The Warmth of Frost

by SilentAvera

Summary

There's been a growing chill forming between Ash and Gary's relationship, and despite what
amends they hope they can bring to the table, forces beyond their control may not ever let
them get the chance.
It was cold when Ash woke. A shudder rocked through him as he turned over to see Gary’s side unkempt. *…At least he was in bed with me,* he thought. It was dark in their room, nothing but the cold front blowing outside as ambiance, and a pale nonchalant moon for light. Spring couldn’t come soon enough, nor could the repair team for their heating unit, but with the added inches of snow, there was doubt they’d be there anytime soon.

*It’s what Gary wanted, it was closer to his research. Meanwhile you’re conducting your own: How Fast Can A Couple Break During The Winter That Refuses To Die, part 2, Mountain and Woods Edition.*

Wiping some sleep from his eye, Ash sat up slightly and tapped on his communicator, 4:13am. “Uggggghhh”, he plopped back down, too late to go back to sleep, yet too early to get up. Ash rolled over and gave the window a blank stare. It was snowing. Yay.

He heard some faint fumbling in the kitchen, then saw the light in the hallway appear briefly as their bedroom door swung open and closed halfway. Not making a sound Ash watched the splinter of light as he heard Gary behind him shuffling about and grumbling, then nothing…Until he felt their blanket get pulled over his feet, *oh*, he didn’t even feel they were exposed – the light splinter swung open, then shut away. Ash pulled his feet up under his knees.

*It’s the smallest actions that get such a rise of you isn’t it? Of course he cares, how could you ever think otherwise? Maybe because you hadn’t cared recently, or so you’ve been told…but that’s just it, you do care, you care a lot…*  

Ash desperately began to try and blink away the burning growing in his eyes and throat.

*That’s how your first relationship ended; for someone so loud, you sure are quiet.*

*Have we been growing distant?*

*Or have you been growing distant?*

Ash looked at his communicator’s dark screen.

*Maybe they’re right, maybe you don’t know how to be in a relationship.*

He continued his blank stare at the window, watching the snow blow in uneven waves.

*You love him don’t you?*

****

Ash stood up off the bed and slipped on his heavy coat, “It’s not going to be a long sweep, it’s just me and Richie doing an observance of the area. I should be back around one or so.” He heard Gary yawn from the kitchen,
“Well I hope it goes a lot smoother than me trying to get this impromptu heater going, at least you got more rest than I did.”

“Yup.” Not.

Ash heard more fumbling in the kitchen. *He’s nervous, you know when he fumbles like that, he’s nervous, and he’s not going to admit it, like you. He’s already cooked breakfast, you can smell it, and the last thing you need right now is Gary’s nerves to throw you a curve ball.*

“We’re not going anywhere near the Disappearing Mountains.”

The fumbling stopped almost instantly.

*Okay great so just throw it yourself.*

The door to their room swung open and their eyes met for the first time that morning. “Well thank goodness for that,” said Gary.

*You can clearly see the worry in his eyes, just tell him you love him, just tell him you love him, but what are you going to do instead?*

Ash grabbed the rest of his gear and swung it on, his communicator buzzing that Ritchie was five minutes away, “Alright, I’ll be back,” Ash kept his head tilted low under his cap, leaning in as he passed Gary to give him a minuscule peck on the cheek that Gary was clearly not expecting – *Not nearly enough.*

“Oh” –

Ash heard Gary’s slower movements follow his swift steps through the kitchen as he picked up his breakfast and shuffled out the front door.

*And out you go, kicking yourself once again over and over for how hard you didn’t mean the door to slam, and how much you want to fix something you can’t even begin to touch.....That door probably slammed in Gary’s face didn’t it?*

Ash quickly spun back around with apology written all over his face in scribbled nonsense, but Gary had yet to exit.

*How much you want to bet he’s resting his forehead against the door, even contemplating to see your horrible self off? Did you even thank him for cooking you food? You know so you can have your strength to do a shift on what was supposed to be your day off? How much do you think it’s going to hurt him to know that you volunteered for this in the first place? You can hear that voice as loud now as you did then, *You don’t think, you never do!**

“Hey Ash!”

Ritchie’s call snapped Ash back from the void, “Hey! I’m coming!”

Ritchie was riding Ash’s Charizard, the pokemon flicking its tail around upon landing and roaring happily to greet its Trainer. A sudden wind almost blew Charizard’s balance with Ritchie just barely saving his own; the trees above unwillingly rocking back and forth, their branches itching to dump the accumulated snow.

WOUMPH. A hefty patch landed squarely on Ash’s head.
You deserved that.

“Bunch of fresh powder today, huh?” said Ritchie adjusting his cap.

“A little too much if you ask me,” replied Ash dusting the snow off, he walked swiftly toward them, hearing Gary finally exit behind him as he mounted up on Charizard behind Ritchie.

“You both be careful!” Gary called.

“No worries! Nothing like a little volunteer work to grease karma’s wheels am I right?”

And the award for the worst things your best friend can say in the moment goes to Ritchie! Your prize is a surprised expression from your lover and a breathless chuckle that is disguising the hurt he obviously feels right now!

Ash kept his head tilted low under his cap, his mouth quivering.

Because this is clearly the action you should be taking right now! What is colder, the snow, or your shoulder? Or the empty couch you are going to be banished to for the rest of now and forever?

Charizard reared, ready to move and get its boiling blood circulating against the biting wind threatening to pick up again. Ash adjusted his cap, once again his eyes meeting with Gary’s, Ash fearing his unspoken apology would stay on his face –

Now here’s your moment –

Ash and Ritchie waved, “I’ll see you soon!” Ash called frantically as Charizard gave a powerful wing stroke to get them airborne.

And there went the moment.

Gary gave two waves watching Charizard catapult themselves and their passengers over the treetops towards the mountainous region connecting Kanto and Johto.

The wind gave another icy howl signaling how ready Gary was ready to go back inside, but something in the snow abruptly caught his attention. He inched over with a few crunchy, wobbly snow steps, and discovered Ash’s cap. For a split second, Gary wished Ash would turn around and come get it; he kneaded the worn fabric between his fingers.

*No...he’s needing some space right now,* Gary thought, *I’ll have it here when he gets back.*

You thought for sure he’d love it up here, in the rugged, in the wild, with you...it’s not often a researcher of your caliber is wrong.

****

Ash’s mood went from bad to worse as the wind nipped at his scalp. *I’ll text Gary when we land,* he thought, his hand instinctively reaching into his back pocket to check for his communicator, which thankfully was there.

“Are you okay back there?” Ritchie asked turning around for a split second, “Oh no you lost your hat!”

“Ugh...”
Ritchie turned back for quick second again, nudging Ash with his elbow to look at him, “’Ey, I’m getting this vibe from you.”

Ash moaned.

“If you’re not going to help me translate it, I’ll just have to start guessing then.”

SPEAK, ASH.

“Will we need to stop by a flower shop on the way back?”

“Yes.”

“And get some chocolates?”

“…..Yes.”

Oh lets go all out and get him a ‘I'm sorry I'm the worst boyfriend ever card too.’

“I thought things were chiller than normal…..You want to talk about it?”

Shoot me.

Ash’s voice was low, “That’s the problem, I’m…not…really talking with him.”

“Like, not-not talking, or he doesn’t know how to talk to you?”

“No, it’s, he talks fine, I just…..”

“Oh no” –

“What?”

“Your barrier activated again.”

“I don’t want it to activate! It needs to not activate and stay off!”

“Then talk to him” –

“I can’t” – Ash let his head fall hard against Ritchie’s back.

Charizard looked back towards Ash hearing the distress in his voice.

Ash patted Charizard’s belly, still keeping his head down against Ritchie’s back, “I’m okay big boy, don’t worry,” he sniffled and wiped his nose. Charizard grumbled in reply, keeping their trajectory steady.

“Ash, I’m going to be blunt.”

“Okay?”

“And correct me if I’m wrong.”

“Okay…”

“You are so passionate about everything you do, in fact, you’re so passionate about your relationships that you have trouble expressing it, because how could you possibly translate, literally,
the mountainous amount of love you feel? There are no words for it!”

It sounds so silly out loud doesn’t it? And even sillier still when that’s only a FRACTION of the turmoil inside of you.

“That’s…yes…That’s it!”

“But then you kinda break down, get frustrated, and your actions do more damage than words ever could.”

“….Yes.”

“Everyone wants the two of you to succeed.”

“I know….”

“And that only adds more pressure.”

Ash’s grip on the harness tightened, “….I don’t want to lose him.”

Like how your last relationship went south. The trope is real with you: The Blossoming Adult Who Can Handle Everything Except A Relationship, insert laugh track when appropriate….And boy, it was a big fight that broke the two of you up, you were shaking so hard by the end of it. The fact that the two of you are still friends, and good friends at that, is nothing short of a miracle. Maybe because deep down you both were at fault and either party could’ve handled the situation a lot better, but that wasn’t the route taken. You’re not going to get that with him. Misty has spent a lifetime forgiving and tolerating you and is well versed in your shortcomings. For shame Mr. Ketchum.

“Ash, if you’re this bothered, this stressed, you’ve got to talk to Gary, write it down, rehearse it, I’ll rehearse it with you, but this is not healthy and you know that.”

But you can’t, you just can’t, you can’t, put this on him, you can do it, you can do this yourself...

However, isn’t that what ignited the keg with her?

Ash took a deep breath, “I don’t know what to do.”

Ritchie shifted himself sideways to give Ash a quick, strong one arm hug, “We’ll figure this out, you know me, I’m not going to let my best buddie go off on some uncharted territory alone. We can get lost twice as much better together!” he snickered, and Ash gave his first honest smile in weeks.
If there was one good thing about living in what many consider the wilderness, there will be no bum rushing fans hounding you while you were doing some good ol’ domestic duties. Still the shades are a nice touch. Wearing Ash’s cap is a bit much though, pbbbbth, and people think Ash wears his emotions on his sleeves. Oh well, beats freezing alone at home with your thoughts, and the grocery store is sooooo waaaaaarm insiiiiide.

Gary scanned the grocery list while he aimlessly swung the basket around, casually walking from aisle to aisle. To aisle, to aisle, and, to aisle.

You’re so spoiled by Pelipper’s Grab and Go you have no idea where anything is anymore. Makes you wonder why Ash always opted instead to go the store himself... Wait, no, no it doesn’t.

“Ash! There you are!”

Gary spun around so fast half the contents of his basket spilled over, “Opbbth, great.” He bent down shuffling his groceries back into the basket aggressively as a couple walked up to him.

Whyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy didn’t you just use Pelipper’s –

“Wait, Gary?”

Gary looked up pushing his shades up, “Misty? Tracey?”

WHYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY DIDN’T YOU JUST USE PELIPPER’S??????

“How’s it going?” smiled Tracey.

“How’s it going?” said Misty –

“Hello to you both, sorry but I’ve got, things to get done” –

“Where’s Ash?” asked Misty, “Isn’t today his day off?”

“Volunteer work,” said Gary shortly, “I’m buying stuff to make for lunch when he gets back, he’ll be back soon.”

Tracey looked at his watch, “How soon? I’ve got a little past eight.”

NAAAAAAH SON, IT’S NOT LIKE YOU DON’T HAVE A WATCH –

Gary gave Tracey an I know what you’re doing and it’s not appreciated look, and Tracey responded with a head tilt in Misty’s direction, she was biting her lower lip.

“It’s not like you to hold your tongue, and at me of all people,” said Gary flatly.
Misty’s communicator buzzed, she gave it a quick glance, tucked it away and locked eyes with Gary, “You’ve got time to grab some breakfast?”

NO. NO NO NO NO BECAUSE THE LAST THING YOU’RE IN THE MOOD FOR IS A GODDAMN LECTURE –

“Ash is getting off around one right? It’s not like you don’t have time,” Misty pressed.

Gary’s nose crinkled, “How do you know?”

“Texting is a thing,” Misty’s communicator buzzed again much to Gary’s chagrin as he watched her read the screen, “You know him, when he’s stressed he gets a little absent minded.”

*Seriously Ash?* Gary’s communicator wasn’t buzzing at all, he reached to his back pocket only to discover it wasn’t there.

GREAT. No but okay, you’re probably getting loads of texts right now, that, you can’t respond to.

“Ash was supposed to meet us here for breakfast this morning,” said Misty.

OUCH. NEVERMIND.

“You know, just to talk, how many words has he said to you lately?”

Gary gave an incredulous look to Misty’s unwelcomed, yet accurate bluntness, shifting his gaze over to Tracey who was scratching the back of his head with an apologetic smile, “I mean it’s a good time to eat right?”

Misty crossed her arms, Gary knowing that look he had given her gave her all the confirmation she needed for an upcoming accusation.

Honestly! You don’t need this. What’s stopping you from just walking away?

“Gary,” said Tracey, his cheery tone suddenly changed into one of reserve, “We really need to talk with you.”

Gat fammit, you hate that tell-tale tone of sincerity in his voice, you heard it all over while you both did work in Oak’s Lab, and it was never, ever, wrong.

“Let’s go get some breakfast,” Misty stated.

****

Charizard landed a little less than gracefully at the small forest station, Ash and Ritchie sliding/stumbling off with the both of them giving a whistle up towards the barn, their pokemon giving some welcome nickering, cooing, and roaring right back.

“I’ll go get some treats for Charizard because he was a good, good boy for me,” said Ritchie, Charizard lovingly growled and flexed his wings happily, “You go get those fly by readings.”

“Yup.”

The moment Ash opened the station door he was catapulted in the chest by Pikachu, “Hey little buddy!”

“PIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII-PIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIPiPikaCHU!”,
Pikachu nuzzled, nuzzled, and nuzzled, “Miss me much? It was just overnight!”

**Better for your pokemon to stay somewhere warm.**

A tall woman with dark hair up in a pony tail and decked out in full Ranger gear like Ash and Richie walked out from an adjacent room tightening her gloves, “I’m glad you two could make it in on such short notice, these are small runs, but they’re shaping up to be important ones.”

“It’s no problem Mary, really.” Ash finally settled Pikachu on top of his head.

“Good to hear.” Mary handed two reader cards to Ash, “You’ll find your general coordinates on them.”

“Wait, I thought Ritchie and I were going together?”

Ritchie came jogging in through the door slightly short of breath, “Huh? What?”

Ash held up the two cards, “We’re doing separate flights.”

“This scout has been upgraded to an official observance,” said Mary, “Plus I wanted to save you two some time, the weather looks like it will turn south soon. Anywho, we’ve got some interesting leads that suggest pokemon’s migratory and territorial patterns are changing. We think it’s in part to the fallout of the weather patterns shifting. Large herds of Bergmite and Avalugg have been spotted up in our mountains.”

“Here? This close to spring?” said Ritchie.

“What spring?” snorted Ash.

“I know,” said Mary, “These mountains don’t stay frozen forever however, and those pokemon might quickly find themselves stranded or at least confined up in the higher regions and competing with the native pokemon already there. Our biggest worry is a turf war that results in rockslides, avalanches, and habit loss.”

“Yeah, and that’s a long trip for ice pokemon to make this late in winter,” said Ash, “There’s no doubt they’d get upset real quick.”

“Our partner researchers are hard at work trying to find what caused them to migrate this far, this scouting data will be very valuable,” said Mary, “I’m sure Gary wouldn’t mind taking a look at the case file.”

“Hm.”

“The coordinates on the red card are for the Avalugg and Bergmite scout, the one on the blue is a follow-up to an Articuno sighting.”

“That would explain why spring is so late for our region,” said Ash crossing his arms.

“I see,” said Ritchie with his hand on his chin, “If Articuno has settled in this region it would explain why the Bergmite and Avalugg think it’s a-okay to stay, they think winter hasn’t ended yet.”

“Yes, absolutely correct,” said Mary, “And when Articuno decides it’s time for themselves to leave, those pokemon will be out of luck.”

“Makes me wonder where the heck Moltres is on their flight pattern back to our region,” said Ash.
“Yes, that is another growing concern of ours,” said Mary leaning back on a chair, “We’ve had late springs before, but this one is on its way to breaking the record. Spring will come whether Moltres gets here or not, but Articuno looks like their just being stubborn.”

“All right,” said Ritchie clasping his hands together, “Let's not waste anymore time, I’m good with either one Ash.”

“Same here.”

“Ugh, you boys, I’ll pick then, Ash you get Articuno, Ritchie, the Bergmite and Avalugg. Rangers, these are your scouts.”

“Understood,” replied Ash and Ritchie.

“Pika-pi!” Pikachu saluted.

_Eeyyyyy, how close are those coordinates to the Disappearing Mountains?_

****

Gary sipped on his berry shake loudly with a potent glare.

“Can you stop giving me the bad guy look already?” Misty spat, stirring her coffee aggressively.

“Sure, as soon as you stop giving me the bad guy look,” Gary retorted through his straw.

“You guys, we’re not here to exchange insults, we need to talk about Ash,” said Tracey, half hiding behind his own cup, he quickly waved the approaching waitress away from the table.

Gary started chewing on his straw, “Yes, please do reveal intimacies about MY boyfriend.”

Tracey heaved a sigh and let his head fall, but Misty wasn’t taking the bait – for the moment – “He’s been going through a really rough time as of late, I think more than you realize.”

_Points to her for acknowledging you are not a wet stone….He has been really down. And you'd be lying if you said you were almost at your wits end on ideas on how to get him to talk to you..._

“I know he’s been down,” said Gary, “I was buying stuff to make for his favorite lunch, I’m trying to get him to relax and loosen up, give him his space. As a researcher, observing is what I do best, I’m not just going to attack him blindly out of left field.”

“I didn’t attack him! Oh my god did you even LISTEN– ” Misty dropped her head into her hands as her elbows slammed the table –

“Okay, okay guys time out!” bleated Tracey now half hiding behind his satchel, “I think our intentions are getting lost here. Gary, we’re not here to criticize, we just want to help. And from what Ash has been talking to us, and Ritchie, about, he’s leaving a very important person out of the loop, you. Don’t you find it a little upsetting he’s leaving you, his boyfriend, out of his troubles?”

Gary set his cup down, “Well yeah, but, I mean I certainly don’t want to add to them, he can come around when he’s ready.”

“You’re the trouble,” said Tracey pointedly.

_FUCK._
“Well that, brings us to an interesting junction,” said Gary with his voice trailing off, shifting his glance away and sucking up more of that berry shake.

*What did you do, what did you do, what did you do what did you do –*

Gary side-glanced Misty, “Misty, you’re being awfully quiet here.”

*Especially now that she can nail you to a cross.*

Her head was still facing down, now being propped up by the side of her arms, her fingers running through her hair, “I think Tracey is doing a pretty great job conveying his girlfriend’s intentions,” Misty looked up, “because we, I don’t know, TALK?”

“Probably because you whipped him until he got it right,” Gary sipped on his shake, and Misty slammed her hands on the table –

“Ouch, below the belt Gary!” Tracey spat, “Fine, if you want to be so direct, for someone who is so observant, you have no idea what you’ve done to upset him, do you?”

“I didn’t know the problem was me!”

“And who could have foretold this?” said Misty throwing her hands up.

“Misty hold on,” Tracey placed a hand on her shoulder and Misty let her head fall to the table with a thud making the plates jingle, “Gary, you two had an argument a couple of weeks ago right? About going up into that cabin?”

“It wasn’t about the cabin, it was about how long we would be up there because Ash and Ritchie have a big scouting job at the Orange Islands coming up and he didn’t want me up there in the wilderness alone.”

“Because you can take care of yourself right?” came Misty’s muffled voice.

Gary waved his hands, “It was a fight, yeah, fine.”

“It got kind of passionate, didn’t it?” said Tracey.

*Well….if there’s one thing you can say about your relationship with Ash, you both are pretty passionate, if sometimes for not the most constructive reasons. Couples have arguments, it is what is done afterwards that shows a relationship’s validity, you know this. On that note, you both haven’t been doing too much for each other as of late have you? Merely just co-existing at this point. Admit it.*

“Yeah, but, we got over it. I love him and I know he loves me. I know he worries about me, I worry about him! Our jobs are not exactly the safest at times. That, and he’s got pressure about being a potential Master candidate which he’s been working so hard for. I thought about getting him away from all of that for a bit, but no of course he can handle it.”

*So you forced him up there by saying it would help by being closer to your research, smooth.*

Misty raised her hand with her head still flat on the table, “Bingo.”

“Oh boy,” Tracey sighed.

It was Tracey’s turn to be flat, “No it’s a lot worse.”

“Whatever! I’m not going to pin him and force him to do something he clearly does not want to do.”

*Like um, totally tricking him to go up to the cabin with you - because part one of being a scientist is to write down your mistakes and test them over and over again! Lets tell him it’s for your research!*

“You both are acting like I don’t even know him. I’ve tried talking with him, we DO talk, maybe not as much as a couple should, but I…I….” Gary sighed in defeat and rubbed his temple with his hand, “I just want him to…I just want him to be happy. Clearly I’ve done something wrong.”

**DUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUH!!!**

Misty tapped the table with her fingers before finally sitting up, “He doesn’t know how to express himself when it comes to matters like this.”

“Matters like what?”

“The matters that matter,” said Misty, “We know Ash is a doer, not so much a thinker. There’s no doubt he’s vocal and passionate, and we know when he hits a low, he can hit it hard, and he bounces back by pushing it down and launching himself into this wave of self-esteem, then he’s good for a bit, until he crashes headlong into the next wall, rinse and repeat. But he's not getting up so much now is he?”

“Your point?”

Misty clasped her hands together, “We had a bad break-up, simple as that. What has me concerned is that he’s not coming to you with his insecurities, but to me of all people. I’m glad we’re still friends, I care about him, so I’m not going to lie when I say that when he told me the two of you had gotten together, I had some reserves about it.”

“I couldn’t tell.”

“Bite me. Moving on, honestly I was shocked” –

Gary crossed his arms, “Humph!” but Tracey again signaled with his eyes at Gary to listen.

“You two came together rather quickly though, right?”

*Now there was some truth to that, yeah. You wouldn't say you were the rebound, but then again, *COUGH COUGH COUGH*, oh hell, Ash doesn't even know what a rebound even IS for f*cks sake. Anywho, spark notes version: For your first “date”, you had requested a Ranger to assist you in some risky field work for a couple of days, and low and behold, it was Ash! MMMMMMMM-boy howdy what an adventure THAT turned out to be – just discovering him and his brave reckless nature all over again, him protecting you, sheltering you…displaying before you his absolute respect, control, and love for the wilderness, not to mention the straight up bad-ass he’d grown to be with the Ranger training included… It’s not like you don’t know how to take care of yourself, but holy SHIT if Ash wasn’t there things could have gone so much worse, like you might not have returned home worse, sit on those apples for a bit. So by the third “date” as soon as y'all had returned to your place, you had Ash up against your foyer table, spreading his legs and dry humping him while making out senselessly. For science of course! How did this once clueless ten year old grow up to be Superman?!*

“Oh boy you’ve got it bad” said Misty flatly.
Gary snapped out of his daydream to Tracey giggling in his cup, “Don’t worry” said Tracey, “I get lost like that too.” Misty rolled her eyes.

*But that makes you realize something though doesn’t it?*

“I know this may sound a little weird,” said Misty, “But with me, Ash got closer and more distant the more we got involved with each other. He feels the need to hide things from his significant other to protect them, he wants to be strong for you” –

“Like he’s Superman” –

“He wants to be,” Misty have a half-hearted chuckle, “the very best, and it’s so hard to get him to understand it’s okay to show weakness in front of the ones you love, so instead, he gets all stoic and reserved, and it just snowballs from there.”

“I don’t understand,” said Gary, “Ash isn’t ashamed to confront his weaknesses, god, Misty. understanding, overcoming, and owning up to what needs some work is his creed as Trainer” –

“As a Trainer, as a friend,” said Misty, “Not a boyfriend. He thinks that’s something entirely different. Do you really think our Ash could put that two and two together?”

Gary threw his hands to face sinking back in his seat, “Oh my goooood….”

Then again this is all speculation and you won’t know jack shit until you actually TALK to Ash, but, would you really put it past him to be THAT clueless....? God help you, you love Ash Ketchum to death but oh, HONEYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY-

“He’s strong for his pokemon, and he wants to be strong for his friends, and who he loves, even if it’s at the cost to him, and he’ll bury it, and bury it, until he’s down and out and won’t admit why.”

And boy has he been down....

“If you don’t mind my asking,” said Gary, “What, what was the final straw with you two?”

“We broke up because he was tired and I was tired, and we just wore ourselves out, plain and simple. And I know your ego is as big as mine.”

*But you would never....*

Misty gave a deep sigh, “I would like to think he’d have learned from his relationship with me, but, I guess not. You know you’re only his second relationship right?”

Gary glanced down as his cup, “Want to hear something funny? He’s my first.”

“Well there’s your problem,” said Tracey, “Just inexperienced is all. You’re both bottling up from the other to make them think they’re okay, which is not okay.”

“Yes,” Misty sighed again, “And it sucks being the first Delibird, but what can you do?”

*Say it Gary, say it, and you mean it mister.*

“….Thank-you. Thank-you for sharing this with me. It, really puts things in perspective with him. On that note, what do you think I should do?”

“I don’t know,” said Misty with honest hurt in her voice, “I think Ritchie is pretty good at talking some sense into him, just try not to let this mood of his progress.”
And on that note, do you think he still feels the same about you?

