a giant Meowth balloon. These people don’t know the meaning of the word *subtle*.

Duplica still had Ditto’s pokeball so there was no way to teleport Ditto out of our reach. They’d have to transport him manually. They wouldn’t get far.

At least, that’s what I told myself when it felt like every minute that passed was crushing our chances lower and lower.

Misty did her best to reassure Duplica, sitting down beside her and throwing her arm across her shoulders. I didn’t pay much attention but I did follow suit on her other side, pressing against Duplica in a show of solidarity. It was awkward to do this to someone I didn’t consider a close friend.

Ash, Misty, or Brock? We held hands, elbowed each other, hugged, ruffled hair, sometimes shared beds, lots of touching.

And Pikachu of course is a fluffy hot water bottle. He preferred Ash of course but all of us at some point had sported a staticky neck pillow.

Offering Duplica support was a whole other beast entirely. I was hyperaware of my side pressed to hers and had to *remind* myself that it would be rude to scoot away from her. She’d just lost her pokemon—her partner!—I should comfort her.

Thankfully for my nerves, Zubat and Pidgeotto swooped back in through the window at that moment. Fearow’s cry came from outside, somewhere high above as he circled over the building. He was a little big to come in through any of the windows.

Pikachu and Pidgeotto talked back and forth for a few moments. It’s always fascinating to watch pokemon communicate. To us it all just sounds like their names repeated in various tones. Pokemon hear something else though.
“So do we know where Team Rocket’s hiding out?” Ash asked Pikachu after the conversation stopped.

“Pika!” His cheeks sparked.

“Then let’s get going!” He jumped to his feet.

Duplica surprised us all by catching him by the arm. “Hold on!”

“Huh?” We all stared at her as we stood up.

Her pokemon was stolen and she wanted to wait?

“Do those Team Rocket guys always wear the same get-up?” She asked, a smirk inching across her face.

“Except for when they use disguises, yeah.” He answered.

And in that moment it was like the five of us were on the same wavelength. All at once, it clicked.

We looked at the assortment of costumes around us.

Imitating their motto during the butterfree migration was funny enough on its own.

Imitating it badly while we were dressed in Team Rocket uniforms? Hysterical.

None of us could keep a straight face as we managed to sneak our way into their hide-out, a small cottage with a giant Meowth balloon on the roof.

“Prepare for trouble!” Ash started us off, standing side by side with Brock.

“And make it Double-Double!” He snickered.

“To protect the world from devastation!” Misty was standing between me and Duplica. Her line was my cue to turn around and pose, hiding the discomfiture that came from baring my midriff. The gap between thigh-high boots and the skirt wasn’t any easier to ignore.

“To ignite all people within our nation!” I made sure to catch Jessie’s eye as I said my line. Just behind her I saw two Meowths standing on the table.

Seems Ditto has mastered Transformation.

“To defend the beauty of truth and love!” Duplica put in her own part of the performance.

Then, all together. “To send you flying to the stars above!”

Jessie and James grew more and more incensed. James would grind his teeth when we mixed up words. Jessie developed a twitch in her eye.

I’ve got a picture of all of us in the Team Rocket costumes. Duplica had everything except the logos already, but she was a fast hand at sewing. Not something I ever want to wear again but worth it for the looks on Team Rocket’s faces.

Too bad I didn’t get a snapshot of that!
The Connection

Chapter Notes

I have been looking forward to this chapter for a long time! The next one too! Big things are happening people! Happy Holidays everybody!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

We got Ditto back and sent Team Rocket blasting off again. I really have to wonder how they manage to survive their landings. Do those uniforms have hidden parachutes in them or something?

Ditto mastered Transformation while Team Rocket had it. Good for him and all but what did they do to get him past that obstacle? I can’t imagine them showing any love and support to a stolen pokemon.

I’d write up the actual sequence of events but I want to get this entry done quickly. I want to get a good night’s rest tonight!

We’re going to Matcha city! We’ll be there tomorrow just a couple hours after breakfast! By ten thirty I could be meeting Professor Akihabara and finally narrowing down the time frame I come from!