“What has he said about me in the past weeks?”

Misty’s lips pulled tight, “He’s sworn me to secrecy on many fronts, but Gary, he is absolutely just smitten with you, he really, really loves you, he just, doesn’t know how to express it sometimes.”

So of course he wouldn’t want you up in the wilderness in that cabin alone, and he was so so so very adamant about it….Your relationship with him started with him protecting you….That’s all he wanted to do….and look what’s happening now, the heating unit is out, there’s more snow on the way, and it not like you both can just up and move with the weather as it is. Your heart is aching for him so badly right now. He’ll be home soon though….he’ll be home soon....
Charizard broke through the clouds swiftly, throwing a defiant roar to the biting wind.

“We’re not going to be long big guy,” said Ash, “I know, we’re cold too.”

Pikachu snuggled in Ash’s lap against Charizard’s harness, trying to situate itself with its own little gear bag on its back.

“Oooookay,” Ash peeked at his communicator, “We should be nearing the location, sooooo,” he adjusted his binocular camcorder around his neck to grab at the ready. “Alright, this is good enough, Charizard, a 45 minuet circle fly-by scope, then hopefully we’re outta here.”

Deep down you know you’re going to extend it, because it’s important. You over-achiever you.

Charizard roared happily in reply. Ash leaned down and tapped Charizard harness camera to start filming.

“Pipiiii!” Pikachu scrambled up on top Ash’s head, keeping it’s own on a swivel.

*Wow,* Ash thought at the scenery below, *Articuno must be here…*

There was nothing but shades of white and grey trailing up into the mountains, every tree was completely covered, every open field nothing but a blank canvas.

*I’ve never seen it so covered this late in winter….*

Yes, and they’ll see the footage on Charizard’s gear, you know there are hills, valleys, and slopes down there, but not anymore, it’s all shaded in white, and you what that means….

*Disappearing Mountains…..*

With winter refusing to end, it wouldn’t be impossible for their creation to shift this far south from the slopes, not to mention there’s more snow on the way, one could easily form overnight, if it already hasn’t!

*This is not good,* Ash pushed a button down on his communicator, “Hey Ritchie, how’s your flight?”

“Cold, and empty, I’m not getting much love from the Avalugg and Bergmites, but I’m seeing a growing concern about Disappearing Mountains, what about you?”

“Same with the Mountains, this slope valley is nothing but ice and snow.”

“Yikes…”
“Yeah, those hiking trails may as well not even exist right now, not to mention, I’m not seeing a sign of *any* pokemon,” Ash craned his head about, “*anywhere.*”

“Ditto, err I mean as not in Ditto Ditto, but, yeah” –

“I know hehe, but ah, I think this weather might have some of our native breeds spooked if they’re being so shy this late into the day. I mean not even the Spearows are out.”

“And that’s only going to push them into other territories.”

“We’re going to have such a fun summer.”

“Oh my god, don’t I know it.”

Ash leaned with Charizard as it did a lazy turn around the scouting area’s perimeter.

“Oh oh oh! Jackpot!” yelled Ritchie.

“You found ‘em?!”

“Yeah yeah! Wow! It is a whole herd!”

Ash’s communicator screen flashed a picture of a several Avaluggs walking with Bergmites on their backs.

“Okay, time for me to earn my keep,” said Ritchie.

“Alrighty, hopefully I’ll be sending you a picture of Articuno soon.”

“Don’t blink or you’ll miss it, laters.”

“Later.”

“Pikapiiiiiii.”

“Pikapiiiiiiiiiiiiiii,” replied Ash.

Charizard growled, then grumbled because it did not sound at all like Pikachu.

“Alrighty, round and around we go, when we stop, we’ll see Articuno!”

Charizard grumbled again.

*It’s amazing how fast 45 minuets can pass when you’re diligently trying to find a pokemon that can completely cloak itself in the very elements that is now cloaking everything else at the moment. Not.*

About 30 minuets in with absolutely nothing to show, Ash turned on his binocular camcorder, and held it up to scan the air around them, “And here we are, ready to confirm the sighting of the great legendary pokemon Articuno, which as you can see is not here at the moment, but I’m sure it’s on its way. Here is Pikachu on top of my head, doing an awesome job at focusing on the task at hand, he is buddy, my buddy buddy, say hiiii Pikachuuuuu.”

“Pikapi!”

“Hehe, and here’s Charizard, lord and master of all that dare to challenge it, his mega-evolution is second to none, and could probably melt all this snow which I think that’s what we’re going to do
unless the spring geysers wake up and then we won’t because we risk being blown to bits along with the Disappearing Mountains because water pressure and heat and tight places do not mix well and I love my pokemon. Aaaaaand this is sky, and this is air, and that’s the ground faaar, faaar below us.”

*Did you text Gary yet? You should text Gary.*

Ash turned off the binoc-cam and pulled out his communicator and…..settled. “When I get back, do you want to go out to eat? Send…..Heart emoji, send.”

*It’s always the little things with you. Just, call him, you have ALL THIS TIME, call him…..Just call him. Hit the green phone icon. Call him. You’re going home to him later aren’t you? Call him, just a quick little call, you know you’re on scout detail right now, but come on, a quick check up call is warranted here buddy.*

Ash clicked on the icon next to Gary’s name and held it to his ear…..No answer. Ash called again, and again, no answer.

*Okay. Maybe he left his phone on silent, he’s done it before, he’ll see the text and respond when he can, no biggie, it’s no biggie at all. He’s got research to do and stuff.*

From atop Ash’s head Pikachu bent down right in front of Ash’s face due to his sudden mood change, “Pikapi?”

“I’m okay little buddy, just, tired.”

For the rest of the scout Ash let himself feel every nip and bite of the wind. His timer on his communicator for 45 minuets went off at the same time his incoming call jingle did, “Hey Ritchie.”

“How are you guys doing?”

“Like we’ve been flying for 45 minuets in the cold,” replied Ash.

“You want me to join you?”

“Nah, we’ll be fine, I think we’ll do another 15 just to be sure, then we’ll head on back, besides it’s nearing feeding time and Mary is probably going to get jumped by the babies again.”

“Alright, you guys be careful out there.”

“Will do.”

Ash gave a great big sigh and Charizard turned around to face him and growl.

“Just a little longer big buy, it doesn’t hurt to be sure.” Charizard huffed and continued the flight.

Ash stretched and leaned back trying to get ride of crick threatening to settle in his spine, Pikachu watched it’s balance, “Oh great god of the snow, I command thee to appear before me!….” Ash flailed his arms around, “I offer a lot of birdseed and a great big nest!.....All the snow-cones in the world!....An ice box! With ice…..!” Ash let his arms flop to the side.

*An hour is long enough, there will be other scouts, and have you noticed the cloud cover is growing? The weather might be ready to turn south.*

“Alright, let’s call it you guys.” Ash opened up the Send Picture screen on his communicator and typed in the text: ‘Nothing but smiles to report.’ He raised his communicator to face him, Pikachu,
and as far as Charizard could lean back without throwing off himself or Pikachu, “Lean back a little more Charizard, there you go, okay, smiiiiiiile.” Cli –

“AIIIIIIIIIIIIII!”

“AAAAACK!!”

Charizard did a barrel roll as the claws of Articuno barely missed Pikachu and Ash’s head, Ash’s jaw dropping as the legendary bird pokemon pulled away from them in a powerful wing stroke, blasting back the surmounting cloud cover.

Ash immediately snatched up the binocular cam and set it to record and snap, Articuno taking a low dive at the landscape below, Charizard motioning strongly to give chase –

“No no, hold back big boy, observe, not retrieve. Long distance follow.” Ash kept the sights locked on Articuno as it swooped low, then high up, then low again, strain looking to overcome its wing thrusts.

“Pikapi!”

“It...it looks like it’s in trouble!” Ash immediately sent a Pokemon in distress text to Ritchie.

Charizard looked back to Ash, and Ash nodded. Pikachu leapt down in Ash’s lap and Charizard dove down towards the white covered landscape and the injured Articuno below.

Articuno gave a strangled cry that almost sounded like it was choking.

*Probably an internal injury,* Ash zoomed in closer with the binocular cam, *I don’t see any gaping wounds or gashes...*

“Ash?!” came Ritchie’s voice from his communicator, “What’s going on? Who’s hurt?”

“Articuno, it’s having trouble flying!”

“You found it – okay I’m on my way, send me your location.”

With his finger tip Ash opened up a side screen for their general location and sent it over to Ritchie.

“Um, you guys are getting awfully close to you know what.”

“I know,” replied Ash, “Please hurry, even with Charizard and Pikachu, I’m not sure of handling an injured and scared legendary.”

“I’ll be right there.”

Before Ritchie signed off, Ash could hear Mary screeching in the background, *Guess that’s not what Mary wanted...*

*But oh well, she knows you two do what you do best, and you and Ritchie are not the fastest rising Ranger team in this region for nothing.*

The Articuno continued its swift wavering journey through the slope valley, leading Ash, Charizard and Pikachu deeper and deeper into the snow stricken land, until it suddenly did a beeline straight up into the sky, and with another powerful wing thrust, seemingly slipped into the crease of the wind and vanished.
“Huh?!”

“Pikapi!”

Ash suddenly felt a violent jolt rock through Charizard’s body – “Charizard!?!” Charizard’s wings were completely still, frozen in place with the rest of it’s body, the pokemon making gasping noises – like it was choking! “CHARIZARD!” – they fell like a rock out of the sky.

“PIPIPIKAAAA!”

“CHARIZARD!”

Is it having a stroke?!

Ash pulled Charizard’s head to the side to keep its throat clear, Charizard’s body twitching, trying to regain it’s movements from the unknown force, Ash pulled a cord on the pokemon’s harness and a parachute immediately released – “OOF, Cha-Charizard!” – its body was still frozen in place, it’s subtle, twitchy movements still fighting to be free – “This is paralysis” –

But where the hell did the attack come from?! This can’t be a frozen status either!

Ash pulled from his pack a full heal and immediately applied it to Charizard, but there was no response, the pokemon was still, and most likely painfully, frozen mid-flight.

The white ground was nearing. “Hang in there, easy buddy, easy, I’m going to get you back home and we’ll fix you up nice and good!” Charizard’s ragged breathing was the only response it could give, until just before they landed, Charizard’s body was freed from what whatever was restricting it, and the pokemon pitched a fit by tearing into the parachute that covered them.

“EASY! EASY!” Ash tore off the parachute and caught Charizard’s head in its hands, “Its okay, you’re okay, you’re okay.” Ash held its head steady to face his own, “Easy, easy boy, I’m here, I’m right here, you’re okay, you’re alright.”

“Pikapi….” Pikachu hugged Charizard’s leg.

Once Ash was sure Charizard was calmed, he called Mary –

“ASH?! Fall back immediately” –

“I’m not engaging, there’s no way, Charizard has suffered an injury my items had no effect on, I thought it was a stroke, however it was completely paralyzed, and we weren’t hit by any attack. I deployed the parachute and we all landed safely in....”

Oh shit....

Ash heard a deep sigh from Mary, “Ritchie is on his way, I’ll prep the medical hub for Charizard, I’m ready to receive him.”

“Understood.”

“And Ash? STAY. PUT.” Click.

Ash sighed through his nose, “Okay big guy,” Ash gave Charizard a gentle hug around its head with its pokeball in hand, “Return.” Ash recalled Charizard and its mopey face back inside the pokeball, the pokemon disappearing through Ash’s arms. He held his communicator over the pokeball, adjusted the location screen for transfer back to the ranger station, scanned it, and sent it on its way
with the touch of a button.

Ash traded glances with Pikachu as the wind lightly swept over them through the sea of white.

“Well, nothing we can do until Ritchie gets here.” Ash sat down in squat style with Pikachu huddling close. He checked through his communicator that all his scouting files had been uploaded to the server, including his selfie with his pokemon and the barging Articuno, Ash couldn’t help but chuckle through his rising nerves.

“Caught a real good one right here buddy, scout mission a total success.” He showed Pikachu who tilted its head. Ash stood up again, the crick in his back from slouching too long threatening to return. He looked up and saw the cloud cover had grown exponentially. Pulling his lips thin into a frown, Ash looked back at the picture with Articuno and tilted his own head.

*That’s weird…* It looked almost as if Articuno was slightly see-through. Ash shifted his weight in thought, lifting one foot up, then the other – crsk – and felt the ground give the moment his foot touched through the snow, he snagged Pikachu as the ice below the snow collapsed, throwing the pokemon from harms away –

“PIKAPLLLLLLLL!”

There was hardly time for anything else, the drop was sharp and narrow, Ash was banged painfully against either side until he halted his freefall by pushing out his back and legs against the ice, letting the friction stop him, but even with the grip on his shoes and gear, he was slipping fast.

Ash quickly pulled out his pick axe, propped it in this mouth, then his grappling hook and fired it up, the claws shooting through the ice and finding their grip, he tied the rope around his waist.*That’s not going to hold for long.* As if right on queue, Ash heard a thick icy crack shoot through the opening cavern, and his footing slipped away, he was now only held up by the grappling hook from the dark depths below.

“PI-PI-PI!”

“I’m okay!” Ash called through his teeth, “I need a snow anchor!”

Pikachu dug out the snow anchor quickly, poking its head back over the opening awaiting command. Ash pulled out some rope from his pouch, “Catch!” Pikachu caught the rope and fed it around the snow anchor, giving Ash two systems of support to pull himself up. “Now stay back, get away from the edge!

*Your weight could pull you both down, these ledges are not stable.*

More deep cracking, Ash hurried to pull himself up faster, and was just a quarter of the distance away from being out when he saw a crack cut through his reflection in the ice, “PIKACHU RUN!”

The ice supporting the grappling hook and snow anchor gave way and Ash dropped like a stone into the dark as the cavern opened up further, he desperately tried to stop himself by spreading out again and trying to get his ice pick to catch onto a side, but the ice was too slick - the distance from either side now just out of reach, Ash landing hard on the snow and black ice below, letting out a gutted cry, a sharp pain shooting through his head, back, and legs.

“PIKAAAAAABBBBBBBAAA!”

Ash shakily pushed himself up, blinking the dizziness out of eyes. *I hit hard…*
Yeah, and if this snow wasn’t here you’d have hit even harder, still, something inside you is definitely broken…

Ash looked up, his vision trying to focus, *Woah…200, 250…That…can’t be right?* Pikachu’s now very distant silhouette appeared over the ledge, and Ash let out a deep sigh of relief his little friend was still safe.

“PIIIIIII! PI-PIKACHU!”

“I’m okay little buddy! I’m okay! Listen, nugh-ow…”

“Pika….”

*This could have been a lot worse, broken bone, okay, a broken head, you’d be dead right now, and where would Gary be? Just, no. No Mr. Ketchum.*

A 200 hundred foot drop, at least, maybe more……The rope, pick axe, and grappling hook along with the rest of Ash’s gear laid scattered around him. Ash pulled his communicator from his pouch, so very thankful they were built to be so tough, but there wasn’t a digital signal to be found, even so, Ash switched his communicator over to analog, wincing through the pain of his moments, then onto the frequency all Ranger communicators were hardwired to receive.

*God bless Ranger gear, yes, each little communicator is its own wireless hub, any Ranger within distance will get this signal, and you know Ritchie, jeeze, you can hear him now….Come to think of it, he’s the ONLY other Ranger out in this area…And god...what will Gary....?*

With a trembling hand, Ash began tapping out his distress call in Morse Code, “Fallen 200 feet, injured, coordinates fr-“ Ash’s hand dropped the communicator as pain jolted him from place to place in his body, causing him to shut his eyes and grit his teeth so hard they might break, until a particularly cruel pain shot through his hip forcing him to cry out, heaving, and breathing heavy.

七星 is not good, this is not good, THIS VERY, VERY, VERY BAD. Boy, you are HURT.

When the pain subsided somewhat, Ash opened his eyes and saw snow trickle down. He looked up, “Pikachu? PIKACHU NO!” Pikachu was attempting to scale down the ice walls with its own little anchor gear. “PIKACHU STAY UP THERE! IF YOU FALL I CAN’T HELP YOU!”

But the pokemon ignored its Trainer and began scaling its little self down. Pikachu’s nylon rope lasting a good distance, a little over three quarters of the way down, then Pikachu wiggled out of it’s makeshift harness and zipped from side to side until it was by Ash’s side, “Pi-pikaaaa!” the pokemon throwing itself in Ash’s lap and nuzzling him heartily.

Ash welled up big thick tears, “My– my crazy little buddy, you’re as bad as me!”

Pikachu kissed its trainer on the cheek then picked up his communicator, at the ready to tap out the signal.

Ash through his tears finished his distress call, and had Pikachu set it to loop over and over and over.

*Ritchie is coming, Ritchie is coming, Ritchie is coming, and he’ll come fast.*

The communicator began beeping a notification, Pikachu held it up for Ash to read, “System will reboot momentarily, please wait.”

The screen blinked again with the words “system reboot” flashing across the screen, then to power
save mode, and refused to do anything else. Ash looked at the communicator in disbelief.

“P-pikachu, give it to me,” Ash squinted through his pain, no…his communicator was working just a moment ago…

*Maybe it did sustain damage*... *Whatever, you don’t have time for his, you need help, and you need it now.*

“Listen, my buddy, you have to leave me here, I need help, quick, you’re my only hope of getting out of here now. Wi-with, n-AH, wi-with the landscape, R-Ritchie won’t be able to see us, you, have to get back up there, and show him the way.”

*Oh but Ritchie is going to scope out real quick you’re in trouble, yet he’ll only have a general estimate of where the fuck you are because your DUMBASS SELF HAD TO GO OFF SCOUT INTO THE DISAPPEARING MOUNTAINS.*

“Pi….” Pikachu took its little pack off and dumped all the berries it was carrying out, placing them close by Ash’s hand.

“Thank-you…”

Pikachu then moved Ash’s entire gear lot next to him, pulled out a thermal blanket from his pack, and helped tuck it around Ash, and finally before Pikachu left, it activated a heat light and placed it in Ash’s lap.

“Honestly, I wouldn’t be half the Trainer or Ranger I am today without you little buddy.” Ash lovingly gave scritches to Pikachu’s head, but immediately had to stop as pain shot through his arm.

That was the sign Pikachu had to go. Pikachu gave a Pika-kiss on Ash’s forehead, and then pulled itself away. It jumped and zipped from side to side of the ice walls until it caught onto its nylon rope, and climbed up the rest of the way.

Ash watched Pikachu for every inch, until it reached the opening, gave one last look to Ash down below, then disappeared off in the hopes of flagging Ritchie down.

It was cold. Even with the little heat light in his lap, it was cold. Through the opening, Ash could see the clouds turning darker and hear the wind picking up, giving sharp violent whistles against the ice.

*What if….*

Ash looked down at his communicator, now displaying an error screen.

Ash sunk down in his heavy jacket and let his head lean back against the ice. “Gary….I’m so sorry…”
Gary walked through the front door with a confident, albeit somewhat cocky smile.

*Alright you beat the weather, and he’ll be home soon, its go time! You got your game plan, first fill his belly, then reassure, reassure, reassure him you are in this for the long haul, no beating around the bush, yet, hehehehe, just talk to him, and then after said little chat, you are going to help him burn off that meal loooooooooooooong into the night, oh yessssss, yes, yeah...but first boy, where is your communicator?*

Hauling the groceries in tow, Gary listened for his buzzing com and made a beeline to the kitchen counter where it lay trapped in a corner, *Better see the damage done first,* he thought.

There were several missed calls from Ash, and two texts, Gary’s heart gave a fleeting throb, then sometime later there were…six, six missed calls from Ritchie, then a text from him.

Gary’s mind went blank, immediately dumping the thought that something horrible has happened. He opened the first text from Ash: When I get back, do you want to go out to eat? Then the second, revealing a lone heart emoji. Still holding an empty mind he opened the text from Ritchie, skimmed it, skimmed it again, and his arm holding the grocery bags slowly fell limp, letting the contents spill out onto the floor.

*Ash is missing, no sign of foul play yet, I’m coming to get you, are you home?*

No sooner had Gary finished reading the text a third time his communicator rang again with Ritchie’s icon flashing, “Hello?”

“Gary?! Where have you been?!”

“I-I forgotmycom, please, tell me you’ve found him.”

“Not yet, I’m less than a minuet away, I need your help, get something of Ash’s, anything that has his scent on it” –

“His scent?”

“Tracker pokemon, come on Gary, anything! I’m fixing to land” –

“Okay” –

*Scent, scent, scent, oh! You’re wearing it! Wait, no, it would have too much of your scent now wouldn’t it, uuuuuuuh – oh why did you have to be so diligent about laundry?*

There came a sudden pummeling knocking at the front door – “GARY COME ON!”

*His cap will have to do! Those better be ace tracker pokemon!*

Gary grabbed his thicker jacket, tucked Ash’s hat in it, and bolted out to meet a much frayed looking Ritchie, “What do you know?” Gary asked while locking up.

“Not much, Mary is examining the footage he sent in.”
Both young men hauled themselves up to the waiting Mega-Pidgeot, and as soon as they were hooked on its harness, the pokémon took off with such force, the snow on the surrounding trees and roof of the cabin were blown almost clean off.

“What happened?”

“Mary got some important leads and gave us separate scouts to save time before the weather got bad, Ash got a scout to follow-up on an Articuno sighting, he found it, saw that it was injured, and pursued it towards the slopes near the mountains, then his Charizard suddenly suffered an unknown injury that froze its movements and Ash deployed its parachute. They managed to land safely, and he was successfully able to send his Charizard back, and then he just, disappeared.”

_Swallowed up by the Mountains…no no no –_

“All I had to go on was the location he sent me while pursuing Articuno, _and I tore that valley apart_. I was hoping to see an electric flare or something from Pikachu at least, but nothing! My communicator didn’t pick up his signal either, which means his com must have suffered damage.”

“What damages your communicators? Couldn’t a Steelix fall on the casing and it would be fine?”

“Sure the case would be fine, anyways, that has Mary and I thinking that it was damaged from the inside, like an electronic pulse, or intentionally turned off or jammed by a third party.”

_Who would want Ash, or on second thought, who wouldn’t want Ash? You know he’s made enemies, but a majority of the conflicts have been resolved, somewhat, hell even Team Rocket are your informants now!_

“Misty knows,” said Ritchie, “She and Tracey are going to talk to Jesse and James and see if they’ve found anything, or just overlooked something they shouldn’t have.”

Gary almost felt sorry for Jesse and James if they did somehow overlook a threat, but then again if that were true, he would only be more than happy to help beat the ever-loving daylightOuts of them.

Mega-Pidgeot suddenly dipped and sliced through a gust of wind, Ritchie immediately threw an arm back to steady Gary as the pokémon regained its flowing, yet powerful wing strokes.

Gary took notice of the clouds beginning to darken more; snow was starting to blow with the gusts.

“D’nah, Brock said he was going to try and make it over to the station, but I’m not sure how far he’ll get in this mess.”

_Oh but you would burn this entire region to find him…And if you could, you would even turn back time and do everything in your power to, just, not have today’s events happened, ever. He’ll be fine, he’s always been fine, he’s been through worse, he’s handled worse, right? Of course, he’s just lost in the snow. Ritchie will send off the Tracker Pokémon, they’ll find him and everything will be fine. Everything will be fine. Yes. But then again, what do I know? I’m just your disembodied consciousness speaking to you because you couldn’t make conversation with a certain significant other who probably wouldn’t even BE in this situation if YOU’D JUST TALKED TO HIM._

Gary saw Ritchie pull out his communicator and speed dialed, “……Mary? Yes I’ve got him, anything on the footage yet?…..No, the wind is picking up a lot though…”

Against Ritchie’s voice Gary felt like he was hearing and not hearing. He felt around in his blank mind, taking in the absurd notion of his unwillingness to accept the situation, and then allowing it to crumble away to an unforgiving chill far deeper than what the wind could bite.
Ash is really gone. He’s gone.

All to see in the landscape below were ridges and mountains made of solid ice and covered in snow. Snow everywhere, nothing but a solemn white blanket draped over the land like a cloth to mask the deceased underneath, and underneath it all somewhere, was Ash.

A soft rumbling in the distance snapped both Gary and Ritchie’s head up, “You’re kidding me,” Ritchie breathed, “No, Mary, we’ll be there in minuet.”

The rumbling happened again.

Wow, you’ve always heard Ash talking about it, but you’ve never witnessed thunder-snow before… The infamous bolt beam combo! It sucks for people too!

****

Ash shuffled his feet under the thermal blanket, watching the snow and lighting overhead lick the edges of the crevice. He moved his fingers about in the berry pile, picked up a Sitrus Berry, and began to suck on it. *NNNNNNNG, this one is more sour than sweet, eugth….* Ash closed his eyes for a bit, not bothering to spend too much energy to simply process sight. He opened them slowly. *I’m so spent…* The pain in Ash’s body had simmered down to sudden sharp spikes with the heat light in his lap helping to soothe him further.

A tingle in his mouth reminded him there was a berry in there, and he sucked on it more against the tugging drowsiness building up in his head.

*Don’t fall asleep, don’t fall asleep, not even for a minuet or two…* Ash’s blinks were getting slower and slower, and as his eyes were about to close, they rested upon two bright glowing blue eyes peering from the darkness of the ice – Ash snapped wide awake, blinking, wiping his face awake.