I just have to figure out how to bring up porygon without revealing how I know about them when they haven’t been released to the general public yet. Claiming to be a future Pokemon Professor can only get you so far, right?

I could try asking about his current projects. He might expound a little on their development. I wonder if he’s susceptible to flattery. Or should I act unimpressed to challenge him into showing me something?

No way of knowing until I actually meet the guy. Doing this without casting suspicion on myself is going to be tricky.

And it’s not like learning anything about porygon is going to tell me what time I’m from.

No, don’t think like that. Be optimistic! If porygon is still in development then porygon 2 and porygon Z probably haven’t been created either. My pokedex has information on the full line so if I can figure out the timeline for Professor Akihabara’s project then I can have an estimate of my birthyear.

My pokedex has some wear and tear to it. The casing isn’t as bright and shiny as Ash’s. I’m eleven years old so if we assume I received it as my Trainer License when I was ten then my pokedex is a year old. Granted, it’s only an assumption but it’s the best I can come up with.

So, we assume my pokedex is a year old. Let’s further assume that all the files on it came pre-loaded. So at the very least the full porygon line has been recognized for at least one year prior to me receiving the pokedex.

Figure out the timeline of the project and then do the math to figure out when future-me will be born. I’ll finally know…
Something. I’ll finally know something. Something other than my name and age.

In some ways I could view this as taking the first step to figuring out how to get home. And whether I want to go home.

I do want to go home! I do!

But I don’t want to leave my friends behind. And what about my pokemon? Char, Fearow, Cleffa, Gyarados? Could I take them to the future with me? I’d be taking them from the time they belong in.

I can’t abandon them, but I don’t know if I even can take them with me. And Ash? How am I going to tell him that I have to leave and we’ll probably never see each other again? I don’t know if I’ve even been born yet!

Well, now I’m depressed again. I hate thinking about this because there isn’t an easy answer, but I can’t just ignore it either. This affects me whether I want it to or not.

So I figure out the timeframe I was born in? So what? What then? I still don’t have any memories. I still won’t know anything useful. Just my name, age, and the year I was born in!

AAAARRRRGGGHHHH!!! This was supposed to be just a quick recap so I could get a good night’s sleep!

I can’t…there’s nothing I can do. No way to figure this out.

So what? What now? Should I just give up? Live in this time with the friends I have now and the memories I’m making? Pretend that I’ve always been Cal Memo, wannabe Pokemon Professor?

Should I tell them? I’d love to be able to ask their opinions. Get some advice.

Alakazam, I’d love to talk to you. I’d like to know something for sure. Something besides Cal, Eleven Years Old.

Who am I? Was I a good person? Do I have a family? Do they miss me? Did I raise other pokemon? Did I have a dream? Friends? Was I still shy or more confident? How come I never learned to swim? Did I bet on pokemon fights? Why am I afraid of guns?

What am I in the past to do?

I wish you’d at least tell me that.

There was nothing about Matcha city that made it stand out as the home of a famous inventor. Lots of trees and old manor homes. I’d gotten some restless sleep and if I was quieter than usual the others just assumed I was nervous about meeting Professor Akihabara.

And I was. A once in a lifetime genius who figured out how to mechanize teleportation. A power only pokemon had ever possessed. Turning living creatures into ones and zeroes and shooting them to distant locations before reconstructing them as flesh and blood creatures again. And then created the porygon line! A line of artificial pokemon capable of entering the internet, converting themselves into different types, performing system maintenance, so many things I’d love to see first hand!

I pulled out my notebook while we took a break at a bench. I wanted to try to organize my thoughts
before we hit the Pokemon Center and asked for directions to his lab.