The two glowing blue eyes were still there, and blinked back.

*What pokemon, what pokemon, what pokemon…..*

Well, certainly one you can’t defend yourself from….You’re a sitting duck.

The blue eyes tilted, and the pokemon began to manifest itself out from the ice. Ash’s communicator’s screen suddenly flicked on and scanned: Froslass, the Snow Land Pokemon, and an evolved form of Snorunt. Legends in snowy regions say that a woman who was lost on an icy mountain was reborn as Froslass. This pokemon is known to freeze its opponents with breath as cold as -58 degrees Fahrenheit. In the wild, it is said that Froslass like to display their frozen prey in their icy dens.

Well, fuck, this little heat light can only do so much.

The Froslass finished manifesting before Ash, clasping its tiny little hands together. The pokemon swayed nonchalantly, looking about the ice crevice cavern.

Ash moved the berry in his mouth to his cheek, “Hello there…Is, this your home? I’m sorry, I uh, heh, didn’t mean to drop in like this, but ah, OW….”

The Froslass started hovering here and there, observant over Ash’s gear, passing over his communicator, and immediately the screen went dark and into error mode.
Oh…..OH….OH MY GOODNESS, YOU LITTLE SHIT AND YOUR CURSED BODY BUSINESS, WE DON’T NEED NO GHOST POKEMON SHENANIGANS AT THE MOMENT, WE ARE FULL WITH UNPLEASANT CIRCUMSTANCES AS IT IS RIGHT NOW –

- And it honed in on the berry pile next to Ash.

Ash picked up a berry. “Want it? *So you don’t eat me instead?*

The Froslass sniffed it, sniffed Ash’s hand, then began looking Ash over.

“Mmmmmh, berries good huh?”

The Froslass plucked the berry from Ash’s hand and ate it, then stuck its little hand in Ash’s mouth, pulled out the berry, and it as well.

“Uh…” Ash was somewhat taken aback that a pokemon just stuck its little icy hand in his mouth…..“See? Isn’t the berry much better than me? All broken and banged up – AH, OW.” Ash tried to steady himself from the pain shooting back and forth through his legs. The Froslass pulled back, its body beginning to glow in a soft light.

Ash quickly held up the heat light to try and distract the Froslass, but another pain bolt aiming for his arm forced him to drop it. The Froslass opened its mouth and Ash shut his eyes tight, *Oh Gary – I love you*–

The moment Ash felt his body given a violent jolt, his eyes flew open only to see the Froslass dropping and hitting the ground hard. *What?* “Hey! Are, you okay…?”

The Froslass curled up in on itself, obviously in intense pain, while Ash, as he stood up, realized he was hardly in any pain at all. He made his way with careful movements over to Froslass expecting himself to be riddled in as much agony as the pokemon was at any moment, yet Ash felt almost no pain in his limbs, and knelt down right next to the pokemon with ease.

Ash knew better than to have prolonged contact with a Froslass’ body, as much as he wanted to cradle the poor thing, he settled for stroking the pokemon’s head with his gloved hand.

“Did you…you used Pain Split on me, didn’t you? You healed me?”

The Froslass’ eyes told what its mouth could not.

“Oh you, amazing pokemon you….”

The Froslass struggled to crawl itself out from under Ash’s pettings, “Hey hey easy!” It was moving toward the hoard of berries. Ash moved the berry pile in almost one swooping movement of his arms, “There, eat up! And I’ve got some healing items that are going to make you feel like a champ!”

As Ash dug in his pack, the Froslass with sparkly eyes scooped up every berry with it’s arms along with what power it could muster, and stuffed them all in it’s mouth in one gobble –

“No! Not, all at once…”

The Froslass began to choke.

“Oh good grief,” Ash patted the Froslass’ back until it was able to squash the berries through its throat and down into its tummy.

“Don’t get me wrong, I’m eternally grateful for your help, but you really should learn to ration
berries.”

The Froslass’ body gave a little shudder, then hopped right back up into hovering about.

“Come here, this is a Full Restore, if you feel good now, you’re going to feel great after you’re sprayed with it.” Ash stood up trying to coax the pokemon closer, “Really, thank-you so much,” but the Froslass with its powers yanked Ash’s foot out from under him, landing him squarely on his rear – “Ow! Hey!” Ash tried to stand back up, but the Frolass yanked his foot in the opposing direction, landing him half way on his stomach and causing the Full Restore to spray in his face and into his mouth.

“EUGTH – PLEH – PLEH *COUGH* - If this is some ice ghosty pokemon’s way of saying ‘your welcome’ it is duly noted!”

The Froslass then hovered over Ash’s gear, moving things about all absent minded, and pulled out his small retractable pick-axe, raising it up.

“Those aren’t toys! And that is definitely not a toy! Put it down!”

The Froslass looked at Ash with a half-lidded glance, pressing bottom button on the hilt of the pick-axe extending it to life. Ash nervously took a step back, on the ready as the pokemon lifted the pick-axe up as if to strike at Ash, but the Frolass merely slammed it down into the ice, jamming it good and stuck fast.

Ash gave a deep sigh through his nose, *A ghost pokemon is a ghost pokemon after all….*

The Froslass suddenly brought itself a breath’s inch away from Ash’s face, hovered over his communicator, making the screen go dark yet again, rose itself up through the ice walls of the cavern, and was gone into the windy snow storm above.

Ash took a moment for himself and scratched his head, utterly bewildered at his encounter with the Frolass, yet grateful his hip didn’t feel like crumpling paper given pain nerves. He began gathering his gear together and sizing up the cavern walls.

*It’s so risky…but….maybe…..* Ash looked to the white wall of weather above him with snow trickling down in soft sheets into the crevice…..*Pikachu should’ve found Ritchie by now….* The thought of Pikachu lost in the snow storm made Ash take an even longer look at the towering walls keeping him caged. Thinking of how worried sick Gary and the others were about him helped him make up his mind.

Ash gathered up his gear, took out his ice pick and pick-axe, and began to chafe out a step.

Hey, do you suddenly feel tired? I think you really feel tired at the moment for no reason because scaling a wall out of ice is something crazy people do. It’s not like you’re at imminent death at the moment, you’ve got time here, the Froslass healed you, right after it stuck its little cursed body hand into your mouth….Hey…can you even feel your tongue right now? I mean I’m just saying fools rush in you know, like that song Gary likes to sing to you every now and then but hasn’t in a while because eyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy - and not to mention, you have had direct contact with a pokemon whose body can inflict Disable*, I mean okay yeah, it was only your mouth, you’ll get the feeling back later, but whatever the Frolass had in health, it has put in you. Exactly what are the effects of human health and pokemon health transfer? And especially with a pokemon who is technically, dead?

****
Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock –

Gary rubbed his eyes and pressed the rewind and focus buttons again, and again, and again on Ash’s scout footage.

*If that clock doesn’t slow its roll I’m going to break it for you. This ranger station doesn’t need a clock that arrogantly keeping track of time, you know, the measuring tape for death.*

“Attacks on Master candidates are not as common as they once were, some even encouraged it to prove their strength” –

Gary shut the TV over the computer monitor off.

*Yeah the TV can go fuck itself too. The next voice you want to hear is either Ash himself or Ritchie or Mary radioing in that they found him, that’s what you want to hear…*

Tick, tock, tick, tock –

Gary looked at the clock up top the mantle, *They’ve been gone for over an hour now…* He looked to the window, *And the storm has hardly let up…*

*Hardcore, they have thrown themselves into the winter abyss for Ash. You’d be out there yourself if you could, but you know, not that you can’t take care of yourself, because you can, but you need to keep an ear to the radio for your Rangers, or some allies calling in with info. Also Mary heavily threatened you to stay in the station because the last thing she needed right now was to be responsible for Ash’s lover dying on her watch. That’s Mary for ‘you need to do as I say because I care about me not having to slay your ass.’*

Gary rubbed his eyes again. It was just white, white, white plain landscape on the footage. Nothing. Gary swirled around in his chair, looking around the ranger station, his eyes landing on a plaque above the entry doorway which read, “Watch each other’s backs, bring each other home.”

*TOOM.* The front door of the cabin shook from impact, rattling the plaque above and making Gary leap out of his seat and onto his feet – the door burst open and a figure covered in snow charged through the door with snow flurries. The figure shook off the snow promptly, revealing it was Mary, she slammed the door shut, and stomped over to the supply cabinet, nearly ripping the door off as she opened it.

“Mary? Where’s Ritchie?”

“Going to get himself killed,” she spat through her mouth cover, shoving rope into her backpack, “I swear they rub off all the wrong traits on each other, I’m glad those traits haven’t rubbed off on you.”

*To be honest, you have half a mind to walk out of here right now and look for Ash.*

“What on earth is Ritchie doing?”

“Something stupid,” Mary pulled down her mouth cover and pulled up her goggles, “Has anyone radioed in?”

“No, no one. I can’t even get bars on my communicator.”

“Not even on the Ana?”

“I’ve heard no one.”
Mary cursed under her breath pulling out her own communicator from her lap pack and scrolling through it. “Our sister station should have called in by now. Listen, the tower might be down from the storm, I’m going to bring Ritchie back, and then I’m going to fix it.” Mary stuffed her communicator back in her lap pack as she grabbed her backpack and swung it on her back.

“What about Ash?”

Gary heard a low annoyed grumble from a pokemon outside.

“Gary,” Mary stepped forward, “Keep yourself busy by studying that footage.”

“MURRRRROOOOOOOOAR.”

“I’m coming Aggron! Speaking of which, have you found anything on the footage that I may have missed?”

“There’s nothing on Charizard’s footage, but I’m with you and Ritchie about Ash’s selfie, that Articuno looks odd, it looks transparent, and you’re right when its focused and lightened it looks like a Zoroark illusion, but –”


“Bring my Ash back.”

Yeah, set that whip upon her, she who sent him on the Articuno run, that split them up to save time, that is, without a doubt, the person you are going to reign hell fire and ruin if your precious Ash doesn’t come home, and she knows it too. Is she tearing up? Oh wait shit, no, dick move, dick move – she feels awful enough already–

“Understood,” Mary pulled up her mouth cover, pulled down her goggles and exited the cabin slamming the door shut and yet again rattling the plaque above.

Gary slumped down in his chair, resting his elbows on his knees, and his head in his hands.

*My name is Gary Oak and I’m twenty kinds of awful and I don’t know how to handle this.*

He pulled his communicator out from his pocket, and glared at it for receiving no bars for communication.

*You’re alone again. For real this time. It’s okay now. It’s okay for you to do it.*

Gary heaved deeply, a tear falling out onto his com as he clasped it and brought it to his mouth. Gary wiped his eyes on his sleeve, pulled up Ash’s icon through the quick dial menu, and called it.

“We’re sorry, we are unable to complete your call at this time, goodbye.”

Gary dialed it again.

“We’re sorry, the number you have dialed is either in a non-service zone or has been disconnected at the moment, please try your call again later.”

And again.

“We’re sorry, we are unable to complete your call at this time, goodbye.”

*I’m not sure what you’re accomplishing here, I don’t think this is how Mary meant you to keep busy,*
you’re just making yourself feel worse and falling into the pit of damsel despair distress. You’re not
going to get through to him, otherwise you would have gotten through the other 50 million times you
tried calling him since you got here, especially now that your com has no bars. What is it going to
just magically start working through the power of loooooove? Hey you know what if they all die out
there in that snow storm? Or Mary sacrifices herself because she feels responsible for this too? You
should really find something productive to do otherwise you’re just going to keep spewing out
terrible thoughts like how you’re going to throw yourself over Ash’s frozen corpse in his coffin and
then beg the pallbearers to be buried with him and stuff, or how you’re going to be forced to identify
his remains after dark Pokemon have torn him apart, or how Ritchie will be just, ruined. Okay,
okay, you really need to find something to do. It really would be nice if your Pokemon were here
with you, especially Umbreon, they know how to calm you down like nobody’s business, but
eeeeeeeeeeeeeee they’re at Oak’s lab, and you can’t have them transferred over to you anyways
until you get some damn bars up in here….Hindsight is always 20/20 as they say. So here you are.
Alone. Like alone, alone. This what your home is always going to feel like now. This emptiness.
You’ll never forget your com again will you?

Gary shoved himself in his chair back over to the monitor and pulled up Ash’s selfie.

**God, look at his dumb face…Your going to lay kisses all over that, yes you are, you can scold him
later for going off scout, right now all you want is…**

Gary tilted his head in looking at the Articuno. He dragged the picture over to Photoworks again and
lightened the picture a bit while focusing it…*No matter how I look at this, it looks like something is
inside of it, like…it’s some kind of outward projection….*

*Like an illusion….Exactly like a Zoroark illusion focused on film, but they can’t fly! Something
would have to keep that pokemon up in the sky, and fly with it to mimic the pokemon’s flight
pattern….it couldn’t be a psychic type….the only other option is a ghost type. A ghost type…..A
ghost type in vapor form wouldn’t have been seen at all by Ash and his company…Could it be….*

Gary lightened the picture up as far as it would go and focused it more, *Geeze Tracey is better at
this stuff than I am, when the com comes back up I need to call him and get him to help me with this
stuff….Oh…?*

Gary could barely see it, but his blood ran cold when he realized the film had captured two pale
glowing blue eyes in the top left corner.
The storm outside the cabin came in waves of wind and snow, but Gary was focused intently on Ash’s selfie, and the two pale eyes shining in the corner.

Toom.

What a fine time for this memory to rear its ugly head. You remember Ash coming home in daze, almost a trance, in fact the expression on his face scared you. You rushed over to his side as he let himself fall onto the couch, you tried to get him to tell you what was wrong, but he started crying, he became practically inconsolable. So you wrapped yourself around him and held him, cradled him, until you could find out what happened.

Toom.

That’s when you learned through his sobs that he had gotten a call to search for a Trainer’s missing pokemon, a Sylveon. The Trainer said they had been attacked by a strange pokemon that they couldn’t see, and the Sylveon held it off while the Trainer ran for safety, but it didn’t return. So Ash went up into valley to find it, his search eventually leading him to the Disappearing Mountains. You asked Ash if he had found the pokemon, and he answered yes, but he couldn’t bring it back, there was nothing on this earth that could bring it back.

TOOM. The front door of the cabin rattled.

Unfortunate circumstances are commonplace in Ranger work, this you’ve always known, and you know Ash has dealt with death before, but this, something about this just threw him completely off. He never told you more than that he had just found the Sylveon, so you assumed it was dead.

The front door burst open with the kick of the wind, knocking Gary to his feet in surprise, and a snow covered Mary half supporting a heavily breathing Ritchie stumbled in.

“Gary! Help get him settled, asses his wounds.”

Gary immediately went to Ritchie’s aide, helping him get to a chair and relieving him of his gear as Mary stomped off to the computer monitor, waggling and slamming the mouse on the desk to wake the screen.

Ritchie was still breathing heavily, “Ha, HAH! I told you, I didn’t need the rail support,” he said trying to still himself from slumping further into the chair, “Ow, ow…”

“I’m pretty sure it would have saved you a rib or two. I told you to wait for me.”

“What on earth did you do?!” said Gary as he lifted up Ritchie’s shirt, revealing a large bruise that partially covered his stomach and half his chest, “Ritchie!”

“Avalugg have hard bodies, and heads, heh…”

“Avalugg?”
Ritchie winked, “They’re Tracker pokemon now! I recruited some Avalugg and Bergmite to track Ash’s scent, oh,” Ritchie pointed over to his pack left by the chair, “Ash’s hat is back in there.”

“Yes, that you recruited in a blizzard, who are in a region unknown to them, and thus are veeeeeeery hostile to anything outside their herd,” Mary spat while typing furiously.

“Oh come on Mary, you know Avalugg say hello with headbutts – OW, I’m tender there” –

“Alright this chair isn’t going to cut it, you need to lie down, come on,” Gary scooped Ritchie up and helped walk him over to a couch by the window.

“Get some ice,” came Mary’s voice.

“Sure let me just step outside,” replied Gary as he tried to prop Ritchie up with the couch throw pillows.

*I mean it’s not like you haven’t treated Ash’s wounds before ahpfffffffffffffffff* –

“No, no need for all that fuss, I just need a breather, really it looks worse than what it feels,” said Ritchie

Mary held up her hand, “I quote, ‘Oh my god, I think my chest is crushed.’”

“A moment of weakness I will admit, but more importantly,” Ritchie turned to Gary, “since had I tagged the herd leader earlier today from our scout, it was easy to find them, and then I tagged a few more who were willing to sniff Ash out, so when they find Ash, we find Ash.”

*Geeze Ritchie…*

“Thank-you,” said Gary while icing down Ritchie, “Really, Ritchie, I, I don’t even know” –

“Think nothing of it,” said Ritchie with a smile, “If it wasn’t me, it’d have been Ash tearing this mountainside right off its roots.”

“Not that, I’m criticizing your choice of Tracker Pokemon,” said Gary, “but aren’t Avalugg and Bergmite extremely slow?”

“Nah on ice they’re pretty darn fast, case in point,” Ritchie pointed to his bruise, “Besides they’re the only pokemon in this area that hasn’t flat out disappeared for some reason.”

“Disappeared?”

“Yeah, something has them rightfully spooked…but you should have seen the determination in this one little Bergmite, oh my goodness Gary, that little guy is going to find Ash, I can feel it.”

Gary gave a small smile, but it faded into a frown, “Here, you have another bruise on your shoulder blade.”

“Do I?”

“I need to put a pack right here, just take off your shirt, I’ll get a blanket to put over the packs.”

Ritchie stripped down, somewhat sheepishly, and when Gary returned with a new pack and blanket he quickly stopped in his tracks and gawked, “When did that happen?”

“Which one?” asked Ritchie looking down at the scars that littered his body–
“The long one!” Gary pointed to a long scar that reached from Ritchie’s abdomen, across his stomach and partially the bruise, up to the side of his chest.

“Oh this one, I’ve had this one, and it comes with a story, Ash and I will tell it to you someday.”

_Haha…Makes you think of Ash’s collection of battle scars, and the many, many times he has come home with some knocks and scrapes, and it does worry you…Boy does it worry you…But, lets not lie to yourself Gary Oak, when he comes home with some battle damage bandaged up like a wrangle ‘em up Ranger God you could cut diamonds in your pants, aaaaaand then kiss each one of those widdle scrapes, because proven fact it helps with the healing process. Well, minus that one scar on Ash’s hip that reaches down his leg that you will never forgive yourself for, but that’s beside the point._

Mary walked up to Ritchie with crossed arms, “How are you feeling tiger?”

“Muuuuuuch better,” Ritchie sat up, undoing all of Gary’s ice patch work.

“Really?” Gary spat.

My goodness Mary was not kidding about those traits rubbing off.

“Hey after my breather, can I tend to the barn pokemon?”

“Ahahahahaha – no. Lift up your arm, let me see the full extent.”

Begrudgingly Ritchie obeyed, and in one swift movement Mary handcuffed Ritchie’s wrist to the frame of the couch.

“Mary!”

“You’d be surprised how often I have to do that,” said Mary turning to Gary.

“Oh no, I believe it,” Gary replied crossing his arms.

“Right,” Mary turned back to Ritchie who had the angriest kitten face, “You are staying to rest, remember our Blissey is away for training, and your Sparky is away assisting at our sister station, and I’m going to go fix the tower and tend to the barn pokemon.”

“I can help,” said Gary.

“Nu-ah, I need you here to listen for contact while I’m out there, we should have a back up of messages that are going to come through.”

“Alright.”

“And keep an eye on him.”

Ritchie stuck his tongue out, Gary flicked the side of his head.

“All right, I’ll be back, here Gary, take this walkie talkie, I’ll call in when I get some results.” Mary pulled her mouth cover back up, re-positioned her goggles, and went out the door into the biting snowscape.

Ritchie moaned and leaned back on the couch.

“She does this often?” asked Gary raising an eyebrow.
“Sounds worse than what it is…My Pikachu is really good at picking the locks.”

“Hmph.”

Then again you are not liking the idea of your Ash handcuffed unless under your circumstances, and oh my god Mr. Hornbiddles get a hold of yourself.

Ritchie and Gary both looked to the window to the biting wild weather outside.

“You know, he’s going to be fine right?” said Ritchie, “He knows how to hunker down, heh, you know he might even be on his way back over here right now if he’s managed to find an able bodied pokemon and use his Capture Styler on it.”

“Yeah…”

“…When Ash and I were building up our resistances to pokemon powder attacks, we had to take a small dose of stun spore from a Vileplume. Ash said there was this one time he fell right into a Vileplume’s head and took a nose full of the stuff, so he thought he would already have some kind of resistance right? So, heheh, he inhaled the whole thing, and his face froze in the stupidest expression for like an hour!”

Gary gave an exasperated laugh under Ritchie’s louder laughter, “What? When was this?”

“Oh a long while ago, when Ash and I first decided to become Rangers, it was part of our training regiment to, you know, stand up to the elements and whatnot, give us a fighting chance and not be so sick should we get fumed. We still have to take some powder extracts from time to time to keep our resistances strong, I still like to give Ash a hard time about it, and he makes that stupid face.”

“Of course he would.”

“Then there was this other time, oh man,” Ritchie face-palmed himself, “We were doing some field work in observing the Stantler population, and we had our rescued lady Stantler all ready to find herself a good man – I see you shaking your head, don’t get ahead of me” –

Gary was already half chuckling, “No because I can only guess what Ash did” –

“Well it was what he didn’t do, and that was to check and see how loose the lid had gotten off the pheromone bottle, and in two stumbles, Ash and I became the sexiest Stantler in the entire region.”

“Oh GOD.”

“Oh my goodness yes, we had to BARRICADE ourselves in this stupid little mountain spit cave and spend the night being screamed at by horny Stantler studs.”

“Good lord.”

“Ugh, that was one of the longest nights of my life, Ash kept his cool though, he mainly felt bad about the lady Stantler and all her suitors just up and leaving her dry while they fought each other like ravenous Houndours outside our hold.”

“I can only imagine.”

“Yeah, well now try to imagine having to climb up over the barricade and scaling the mountain side to get to the lake with all our suitors following us from below. We jumped into the lake in the hopes of washing that stuff off, but since we sat with it all on us overnight, that didn’t work, hence us
learning how fast Stantler swim, so once we were back up the mountainside, Ash got the idea to try and make us look as unattractive as possible, buuuuut that didn’t work either.”

*The double meaning is strong in this one.*

“Couldn’t you two have used one of your pokemon to fly away?”

“We didn’t want to give up on the mission, but you know, it’s best to know when you’re beat. Eventually Ash called in to have his Charizard sent over to us, and we just flew on out, back up into the heavens and into the lore of male Stantler everywhere.”

Ritchie rubbed the side of his arm, “Ash went back into the woods the next day to find the lady Stantler, I trailed along, but we never found her. And then, about, I think a year later, we get word of a herd of nothing but lady Stantlers, and low and behold, they were led by our gal.”

“Wow.”

“Yeah, Ash was so proud of her. That lady Stantler overcame a lot, and now she’s leader of her own herd.”

*There’s a message being sent here, but you have no idea what.*

“When Ash gets back, he’s going to have a whole other story to add to our story stock, telling us about his adventure in the snow, not to mention his ice resistance is going to be through the roof.”

“Heh.”

*Ritchie I don’t think it could be more obvious how much you’re suffering right now. Bruise be symbolic yo, and, really, really painful, you think. You can see Ritchie’s hand slightly shaking grasping the blanket, he’s trying to be strong for you in Ash’s stead, distracting you, because you know above all else Ash would want you well taken care of if he couldn’t do it himself…Good god what happened between you two that made such a rift? No, you know exactly when and where your rift all started; let’s not kid ourselves here, that one trip a winter ago with the missing pokemon and the Disappearing Mountains…*

“Hey, Ritchie…”

*Since we’re on the subject here…*

“Hm?”

“What, happened, last winter when Ash found that Sylveon?”

Ritchie’s eyes went wide, “He’s, never told you?”

Gary shook his head, “All he told me was that he had found the pokemon, but, nothing could ever bring it back.”

“Nothing could bring it back, it was dead.”

*This you have already presumed.*

“But it was still walking.”

*Haha what.*
Ritchie shuddered, “I really shouldn’t be telling you this, if Ash doesn’t want you to know” –

“No, Ritchie, please, I need to know, I need to know what shut him off from me.”

Ritchie’s eyes grew wide again, “I…” he sighed, “It was, one of the weirdest cases we had ever seen, from the footage Ash sent us, the pokemon was clearly dead, its body had been frozen from the inside out, but, it was still moving around on its own.”

“From the inside out?”

“Yes, its as if, say like, something just breathed ice into it, it’s core temperature was much colder that it’s surface.”

“That’s, impossible.”

“I know! Ash brought it back to the station, he thought, he thought he was doing the right thing, the Trainer was so happy, and there was no time to explain, even I thought the pokemon was still alive, but, the moment the Sylveon leapt into its Trainer arms, it…it shattered like glass!”

Gary’s hand went over his mouth.

Ritchie’s eyes shut themselves, “It was horrible! I’ll never, I’ll never forget those screams…”

Why didn’t he ever tell you?! Why didn’t he ever tell you…You were cradling him, you didn’t know, and what you said to him, you were just trying to get him to pull through, but the way he suddenly looked at you, like he couldn’t figure you out, the way he ripped himself from you and stormed off to your room, slamming the door shut. Sure he came out later, and apologized for how he acted, and you apologized for what you said, but deep down you knew, you knew there was a crack that had come between the two of you that would not be so easily healed, if, ever… How could something so stupid and so meaningless have that much power over a relationship?

Then again, it was always the little things that got such a rise out of him.

“That, little Sylveon picture over there on the mantle, you can’t see it because its lying flat now, but Ash put that there. I wanted to remove it, but Mary said it was best to leave it there until Ash was ready.”

And it’s still there, doesn’t matter that it’s laying nonchalantly on the mantle.

“I…had no idea it was still bothering him so much.”

“You’re kidding right?”

“No! I swear, if I had known, I would have never, EVER suggested we come back up here! I thought it was something else, something, I never…”

You don’t know what he talks to Misty about, or to Ritchie (which is probably everything though), or Brock, or Tracey, or anyone else for that matter. Why on earth would he think this wasn’t important to share with you?

“He’s so protective of you,” said Ritchie as if reading Gary’s mind, “If anything ever happened to you…He’ll even protect you from himself.”

And so he holds it in. Because he knows he can get heated, and easily at that, and you remember what Misty said? “He feels the need to hide things from his significant other to protect them, he
wants to be strong for you…” This young man has no idea how to be a boyfriend, seriously, it’s not, it’s not any different! Why does he think it’s so different from how he treats and acts around his friends and pokemon

UUUUUUGGGGGGGGHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH THIS IS SO DUMB! DUMB DUMB DUMB DUMBY DUMMY DUMB DUMB DUMB DUMB!!! And now this shit from his past relationship is carrying over because he failed with Misty, but stuff like that happens! Ash! You BIG DUMMY YOU KNOW IT‟S OKAY TO LOSE, SOMETIMES THINGS JUST DON’T WORK OUT YOU KNOW THIS YOU KNOW THIS SO WHYYYYYYYYYYYY????

This is such a terrible cry for help – and you have no idea and yet you know exactly why you feel so horrible…

Gary swallowed, “Does, does he think he’s worthless…”

“He, has his doubts, like anyone does” –

“Does he think, that I, ME, that I will think he’s worthless unless he’s…Because nothing could be further from the truth!”

It is killing you to say this. How on earth did he spiral so low, and right in front of you. How could you be so blind, and how could he hide so well, well, until now of course…He likes to impress you, you two have always had a thing about that…Outdoing each other when you were kids and all. And when you saw him start to get sad, you pushed him on, because you knew that becoming a Master was his dream, and, you had no idea you were hurting him…

Gary felt a hand get placed on his, “Gary, he loves you, he does, he just…” Ritchie looked down, “I can only convince him so much, I must admit, I don’t know what state of mind he’s going to be in when he gets back, he might do something really dumb. We all have setbacks, I mean, well, I’m not even sure now what I’m trying to say…”

Gary squeezed Ritchie’s hand back.

“Thank-you for telling me this Ritchie, I will take care of him, I swear it, when he gets back, I will talk with him.”

Ritchie smiled, “I think he would really like that,” he heaved another sigh, “Who knows what’s going through his head sometimes, but right now, he needs help, even if he doesn’t know how to say it, much less, understand it…”

The radio by the computer began stirring, making static noises, Gary wiped his nose, sprung up and jogged over towards it, hearing Ritchie get pulled back by the handcuff.

“I’m bringing it over,” said Gary.

“No, look up on the computer monitor, it works kind of like a com, but with a bigger database, I’m fine, just turn it up so I can hear.”

Gary turned the radio up all the way, the computer monitor was reading ‘Messages in progress, please wait.’

The walkie talkie Mary had given Gary came to life, “Gary, come back.”

“Um, I can hear you.”

“What’s the monitor doing?”
“It’s saying its downloading messages, the little radio icon is glowing green and stuff, looks like its back online.”

“Okay awesome, I’m going to tend over to the pokemon in the barn now, shouldn’t take too long.”

Gary’s com suddenly began buzzing in his pocket, Gary slid the screen and his message board sprung to life revealing 4 missed calls from Misty, 2 from Brock, along with several texts from them both.

Gary skimmed the texts gaining he gist of the information his peers had gathered.

“What’s up?” called Ritchie.

“Brock is having trouble get over here, but he is without a doubt on his way, and Misty is saying nothing turned up from Jesse and James. She said they had squeezed their informants once they heard the news, but the well was dry, no one’s got any business with Ash.”

“Gary, on the computer screen, you should be able to pull up the Tracker Pokemon’s signals, can you check on them please?”

*Oh hell yes!*

“Yeah, I’m doing that right now. Okay, there’s five of them right?”

“Yes! YAY! Oh my god thank goodness, I was so worried they wouldn’t transmit through the weather but they’re working! They’re working! Thank goodness, thank goodness!” Ritchie fell back on the couch with a deep sigh.

“Thank goodness,” Gary whispered to himself, watching the little pokemon tags on the screen moving about the region, one little tag in particular really gunning it south.

Gary’s com began buzzing, it was Tracey, “Hello?”

“Weather is terrible for coms!”

*Captain Obvious!* “No kidding, the tower at the station was down, but Mary just fixed it, I got all of Misty’s messages, anything new?”

“No, even if we pummeled them, what would that have accomplished?”

*Traits be rubbing off on everyone.*

“Stress relief.”

“Funny, listen, Misty and I are going to try and make it to the station after the weather lets up some, there’s just no way right now.”

“No, no it’s fine; don’t put yourselves in any danger.”

“We’ll call if we learn anything new, we’ll see you soon.”

“Yeah, okay, later.”

“Later.”

Gary hung up, he turned over to Ritchie who would have sprung Lopunny ears if he could to listen
in, “I’m going to call over some of my pokemon from the lab, I’ve got an Audino that knows a little of human health transfer, it’ll help get you back up to speed faster.”

“Thank-you, thank-you.”

“She might not be as skilled as a Ranger’s Blissey, but she’s a fast learner.”

_and when Tracey gets here, he can go through through Ash’s footage himself, yes, yes, things are setting in motion to get your boy back. I mean if he’s not already on his way back, which in that case you all can –_

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM –!

A panicked banging at the front door startled both Gary and Ritchie, Ritchie craned himself to try and see out the window –

“Mary?”

“Pipipipi! Pikachu!”

“ASH?!”

Gary bolted to the front door leaping over a stool, ripped it open, and was promptly knocked onto his back by a large figure covered in snow from head to foot, “OOF” –

“Get back!”

Gary quickly wiped off the snow that fell on his face and discovered Ritchie was suddenly in-between him and the hunched back figure that paced on all fours in place.

The figure shook itself clean from the snow, revealing black fur with red highlights–

“It’s a Zoroark!” yelled Gary.

“Pipipipi! PIKA!” Pikachu put itself between Zoroark and Ritchie and let loose the sharpest hiss that cut right through Gary and Ritchie’s chest, Pikachu’s back hair standing up like a ridge, the Zororark stepped back, cowering down, showing submission; the pokemon was whimpering and looking about in a frantic uneven manner.

“Easy, easy, hey, hey, shoosh, its okay,” Ritchie began stepping toward the pokemon, showing his hands, the handcuff dangling from his wrist, “I’m not a threat here, easy, easy big guy…”

But Pikachu was having none of it, it had run across the room and pulled out a flash card pack from a drawer, returned, and spilled them all over the floor in front of the Zoroark.

“PIIII-PIKA, PIKACHU!”

The Zoroark dropped to the floor in complete submission.

“One at a time!” yelled Ritchie, “Pikachu, where’s Ash?”

Pikachu held up a flash card that read “cave.”

“Cave? Cave? He’s in a cave?” said Gary.

Pikachu then held up two flash cards, “fall” and “down.”
“HE FELL DOWN INTO A CAVE?”

He is hurt! He’s hurt! He’s hurt!

Pikachu scuffled through the cards and held up another card that read, “Okay.”

“He’s okay?” asked Ritchie.

Pikachu held up another card that read “hurt”, and shook the “okay” card.

“He’s hurt, but he’s okay?”

“Pipi! Pikachu…”

Ritchie and Gary exchanged glances.

Gary stood up, “And you, you’re the Zoroark that tricked them aren’t you? You were that Articuno!”

Pikachu nodded angrily and the pokemon’s whimpering became more high pitched.

“Hold on Gary, I think there’s a lot more to this than what we’ve got on the surface right now.”

Mary came charging in through the front door and slammed it shut, making the Zoroark leap its entire self into the air only to crash down on a table, breaking it flat.

“I’m barely gone fifteen freaking minuets!” –

Ritchie waved his hands, “Mary! Pikachu’s back, and he brought this Zoroark with him, I think as an informant.”

Pikachu nodded confirming Ritchie’s thought.

“Where’s Ash?”

“He’s fallen into a cave,” said Ritchie, “he’s hurt, but he’s okay.”

“Well then what are we waiting for? Pikachu where is he?”

But the Zoroark snapped up and threw itself in front of the door, blocking it, Pikachu held up another card that read “Danger.”

“Danger? What danger? Do you mean the storm?” asked Ritchie.

Pikachu shook its head and held up another card with the word “pokemon.”

“A dangerous pokemon?”

Shall you admit you’re feeling faint? Better just, you know lean discreetly against this not-broken table.

Mary just stared at Pikachu, then whipped around to face the still cowering Zoroark, “Alright big guy time to spill it, who made you become that Articuno?”

The Zoroark tilted its head and Pikachu stepped up, chirping to get the pokemon’s attention, “Pipi! Pi-pika-chu!”
“Zoro, Zoroark!”

Pikachu looked through the cards, flipping them for pictures –

“Hold on, here,” Mary rushed over to the drawer where Pikachu pulled the cards from and pulled out a bag of letter blocks, spilling them out in front of Pikachu and Zoroark.

“Zoro-ARK!”

“Chu! Pika, pi!” Pikachu began spelling, putting the blocks together one by one.

“Fors” –

“No Fros, Froslass?”

Mary took a step back, “A Froslass made you do this?”

“Is that the dangerous pokemon?” asked Ritchie.

“Froslass are extremely dangerous,” answered Mary, “When I was back in Sinnoh we had to keep them away from populated areas during the winter, we had to close down entire parks and trails until we could relocate them, but I have never EVER heard of Froslass coming so far as to this region unless they were owned by a Trainer, or, other events. This would have to be the first sighting in the wilds near Kanto and Johto.”

“Migration shifting?”

“Possibly…but if it’s a truly wild Froslass, it’s not a native pokemon that’s for sure,” stated Mary glaring at the Zoroark, “And you sure as hell aren’t native to these lands either.”

Ritchie kneeled down to get on the Zoroark’s level, “Zoroark, is Froslass the one that has all of the pokemon in the valley spooked?”

Zoroark nodded heftily.

“Something still isn’t adding up,” said Gary, “This Froslass is already an anomaly by just presenting itself, they don’t do threat displays, and certainly not on the scale to threaten an entire valley, they’re trap and lure type pokemon and pretty much keep to themselves….But to use another pokemon like Zoroark, to force it to imitate a legendary pokemon…what would make it do such a thing?”

“A threat display?” asked Ritchie.

“No, you had it right the first time Gary,” said Mary, “they’re trap and lure pokemon…”

Gary’s stomach went from turning to flopping up into his chest, “Are you saying it purposely lured Ash…?”

“It’s a big possibility, Zoroark, do you know?”

The pokemon shook its head, and barked at Pikachu to spell out more words, Pikachu obeyed, spelling out all the Zoroark wanted to say.

“Kill, hurt, crazy, evil,” recited Ritchie.

Oh joy it’s every word you want to hear right now!
The Zoroark slammed its paws over the word “crazy,” making the blocks jump, and then over the blocks for “Froslass,”

“What if we try to rescue Ash?” asked Mary.

Pikachu immediately pointed to the word “kill.”

An audible gasp came from Ritchie, Gary stumbled back into a chair.

“Why? Why is it doing this?!”

“What does it want Ash for?”

The Zoroark shook its head and whimpered, slamming its paws around the word “crazy” until the blocks were scattering about –

Crazy! Crazy! Froslass crazy! Froslass hurt valley pokemon! Froslass crazy! Froslass EVIL!

Suddenly all of Ash’s nuances came to haunt Gary, such as how he likes to bury his head in Gary's shoulder and speak and only Gary would be the only one that can understand his mutterings, or how he would taste his pokemon’s food to make sure it was just right, or how just before he laughs his mouth pulls back into the widest grin –

This can’t be happening, not to him, not to your Ash, all he’s accomplished, all he’s done in his Trainer and Ranger careers, only to have this? This? Are you kidding me? What does it all amount to? Betrayed by the very being he’s sworn to protect like some sick irony or some twisted cosmic shit giving a very fantastic fuck you to every avenue of his hopes and dreams. And now you’ve learned he’s not only hurt, he is in the path of immediate danger with little to defend himself.

Ritchie and Mary were talking but Gary couldn’t hear them from the drowning depths of his thoughts.

You would do anything, ANYTHING RIGHT NOW, you could run right now out into this snow storm and pull him from the walls of ice that are crunching him, you could do that, just run right out into the blizzard and get him. He’ll die Gary, he really will die out there if you can’t help him. He would risk his life for you, you know the lengths he’ll go to defend you, now its your turn to save him.

********

Ash’s legs were heavy, his arms were wrapped around his middle as a poor shield from the wind, his body was hunched over, but he was walking.

You have no idea how long you’ve been trailing through this wall of white. Surely every inch of your body must be ice by now, and yet you’re still moving, still breathing the cold, cold air, because if you can just make it back, if you can just get back to him...Never mind the pain in the past, never mind any disagreement you’ve had with him, if you can just have one more victory with yourself, all you want right now is to be by his side and tell him how sorry you are...This is all your fault, everything that went wrong, everything that edged the crack deeper between you both, it’s all your fault.

Ash’s eyes had shut tight as he berated himself, Gary’s name slipping from his wavering lips.

“Ash?!”

Ash’s eyes snapped opened to discover the snowscape had given way to the quiet woods, and
standing just before him, was Gary with a face of utmost relief and arms spreading wide –

“Gary!”

Ash lunged forward, his legs taking two steps before his knees could take no more, but Gary was already above him, sweeping his arms around Ash’s back and pulling him close, and Ash likewise threw his arms around Gary’s neck, letting him support his full weight.

Before Ash could speak, Gary was already leaning down upon him, eyes closing, mouth slightly parted. Ash closed the gap between them feeling Gary’s bangs tickle his forehead, his body heat from his face alone radiating off him, his nose filled with his scent, and before his mouth could close on Gary’s, he breathed a cold exhale, and opened his eyes, his breath disappearing before him in the ice cavern.

Absently Ash’s hand rose to his mouth as his vision and motor skills tried to stir themselves to life.

So real…he was there, he was right there, you could feel him, smell him, hell – you could just barely taste him! But no…you are still here.

Ash realized he was laying nearly spread eagle on his back and sat up quickly, checking himself, *How, how far did I fall…?!*

Not too far, not too far, look you only have like five steps made, and there’s lots of snow down here, and oh, greeeeeeeeat, your gear has been thrown around again. Hey…that’s right! As you were making the ice steps, those blue eyes appeared on the ice, they must have been reflecting off from behind you, you must have been knocked out by that damn Froslass!

Ash growled and tried to pull himself up, but his strength just wasn’t with him, he could barely roll himself over onto his side, and his hip gave a none too welcome pain bite that shot down his leg.

*Ugh…what did that thing do to me…? It must have used another attack…!*

Maybe another Pain Split*? Maybe, but your strength is purely sapped….Hmmm, maybe Draining Kiss*? Draining Kiss*, that had to have been what that little shit used!

Ash tried to push himself up at least, but it was no good, his strength just wasn’t manifesting, however his anger was growing by the minute. *Why? What is that pokemon’s deal?*

For one thing, it’s a Froslass, they’re aren’t exactly known for their well-mannered natures say like a Blissey or an Audino, no, Froslass are made from ice and spite and possibly a short-lived life… You remember those tales from Mary who back in the Sinnoh region had to cut off entire parks because a Froslass had been spotted there in winter? These things are not friendly, especially wild Froslass, you’ve maybe had like, what a single encounter with one back in your kid days? To be honest you don’t remember it much, but for sure you know it wasn’t exactly honest in its intentions… Okay so great, you’re being pissed with by, most likely, the only Froslass in these mountains! What luck!

Ash felt several soft icy taps on his shoulder, he moaned, rolling over onto his back and –

“GARY?!”

Gary tilted his head while smiling. Ash was speechless. He felt Gary’s hand cup his cheek ever so gently and Ash couldn’t help but lean into the touch, yet–
Gary then hovered his fingers right over Ash’s nose, and flicked him hard – “OW! HEY!” Ash blinked with his eyes watering up from the stinging pain, and through teary, blurry vision, he watched Gary’s form morph into the Froslass.

“You are really starting to get on my nerves,” Ash hissed, still blinking the water from his eyes and rubbing his nose.

UUUUUMMM, how did that thing know about Gary?

The Froslass gave a ghastly giggle that sent a chill down Ash’s spine before it rooted through his gear yet again and picked up Ash’s binoc-cam. The Pokémon tilted its head putting the gear on, looking about stupidly.

“That only works when it’s synced with the com,” said Ash flatly, “And you’re probably just breaking it more by putting your hands all over it like that, no, don’t just, just take it off.” The Froslass pushed one of the cam’s side buttons and Ash heard the cam take multiple shots at once. “It doesn’t have all that great battery life either.” As if on queue, the binoc-cam died and the Froslass became startled, taking it off and throwing it aside. Ash heaved a sigh.

For real though, how did that thing know about Gary?

As if reading Ash’s mind, the Froslass twirled about, then produced Ash’s communicator and pointed to a picture of Gary on the screen.

Oh you little shit.

“That is not a toy, put it down,” said Ash quietly, trying to mask his anger about to boil over, he pushed himself to sit up with shaking arms and the fuel boiling in his gut.

The Froslass moved its little ice finger across the screen and brought up another picture of Gary in his lab coat feeding a Rapidash, then another with Gary asleep over his desk, and another with Gary leaning his head on Ash’s shoulder, both young men smiling happily.

This fucking thing knows how to use a communicator, so it must belong to someone, or, someone released it up here because they couldn’t deal with it anymore, oooor, it used to be a person and then died up in the mountains. Which is the most obvious answer? Let’s go with the Trainer route because if this was a former person that underwent a transformation after having died up here in the mountains, that would be too sad for you, and I mean its not like the latter isn’t sad too because it is – and shame on that human – but that would at least explain why it feels the need to mess with you, a lovely alive human. Besides, you haven’t had any reports of people getting lost up in these mountains for years, you guys run a pretty tight ship in keeping people and Pokémon safe, well, minus one rather traumatic experience during your Ranger career. COUGH, COUGH. But you push it down, push it down, haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa.

The Froslass smacked Ash’s face to get him to look at it after he had drifted away in his thoughts, Ash growled back in reply. Continuing on, the Pokémon swiped Ash’s com to a picture of the landscape above, then to the treetops with snow blowing furiously, and then to the ranger cabin. Ash’s heart nearly leapt in his throat as the Froslass swiped to a picture taken through one of the windows that caught Gary sitting on a chair slumped over with his elbows on his legs and his head in his hands.

Ash’s heart plummeted, *Gary....*
Ash moved to grasp the com, but the Froslass moved back accordingly. It tapped the picture and pointed to Ash’s chest.

“He means the world to me, please, I just want to get out of here and get back to him, please, can’t you understand that? I just want to get back to him. Can you help me get out of here? Help me get out of here, find Pikachu, and then we can all go back to the ranger cabin together and you can get the help you need, please.”

All the while Ash made his plea, the Froslass looked on in silence. With its powers, it pulled Ash’s Capture Styler from his pack and held it before him.

“I won’t use it on you, I swear. I think you’re the kind of pokemon that has issues with control right? That’s why I’m asking you to help me, and if you won’t, then I ask you to please leave me alone, and I’ll get out of here myself.”

Yes, with that pokemon gone hopefully your com will work.

The Froslass tapped Ash’s head with the Capture Styler, then tossed it away.

“Are you going to help me?”

The answer to Ash’s question was frank, the Froslass’ body glowed in preparation for an attack, and Ash felt what strength he had gathered get stripped from his body in the form of a ball of light, and pulled to the Froslass – “You” –

Yup, that is Draining Kiss* alright.

Ash fell like a limp doll to his side, breathing heavily while the Froslass happily swallowed the ball of light, licking its little icy fingertips.

“I can’t believe you…”

The Froslass then tossed Ash’s communicator to him with it once again displaying an error screen.

*This thing, this thing knows exactly what its doing…* Ash was so mad his teeth were grinding, “Why, why are you doing this?!”

The Froslass twirled aimlessly around again.

Ash slammed his fist down on the snow blanket, choking back a wet angry sob.

That’s it, you’re being held hostage by a fucking Froslass. Ash Ketchum, it’s using you as food!

The Froslass hovered over Ash and placed its little hand over his heart, Ash could barely move, but he growled his defiance, “I’m not your frozen dinner!”

The Froslass merely patted Ash’s head, and then it flew up and out of the ice crevice and into the wall of white leaving a much weakened Ash to growl and sob on the snow blanket.

Fuck, any attempt you make to get out of here that thing is going to stop you, and what can you do? It’s disabling your communicator, so it more than likely knows that people can find you with that device, and you’re pretty sure it knows what most of your gear is, or at the very least can figure it out, so this Froslass must have had some extensive human interaction, and either this pokemon was released, or, heaven forbid it was someone who died up in the mountains…But worst of all, it knows where the ranger station is, and it knows about Gary, and that he can produce a strong reaction
from you to feed off your energy…. What if it tries to go after him?! In that picture he’s all alone in the cabin, Ritchie and Mary must be looking for you, he’s left all alone in there! That Froslass could swing right in and hurt him if it already hasn’t! And what about Pikachu? Oh my god, you know what?! This thing was what hurt Charizard! Disable*! This pokemon can use Disable*! That Froslass must have been in vapor form, that’s why you all never saw the attack coming. You spent all that time flying around, it could have had all the time in the world to observe you and your pokemon!

Before Ash could drown in despair, he saw a large patch of snow drop onto the snow blanket.

“Huh?” Ash rolled himself so he could see the crevice entrance and spotted a small figure moving about the edges and pushing snow over.

“Hello? HELLO?! WATCH OUT! THERE’S A FROSLASS KEEPING ME PRISONER DOWN HERE!”

The snow continued to trickle down, Ash couldn’t make out what the figure was, but it was determined to find a way down.

“Wait! Hello?! The fall is too steep! STOP!”

But it was too late, the figure had pushed itself too far over and began its fall into the ice cavern with Ash –

“Oh no!”

As it fell, the creature was banged violently from side to side of the icy walls until the cavern opened up, and it landed hard right next to Ash, Ash covering his head with his arms in thinking it was going to land right on top of him.

As the snow settled around them, Ash looked up and realized his new prison mate was a Bergmite.

“You poor thing, you are okay?”

The Bergmite shook the fall off like it was nothing. It looked about, waddled over to Ash, and sniffed him. Then it bounced up and down, happily trilling, and began to twirl in a happy Bergmite dance, shuffling snow about.

As it twirled, Ash saw that the pokemon had been tagged with a bright green Note through a Capture Styler – Ash would recognize that tag signature anywhere – *RITCHIE!* Ash’s eyes welled up, his best friend, his buddy, of course, of course they’re going to get him out of here!

Huzzah! There’s hope for escape out of this ice prison yet!

The Bergmite looked up suddenly, stopping its happy dance, and as quickly as those hopes of escape were raised, they were dashed. On the ice wall behind the Bergmite, Ash saw the shadow of the Froslass’ figure manifest, the glow of its blue eyes radiating fiercely off the ice.

Chapter End Notes

I was thinking about keeping up with the two week schedule thing, but work is kicking my butt =n=;; I do apologize for the long wait inbetween chapters, but I hope to make
up for it! The next two chapters are where things really kick off methinks.
Alright Gary Oak, in most situations such as the one you’re in right now – love of your life being held hostage in blizzard by a crazy ghost and ice type pokemon – such circumstances would be the optimal time to panic, but you’re not going to panic. You’re a much respected – HIGHLY renowned researcher and a damn good trainer to boot, you can take down a fucking Froslass easy, they have shit defense and attack potential, they only have speed which your pokemon can cripple in their sleep.

Gary’s Umbreon stood up on its hind legs to reach his lap as he sat on a stool while hunched over a table, the pokemon nudged his arm draped across his legs.

Fucking Froslass, it’s going to wish it never, EVER, decided to take your Ash. Umbreon could make short work of it easily, Arcanine could snuff it blind, Houndoom would absolutely WRECK ITS SHIT TO PIECES.

Umbreon jumped up on Gary’s lap, placing its face right up to Gary’s nose, but he was too busy to even register the dark pokemon as he looked down at this com, scrolling through his online pokemon bank profile. Gary placed his chin on top of Umbreon’s head; the pokemon gave an audible huff.

Or Mega-Blastoise can give this little shit a Flash Cannon and a Dark Pulse RIGHT UP ITS ASS. NEVERMIND NOT HAVING STAB, MEGA-BLASTOISE MAKES UP THE POWER WITH ITS ABILITY AND BEING YOUR FAITHFUL PARTNER SINCE YOUR JOURNEY BEGAN, which like, ADDS 120% MORE POWER, or something like that, hey – ow o wow OW OW OW OW –

“Umbreon! Ow!”