*Pokemon Teleportation, as far as science is aware, is an instantaneous movement from location A to location B. Mechanical Teleportation, however, moves the target through the internet to the desired location in a process that takes only seconds. The time delay is negligible and Mechanical Teleportation has some other advantages over Pokemon Teleportation. For one, it does not require a pokemon or person who has been to the desired location before. For two, the only limit to how many times Mechanical Teleportation can be used is the amount of power available whereas a pokemon can only Teleport so long as they have the energy for it and the food necessary to replenish their stores.*

*On the other hand, Mechanical Teleportation does require the appropriate technology to exist in both Location A and Location B. Pokemon Teleportation only requires the memory of the location. Furthermore, anything that disrupts the technology and equipment runs the risk of losing the object in transit, making them irretrievable.*

*Are there plans in the making for ways to recover lost objects? Was that the original purpose of the porygon line? A being capable of traveling within the internet’s code and processing the information available there might be able to trace lost objects.*

“Cal, you ready?”

*Does the internet function as an alternate universe? A man-made alternate universe? How do porygon move in and out of the Cyber-verse? Is it Teleportation or some similar move? Do they have to eat extra food to make up for the energy expenditure or, like electric pokemon, are they capable of sustaining themselves on electricity alone?*

“Earth to Cal,”

*Porygon are classified as Normal Types due to not having any outstanding characteristics of other types. Their Conversion move, however, allows them to temporarily match another pokemon’s type. Was that an intentional choice?*

“Cal, what’cha writing?” Ash pressed himself against my shoulder to read, shocking me out of my thoughts.

“Ah! Uh, um,” I jumped, reflexively pulling the notebook against my chest. “Just…just some questions I want to ask Professor Akihabara.”

He grinned at me. “Well, let’s get going to the Pokemon Center so we can ask where he lives then!”

“Right, sorry.” I quickly put my notebook away, leaving it at the top of my bag so I could grab it quickly.

It didn’t take long to reach the Pokemon Center. The normally refreshing burst of conditioned air now struck me as chilly. Glad for my jacket, it took me a moment to process the sheer *bedlam* going on in the lobby.

Phones were ringing off the hook. Trainers with worried and panicked expressions were occupying the phones. Nurse Joy was talking rapidly into one of the phones behind the desk while someone else I didn’t recognize was bent over the nearby pokeball teleporter.

A man in a lab coat with sea green hair and thick spectacles.
“Whoa, what’s going on here?” Ash muttered beside me. I noticed that he had instinctively moved Pikachu from his shoulder to his arms. Maybe to protect him, maybe to just give Ash something to do with his hands.

“Professor, any luck finding the error?” Nurse Joy hung up and looked at the man in the lab coat.

“There aren’t any errors in my work, Nurse.” He didn’t bother looking up, merely scratching his scruffy chin as he continued to analyze the data the teleporter gave him. “My code is as flawless as ever. That is not the issue.”

His code.

Before I could process that—before I could react in any way other than my eyes widening and my jaw dropping—He was up and off like a shot, pushing past us and out the door with a grimace on his face.

“Rude!” Misty shook her fist after him.

“I’m terribly sorry about that.” Nurse Joy stepped over to us and bowed briefly. “I called Professor Akihabara here, hoping he could fix our little problem, but as always he has more important things in mind.” She huffed slightly, almost rolling her eyes.

“Please be aware that the teleporter system, yes, the whole system, is currently out of order. Please do not attempt to trade or teleport any pokemon until the issue has been resolved.” Warning given, she turned on her heel and answered another phone call behind the front desk.

“That guy was Professor Akihabara? Man, what a jerk! And he didn’t even fix the problem!” Misty planted her hands on her hips.

“He likely didn’t have what he needed to fix it here.” I argued, though part of me was already speculating what kind of interference could cause so much trouble. This had to be a recent thing too. We hadn’t heard anything about this in Sunnytown.

What happened next is just…It would be cliché to say “out of this world” wouldn’t it? We’ve seen and done some weird things but I think this has definitely been the weirdest. Objectively speaking.

The most fascinating too. The Giant Tentacruel was intriguing in its own way but the danger and the amount of devastation involved made it difficult to be really excited about the possibilities. The diglett’s agricultural society provided a unique viewpoint into the lives of wild pokemon.

Today’s incident however? While wild and dangerous like all our other adventures this one was also positively steeped in possibilities. This one is even more amazing than the possibility of Controlled Astral Projection!

The internet really is a man-made universe, ripe for exploration. Ugh, what I wouldn’t give to be part of that surveying team.