Umbreon jumped off of Gary’s lap, straightening up its posture with a stern look in its red eyes. Gary held up his arm with two fresh soft bite marks, he crinkled his nose.

“Bre, bre! Ummmbreon – bre!”

Gary rubbed his face with his unbitten arm, “I know, I know…”

Bruh, you’re a fucking mess. Sure you have your pokemon by your side now, but there’s only one thing that’s going to quell the storm inside you.

Gary felt a gentle hand on his shoulder, but his nerves made him jump anyway, it was Ritchie all dressed back up in his Ranger gear with Gary’s Audino trilling happily beside him; he was flexing the wrist that had been handcuffed to the couch.

“Audino did an amazing job Gary, I feel great!”

“Good, good, I’m glad, so, so what’s the plan?”

“First step, calm you down.”

Speak for yourself – you’re not fooling anyone – THE LAST THING YOU WILL BE RIGHT NOW
“I’m fine Ritchie, I’ll be even better once Ash is found and safe.”

Ritchie gave Gary’s shoulder a squeeze before letting go, “You and me both, but” – “But?”

*Failed Step One.*

“We checked the tracker signals, and one of them is missing, I’m thinking, the Froslass, it – it might have….”

*SWEET ARCEUS THIS THING IS EVIL INCARNATE –*

“This Froslass isn’t only crazy,” said Ritchie, “it’s smart, like Trainer-trained, or, otherwise.”

Gary dropped his head into his hand, “Can’t you just use the last coordinates the tracker gave off?”

*Can you hear yourself right now you sound like a gurgling waterlogged widower –*

“We can’t go off blindly, that signal, might not be where Ash even is,” Ritchie sighed, “Pikachu’s estimation is around where the Note disappeared, so it’s a pretty good sign it at least reached the Froslass’ would-be territory. It can take up to ten minuets for the signal to change its shade once the pokemon stays in position long enough, or,” Ritchie scratched the back of his head, “the Froslass could’ve intercepted it, there’s too many variables…honestly, my gut is telling me to side with Pikachu’s estimation, it would give an idea where he is, or the ballpark at least.”

“And that is where?”

“Our initial hunch, he had made out of the valley and to the Disappearing Mountains.”

Mary stepped up tightening her gloves, “You know Ritchie if we want to shave more years off of Gary’s life, we can tell him Ash’s current rate of survival too.”

*Alright just down them out for a second so that instead of spiraling into despair, you can opt for outright denial. Denial is still a thing. Rangers are tough, and your Ranger is one of the hardiest, yup yup yup.*

Ritchie face-palmed himself.

“Our sister station is on standby and ready to assist,” said Mary placing her hand on her hip, “They’ve already reached out to the Kanto branch and they’re working to get a geo-scan of the region to help us coordinate through the ice buildup, but due to the blizzard causing power outages, it might be longer than we want. On that front, any support our region team can provide might be hindered by the weather.”

*Thank-you based Mary.*

Gary stood up and began pacing around the room with his Umbreon watching him intently, “Okay, so we have a pretty good estimation where Ash is, but we can’t make a move unless, one, we know for sure where he is, and two, unless we can get him away from the Froslass, or remove the Froslass, because if we don’t, according to Pikachu, and that, Zoroark” –

Pikachu had Zoroark crouched submissively in the far left corner of the Ranger cabin –
Gary gave a sharp inhale and turned on his heels, Umbreon gave a look to Gary to calm down, but it was not received – “Unless we can get Ash away from the Froslass, Froslass is going to kill Ash.”

“That’s right,” said Ritchie quietly.

Yeeeeeaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhh, speaking of THAT ZOROARK, after further interrogations with blocks, and pictures, and screaming, lots of shouting, shouting – you learned some pretty, unhappy things shall you call them, liiiiiiiiiike that the Zoroark sold Ash out to save its own hide – like oh would you look at that human yeah I’m sure that human is a much better toy than me – yeah that Zoroark BETTER STAY IN THAT CORNER.

“Why can’t we just go after the Froslass?” said Gary.

“I don’t know,” said Mary crossing her arms and tilting her head in a mocking manner, “Maybe because there’s a blizzard outside and Froslass is an ice type that can have the Snow Cloak* ability – AND, has proven its capabilities are just a little more than your run of the mill Froslass, which are bad luck to begin with.”

“It’s ONE Froslass” –

“That has Ash as its hostage! It’s HOSTAGE Gary, we all want Ash back safely, and none more so than you, but if we are going to pull this off, we need more information” – Mary raised her hand before Gary could shout his rebuttal – “And I know, I KNOW we are on borrowed time as it is, but from the information Pikachu has gathered from Zoroark, the Froslass isn’t going to let Ash die, it’s going to keep him alive because it needs him, for what we don’t know, but it won’t kill him unless it is interfered with. This pokemon knows a lot about humans and has a strong desire for us.”

“What could a ghost pokemon need him for? Companionship? A pen pal? We all know what their type can truly do and what they’re capable of.”

“Oh yes,” said Mary darkly, “I know ghost pokemon very well, and I can tell you they’re unpredictable at best, but this Froslass’ actions are beyond a wild pokemon’s motivations of simply luring and capturing prey or mucking about, it could be acting through trauma.”

Or it’s just a colossal DICK.

“And if that’s the case, we must handle this as planned out and as carefully as possible.”

“All the more reason to get Ash out of there as soon as possible,” said Gary, “What more information do we need? Ash is in the hands of a GHOST pokemon that is mentally unwell!?”

“If that Froslass is working alone or not,” said Ritchie, “We know Froslass has a desire for humans, and that it is more than capable of manipulating pokemon to do its bidding, we could be walking right into a trap with Ash as the bait.”

Fucking bring it, how many Megas do you all have at you disposal here? Mega-Blastoise, both Mega-Charizards from Ash and Ritchie, Mega-Pidgeot, and Mary’s kick ass Mega-Aggron, AND Mega-Lopunny –

“We need to do a covert scout at the coordinates we last received from the missing tracker,” said Mary, “We’ll use a flyer and give it our infrared cam to scope out how many bodies are in the vicinity if the Froslass has pokemon as guards, and with any luck, we could also find where Ash is too.”

If he’s not a frozen popsicle by then…
“So until that mission is done and we have the geo-scan, we have to sit tight,” said Mary.

“Who will be the flyer?” asked Gary.

“My Skarmory will be best for this scout,” said Mary, “It has the most experience in hazardous weather.”

Gary’s com began ringing, it was Tracey again, “It’s Tracey,” Gary answered and placed him on speaker, “Hey, anything new?”

“Well really, I thought while Misty is packing up some supplies I’d call you guys to see if there were any updates” –

HAHAHAHAHAHA WHERE DO YOU BEGIN –

Gary noticed Ritchie scratch his face nervously.

_How do you think Misty is going to handle the ‘Ash is being held hostage news’?_

“By the way, Misty went ahead and made a report of the findings from Team Rocket, I’m sending it over to you now so you guys can have it on file, who knows, it might come in handy in the future.”

Gary heard his com make a jingle, he opened up the file and scrolled through it quickly.

_God knows after this ordeal is over you don’t want ANYTHING distracting Ash from his recovery. Heh…heh…..Recovery…._

“Looks like business as usual to be honest,” said Gary, “….Wow, this is about the stupidest group name I’ve ever heard.”

“You mean the new group?” said Tracey, “Yeah we thought so too, I mean what kind of group name is ‘Onelings’ anyway?”

The Zoroark perked up its head upon hearing the group name.

Gary noticed Mary’s eyes grow impossibly wide.

“Mary?”

“Onelings…They’re, um, not new, well they’re new to Kanto and Johto, but not…they’ve been around. They’re a modest cluster from the Sinnoh region….” Mary’s hand went to her chin, “What on earth are they doing all the way over here?”

“Are they bad?” asked Ritchie.

“Depends,” Mary crossed her arms, “They keep to themselves a lot, don’t care much for outsiders unless they share their ideals, which _seem_ pretty harmless, they believe people and pokemon are meant to live and act as one.”

“According to the report,” said Tracey, “They’re just living up in the woods by themselves away from civilization. They were pretty adamant against having outsiders anywhere near them.”

“On paper they do seem harmless enough,” said Gary, however an alarm bell was going off in his head, “But really Mary, what’s up with this group?”

Mary stepped in place, “Once you’re recruited, you’re recruited forever, there’s no leaving, _ever_.”
“Pipipi! Pikachu!”

The group turned towards Pikachu and Zoroark in the corner.

“What’s up Pikachu?” Ritchie asked. Pikachu motioned for them to come towards the Zoroark.

Not that you really care to hear what that horrible sell-out of a pokemon has to say, but if Pikachu thinks it’s worthwhile, better take a listen…

Pikachu brought the block bag over and spilled it out in front of Zoroark. Going right to work, it spelled out two words out, “Onelings” and “Froslass.”

The Zoroark barked pointing to the word that made Onelings, and then pointed to itself –

“You are kidding me,” breathed Mary, “You're a Oneling?!”

The Zoroark barked again in affirmation. It sat up a little more while pointing to the blocks that spelled out “Froslass”, and then back to the ones that made “Onelings” –

“Oh god,” Mary covered her mouth.

“So you both are from this Oneling group,” said Ritchie.

Gary’s inner alarm bell was sounding off harder, “Mary, what is it?”

“It’s just,” Mary ran her hand through her hair, “…Some of their members take being one with pokemon too far, and going as to so far, as, as to try, and undergo a transformation.”

Tracey made a troubled sound through the com while Gary shook his head, “Mary, you mean that…”

Mary turned toward the Zoroark, “Zoroark, was this Froslass, did she used to be human?”

The Zoroark looked down, trembling –

“Answer her,” Gary growled.

The Zoroark gave a shaky trill to Pikachu, and Pikachu spelled out “Monster” to which Zoroark placed its paw over, then pointed to itself.

“I’ve heard enough,” said Ritchie.

“Same,” replied Mary, “It has to be a transformation of some kind then,” Mary’s voice grew quiet, “Like I said, I’ve dealt with a lot of ghost pokemon from my home region Sinnoh….mainly because a majority of them used to be Onelings”


Mary swallowed, “…Sinnoh is known for being split down the middle with mountains, so the ghost type we would see most often from them was, Froslass.”

Well fucks then.

“Mary,” came Tracey’s voice a few octaves higher, “A-are you saying they purposely went up in the mountains to die?”
“Not, die as they saw it, these extreme members could think of no greater feat of people and
pokemon becoming one than a person actually becoming a pokemon. Now, mind you, only women
could become Froslass, as for the men, something...something far, far worse happened...”

Gary’s knees felt weak.

_You can’t hear any more of this, and this monster, this crazy occult thing, has possession of your Ash –?! God, what if it’s trying to recruit him?! Not that Ash would EVER agree to such a pact, he has always believed that humans and pokemon can work and coexist in peace, and now here is this, THING, to take yet another shit on what he holds so dear!_

Gary whipped back towards the Zoroark, “And you just let the Froslass take him!” Umbreon joined
in Gary’s anger by growling ferociously at its dark brethren, the Zoroark sank to the floor showing a
position of utmost submission.

Pikachu showed little concern to the Zoroark in spelling out the next words, “Recover” and “Crazy.”
The Zoroark with a shaky paw pointed to itself, then to “Recover,” then to “Froslass.”

“Oh this is just grand,” said Gary coldly, “So you were supposed to take Froslass back to the group
were you? But it was too much for you?”

The Zoroark tapped its paw repeatedly over the word “Crazy.”

“You’re terrible! You should have let it ice you!”

“Gary, take it down a notch,” said Mary taking note of Ritchie’s angered silence which he finally
broke by asking,

“Do you plan on going back to the Onelings?”

“Pipipichu?”

Zoroark paused, scratching its claws lightly across the wood, then hissed and scattered the blocks
that spelled Onelings with an angry slam of its paw.

“Well that’s a no.”

Pikachu spelled out “Done.”

“Yeah, we can see,” said Ritchie.

_Good choice you stupid sell-out._

Tracey gave a much troubled sigh from the com, “Okay, so, considering this Froslass used to be
human, and now it has Ash” –

“Tracey stop,” said Gary rubbing this forehead with his hand, “Let’s, _not_ even go there.”

“I’m going to speak with our sister station,” said Mary, “They have a Swanna that can assist my
Skarmory” – the power suddenly went out in the cabin thrusting them into darkness– “….Right after
I get our generators back online,” and Mary stomped off.

“What happened?” asked Tracey.

“The power is out,” said Gary in a dry tone, he felt a tap on his shoulder and Ritchie handed him a
flashlight.
“Oh dear…”

Gary felt his Audino hug his leg giving a trouble trill, his Umbreon’s red eyes were cutting through the darkness like two ruby beacons, it blinked nonchalantly, turning its head toward the window. “It’s just Umbreon,” said Gary, “It’s okay.”

Better those eyes than the blue death knell orbs.

“Hey…” said Ritchie, “Did you guys hear that?”

“Hear what?” asked Gary, his Audino trembled harder.

“I could’ve sworn I heard a scream – but it wasn’t, it didn’t sound, natural?” –

“Hey” – Mary suddenly stepped up to Ritchie and Gary through the darkness causing them both to jump, Audino squealed, jumping up onto Gary’s back causing him to drop his flashlight, “Ritchie, go check on the barn pokemon, and so help me GOD if you try and go” –

“Don’t worry Mary, I’m on it” –

“I mean it Ritchie!” said Mary following him out the door and slamming it shut, leaving Gary alone with Audino, Umbreon, Pikachu, and, that Zoroark. In the darkness, with a moment of silence both inside and out, Gary once again heard the cabin’s clock tick tocking away ever diligently.

 Fucking arrogant ass clock.

Pikachu gave a sigh.

“I don’t know how I’m going to tell Misty all of this,” said Tracey.

“Very quickly and out of range of anything she can throw,” said Gary.

Gary heard movement coming from the Zoroark and pointed the flashlight in its direction. He saw several blocks crudely brought together in front of the dark pokemon to form the words “Sorry.”

“It’s a little late for that,” Gary spat.

*********

It was cold when Ash woke. He could feel it in his mouth, his throat, his nose, his stomach. He could feel the chill in the air reach into his inner being with each breath. He gave several painful coughs as he tried to sit up from his side, but yet again his strength was failing him. He looked up to the walls of the ice cavern reaching overhead, the storm raging above. Lighting cut across the sky, lighting up the ice. Ash tilted his head and waited for another bolt. His vision was wavering, but it seemed there was something in the ice, strange dark patches, odd, dark figures in the ice…It quickly became too much for his vision to focus on with how bright the lightning flashes were, and Ash closed his eyes.

*Bergmite…*

Mustering every ounce of strength he had to spare, Ash pushed himself to sit upright to look for Bergmite. “Ungh…” he felt he must have slept awkwardly since his neck hurt from the slightest mis-movement, "Ah, there you are!" Ash spotted the Bergmite which had seated itself as far as it possibly could from Ash in the crevice.

The pokemon grumbled upon seeing Ash awake, “Berg, berrrrrrrrrrrg-MITE!”
“Oh, thank-goodness you both are okay…” Ash leaned back on the ice wall just behind him to steady his double vision, his hands dug into the snow, gripping the slippery ice, his head was spinning, he couldn’t remember what the Froslass had done, and he was beginning to think it wouldn’t matter. Ash shivered, *I’m so cold…*

“Berg….berg, mite….”

“Where’s my heat light, my blanket…?”

Or the rest of your gear for that matter, your com most importantly, how long have you been out?

Ash squeezed shut his eyes for a bit longer before opening them again, and was rewarded in watching the double Bergmite become one. Ash blinked several more times while wiping his face, he looked down at his hand….*Frost?*

Ash turned to the ice wall just next to him, seeing his brown eyes now a pair of pale, blue glowing orbs, “AH” – Ash fell back over on his side, his body aching upon contact with the ice. From where his faux blue eyes had glared back, the Froslass floated through the ice, its pale eyes shining brightly.

The Bergmite began to growl, but the Froslass merely waved it off turning its immediate attention over to Ash, who growled at the Froslass as well.

The Froslass scoffed and morphed its form into Gary again.

“Stop it,” Ash hissed, pushing himself up with a fire beginning to catch in his belly, “If you really want to keep me alive down here I’m going to need food and help to melt the ice for water, I don’t suppose you can morph yourself into a stove can you?”

Froslass!Gary perked up, immediately trotted over to Ash, sat down beside him, and pulled him close and fast, “OOMPH.” Ash was surprised at how solid Froslass!Gary felt. Froslass’ bodies are hollow, but this body, this form was not, however to the pokemon’s credit, Ash felt like he was being hugged by a block of ice.

A cold cursed block of ice. You really hope this thing’s ability is Snow Cloak…

“This is the exact opposite of helping,” Ash said into Froslass!Gary’s shoulder, but Froslass!Gary just pulled Ash closer, “Please stop, you’re not him.” Ash felt an icy hand pat his head followed by Froslass!Gary’s icy chin resting down upon his forehead.

Ash squeezed his eyes shut, furious with himself for even considering…

Minor moment of weakness, maybe you can pretend, if not for just a second…

“Berg, mite, mite!”

Ash raised his head up, seeing that the Bergmite had come out closer from its refuge away, but Froslass!Gary sensing the approaching pokemon’s presence snapped up, hissing vehemently at it, and much to Ash’s horror, he watched Froslass!Gary’s eyes turn pitch black with it’s mouth elongating far beyond what a human jaw line could do, baring fangs.
Its cool, I mean you're already going to be scarred for life from this, what's a little more nightmare
fuel for you?

Froslass! Gary turned back towards Ash with black eyes, elongated mouth and all, smiling an
impossible smile that reached back behind its ears – “Ugh!” Ash tried to push himself away from the
monstrosity, but its grip upon him was absolute, “No, stop” - in an exhausted frame of mind Ash
cried out to the Bergmite, “Help me please!”

The Bergmite barked, ruffled itself up, and threw its body towards them, skating across on the ice
underneath the layered snow. The Froslass let go of Ash, throwing him back in frustration - the ice
pokemon morphed back into its original form, and as soon as the Bergmite was in range, the Froslass
slapped it so hard in the face, the poor ice chunk pokemon skidded right back across from whence it
came into the ice wall, the impact knocking it from one wall to the next, leaving it to helplessly
bounce about erratically, and eventually, slamming into Ash – a protruding bit of the Bergmite’s
body dug right into Ash’s hip, making him cry out in pain as he was knocked over.

The Bergmite immediately pushed itself away from Ash giving much apologetic trills.

The Froslass poked Ash.

“GET AWAY FROM ME,” Ash roared, but the Froslass didn’t pull back at all, instead, it tapped its
little icy finger over Ash’s heart.

“I don’t care,” Ash hissed through stinging burning tears as his body shook him with pain, “Can’t
you understand it’s wrong to treat people and pokemon this way? WHAT IN YOUR RIGHT MIND
THinks THIS IS OKAY?”

The Froslass then pointed at Ash’s throat.

“WHY DO YOU THI….ah-ack, augh....” Ash grabbed his throat, *My throat!* But Ash could still
breath –  *No, my voice! You….you Disabled* my voice?!* Breathing heavily, Ash curled over in on
himself, trying to speak, make noises, anything, he screamed – he knew he was screaming at the top
of his lungs, yet nothing but silence came from his mouth with his ice cold breath; his throat was
completely numb.

The Froslass placed its little icy hand under Ash’s chin, slowly pulling his face up to look at it. It
placed its hand on Ash’s heart again, and pushed in hard. A slow shivering breath escaped Ash, he
understood the pokemon’s intent that it could stop his heart at any moment, and not give one, single,
fuck about it.

The Froslass giggled and pointed to Ash and then to itself, itself and then to Ash, and Ash, wide
eyed, beaten, and bewildered could only guess what the pokemon was trying to tell him.

The Froslass waved its arms about and dove about the snow, looking for something, until it returned
with Ash’s com, waving it in front of him, tapping its little hand on the screen, and low and behold,
Ash saw that his com was functioning, it had just one com bar, but it was functioning!

With a silence between them, minus the Bergmite’s nervous growling in the corner, the Froslass
tapped on the screen, and then held it over to Ash, wiggling the screen in front of him.

Ash apprehensively raised his hand towards the com, expecting Froslass to take away his little ray of
hope once again, but when it didn’t take it away, Ash tapped the screen, making it show a default
background, a picture of Pikachu and Umbreon making silly faces.

The Froslass twirled about happily, it tapped the screen, then held it over to Ash for him to tap the
Dude you don’t have the faintest fucking clue what’s going on here, but never mind that now, just pray the com towers will not be knocked out by this storm by the time you get a message out because that would be your fucking luck at this pace.

The Froslass began tapping rhythmically and handed the com over for Ash to tap on, which he did. The Froslass looked at him funny, tapped rhythmically again and held the com over for Ash to do the same.

Okay minus this stupid little game, if you can just get a message out under this thing's nose, you're home free. Ritchie, and Gary, and Mary will come get you. Just one text, just send out one text to the base com with a position snap shot and they'll have you, they'll have you. Just minimize the screen when it's the Froslass’ turn, hide it, and you’re home free!

The Froslass was looking more and more bothered by Ash’s aimless tapping. On its turn, it began tapping more slowly, locking eye contact with Ash, repeating its rhythmic tapping several times, then held out the com for Ash to tap on, shaking it angrily.

Has it figured you out? No, the message screen is still there – minimize it quickly and when it’s your turn, just one more touch…!

Ash moved to tap the screen, but the Froslass immediately took back the com studying the screen, clearing its throat.

FUCK –

It tilted its head, tapping at a slow rhythmic pace, locking eyes with Ash again; he pokémon tapping the pattern over and over and over.

Hold on a minuet...No way....

I.

Those taps...are spelling out...

A.M.

This pokémon was speaking to you in Morse–?!

S.M.A.R.T.

It showed Ash the message screen pulled back to full screen, showing their position snap shot ready to be sent, it just needed the send command – the Froslass pushed delete, and Ash’s heart snapped in two.

The Froslass gave a wide toothy grin, its blue eyes ringed with black, it reached out to Ash’s chest, who was too defeated to even protest, and pulled back a small droplet of Draining Kiss* dew, promptly swallowing it, “I aM sMaRT.”

Its voice sounded like a wild windy note grating upon metal and gavel.

*Please…please…..* Ash was trembling, it had gotten painful to breathe – he tried to speak, but his throat still only produced silence, *PLEASE*–
“BaD, bAd, BOy.”

The Froslass pointed at Ash, and Ash braced for the worst – he felt his arms go numb, his hands twitching slightly before he couldn’t move them at all.

*My, my arms...*

The Froslass raised its head, proud of its disciplinary measures. It gave Ash a seething searing look, and with its com in hand, it flew up and out of the crevice into the snow storm above.

Ash couldn’t feel his throat, he couldn’t feel his arms, he could feel the pain from his bruised body, specifically his hip, and he could feel his tears slip slowly down his cheeks and drip off.

That’s it….You’ll never be found.... In all your experience in dealing with the wilderness and its ever wondrous perils, this could be quite the loudest Fuck You nature has ever bestowed to you...It had to have found Pikachu, it must have found Pikachu...and it’s most likely dead...This is all your fault, this is all your fault! Why didn’t you just leave the scout on time? There was no reason to stick around save for you just saying you wanted to be sure of a no-sighting when really you...and now look what’s happened....This is all your fault...!

Ash breathed a quiet sob, and then several more, until his chest was heaving up and down in a cascading crying mess, and he let himself sink down against the ice.

He looked up to the opening above, still breathing heavy, he couldn’t wipe his tears or his nose even if he wanted to.

*I don’t understand...* Ash swallowed, his throat suddenly forcing several painful coughs out of him, *It was supposed to be just a simple scout, and now I’m down here, and....This is all my fault, why is everything just so difficult now....* 

Ash felt a nudge on his foot, it was the Bergmite. *Oh....* Even in his beaten down state, Ash gave a smile to the little pokemon, *I’m sorry we’re in this together,* he thought, *If it weren’t for me, you’d still be with your family, I’m so, so, so, sorry...*

Well, not only that, this little guy, eh, not so little it’s about half your size, but this pokemon came to your aide without hesitation when you cried out for it, and it was injured on your behalf – and yeah it was a physical hit and Bergmite and take hits like a planet in that regard, but still, this pokemon, this pokemon is a good, good, good pokemon, if nothing else, you’re glad to have its companionship in what could very well be your final hours.

There couldn’t be any exchange of words between them. The Bergmite went to Ash’s side and lightly nudged him, feeling Ash shivering.

“Berg, mite!”

The pokemon trotted away from Ash and began sniffing around the snow, it bit down pulling up a long piece of thermal fabric –

Ash gave an exuberant expression, *My blanket! Oh please, please bring it over here!*  

The Bergmite chirped, dragging Ash’s blanket over to him. Ash tried and tried to move his arms, but it was no good, however a tingling in his throat caused him to swallow several times revealing some feeling was coming back in the tissue of the back of his mouth. He tried making a few sounds, happily discovering his voice had partially returned to barely above a whisper, “Hey, think you can help wrap me in this blanket?”
“Bergmite!”

That didn’t last long, with any luck you should be getting feeling back into your arms soon too!

All the Bergmite had to maneuver the blanket with was its mouth, but it did the best it could, tucking Ash in with its head, crawling from one side to the other to make sure he was covered all the way.

Ash was so grateful he could very well cry again, but he was too exhausted to do much else once the Bergmite was done. The pokemon looked proudly at its work, then cozied on up to Ash’s side with Ash returning the gesture by leaning on the pokemon. It was the closest thing he could do to offer it a hug, unlike being smothered by the block of ice that was Froslass, Ash was more than happy to show Bergmite some affection.

“Berg, mite, mite!” The pokemon nuzzled back, and Ash finally had to lean himself away, he didn’t need any other part of his body going numb and Bergmites are the Ice Chunk pokemon after all.

Bergmite looked up at Ash trilling happily, allowing Ash to catch sight of the green Note still attached to the side of its body.

Ritchie’s tag signature! You completely forgot this pokemon was tagged! Disorientation sucks!

Ash could tell it wasn’t active anymore, otherwise it would’ve have had a mute inner glow to it, most likely due to the Froslass, but…*I can fix it, I know how to fix tags, I have my gear here with me, I’ll find a way…yes, I can do it! Once my arms aren’t Disabled* anymore, I can fix the tag when that stupid Froslass isn’t around, we can get out of here!* 

Ash felt his heart swell, no matter how that Froslass tries to dispel his escape, there is still hope for him! No doubt in his mind Ritchie must be watching the tracker signals, and upon noticing one short out, the next logical step is an observant scout!

Yes! YES! You can do this Ash! You can survive this!

*There’s hope yet,* *Ash closed his eyes thinking of Gary, Ritchie, of all of his friends, of all the people and pokemon waiting for him to come home, they would never give up on him, Ash can’t possibly give up on himself now!* *But…* *Ash opened his eyes looking back up to the snow storm, Someone sure gave up on that Froslass….*

You’re going to pass into Sainthood if you forgive this pokemon, I’m your subconscious, so to speak, I’m a part of you, and even I say beat that motherfucker into the goddamn ground, but no, you’re listening to your head and your heart and not the path that is currently the closest to LOGIC. Bruh. Okay so, this pokemon must have belonged to someone, it knows your gear and for fucks sake it knows Morse, and if you ever, EVER, find out the person that trained this pokemon, you are going to punch them into the ground. No loving, well rounded trainer would ever leave it’s pokemon to harbor such cruel ideals, and if that is how this pokemon was trained, then all the more reason to find this person and BEAT THE SHIT OUT OF THEM.

“Berg, berg BERG!”

“Huh? What’s up?” Ash’s voice was still barely above a whisper, but he felt it before he saw what the Bergmite was barking about – a wet chill ran up from his feet and down his legs, Ash gasped, there was water, water, WATER was coming into the crevice!

Arceus FUCKING CHRIST, can’t catch a break can you? So now you’re going to be cold and wet, cooold, and weeeeeeet, although this water is not freezing, in fact it’s surprisingly, warm? This must be from the springs then, just be thankful this water is not searing hot to the point where your
skin would melt off.

Ash swallowed.

“Berrrrrrrg!”

*Where, where, where is the crack?*

Ash scanned the crevice floor, the water already beginning to rise with nowhere else to go but up, the accumulated snow melting upon contact, only adding to the rising pool. “Bergmite!” Ash coughed, his throat suddenly feeling very sore, “Bergmite, I need you to find the crack and seal it!”

“BerrrrgmITE!”

The Bergmite trudged through the rising water, planting its face under where it could, trying to feel out the flow and direction.

This water is rising a lot faster than what you would like, it would reeeaaaally be nice to have some FEELING BACK IN THESE ARMS ALREADY. Could this be the Froslass’ doing? It really wouldn’t surprise you if it was, because why the fuck not.

Ash tried moving his arms, but they were still unresponsive. The water already reaching over his legs and up his abdomen, his blanket sloshing uselessly against him. Ash gave a shaky sigh, *At least I can see all of my gear again...oh there’s the heat light.*

Yeah, soaked and busted.

The water rose up over the eyes of the Bergmite, Ash could still hear its trills from underwater with little bubbles popping around its body.

Yeah, that little guy isn’t going to have problem with the water at all, its body is just made of the solid form of water, you on the other hand are mostly water but cannot breathe it, the ability to somehow make gills would be nice. Yes, you have swim gear, but is it with you? NOPE. Despite your amazing Ranger foresight skills, drowning was not one of your foreseeable perils today!

*Still, I could make use of my gear!*

Yes! Get those brain gears moving mister!

“Berg,” Ash swallowed, his throat warning him not to push it, but he had to get the pokemon’s attention, “Bergmite!”

Only the pokemon’s high arched back was visible above the water now, but Bergmite perked up and trudged through the water back over to Ash.

“Bergmite, I need you to help me gather my gear, if the water gets high enough, I’ll,” Ash swallowed again, his throat tightening, “I’ll need it.”

Ash heard Bergmite’s gurgled trilling, he watched the pokemon half walk, half float now towards its first prize, Ash’s pack.

More than your gear though, you NEED YOUR ARMS.

Ash tried moving his arms again, but they were still lame; the water had risen to just barely over his elbows.
What cures Disable*? Mental Herb, its not as effective on humans, honestly its effect can vary from
person to person – not that you have a Mental Herb on you – but still, Mental Herb, mind stuff,
muscle over mind shit, you can do this, pump your head full of that inner dreamer belief you’re so
full of and believe your arms will move! Your arms will move! They’re gonna move! Yup! That sure
is some un-movement they are making but that’s okay because any second now they are going to
move for real!...Any time now! Move!...Move!....Move!....Fuck.

The water had amassed to reach above Ash’s stomach now; he was beginning to feel his body
getting swayed by the push and pull of the rising pool’s inner current. The Bergmite was doing its
best to bring all of Ash’s gear to his side, but it was a losing battle like finding the gushing crack. For
instance, when the pack was brought over, by the time the Bergmite returned with the now useless
heat light, the pack had floated away!

Ash was doing his best to keep calm while feeling out his buoyancy. The water had pulled him away
from the ledge, and the splashing and jostling and swimming the Bergmite was doing to fetch Ash’s
gear wasn’t helping his balance much. *Okay, plan B,* “Bergmite!” Ash’s throat was really hurting
now, “Bergmite, its okay, lets take a break on getting my stuff for now, instead, please help me
float.”

Had Ash still been firmly seated, the water would have risen up over his head. The pool’s current
had pulled him out toward the center of the crevice, gently swaying him about. Ash was doing his
best to float on his back with Bergmite’s help as water rose, and rose, and rose, the Bergmite using
its body to keep Ash face up instead of the natural tilt which would have him face-planting in the
water.

*You are doing the Life Man’s float that’s what you’re doing. Okay, okay so far so good, just float on
your back with your little pal here, and you’ll just rise on up out of the crevice! Provided the water
rises that far, and you don’t tire out or anything like that. No let’s stay positive here, once the water
rises to the top, you can hide in the snow with Bergmite away from the Froslass, provided you don’t
fall down anymore hidden evil ice caverns – OH! You could just let Bergmite lead an ice path for
you!...On second thought, hiding might be your best bet, yeah, just chill out under the snow, get that
Note glowin’ again, and boom! Recovery bound! Yaaaaaaaay!*

Even better still, as Ash maintained his float with Bergmite, he began to feel movement in his arms!
Ash quickly made use of his returned limbs doing soft arm strokes with soft leg kicks, “Bergmite! I
can move my arms again!”

*Ow, however your voice still hurts to use, and that’s not really moving your arms about, that’s more
like wiggling but hell you’ll take it.*

Ash heard the pokemon’s trill from underwater, only the ridge of its back was visible above the
water line, but Ash could tell it was spinning happily in a watery Bergmite dance.

*Alright!*

Ash looked up to the storm above with hope inching ever closer to the exit. *We can make it, we can make it...*

*You’re starting to feel how spent you are, but just keeping doing what you’re doing, and you’ll be back in Gary’s arms in no time!*

Ash let out a modest sigh, the only thing now that could turn this whole ordeal to ruin would be the
Froslass, what else could happen?
Ash looked to the ice walls, which with the rising water, had become surprisingly clear, he narrowed his eyes upon spotting another odd dark patch deep in the ice…*I knew I saw something in there…* But he couldn’t make the figure out, “Hey, Bergmite, ar-oubb” – water suddenly filled Ash’s mouth as the rising pool gave a sudden violent shudder. Ash kicked himself above the water line, coughing and sputtering, hearing thick sharp watery cracks rattle the ice walls all around him, “Oh no” – Ash looked up and saw the ice walls tilting inward with thick chunks of ice falling toward him –

**DIVE ASH! THE LAST THING YOU NEED IS A CONCUSSION!**

Ash took a deep breath, trying to will his arms to move more than weak flaps that barely slipped himself under the surface. The Bergmite followed suit by pushing Ash down while placing its body over him just in time to take a hit from an ice chunk that pushed them both several more feet under – another huge ice chunk landed squarely behind Ash creating a vacuum that sucked him away from Bergmite momentarily – who was then struck again by another even larger ice chunk mixed with rock that took the Bergmite down with it – *Bergmite!*

*It’ll be fine Ash! You need air! AIR!*

Ash breached the water again, finding his one way out was now sealed by ice, snow, rock, and whatever else debris the storm saw fit to lock his tomb, and the water was still rising.

*Check that Ash Ketchum, you can only marvel now at THIS being the biggest FUCK YOU nature has EVER bestowed upon thee!*

Ash’s mind went blank. He could move his arms more now, but the thought barely registered against the ice cavern sealing up with the wall collapse. Ash just stared at the coming ice barrier, *What do I do…What do I do….* and before Ash knew it, the water was shoving his head up against the caved ice. Ash absentmindedly pushed his hands up against the ice seal which only pushed him under, and in coming back up for air, he banged his nose hard against it, the area for air shrinking quickly. He shut his eyes, focusing on keeping his bruised and possibly bloody nose above the water line for the last few precious moments of air, which was proving difficult enough with the water jostling him about with the broken off ice chunks – Ash felt out a crack in the seal and sucked in what air he could before the water finally rose up and over him, leaving only the air in his lungs to sustain him.

Ash pushed away from the seal opening his eyes, for a moment it was pure silence all around him, the water, the ice, and the darkness below. There was nothing he could do, and there was nothing to be done, except wait for the burn in his lungs to extinguish the fire of his soul at last.

His last flickering flame pushed him back up against the ice seal, Ash’s hands searching frantically for anything, any last chance of hope for him to snag a weak spot in the ice that maybe would just topple a way through for him to breathe! The frantic searching turned into useless pounding against the barrier which dissolved into Ash merely floating where he lay, sinking down, there was nothing left to do, but finally give in and accept defeat.

*If your life is supposed to flash before your eyes before you die, you must have lived one hell of a boring life Ash Ketchum, because all you feel right now is pure terror of what comes next and nothing else, oh no wait –

*What would Gary think of me now?*

Ash swam up against the water, up against the ice wall, and Ash having no choice but to inhale, experienced a most joyous surprise when he inhaled not water, but air! Ash coughed and sputtered and struggled to keep his air passageways in the miracle inch between water and ice, life and death,
Ash was literally clawing his way against the barrier, against all despairing measures to stay alive.

_The water is receding! The water is receding!_

The water was receding, and already far enough that Ash could keep his entire head above water if he just had the strength for it, instead he could barely bob in place. Whatever relief he felt from the water draining was taking the very last bits of his strength with him, running him far past empty in attempting to stay afloat. His stuffy nose and gasping mouth was back to just barely clearing the surface, and his legs just couldn’t kick anymore. Ash inhaled what air he could before he slipped under. It was just his arms moving, flailing really, and he was still below line, nothing stopping his descent into the darkness below. He could hold his breath, but by the time the water would recede under his head he would be drowned.

Ash’s chin hit something hard and cold, he felt a cold mouth bite at his clothing near his chest and drag him back up towards the surface, *BERGMITE!*

Ash tried to hook himself onto the pokemon’s body like a vice but his arms kept slipping, there was just no strength to grab against the soft friction of ice and water. The Bergmite took a good chomp of Ash’s clothing along the neck line and forced Ash up itself, his head breaching the surface, Ash coughing and choking and breathing in all the air his aching lungs could take.

“Bergmite,” Ash coughed, “You are my guardian angel!”

The pokemon trilled happily from underwater.

Ash kept his head pointed up as he and the Bergmite descended back down towards the bottom of the ice crevice with chunks of ice settling around them as they finally reached the bottom, the water completely draining away leaving small pools here and there in the indentations of the cavern.

Ash was still breathing heavily as the Bergmite settled him against a wall so he could sit up, he began coughing somewhat violently, but ever so thankful he and his little friend survived. He closed his eyes in utmost relief as his chest finally relaxed. The Bergmite nuzzled Ash’s side, nuzzling under the touch of Ash’s hand since he couldn’t even lift it on his own.

_That’s one for the history books Mr. Ketchum, that was one hell of a close call._

Ash heard a troubled ghastly trill, opened his eyes, and beheld the Froslass floating above him, looking around wide eyed and bewildered, giving Ash an alarmed look. Ash merely rolled his eyes, “I’ve dealt with worse,” his voice cracked.

The Froslass immediately began scoping around the cavern, until it began clawing at this one small area over to Ash’s left. Froslass zipped over to Ash’s side, using its powers to hold up the Bergmite level with it –

“DON’T YOU DARE” –

Ignoring Ash, Froslass took the Bergmite away and zipped back over to the area it was inspecting, and Ash finally saw it, the hole where the water must have come through! The Froslass wedged the Bergmite’s body into the opening. Bergmite gave a few perplexed blinks and wiggled, but it was stuck fast.

“Don’t…please don’t hurt it…” Ash voice disappeared from even a whisper, his throat hurt too much to continue.

After having the hole neatly plugged up with Bergmite’s body, the Froslass zipped back over to
Ash’s side and inspected him with narrowed glaring eyes. The Froslass made a face upon seeing a small trail of blood coming from Ash’s nose.

Ash’s mind and body was done, he felt beyond faint, his gaze absentmindedly scaled what was left of the ice walls again, those strange figures in the walls appearing and disappearing with the flicker of a bolt, it’s light much weaker now that the cavern was sealed. The Froslass stuck its face not but a few centimeters away from Ash’s.

“You know,” Ash managed to whisper, “I don’t need anymore water…” Ash’s voice trailed off as he slid slowly to his side, falling on it all at once as he fainted.

The Froslass sighed and made a Will-o-wisp in its palm. With its powers it brought Ash’s blanket over and tucked it around him, everything was still sopping wet, but with the intensity of the Wisp in its hand, Ash and his blanket would be dry soon.

The Froslass tilted its head, then brought over Ash’s pack and placed it under his head as a would-be pillow while upping the intensity of the Wisp to dry things faster.

I don’t get you.

The Froslass turned back towards the Bergmite

I don’t get you! the Bergmite barked, You are a bad ghost pokemon! No, you are a bad pokemon all around! Why have you done such terrible things?!

The Froslass blinked, I don’t need to explain myself to you. You are stupid.

And you are mean!

I can kill you easily if I so choose, hissed the Froslass, creating another Will-o-wisp, letting it float softly towards the Bergmite before dissipating, I will make you burn forever. The only reason I have let you live is to give this human hope, he tastes so much better with hope and fire.

You are crazy! yelled Bergmite, If you want hope and fire just eat me and let the human go!

He will die if I do so, look at him, before you came here, I saved him.

Saved him?! Saved him?! You are nuts! Bergmite barked.

The Froslass shrugged, Besides, I decided I need him. A part of me is already inside of him. When I used Pain Split on him, we shared life. He is special. I felt all the typical human emotions, but I also tasted something rare, something I had only tasted once before, Froslass put its hand over its chest, pure love.

Froslass placed its little icy hand on Ash’s head.

You want love? I have tons of love! said Bergmite.

Your love sucks.

The Froslass and Bergmite noticed Ash stirring in his sleep, his mouth was moving softly. Froslass leaned in and listened.

“…..Gary…..Gary…..”

The Froslass turned to the Bergmite, It is the human’s love that he speaks of in his sleep, amazing,
very rarely have I tasted such a powerful bond.

He misses that human! said the Bergmite, Why don’t you just let him go home?!

Like I said I need him, said Froslass, He is going to help me. He will bring other humans, humans that have been touched by his love.

If you want other humans then un-break my Tracker! They are looking for him and sent me to find him! They will come for him and then they will beat you up!

The Froslass sneered, Let them come now, in fact, they might already be on their way here, and then I will have more humans. They will fall right into my trap, they will go to his communicator, but he will not be there. The Froslass smiled darkly, I have finally gathered enough life force to turn this entire valley into my den, all who enter it will disappear, it matters not who will enter it and where. This human has such incredible bonds, and they will be the ones that I want the most…The emotions I will feed off from his love alone, the Froslass gave sharp smile, will be intense.

You are crazy! barked the Bergmite, Crazy! Crazy! Crazy!

Is it wrong of me to want to experience what was stolen from me? He is going to help me get it back, whether he wants to or not, he has no choice now, I helped him, so I will take my claim upon his life. In fact, I am already gaining back human knowledge as I taste him, his, gear as he calls it, his communicator, I can take more.

Then you’re a bully! the Bergmite barked, Just because you suffer doesn’t mean you have to hurt other people and pokemon too!

The Froslass narrowed its eyes, then looked away from the Bergmite, To be honest with you, I am tired of eating such miserable emotions…The clan I used to be a part of claimed they were full of love, but in the end they were fake and desperate. They wanted to make me as some sort of savior? Ha! Nobody ever cared what I wanted, so I will care myself, and I want more of this human’s passion, even his anger will do…The Froslass caressed Ash’s face, You see every time I taste him, I feel love. I...remember so long ago what it felt like, it even felt good to speak again. The Froslass lifted its head, I am not the heartless monster you think I am, I can show mercy, I will not let him die if I am satisfied. He is going to live on, even inside me if I must take it that far. A part of me is already inside of him remember? I would like you to know, I am immortal in this form.

Immortal my foot! hissed the Bergmite, You are nothing but death!

Am I? The Froslass rose up and pointed toward the Bergmite, Then DIE.

The Bergmite starred down the Froslass, and the Froslass glared back….the ghost and ice pokemon lowered its hand, That’s right, I need you to make him hopeful. The Froslass looked down at Ash, If I am to be successful in my change, I will need to gather as much burning, passionate human life force as possible.

Change? What change?

You would not understand. The Froslass crossed its arms, I barely understand, but I know, I want to go back, and this is the best way to do it.

Ash stirred again in his sleep. The Froslass lowered itself back down and placed its hand on his head again, It is almost shame really, to put his love through such trials, but look how brightly it shines, can you really blame me for wanting it?
Yes! I get it now, you want to become human! But I can tell you right now you are making a terrible mistake! You are going to kill yourself in the process!

The Froslass whipped itself over to the Bergmite, **HOW DARE YOU EVEN BEGIN TO THINK YOU KNOW MY PAIN, MY SUFFERING, THE HELL I HAVE GONE THROUGH HAVING MY HUMAN LIFE STRIPPED FROM ME! I CAN’T EVEN REMEMBER WHAT I WAS CALLED!**

So you think you can steal this human’s life, and his lover’s, and his friend’s, and you’ll go back to being a human?! You’ll turn into a monster! Neither human nor pokemon, you will be a demon, **FOREVER!**

The Froslass was so angry with the Bermite, it couldn’t move, it could hardly think –

Bergmite ruffled itself, **You are like a child! You think you have it all figured out, but you are just hurting people and pokemon for your own gain! This human almost drowned in here! Have you not noticed the cavern has almost caved in?! This is no safekeeping, this is a grave! Did you think you can just store him in ice and use him whenever you like, like, some, frozen human dinner thingie? You know the kind you put in those heat boxes –**

**I KNOW WHAT HUMAN FOOD IS –**

Then why don’t you take some of that human food and go stuff your butt with it!

The Froslass slapped the Bergmite again, this time knocking a piece of its body off and setting it further in the hole, but the Bergmite only glared back.

**I defy you Froslass, no, I defy you, Demon!**

Call me what you will, said the Froslass coldly, **When this is all said and done, I will kill you, and I will kill anyone that gets in the way of my plan, and if I am interfered with consuming what I need from my human before I am done with him, I will have no choice but to kill him as an act of defiance for what was taken from me. I will become the master of my life, and I will go back to what was stolen from me.**

By stealing it from everything around you, Bergmite growled, **But it will never be enough to fill your hunger, you empty heartless Demon!**

The Froslass used Draining Kiss* on Bergmite, taking more than half its life away, the ghost pokemon simply licking its fingers as Bergmite sank down on its belly, shaking, silent.

Hmph, pathetic, even with your fire, your love, and your desire, your energy doesn’t even register in comparison to the human’s. Pokemon and humans are not one. Humans are far, far superior, yes... The Froslass looked back at Ash, the small trail of blood that came from his nose drying, **And perhaps...** Froslass slid a finger over the drying blood, bringing it to its lips, and licked it clean, **I will even become greater than that with him...**

****

Gary was pacing around the cabin, his pokemon watching him nervously. The power had returned, Mary and Ritchie were near the barn suiting up Skarmory and Swanna, but despite the progress towards Ash’s recovery, there was a sharp pain in Gary’s chest that wouldn’t allow him to sit.

**Something has happened, something bad has happened, you can feel it in your heart, something**
terrible is coming. Well, aside from Misty that is.

Gary had received word from Tracey via a text that he and Misty were on their way over now because of course they were. *There was no way Misty would stay put after hearing about Ash,* Gary thought, and to their advantage, the storm had let up a bit, but not much.

You should try again, for the hell of it you know.

Gary took out his com, tapped to his contact short list, Ash’s name right at the top, and dialed.

It was ringing. It was ringing!

Gary was frozen on the spot, his hands shook, then the com picked up - “Hey this is Ash, I’m either away from my com or I lost it! Please leave a voicemail, I’m sure I’ll find it, eventually.” Beep.

Gary squeaked into his com, then bolted out the cabin as fast as he could towards Ritchie and Mary in front of the barn, waving, screaming almost like a maniac, “ASH’S COM IS WORKING! ASH’S COM IS WORKING!”

“What?!”

Mary and Ritchie bolted back towards the cabin with Gary leaving poor Skarmory and Swanna attempting to follow along with their loose gear, but Swanna got tangled in its straps and fell.

Gary called Ash’s com again – it rings again – it’s still working!

But why isn’t he answering?!

Ritchie reached the computer faster than Mary, smacking the mouse around waking up the screen and immediately checked the base’s com, a message from Ash’s com had reached it.

“Yes!” Gary screamed nearly dropping to his knees. The message contained Ash’s position snap! Gary was so happy he was shaking, his eyes were welling up, he had never felt such incredible joy in his life, but Ritchie and Mary were not sharing in his enthusiasm.

“The Note’s last signal was here,” said Mary, pointing southward on the map, “And, here’s Ash’s position snap.” It was nearly in the heart of the valley.

Gary’s happiness came to crashing halt.

“It’s no where near where the last tracker signal came from,” said Ritchie.

Mary glared at the screen, “Yeah, I’m not buying it.”

“Me either,” said Ritchie, his hands were clenched tight.

“We have the coordinates to where the Bergmite last was, that’s definitely our hot zone to scout,” said Mary, “I’ll bet my life this thing is using Ash as bait, no doubt traps are set for us, it definitely has the advantage in landscape tactics.”

Pikachu once perked ears towards the commotion dropped in sadness, “Pikaaaaa…”

“Now more than ever we need that geo-scan to help us navigate the ice and snow build-up,” said Mary, “Without it, this will be more or less a suicide mission.

Gary leaned back against the table, “There isn’t, we can’t just…”
Gary, you’re grasping at straws that are just not to be had.

Mary looked Gary square in the eye, “Gary, we’ll be even less help to Ash dead.”

If he isn’t dead already. This thing took his com away from him, Ash must be in a position where he can’t fight back. He sometimes isn’t the best caretaker of it, but he can get frantic in finding it because, well…it’s his link to you when you’re apart.

Gary felt like he had been punched squarely in the gut.

Ritchie pointed to the Tracker’s last location, and then said in a quiet voice, “My heart is telling me that is where he is however…”

“I can’t risk our team’s lives on a hunch,” said Mary.

“I know…”

Skarmory and Swanna finally entered the cabin, Swanna squawking angrily.

“Oh, sorry…”

Mary and Ritchie apologized to the flyers with berries and pettings, and promptly set their gear right.

Mary cupped the cheek of both bird pokemon with her hands, “Skarmory, Swanna, you both must use extreme caution while you’re out there, do not be seen. Gather ground and movement readings. Rangers, this is your mission.”

Both pokemon cawed and nodded. They faced the storm howling just outside the cabin door, and took off on a wing and prayer. Gary watched them off as the storm finally eclipsed them, Ritchie stepped up beside him with a nudge that Gary’s brain barely registered.

*We’re coming sweetheart, please…please just hang on a little longer…*

Chapter End Notes

I reeeeeeeeeeaaaally want to make the next chapter deadline in time for Halloween because reasons…I’ve been looking forward to Chapter 7 for quite some time OwO;;
Gary was seated at the table again, rubbing his temples with his hands. The sudden headache tethering between his eyes and his com from the background conversation made him bend his head down, closing his eyes. Audino waddled up by his side, the pokemon chirped and tapped his leg wanting up on his lap. Gary complied, picking his pokemon up a bit abruptly. Audino gave a weak smile, and papped his cheeks, rubbing a Heal Pulse* into Gary’s forehead. He smiled back, “It, doesn’t quite work that way, but still thank-you, my headache isn’t as bad anymore!” Gary purposely raised his voice at the end against the nagging conversation caused by none other than….