I knew travel to and from the Cyber-verse had to be possible just based on Porygon’s abilities but I didn’t take that to its logical extreme until later. Professor Akihabara did however.

I’m…I’m getting distracted. I should just go back over everything that happened today. It took a while for everyone to calm down and go to sleep so I’m up even later than usual trying to get this all down.
But focusing is so hard when you have the great fortune to be involved in an entirely new field of research! There’s a part of me that wants to stay and beg Professor Akihabara to allow me on his team.

I don’t even know what all the possibilities are but I want to find out!


I’m not staying. No matter how much part of me wants to. I have more important things to focus on. There’s my self-imposed mission, yeah, but there’s also my friends who, I admit, I’m not ready to leave yet. I might have to say goodbye someday but…not yet.

I could spend the rest of the night speculating about the Cyber-verse but I won’t. I’m going to continue with my journal entry and then get some sleep. I’ll probably be a total zombie tomorrow until I get some coffee but today’s events definitely deserve to be written down while everything is still fresh.

So, where was I…?

“A computer virus isn’t the same thing as a biological virus.” I explained while we walked, following the hand drawn map Nurse Joy gave us to Professor Akihabara’s lab. “It’s just meant to be a metaphor, an easy to understand comparison so people who don’t work with computers can understand there’s a problem.”

“A computer vaccine is a program designed to eliminate viruses, much the same way an actual vaccine handles diseases.” I paused for a moment, wondering if I’d had all my shots.

“I think this is the place.” Brock broke my train of thought. We had reached an upscale neighborhood filled with big manors and the name plate on this one read Akihabara.

“Hey, the gate’s unlocked!” Ash noticed, immediately proving it by pushing it open and strolling up the path to the door.

“Er, Ash, I don’t think that’s…very polite.” I coughed awkwardly.

“He left the door open.” He pointed out, bringing our attention to the two inches of space. As we watched a breeze pushed the door open a little more.

Not exactly the most enticing invitation.

“He really did leave the Pokemon Center in a big hurry.” Misty put her hands on her hips.

“Hello?” Ash poked his head through the doorway. When no one answered he stepped inside.

And of course, wherever Ash went I had to follow.

“For a big shot inventor he doesn’t really take care of his surroundings.” Misty sniffed. Half the light bulbs in the hall were blown and all the picture frames, all filled with photos of him receiving various certificates and awards, were covered in dust. “You’d think he’d be able to hire a maid or something.”

“Maid?” It popped out without my permission.

“To clean and cook and stuff. Professors make a lot of money so he should be able to hire one no problem.” She shrugged nonchalantly. Her head tilted to the side as she studied me. “He’s not a
“Pokemon Professor but he still gets paid a lot I bet.”

“Ahh, you think?” I scratched my cheek. “I guess I, uh, never considered the salary.” I still need to look up maids later.

“INTRUDERS!” We all yelped and jumped a mile as a blocky head appeared in front of us.

I might’ve been more shocked if the image wasn’t so obviously computerized. Blocky in the same way porygon are, smooth planes and sharp angles.

“What is that thing?” Ash shrunk back.

“ALL INTRUDERS WILL BE DESTROYED!”

Ice spilled down my veins. Instantly I had Char’s belt unclipped from my belt and I was watching the walls, the ceiling, waiting for turrets to slide out.

As fast as I reacted though it was still slower than a jumpy electric type. Pikachu rocketed off Ash’s shoulder and shot a Thunderbolt at the hologram, disrupting the image.

“HA! JUST KIDDING!” It laughed as it reformed.

No turrets. No guns. Just…a blocky hologram and four scared/confused kids. I put Char’s ball back on my belt.

“Hey, that little box is what’s making the image.” Brock pointed at the floor, revealing the mobile platform.

“Hologram.” I corrected absently.

“Yes! The hologram! Future of Imaging technology! Someday plain, flat photographs will be a thing of the past!” Professor Akihabara boasted.

Given his hologram couldn’t sync with the words I’m going to go out on a limb and say photography is still safe.