Headache aside, you’ve got information now that things really are on the up and up, besides your rising temper! Hot enough? That’s okay! Because you know what’s cool? Skarmory and Swanna are well on their scouts and are already sending back data! What’s not cool? MISTY showing up like a goddamn hurricane and gobbling up every iota of knowledge in recovering Ash – FUN FACT THERE ISN’T MUCH TO BE DONE ASIDE FROM SITTING - looking over orders like she owns
the damn place, buuuuuuuut you can’t say you didn’t enjoy Mary quickly putting her in her place.

“Yes Misty.” said Mary still facing the computer and typing, “we did take into account the Oneling members may come looking for Zoroark and Froslass. When Swanna was transferred over, Ritchie and I requested they be investigated further, I wouldn’t be surprised at all if several Top Rangers and Law Officials have made it to their, village shall we call it, by now.”

Misty had a hand over her chest and gave a deep sigh of relief, Tracy was holding her steady around her waist.

Annnnnnnd perhaps you should lay off Gary, she’s as worried sick as the rest of you.

Misty turned to Gary, “Gary, how’re you holding up?”

_Her voice sounds so soft, uuuuuuuuuugh you feel like a diiiiiiick –!_

Gary eyes met with Misty’s only briefly but it was more than enough time to register the absolute somber in them, Gary quickly turned his gaze down towards Audino, the pokemon still smiling back, “I’m okay,” he replied in an empty manner.

If you turn up your gaze you sense you’re going to see Ritchie’s disapproving side look, and his side-look-of-judgment hurts just about as much as Ash’s. And no, you’re not blah, blah, blah, ‘okay’ – you’ve been calling Ash’s phone over and over and over with it just ringing and then going to his voicemail, and you know, it playing his voice that you’re kinda desperate to hear? Yeeeeeaaaahhhhhh – because if it was near Ash, or if Ash was capable of answering, he would have by now. In a weird way you almost want the Froslass to pick up so you could give it a piece of your mind, but, that probably wouldn’t end well, like at all. Sooooooooo all in all, Mary and Ritchie made a damn good call in sending Swanna and Skarmory where they did because they have that Ranger Jedi Mind Reading Master Skill or what the fuck ever. You saw the position snap for yourself, and that was just it, a position snap, no, ‘hey I’m alive’ or ‘I’m not dead’ or ‘can someone come get me please’ it was just a position snap. You’re catching up to where Ritchie and Mary already are and realizing fast you never were the one to bring Ash home since you can barely keep it together here, and that, kinda has you feeling ashamed to be honest. Everybody has their limits, and you’re about to find out which one is going to get hit.

A strong wind rattled the windows.

“How can you two lock everything up and still leave your keys inside?” asked Misty flatly.
“We were playing with the remote, it was really neat seeing everything just lock up with the touch of a button –!”

“While you both were standing out in a storm” –

“And then the remote’s batteries died and, um, yeah.”

OY VEY.

“Wow Ritchie.”

Ritchie cleared his throat, “Not one of our finer moments I will admit.”

Gary rubbed his face.

That’s your sweetheart for you.

Ritchie stepped in place, “Thankfully the far right set of blinds glitched out in locking, so Ash bumped himself over and over onto the window to knock the blind loose and make it retract up, which it did, aaaaaand then broke the glass so he could, get back in….and get our keys….after locking ourselves outside….in a storm…”

“Mary I remind the room,” said Mary, “Everyone here is an adult.”

“Yeah but you’re the higher level adult,” said Ritchie.

By about a decade of maturity and the power of nearing her 30’s! Can the mid level 20’s get a holla up in here? No, no you cannot, honestly the rest of you are what, just one or two years younger than Mary?

“Ash fixed the window,” said Mary, “But I went ahead and just replaced all the glass myself with a stronger brand AND got rid of the automated crap even though it was nice. This cabin has been through a lot over the years, we’re alright with the good ol’ manual way, whatever gets broken can get fixed.”

Life lesson number 1025, alas it usage is fickle.

Mary stopped her typing, crossing her arms as she spun around in the chair, “So the geo-scan has been received” – she pressed the spacebar and brought up the geo-scan on the main screen so everyone could see, “our counterparts in Kanto pushed it through.”

“That’s great!” piped Ritchie with a wave of relief going around the room, however…. “That’s an awful lot of blue, light blue, and, dark blue….”

“Indeed,” said Mary, “there is a lot more ice build-up than we’ve had in previous years, and the springs look to be waking up.” Mary wiggled the mouse pointer around the southeastern side of the map with light blue and warmer colors seeping in. “We’ll be having a lot of unstable landmass to deal with which coincides with Ash falling into that ice trap, so to avoid any further collapses, ground work should be avoided as much as possible, this will be best served as an aerial recovery; water recovery if we can manage it.”

Right so where is Ash in all of that ice mess hullabaloo?

Ritchie shifted in place crossing his arms, “Not to mention flooding in the region with the rate the springs are progressing. The lake is already rising.”
Again, where is Ash in all of that? Flooding? Possible ice collapse? You know, life threatening danger?

“That’s right,” said Mary, “They did note that some of the ice build-up in the valley looked to be conducted.”

“Conducted? You mean like pokemon conducted?” asked Gary.

“Yes,” said Mary, “I have no doubt the Froslass was behind it.”

Gary’s mind clicked and thought of a crazy theory, “…Maybe that pokemon has something to do with the prolonged winter in our region. Maybe its trying to keep things iced for a purpose?”

Like a Froslass EVEN has that kind of power, but who the hell knows, any dual typing with ghost can bring about nasty surprises CASE IN FUCKING POINT.

“The key word being try,” replied Mary shrugging, “The geo-scan shows the ice is on its way out however, as for the weather, climate has the ultimate say on that.”

“True,” said Ritchie, “We’re progressing, but, there are still so many questions that need answering. Personally I think the Onelings should have been taken more seriously after they were found to have been in Kanto…”

Mary turned back to typing and planning with her head down, “Cannot argue with that.”

“That can come after we get Ash back,” said Gary.

“Right.”

A sneeze came from the corner of the cabin, it was the Zoroark. The dark pokemon was still in the corner being watched over by Pikachu and Umbreon. Audino shuffled over behind Gary and stuck its tongue out at it.

“Terrible thing,” said Misty in a low voice.

Honestly Pikachu and Umbreon are protecting Zoroark from the rest of the group at this point.

The Zoroark finally noticed Tracey watching it like a hawk and jumped slightly.

“Hey,” said Tracey, “Since that Zoroark is from the Onelings, could it be, some form of Transformation?”

Mary whistled to the Zoroark, “Hey, are you a Transformation?”

The Zoroark shook its head, then scratched the floor boards slowly and shrugged.

“There you have it,” said Mary, “To be honest I wouldn’t put anything out of the question at this point,” her typing slowed somewhat, “To think it wasn’t proven until not too long ago that human transformation into pokemon was something that could actually be controlled under certain circumstances, not just for folklore, or stories to frighten children to stay away from certain pokemon.”

“Yeah, and look where people have taken it,” said Ritchie under his breath.

And certainly not any research you would ever want to be a part of Mr. Oak. The horror stories you’ve heard honestly made you reconsider some parts of your own research.
“I know,” said Misty, “That’s just crazy.”

“For the record those instances are extremely rare,” said Gary, “Even if you deliberately end your life like in the cases of those Onelings, sometimes you won’t change. There certainly are circumstances to improve the chances of a transformation, but it’s not a guarantee by any means.”

Misty shook her head, “That is just so sad and terrible all around.”

“As far as we know,” said Mary, “About 98% of known human transformations are to ghost types, 1% to psychic types, and the rest are, under further investigations…” Mary glared at the Zoroark who cringed down, “Hm, call me crazy, but I think our little, Froslass friend may have an interest in changing back.”

“Is that even possible?” asked Misty.

“Nothing can bring back the dead,” said Ritchie.

“That’s right,” said Mary.

“What makes you think it wants to change back?” asked Gary.

“Just a hunch, I mean aside from its absurd interest in humans, and kidnapping Ash,” Mary ran her hand through her hair against the ‘UGH’ glances from Gary and Misty aimed at the back of her head, “Besides, the ghost types from the Onelings…they were, off to say the least.”

Gary’s inner alarm bell sounded off loud and clear, “Mary, I get the feeling there’s something you’re not telling us.”

“Gary!” came Misty, “There’s probably a good reason for that!”

“Like you know?”

“Can you two seriously not,” growled Ritchie; Gary and Misty immediately tempered off.

Beware an angry Ritchie, or rather, he’s like the last person next to Ash you want to upset by a petty fight with Misty.

“Mary, has something been bothering you?” asked Tracey, “About the Onelings?”

“Tracey!”

But Mary didn’t seem deterred, just caught, and with a defeated smiling sigh she relented and turned back around, “I should have known better than to guise it in front of a well-respected researcher and pokemon watcher, you two may as well have psychic senses that rival a pokemon’s.”

“It’s not so much as a guise as it was ‘woah Mary, you kinda have guilt stamped onto your face when the Onelings are mentioned????’

Tracey scratched his nose, “Practice I guess.”

“Well its good practice, here, Ritchie, I need your input now.”

Mary moved up as Ritchie took seat in front of the computer, synching up his com and scrolling through the new data Swanna and Skarmory were sending in. Mary turned to communicating and observing through her own com, she sighed, “According to the information you guys gathered from Team Rocket, the timeframe the Onelings have been in this region is unknown, besides they
wouldn’t have reported their missing. Of course there are reports of people going missing in the cities all the time, but, well, we typically just have our region to maintain and wherever else we’re needed. Honestly this Froslass showing up under these circumstance is like a slap in the face.”

“A big slap in the face,” added Ritchie.

“It’s not your fault,” said Misty –

“You’re stalling Mary,” said Gary, he felt a couch pillow hit his side via Misty; he was glad Ritchie made the choice to face the computer.

Mary was looking to the ground swaying, then she stood up straight, arms crossed, “….I used to have a sister, her name was Lisa, but she had, a lot of issues, and, before I came back after a Ranger summit, I heard she joined up with the Onelings, and, I never saw her again.”

Ritchie turned around, Misty and Tracey faces showing hurt, Gary’s showing remorse for prying.

“Mary…”

“And, I would wonder if, one of the ghost pokemon I came across in Sinnoh was” – but Mary stopped herself, and took a deep breath, “It’s not something I often talk about.”

Ritchie placed his hand on Mary’s.

“I’m fine, I’m fine…” said Mary taking another breath, placing Ritchie’s hand on his lap, “I, had my ways of coping, but I always thought, if there was anyway I could help someone else avoid that pain, I would do everything in my power to assist.” Mary looked Gary right in the eyes, “Gary, when we lock down our point of recovery for Ash, I’m going to be leading the mission right along side Ritchie, and I promise you, we’ll get Ash back.”

The lump that suddenly formed in Gary’s throat refused to let him speak, so he only nodded back with utmost appreciation.

*You know that plaque above the door is their creed, ‘Watch each other’s backs, bring each other home.’*

Mary reached for the side of her belt pulling out a pokeball, “And this, will light our way,” she tossed it up, “Come on out Chandelure!”

The ghost and fire type pokemon made its entrance with a hissing clearing of its throat. Everyone in the room took an immediate step back, Ritchie only leaning back in the chair, he wasn’t afraid, he looked more antsy of his colleague’s fire than anything, but Gary marveled at the specimen before him.

*Woah, dude, she’s mastered a Chandelure…!*

The Luring pokemon raised and flexed itself amongst its onlookers, “Chaaaaaaaaandeeeluuuuuure…."

Audino dove behind Gary’s legs trembling.

*Good lord, if hell fire had a voice that would be it.*

Mary smiled at her ghastly pokemon, “More traditional Rangers have only a single partner by their side, if I were to have continued that, no doubt Chandelure would have been mine.”
“You came from Sinnoh though right?” asked Tracey, “How did you come by a Chandelure?”

“I raised it from a Litwick I got from a Breeder’s Trade Fair,” Mary patted her pokemon, “Since I was having a hard time coping with coming across transitioned ghost pokemon, I decided I needed some help, and it, well, seeing how Chandelure was just, my Chandelure, helped me cope. Don’t worry its ability is Infiltrator*, still, I’d be careful not to touch the flames, they are not your normal fire.” Chandelure nudged Mary lovingly. “Hence why I almost always have my hair up in a pony tail, I caught fire from my dear friend when I was younger.” Mary rolled up the side of her right sleeve and showed a dark patch on her arm, “The skin has healed, but that scar will never ever go away.”

***

On the outside Ash was still and peaceful looking in his sleep, head on his pack, and wrapped in his thermal blanket, but on the inside he was anything but. His dreams took his anguish all over the place from arguing vehemently with Gary, to losing his pokemon, to falling through the ice over and over – to a rescue mission gone horribly wrong, to watching his best friend Ritchie being killed by an ice move that shattered him like glass.

Bergmite had regained its strength and attempted to keep watch over Ash from its stuck position in the ice wall, noting Ash’s involuntary flinches in his sleep, a small sign of the tempest storming within.

*I’m so sorry human,* said Bergmite lowering its gaze, *I cannot be more than the ice that imprisons you...Oh?* The Bergmite heard an odd trickling and gurgling sound from below, it dropped its body flat to the ice....*The mysterious sound was coming from far below, the echoes of streaming, rushing...water...?* Bergmite rustled itself up, *Oh no...*

Bergmite’s realization was interrupted by Froslass phasing itself through the ice seal above with an armful of berries, the ice and ghost pokemon dropping them by Ash’s sleeping head as if it was dumping trash. Bergmite scoffed, *I thought you knew about people food?*

Froslass didn’t even look up at Bergmite, it poked the berries in a bored manner, *And I would think you would know people food does not magically appear in bushes or trees, stupid.*

*They’re completely frozen! Do you expect him to eat those rocks?!!* Froslass raised its finger and popped up a Will-o-wisp* flame, *I am going to heat them up, dummy.*

*With Will-o-wisp* fire?!! barked Bergmite, *Do you not know the repercussions of your own attack?!* Froslass ignored Bergmite bringing up a berry to cook it, but the berry was immediately burned. Froslass blinked, Oh... *See?! Who is the dummy here?!* You if you keep speaking to me, said Froslass, *I will just heat them farther away.* Froslass began roasting the remaining berries with its Wisp* at a respectable distance.

Bergmite growled, *Froslass...I must implore again that you find another shelter for this human.* Don’t care.

*If you truly cared for his well-being in assisting your goals we would move!*
Still not caring.

Bergmite growled louder, *Do you not hear that? That is water from below!*

*Meh.*

*We need to move Froslass!* barked Bergmite, *The ice is breaking up, it is not safe here! It is not safe for the human!*

*We are fine here,* said Froslass sternly dispelling its Wisp* and moving to wake Ash. *Get up, you need to eat these berries now, get up human, move.*

But poor Ash wasn’t waking fast enough, he was locked in his sleep, locked in another nightmare which now involved Gary, Ritchie, and Pikachu locked in ice and no amount of fire would ever get them out –

*Get up human!* Froslass smacked Ash hard on his pained hip – the strike cutting through his nightmare forcing a yelp from his mouth and Ash woke with a start, breathing heavily. His eyes took a little time to focus, but when they did, they focused right into Froslass’ pale blue orbs. In a twisted way he was relived to see them, for it meant his horrible nightmares were only thus.

*Oh…*  
Ash saw the Froslass push a pile of berries toward him, but he had no desire to move himself, much less get up. The Froslass picked one up with its powers and pushed it against Ash’s lips which he kept firmly shut.

Froslass motioned to Ash by clamping its mouth open and shut that he was to eat the berries, but still, Ash refused to open his mouth, despite the obvious rumbling in his stomach.

*It’s kiddies’ corner now, tonight’s episode, refusing to eat food from your captor even though you requested some, which it brought, half assed, still brought, but hey fuck your agenda you frozen misguided fuck twat!*

Ash felt his nose was sore, his hip was very sore, and his whole body was sore and throbbing and just had enough, enough, *enough*…*Likewise,* Froslass was done with Ash’s stubbornness and used its powers to force Ash’s mouth open, stuffing as many berries it could fit inside – Ash lurched up, coughing and hacking and fell back against the ice wall behind him because strength be damned, now he was just trying not to choke!

*You are terrible,* said the Bergmite in disgust.

*Ash Ketchum, you are not going to thank this thing, you are not going to thank this thing, Ash Ketchum you are not going to thank this thing.*

Ash coughed once more, spitting a berry husk out, and muttered, *“Thank-you.”*

*ASH FUCKING KETCHUM COME ON NOW.*

Bergmite looked sad for Ash.

Froslass held its head high in approval, then motioned towards its neck and pointed to Ash’s. Ash tilted his head, *“Huh?”* *“Oh…* Ash remembered the Froslass was able to speak before, in a horrible voice at that, but it was able to speak once it pulled more energy from him, more specifically from his throat, and as if on queue, the Froslass pulled another dew drop Draining Kiss* from Ash aimed
exactly at his throat. Ash felt his vocal chords grow numb as Froslass opened its mouth, letting out a cold, cold, exhale.

“Greetings human.”

Its voice didn’t sound like that god-awful wind and metal grating mess anymore, it just sounded hollow and whisper like.

Ash swallowed, “Um,” he coughed trying to get his voice back, “hello?”

Silence.

Froslass motioned to Ash’s blanket, “Are you warm enough?”

“I, guess?”

*More mind games! Yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay.

Froslass created another Will-o-wisp* at the tip of its finger, “How about now?” But Ash was more impressed with the attack.

“That Will-o-wisp*...it, has a...” Ash tilted his head, ”It has a red hue.....You know, for a long time we thought Froslass couldn’t use that move, but.....”

Froslass looked at Ash with an annoyed expression, “I can burn, because I feed off of what burns.”

Ash merely blinked.

*Mmmmmmm’kay. Whatever you say.

Ash tilted his head down, “It’s because you feed off of emotions, isn’t that right?”

Froslass nodded, “It is also more than that, it is what makes you, you,” it dispelled the Wisp* by flicking its tiny icy fingers.

You do realize its feeding off your soul right? You know, because emotions are the vessel of a soul and yeah, so there’s that.

“And….do you like feeling, what I feel? What, a human feels?”

Froslass nodded, “I used to be a human, like you.”

Ash closed his eyes, shoulders slumping, and his head dropped down in sadness..

*You knew the probability was there Ash.

He took a deep breath, giving Froslass a heavy gaze, “I’m so, so, sorry this happened to you…”

Froslass blinked, slightly taken aback, its own stomach in turn giving a rumble, the ice and ghost pokemon could feel Ash’s emotions, it could feel them overflowing with something that the human felt for it *and nothing else* – Froslass took another Draining Kiss* from Ash, a larger dew drop over his heart, eating it greedily. Ash sunk down, his hand immediately clutching the point of attack on his chest –

Bergmite barked in anger in the background, *You are cruel!*
Ash struggled to pull himself up, “Can, you feel so little, n’ugh, you must steal it from others?”

Froslass looked at Ash tilting its head, “I will feel everything soon enough.”

Ash swallowed, “You, want to become human again, don’t you?”

“Yes” –

“I’m sorry Froslass, I’m so sorry, but, you can’t, there’s nothing that will ever change you back!”

Nothing! Bergmite barked loudly.

Froslass narrowed its eyes, its body rose like a cloth caught on wind, hovering slowly over to Ash until its face was even with his own, “You will change me back.”

“I, what?”

“You are going to change me back,” said Froslass raising its head, “You will do it.”

“I, Froslass, I can’t, I’m sorry, but you’re horribly mistaken!”

Froslass merely shook its head like how a Teacher would scold a child, “Once I eat enough of you, your Love, and your friends’ life force, I will become human again, even if I have to drain them dry!”

Ash trembled in horror – *It is going after them! After Gary! After Ritchie!*“

Froslass smiled its terribly wide smile, “I know they will come for you, and then I will have them!”

Ash gulped, his nightmares would quickly become reality if he didn’t do something fast, he tried to swallow his fear down, and in a hasty measure made a proposition before he could fully think it through –

“If I help you, will you promise not to hurt Gary, or Ritchie, or any of my friends?”

For the second time Froslass looked bewildered at Ash. Ash couldn’t control his body from shaking, be it with fear, or a rising anger…He held out his right trembling arm, wrist up, “Take what you must, but…don’t you dare hurt Gary, or Ritchie, or any of my friends! EVER!”

Froslass looked down wide-eyed at the offering before it. Bergmite was stunned silent. Froslass placed its tiny frozen hand on Ash’s wrist, its mouth opened wide with sharp, sharp fangs – but then it quickly closed its jaws and twirled, looking at Ash starry eyed –

“I can give life too,” piped Froslass, “I can share, I did with you didn’t I?”

It was Ash’s turn to be taken back, “But, you’re not sharing, you’ve only been taking,” he retorted, still holding his arm out.

“I can still give life back!” Froslass smiled smacking his hand away and clasping its own together like an excited child, “I’ve done it before, to dead things even! I made them walk around like they were alive again! And they were!”

A deep dark rooted feeling in Ash gut shot up his spine, “What….?”

“I can make dead things walk! They’re not dead anymore! If I take too much from you and you die, I will bring you back to life! Easy! And if the people make me mad, you can stay with me in my ice
comfort, forever!"

“Froslass…wait…”

Froslass’s hands were slightly shaking, its eyes grew wide, “We’ll be snow angels! Really! Snow angels! You’ll look so pretty walking around with ice, trust me I’ve done it before!”

“Froslass I don’t want” –

“Oh, so onetime, in these mountains, I was looking to gain more feeling you see, and I came across a trainer with a Sylveon!”

*NO*–

Froslass’ eyes were growing wilder still, “You know what it takes for Sylveon to evolve?! It’s love! It takes love! There was so much love I couldn’t help myself! I had to take it! I had to take it all!”

Ash was almost speechless…. “You…it was you that killed that Sylveon” –

Froslass whipped over to Ash, “So? I brought it back! It’s fine!”

Ash let his arm drop and just stared in disbelief, “But, you’re a ghost pokemon,” his body was trembling from his deep within his core, “You have no idea what you’ve done” –

“SHUT UP OR I’LL RIP YOUR VOICE OUT! You don’t know me! I know exactly what I’m doing! Here, I’LL PROVE IT TO YOU!!” Froslass threw its arms wide, head back, eyes and body glowing intensely in blue –

“Froslass –!” Ash saw the dark patches in the ice begin to glow with the same intensity – the cavern was beginning to quiver like an earthquake – ice started to fall from the seal –

“I might be a ghost pokemon now, but that doesn’t mean I can’t go back to the way I was!”

Bergmite barked furiously at the Froslass, FOOL! YOU’RE GOING TO TEAR THE CAVERN APART!

A large crack suddenly split the cavern in half awakening an even deeper abyss that swallowed some of Ash’s gear as the ice fell through into darkness – Ash pulled his legs back in time before a large chunk of ice fell right where they were, taking bits of the ledge down with it, splashing into the deeper ruin, “FROSLASS STOP!” Ash screamed, “THAT’S ENOUGH! STOP! STOP!”

Is that running water down below?!

“No, NO! I have to prove it to you! You have to see!”

Bergmite barked like mad at the glowing patches in the ice, Ash shielded himself and risked a glance up as ice fell everywhere –

Are those things moving?!

“Everyone will see!”

An even larger mass of the ice seal fell through down into the dark depths allowing a glowing ice patch to wedge itself free and crash land on Bergmite’s side of the split cavern. Ash finally able to see what was inside it, a pokemon, a Nidorino, frozen solid with a shocked expression across its face, eyes glossed over white, its mouth torn so wide, its jaws were displaced – from within its frozen
tomb, the dead pokemon’s head twitched up – Ash screamed before a majority of the ledge gave way, taking the awful sight with it –

“**THE DEAD CAN COME BACK TO LIFE!**”

***

Gary pressed the Transfer Now button on his com’s transporter app making a pokeball immediately popped into his hand from his com.

*Yeah you know your com should be facing downward, but you just look so much cooler catching your babies as they pop out of the com transport~*

Gary packed the pokeball swiftly on his belt, *And Blastoise should do it…*

*Yes, aaaaaaand now to make your trump card all the more virulent –*

Gary opened up the Item Transporter app and selected his Keystone Pendant for immediate transfer. It popped up and out like the pokeball before it, Gary snatched it up and quickly clicked it around his neck, tucking the Keystone Pendant inside his shirt. Umbreon and Audino nodded with approval up at their trainer. Gary looked up seeing a somewhat nervous Tracey sitting along side Misty on the couch looking annoyed with the television. Zoroark was arching its neck to try and watch as well, but Pikachu wouldn’t let it move too much.

*Turn it on she said, the noise might help relieve anxiety she said. LOL.*

“**And now with breaking news tonight we have received word that favored Master Candidate Ash Ketchum has been reported missing in the Kanto**” –

Tracey turned off the television by pushing the Power button through Misty’s hand, “And that’s enough of that,” he piped, carefully taking the remote out of Misty’s hands before she broke it.