“Ahh, Professor Akihabara? Sir? We, uh, we were wondering if we could ask about the… the teleporter system?” I coughed awkwardly.

“HM? OH, YES.” The hologram couldn’t show expressions but I got the impression he was feeling thoughtful. “You four seem reasonably bright. Perhaps you can help. Please follow the hologram.”

“Sure.” Ash agreed for all of us and we followed it down the hall to an elevator. There were four buttons, all unlabeled, and the elevator descended to bring us to the bottom level.

The doors opened up to a sci-fi dream. All around were computers and wires and blinking lights. Monitors sped through data segments and the air almost vibrated with the constant hum of working machinery. It was all dominated by the machine in the center of the chamber, a large metal base with a glass cylinder, appearing almost like a giant cloning chamber.

…Cloning chamber? Do I actually know what a cloning chamber looks like? Do I?

Unfortunately my sudden wondering kept me distracted. I followed the others into the cylinder on automatic and didn’t even realize it until the glass sealed shut behind us.
“Hey, let us out!” Misty banged on the glass, producing a ringing thud.

“What’s the big idea?” Ash demanded next to her.

“ALLOW ME TO EXPLAIN.” His hologram changed to a 2D screen showing some very familiar figures. “YESTERDAY, THREE CURIOUS FIGURES BROKE INTO MY LAB.” Team Rocket strolled up to the Professor’s house and tip-toed inside.

“IT WAS THERE THAT THEY STOLE MY PORYGON PROTOTYPE!” My eyes widened. I listened, rapt. “THEN THEY USED THE MACHINE YOU ARE STANDING IN TO ENTER THE TELEPORTER SYSTEM, WHERE THEY ARE NOW INTERFERING WITH THE PROGRAM IN ORDER TO STEAL POKEMON FOR THEMSELVES!”

“Team Rocket. That’s gotta be them.” Ash growled. The rest of us nodded in agreement.

I realized something. “Ah, wait! They used this machine?”

“Yes.” The hologram shifted back to a rendering of Professor Akihabara.

“You’re not actually sending us there, are you?” I gulped.

“DON’T WORRY, I’LL MAKE SURE YOU’RE ALL RECORDED AS BEING THE FIRST INDIVIDUALS TO STEP WITHIN THE CYBER-VERSE. YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS WILL BE REMEMBERED FOR ALL TIME!” He…assured us.

“Hold it! We didn’t agree to this! Why do we have to use your freaky machine?” Misty pounded against the glass.

“BECAUSE,” His voice went grim. “IF THE PROGRAM KEEPS FAILING LIKE THIS THEN SOMEONE WILL EVENTUALLY SEND IN A VACCINE TO FIX IT. IF THEY DO, IT WILL TARGET THE HUMANS INSIDE AS THE SOURCE OF THE OBSTRUCTION. THEY WILL BE LOST. FOREVER.” His tone went back to cheerful.

“AH, BUT DON’T WORRY ABOUT THAT. YOU FOUR SEEM CAPABLE AND YOU WON’T BE ALONE. I’M SENDING PORYGON WITH YOU!” The air buzzed behind me and I turned to see a porygon, an actual porygon, floating nearby.

Above us a bright light started shining.

“HAVE A SAFE TRIP! I’LL BE IN TOUCH!”

What happened next was disorienting in the extreme. I don’t know if there are any words in the common language that could describe what it’s like to go from flesh and blood to ones and zeroes. It was different from astral projection, different from turning from a doll back into a person.

We were falling but there was no sensation of free fall. My stomach didn’t drop out from under me. There wasn’t any air to brush my hair back. No sense of space being crossed.

We were falling and it took approximately three point seven seconds for us to process it.

“AAAAAAAAHHHHH!” Ash and Misty started screaming. Brock flailed around like he could find something to catch himself on. My hands went to my belt.

Ones and Zeroes. A shadow of them underneath red and white. Ones and Zeroes spinning under my friends’ skin. Ones and Zeroes in pink and blue as something flew under us, expanded, lines of
code stretching until there was enough space for all of us.

“Urgh, everyone ok?” Brock was half on top of me and I was half on top of Ash. Misty had the good fortune to land slightly higher on Porygon’s back.

“Yeah, thanks to Porygon.” Misty huffed, sitting up. The rest of us rearranged ourselves enough to look around and take everything in.

We could look at each other and see an odd flat version of how we saw each other. No imperfections, all hairs perfectly in place, skin smooth, clothes unwrinkled and free of travel stains. Like pictures in a magazine.

And if we looked too long? Shadows of ones and zeroes would crawl over everything. Everything here was made of ones and zeroes.

“Where does that guy get off, sending us to this weird place?” Misty fumed, blowing past uncertainty.

“Let’s just find Team Rocket and get out of here as fast as we can.” I think even Ash was unsettled by this place.

“Poorrrrr,” Porygon purred, moving down and following a flashing green line.

The world we lived in was…three-dimensional in a four-dimensional way. Once again I’m forced to conclude that there just aren’t any words in the common language that can describe it. Not yet at least.

Everywhere around us there were…lines of code. Its hard to believe programmers would’ve taken the time to make sure every line of code looked like a neon lit road within the Cyber-verse. I can only conclude that their appearance was just the closest ways our organic minds could comprehend the “world” around us.

“So that must be the Teleporter Network.” Brock leaned over to get a better look.

“Amazing.” I breathed. My eyes zipped around faster than Pikachu. Taking it all in. “Just look at this!”

Where did all the lines go? How did Porygon manage to navigate? Could they read the code? Could we learn to read it? We were clearly processing it in some form to be able to perceive it at all. We zipped along at speeds that should’ve had wind whistling in our ears but not a single hair moved out of place. When I reached up to twist a strand of hair I got this odd sensation, more like I was remembering what my hair felt like than really feeling it.

Has Professor Akihabara tested this with other live subjects before? Other than Team Rocket we’re the first human subjects, right? And none have yet been brought back safely. How much testing had been done? Had he only used porygon for the tests?

No pulse to race. No tremble in my hands. I could still feel emotions but they were mental only. Weird.

Easy to get distracted too.

“Hey, I think I see something!” Ash stood up on Porygon’s back. It should’ve been dangerous but it didn’t feel like there was any risk to it. Gravity didn’t work the same way here.
Down below there was something of a pileup. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of pokeballs were hovering in midair in front of traffic barriers. As we watched a couple more arrived, flashing forward until they suddenly froze in place.

“And there’s Team Rocket.” Brock stood up.

“OH GOOD, YOU’VE FOUND THEM.” Professor Akihabara spoke from a screen on the back of Porygon’s neck. “IF YOU REMOVE THE BARRIERS THE POKEBALLS SHOULD CONTINUE FORWARD TO THEIR INTENDED DESTINATIONS!”

I fixed my eyes on Team Rocket, leisurely sitting around as the pokeballs piled up.

When I saw them release Arbok and Weezing I moved to Porygon’s neck so I could brace myself properly. My hand went to my belt and found Fearow’s pokeball.

But beneath my hand Porygon changed.

“Con—!” I cut myself off so sharply I almost bit my tongue. There was no way I’d be able to explain knowing Porygon’s moves before they were even released to the public. I clapped a hand over my mouth and braced for impact as Porygon jetted forward to collide with Wheezing.

“Ah geez! What the heck was that?” Ash rubbed at his head.

“CONVERSION: THIS MOVE ALLOWS PORYGON TO CONVERT ITSELF INTO THE SAME TYPE AS ITS OPPONENT!” Professor Akihabara’s screen left Porygon’s neck and hovered beside us.

“Ya know what they say!” I switched my attention back to Team Rocket. Meowth was sneering up at us. “Sometimes ya gotta fight fire with fire. Or in this case,”

I saw Jessie smirk as she took a pokeball from her belt.

“Fight Porygon with Porygon-Zero!”

Chapter End Notes

I’m thinking of taking another month off to build up my buffer again. Not January. Maybe February? I’ll decide in a week or two. Until then I’ll keep up my weekly updates. Once again, Happy Holidays everybody!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!