“We’ll give them better news to report soon,” said Mary, she was busy laying gear for herself and Ritchie to bolt with as soon as they had enough evidence to advance Ash’s recovery, which the general consensus was reporting in as soon, very soon.

Gary was feeling uneasy, his nerves on edge with the subtly searing energy in the room as Mary packed. He turned towards Ritchie who was still working away on the com, “How’s the data from Skarmory and Swanna looking?”

“Ice, ice, slush, slush, and more ice after that,” replied Ritchie, “It’s aligning well with the geo-scan that’s for sure…” Ritchie brought up the Tracker’s screen, “The other Trackers look like they’re getting their act together and siding with our ambitious buddy.”

Mary took a break from packing and looked up towards the screen, her Chandelure floating around her nonchalantly. “Mh, our wonderful Avalugg and Bergmite are definitely heading past the north side and heart of the valley and going south.”

“Where the lost Tracker went,” said Gary, he and Ritchie exchanged knowing glances with the pang in their chests –

Mary’s com rang with a notification, she scanned the details and her face lit up, “Good news!” she piped turning towards the room, “A Kanto Top Ranger has made it to our sister station, his Dragonite is going to do a speed-fly to the position snapshot, and if it’s a negative show, which we kinda already figured it would be, STILL better safe than sorry – it’ll sling shot over to assist
Skarmory and Swanna!”

“That’s wonderful!” said Tracey.

Misty stood up, “But isn’t it going into a trap? From what you guys explained about the Froslass, I mean” –

“Oooohh that Dragonite is VERY well trained for hazardous situations,” said Mary, “And it’s packing a Weakness Policy* along with Ranger Balls, I seriously doubt we’ll have much to worry about if Froslass decides to show its face, even with the type disadvantage, and if it does, that will clear us once Dragonite takes care of it to swarm the valley and find Ash.”

Gary’s hands clasped themselves together, his heart began to flutter, Audino chirped happily by his side.

YeEEEEESSSSSSSSSSSSS! Good things! Good things all around! Ash told you about these new Ranger Balls and they are AWESOME, in fact you have some stashed away for yourself back at home. Their very, VERY high rate of capture will make quick work of the Froslass once Dragonite, ahem, softens it up a bit, howeveryyyyyyyy, their function is only temporary, they’re a catch and release kind of deal, unless the pokemon is transferred over to a more permanent keeping pokeball, which in the Froslass’ case would be a Master Ball, and then have that ball sealed and locked away, like, forever.

“Besides,” Mary continued, “we must take every avenue into consideration if we’re to outsmart this pokemon’s agenda. The data and power from Dragonite alone could very well be bringing Ash home with Skarmory and Swanna!”

Gary’s uneasiness was almost all but erased from the rising energy gathering in everyone, however, when he looked over to Ritchie, his heart jolted. Ritchie had a perplexed look on his face as he watched his com, “Mary, we’ve got a problem” –

“What is it?”

The computer suddenly started buzzing a loud and very jarring warning signal, Mary immediately look to her com as Ritchie zipped back to the computer, “Not good –”

“What’s happening?!” asked Gary.

Mary looked up from her com deeply alarmed, “Skarmory and Swanna’s trackers have been shot out!”

“Shot out?!” blurted Misty, “What do you mean shot out?!”

“I mean they must have been attacked!”

Ritchie pulled up the thermal cam view on the computer, it was stuck frozen after just showing a bright, burning light – “The feed from Skarmory and Swanna has shorted out too!”

Gary hand gripped his com –

GOD PLEASE –

“Look at their last transmission – they were trying to make a beeline back to us!” said Ritchie, “They either found something or something found them – geeze, look at that radiation reading!”
“Could that light have shorted out their equipment?” asked Misty.

“If laced with ghost apokemon’s bioluminescence, then yes,” said Gary, “Their whole aura can be like a black hole for energy, and that that pillar of light, that’s an incredible amount of energy for one pokemon to make!”

“Then perhaps that Froslass isn’t alone after all,” said Tracey.

Ritchie’s mouth dropped, “Mary! That light is coming **directly** where the lost Tracker gave its last reading!”

“The photometer is reading that energy as a ghost and ice type – we’ve found our Froslass, that’s for damn sure,” said Mary.

*And most likely Ash! YAAAAAAAAAAAY?? – Hey why is that evil light pillar from Froslass a thing? WHAT THE HELL IS IT DOING??*

“I’m going to see if I can sync up to Dragonite and tell it to high-tail it over there,” said Ritchie.

“Good,” said Mary, “Chandelure! Come here buddy” – Chandelure lowered itself right next to Mary’s side as Mary rooted through a cabinet adjacent to the computer desk, she pulled out a black tracker and latched it onto one of Chandelure’s limbs – “Go light the way for Skarmory and Swanna, bring them home!”

“Chaaaaandeleure!”

The good ghost pokemon took off through the roof faster than any ghost pokemon Gary had seen, phasing itself and it’s tracker out of sight,

“That tracker can work with a ghost type?” asked Gary.

“Wouldn’t have used it if it didn’t,” said Mary, “Very special brand, and, very, very expensive.”

Ritchie called out to Tracey, “Tracey! You have a Venonat right?”

“Yes?”

“Can you have it scan the area directly in front of the cabin?”

“Sure, why?”

“Bad feeling” –

“What is it Ritchie?” Mary immediately went to his side and observed the data Ritchie had gone through from Skarmory and Swanna’s last transmissions –

“Come on out Venonat!” Venonat popped out of its ball, shaking itself, “Come on buddy,” Tracey opened the front door slightly against the bite of the storm but it was enough for Venonat to run out, “Wait no! Venonat!” Tracey bolted on after it, Misty yelling at them both from the door –

“YOU TWO COME BACK HERE THIS INSTANT!” Gary stopped Misty before she could go out after them –

“Ritchie, Mary, what’s going on?!” Gary snapped.

Mary was already gearing to run out after Tracey pulling down her goggles, “Something’s coming”
Mary shoved aside Misty, and just as she exited, Tracey and a screaming Venonat were already pushing back inside, promptly shoving the door shut behind them –

Mary tore off her goggles, “Tracey!”

Tracey gulped, then said, “So, um, there may or may not be a hoard of zombie iced pokemon heading our way, right now, to this cabin.”

Misty shook her head, “I’m sorry Tracey, what?”

“I saw them, eyes glowing, f-frozen, heading this way! One had black, stuff, I don’t know – blood dripping off its mouth!”

Ritchie and Gary shared alarmed glances –

Frozen and walking, like the Sylveon!

Mary and Ritchie sprung into action, Mary turning off all the lights, snatching up her whip and Ritchie scrambling to pull down the metallic blinds nearest him, “Gary! Get those!”

“On it!”

Misty shook her head more, “Tracey, are you sure they were, zombies?”

Tracey recalled Venonat, “Maybe, not zombies, but something close to the–EEE –”

Ritchie practically yanked Tracey away from the door as reached it and locked it up tight. Mary was at the computer sending a message to the sister station before turning its power low –

“Come in Mary we he” –

“Lock down this sub region immediately, we have anomalies about to attack our cabin!”

Zoroark whimpered but Pikachu and Umbreon shushed it quickly. Audino scrambled itself up into Misty’s arms with Tracey wrapping his own around her and Mary pushing them towards the back of the cabin further into the cloak of darkness.

Gary just had one more blind to pull down, but was pulled away and under a table by Ritchie before he could lock it, Ritchie signaling him to be quiet.

All was silent save for the cabin’s ticking clock. Then slowly, arose an odd shuffling sound, like something moping head down in the snow was approaching. The wood porch on the outside ached, followed by uneven, slow, shuffling footsteps.

YOU NEED TO LOCK THAT BLIND GARY!

Gary motioned to Ritchie the blind was still loose, Ritchie nodded, he tried moving towards the blind himself ever so carefully and quietly.

More footsteps shuffling through snow came from the other side of the cabin, and then another set came right up to the front door.

There was no snarling, or growling, or moaning, there was only silence, until….

“Hello?”
Ritchie froze. Gary’s breath caught in his throat.

*It can’t be –!* 

“Gary are you home?”

*HOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOLY FUCK WHAT IS THIS SHIT –*

The hair on the back of everyone’s neck stood straight up, *it sounded like a little child* –


Gary felt a nudge on his arm that shot him up into the table, it was Umbreon and those gleaming red eyes, now wearing a very apologetic look.

“Gary I hear you.”

*FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCK.*

Ritchie dared not to move another inch since he was now right by the wall with another pair of shuffling footsteps walking directly past him outside.

Giggling came from the front door. From the further left side of the cabin, the sound of running footsteps across the patio shook the floor boards underneath everyone’s crouching form.

“I know you’re inside here. Gary. It hurts me that you do not want me. Please let me in. It is so cold out here.”

A loud crashing sound came from the roof, as if something landed up there or fell on it. Mary’s grasp tightened around her whip, all the pokemon were on edge ready to strike.

*What the hell are these things, how do they know your name, what do they know about this cabin?! Why are they talking like they know you?! WHAT THE FUCK????*

The doorknob began to rattle violently, then stopped just as quickly, replaced by a soft knocking.

“Hello?”

Gary’s ears suddenly filled with the sounds of scratching – it was coming from outside the wall besides Ritchie!

“Ritchie….. Ritchie. Ritchie Ritchie, Ritchie.”

Gary saw Ritchie immediately tense up, his eyes shut –

“Ritchie.” It knocked against the wooden wall. “Ritchie. If you can hear me, let me in.”

A long scratch traced the wall, Gary feeling as if it was slicing right through his chest, he could only imagine what ached inside Ritchie as he grasped his shirt over his long scar –

“Ritchie. Please. I’m so cold. I’m so cold out here.”

There was a sudden slam against the wall closest to Tracy, Misty and Mary, making them jump, the blinds rattled.

“Ritchie.” Its voice was down to a whisper.
“Ritchie...Oh.” The soft voice starts coughing a terrible wheezing cough, “I’m dying Ritchie, I know you didn’t mean to leave me out here, it’s my fault, help me, help me, help me, help me, *bring me home*” –

Gary saw Ritchie trembling, whether from fear or anger, probably anger, Ritchie’s hand had moved over his mouth. Gary desperately wanted to reach out to him, hoping his unspoken message *Don’t listen to it* would somehow reach him – another loud slam rattled the blinds close to the door –

The whispering voice started to giggle, an awful muddled high pitch giggle. Gary felt his insides become doused in ice, giving an alarmed glance towards Ritchie, Ritchie realizing one second too late what they were doing – he reached for blind lock – but a hard slam against the wall from the outside bounced him off, and rattled the blind loose – it retracted up, leaving Gary and Ritchie looking up simultaneously to see paws and a dark widely grinning snout pressed against the glass with two bright cold blue eyes peering through the clouded window straight down at them.

“I see you.”

The pokemon, a Mightyena, then tilted its head through the glass looking directly at Ritchie, phasing in like a specter, its neck bending at an angle that no living creature could make –

“EVERYTHING was ALL pOINTLESS.”

The Zoroark gave a screeching cry – Gary felt an icy grip wrap around his ankle, he looked back to see a white two-clawed paw half phasing up through the floorboards –

Mary screamed – “GARY!”

Ritchie and Mary reacted first leaping up at the ready, but not nearly fast enough for anything else – the grip threw Gary with such force, he was knocked up into the bottom of the table, flipping it up and over, landing him flat on his back, Gary seeing tumble-stars with the wind knocked clean out him –

The Mightyena attempted to phase fully through the window leaping at Ritchie but got stuck halfway as its body solidified – the pokemon’s jaws snapping just shy of Ritchie’s face – the dark pokemon struggled for a second before breaking itself through the window, pinning Ritchie down on his back – Pikachu bolted for it, but Mightyena quickly answered with a Protect* followed by a Sucker Punch* to the gut knocking Pikachu back–

The creature that threw Gary leapt up through the floorboards, a Sneasel, and landed directly on top of him yet promptly took a bite to the neck from Umbreon along with the crack of a whip from Mary that attempted to snag a limb – but alas her weapon phased through it – Umbreon growled and snarled tearing hell and fury into the Sneasel, stumbling it off of Gary as Mary grabbed the nearest blunt object she could snag, a metal vase, and threw it with perfect aim at the Sneasel’s head, smashing half of it off –

**WELL THAT WORKED AT LEAST –**

“Ugh” –

The Sneasel stumbled back and phased down and out like a ghost through the floorboards.

A violent pounding on the metal blinds nearest Tracey, Misty and Audino forced their attention, without wasting any time they called out Azumaril and Starmie respectively as an iced Stantler
finally phased its way through the wooden portion of the wall, the Pokemon not wasting any time itself as it loose a Blizzard\* attack that took both water type Pokemon and their trainer’s by surprise –

Ritchie was barely holding the Mightyena at bay from biting his face off with the Pokemon phasing and half phasing through his grip and attempts to shield himself, at one point Ritchie’s foot became caught in the Pokemon’s chest! Yet the dark type’s claws and teeth only dug up splinters and cracked the floorboards as they continued to miss its nimble target – that is until Ritchie was finally backed into the corner with the cowering Zoroark – Pikachu hurled itself yet again at the pure dark type, knocking it off center with a Volt Tackle\* while Umbreon shifted targets and took a Bite\* to the scruff of the Mightyena’s neck, again the Mightyena answered swiftly giving a Snarl\* and easily threw Umbreon off – and before Pikachu could retaliate with a Thunderbolt\*, both defending Pokemon were met with Mightyena breathing a cold, icy breath in Umbreon and Pikachu’s face that slowed their movements instantly and froze their paws to the ground!

As Gary was helped up by Mary, he could hardly believe what he was seeing, *Was that Icy Wind? No, Blizzard?!* “Umbreon! Pikachu!”

The Mightyena looked at Gary and roared with an impossibly wide mouth – Ritchie stumbled up against a desk, pulling out its wooden drawer, spilling its contents everywhere and then slammed it square against the chest of the Mightyena, breaking the drawer into pieces and knocking the Mightyena back against the broken window. With the pure dark type off guard, Ritchie took the opportunity to snag it with a Ranger’s ball, but the item didn’t even register the beast, and bounced uselessly against the wall –

**WELL ALRIGHT THEN**–

The Zoroark’s face showed it had enough of iced demonic Pokemon and was scratching frantically to open up the blind nearest itself and Ritchie – “STOP!” Mary yelled, she aimed her whip towards the Zoroark while reaching for a Ranger Ball, but Zoroark used Night Slash\* and cut the whip into pieces, Mary threw the Ranger Ball, but like the Mightyena, it didn’t not register for the Zoroark either – “OH COME ON” –

The cowardly dark Pokemon only hurried its actions further upon seeing the iced Stantler Misty and Tracey were dealing with attack them directly with another Blizzard\* – thankfully Azumaril and Starmie threw up Protect\* this time to shield themselves from it as the rest of the cabin space around them became covered in cracking ice. The Stantler then bolted across the cabin, Mary attempted to tackle it to the ground, but the ghastly Pokemon just phased through her – the Zoroark finally loosened the latch and threw up the blind, breaking itself out through the window –

**OKAY, OKAY ALRIGHT YOU GO, GO ON WITH YOUR HORRIBLE SELF, IF YOU EVER SEE THAT ZOROARK AGAIN YOU ARE GOING TO PUMMEL IT INTO THE GROUND!**

Pikachu and Umbreon frantically tried to free themselves to help stop Stantler – Pikachu letting loose a Thunderbolt\* from it’s stuck position, but the Stantler easily dodged it, charging right towards Ritchie! The Big Horn Pokemon let loose Flash\* blinding Ritchie – and with its gaping open mouth bit down on Ritchie’s arm, pulling him through the broken window with it, whereas the iced Stantler’s ghastly body easily phased through the window’s remnants, Ritchie’s still very much alive body painfully endured being dragged through glass and wood –

“**RITCHIE!**” – Gary lunged for his legs but he too had been affected by Flash\* and more or less just jumped at air – Ritchie was already too far out of reach! Gary pushed himself up, quickly finding himself at the mercy of the Mightyena back for round two, a great big crack now across the pure dark type’s chest.
Mary jumped over the table snagging a grappling hook from the equipment pile laid out earlier and fired it at the Mightyena, the metal hooks digging deep into the pokemon’s shoulder. Mary jerked the grappling hook wire to the side, throwing the Mightyena off balance, giving Gary time to scramble away from it, only to be jumped by the broken faced Sneasel, phasing back up through the floorboards, grabbing Gary around his neck and pulling at his hair –

Umbreon and Pikachu were in full blown panic – “UMBRE! BREON!!”

Misty, Tracey, and Audino were scrambling over the ice to help with Starmie and Azumaril, only to be blocked by a Houndoom and Nidorina who phased themselves through the wooden walls from opposing sides, Nidorina’s hand becoming momentarily stuck in a blind before the pokemon just ripped it out.

“PIPIPIIIII!!” Pikachu let loose a Thunderbolt* aimed at Mightyena to keep it at bay from Gary, Mary immediately dropping the metal shaft of the grappling hook before she took the attack herself as the bolt traveled up the metal wire – she snatched up a pack filled with heavy instruments instead, arriving by Gary’s side in time to give the ghastly Sneasel another blunt hit to the head with the wooly heavy pack, cracking it further, forcing the pokemon to loosen its grip. While the Sneasel tried to right itself, Mary hooked an arm around Gary’s waist and ripped him from the pokemon’s grasp.

“UUUUGH WHAT EVEN ARE YOU THINGS?!?” Misty yelled stomping her foot, “Starmie! Use Flash*!”

“Azumaril use Aqua Jet*!” yelled Tracey, “Get to Gary and Mary!”

Starmie let loose a burst of light, giving Azumaril just enough distraction to slip through the ghastly pokemon’s disoriented attacks, allowing it to skate over to assist Gary and Mary –

The Sneasel hissed with what was left of its head, it jumped up, fully phasing through the floorboards, opened its mouth wide and loose a Blizzard* attack on Mary and Gary who had little to defend themselves with –

Tracey cupped his hands to over his mouth to make sure his voice would reach over the chaos, “*Use Scald*!”

“Azuuu! RIIIIIIIL” –

The counter front of the steaming water attack diluted some of the Blizzard*, but Gary and Mary were still hit with the blunt force of the blast and knocked back into the waiting, tearing jaws and claws of the Mightyena! Mary quickly snatched up the metal wire of the grappling hook still stuck in Mightyena’s shoulder to block a Crunch* attack meant for her throat, the wire cutting into the dark pokemon’s mouth, slicing open its crushing jaws wider –

The wall behind Misty, Tracey, and Audino began to take punishment, giving the already tell-tale sign of another iced pokemon trying to phase its way in. “Starmie! Give them all the Dazzling Gleam* you’ve got!”

“HUUUUUU~!” The water and psychic type let loose Dazzling Gleam* after Dazzling Gleam* upon the iced Houndoom and Nidorina giving Misty, Tracey, and Audino time to slip by the iced duo away from the doomed wall to Gary and Mary –

“Go Gary go!” screamed Mary cutting deeper into the Mightyena’s throat – Gary wiggled out from under Mary, reaching for another pokeball on his belt, but was forced to shield himself as Sneasel took a slicing swipe at him –
“PIIIKAAAAAAAA” – the Sneasel was met with another blocking Thunderbolt* from Pikachu forcing it back. Azumaril went to Pikachu and Umbreon’s aid, defrosting their feet with a Scald* attack, and the three of them turned their attention to Mightyena and Sneasel.

The entire cabin shuddered as it was hit from multiple points almost all at the same time!

“Azumaril use Play Rough* on Mightyena!”

“Umbreon Faint Attack*!”

And Pikachu let loose Thunderbolt* on the Sneasel as Azumaril and Umbreon bum rushed the Mightyena knocking it clean off Mary and hard against the side of the wall, chips of its iced self breaking off into little specks around it. The Mightyena snarled and rebounded throwing another well aimed Sucker Punch* right in Pikachu’s gut followed by a Crunch* down on the electric mouse’s back, “PIIII” – Umbreon came to Pikachu’s aide with a Bite* of it’s own to Mightyena’s neck, but again the Mightyena knocked it off easily, and threw Pikachu into Umbreon’s side making them squeal in pain.

Azumaril answered back with a Hydro Pump* to Mightyena’s face blasting it clean through the wall, almost breaking the pokemon’s battered body in half. Sneasel was going for a dirty attack on Azumaril, but was met with Misty brandishing a fire poker in which she wasted no time using to nail Sneasel in the gut! Azumaril followed up her attack with another well aimed Hydro Pump* that knocked the ice and dark type through the wall and out into the storm.

Tracey was over by Mary’s side helping her up, “I’m fine, I’m fine,” said Mary, “We’ve got to get Ritchie back!”

Audino began screaming as the cabin walls shook yet again. The normal type pokemon pointed to where Starmie was left taking on both Houndoom and Nidorina – Houndoom and Nidorina both Crunching* poor Starmie attempting to pull it apart!

“STARMIE!” Misty screamed – “Go Politoed!”

Politoed jumped out of the light of its pokeball – and along with Azumaril, Umbreon, and Pikachu launched a Scald* combo that rode a Thunderbolt* and Shadowball* blasting Houndoom and Nidorina off their feet (destroying most of the cabin tech as well) freeing poor Starmie –

“Return Starmie!*” called Misty; Starmie retreated inside its pokeball, “You’ve done more than enough, I’m so sorry!”

“Audino!” Gary called, Audino shakily stood up, “Heal Pulse!*”

Audino greatly relived it was only on clerical duty happily performed the move upon the group, giving them their much needed second wind.

However Houndoom and Nidorina were already up on their feet again, chips of them breaking slightly off, Nidorina looking like its bodily functions were glitching out all together as it half sank through the floorboards, its head twisting this way and that – another deep rooted growl came up right underneath their feet!

“Let’s go!” rallied Mary, “We’re sitting ducks in here!”

“And go where?!” said Tracey –

“To the roof!” –
“They’ll just come up like before!”

Houndoom was about to let loose a fire attack but Politoed’s expert aim doused it right in the face –

“I think they have a problem with metal,” said Mary, “and the roof has metal sheets for shingles – let’s go! We’ve got to try and cut down their numbers before they cut ours! Pikachu get to the roof and secure it!”

“PiKA!”

Gary threw up two pokeballs, “Blastoise! Arcanine! We need your strength!” His pokemon appeared from their light, raring to go –

“Everyone get to the roof after Pikachu secures it!” Mary called, “We’ll need the high ground to fight back!”

The pokemon roared, charging outside through the already crumbling wall into the storm, Mary bolting out with them. Gary recalled Audino after praising it greatly, then he and Umbreon ran outside with Misty, Tracey and their pokemon close behind. The Houndoom and Nidorina quickly gave chase, Houndoom unleashing a Flamethrower* that Azumarill attempted to counter with a Hydro Pump* but found the attack stuck in its throat!

Houndoom leaped for Tracey’s back – Azumarill skidded to a stop and tried to block the Houndoom with a Superpower* to the face – but like some of the more physical attacks, it phased right through the pokemon, and Azumarill was met with a critical hit Flamethrower* leaving the pokemon with a severe Burn*, Azumarill screamed holding its face – Nidorina jumped the poor water type with a Poison Fang* to the gut –

“AZUMARILL!”

A Thunderbolt* from above zapped the Houndoom and Nidorina back, “Pipipi! PIKACHU!” Pikachu had made it to the roof! But its support couldn’t go further than that, Pikachu turned its attention back towards its opponent, a Primape dripping black from its nose and eyes. Pikachu gulped, these pokemon are too weird!

Gary and Umbreon returned to Tracey’s and Misty’s side with Arcanine diving for the Houndoom, taking up the much smaller dark type in it’s mouth with Crunch* and throwing it back as Politoed let loose a Hydro Pump* sending the Nidorina packing, blasting it off into the forest.

“Are you both okay?!”

Tracey was cradling his pokeball, “Yes, but Azumarill!”

The Houndoom squirmed on its back, its head and limbs almost moving completely independently of its body, “HuMAns! Get ThE hUMAnS!”

“Is that thing talking?!” blurted Tracey, “Then, that really was the Mightyena talking earlier!”

“I think that’s the least our worries dear,” said Misty in an exhausted tone.

“These things can phase through solid objects and aren’t affected by normal or fighting archetypes,” said Gary, “just like a ghost type!”

The Houndoom was on its feet in seconds – Arcanine went in for another Crunch*, but its jaws froze, Houndoom seized the advantage, and the pure fire type took a Counter* to the gut, pushing it
back several feet.

*Disable?!* “Arcanine use Dragon Pulse*! Umbreon, Shadowball*!”

“Politoed use Hydro Pump*!”

Arcanine and Umbreon both got off their attacks blowing the Houndoom back into the forest, but no attack came from Politoed, the pure water type flailing its limbs in frustration –

“Your Hydro Pump* was disabled?!”

“Cursed Body*! It has to be!” said Gary.

“ARE YOU KIDDING ME?!” screeched Misty.

“But these pokemon are not capable of having that ability!” said Tracey.

“Enough is enough!” Misty pulled out another pokeball, “Let’s go Gyarados!”

The water and flying type roared its arrival, then was greeted with a Zen Headbutt* to the back of the head from the iced Stantler making a brutal return! The normal type pokemon proving itself nimble by leaping off the Gyarados’ head before taking a Hydro Pump* and asserting itself before the group, getting off several Hypnosis* attacks –

Gary shielded his eyes feeling the ground shake, and once he opened them, both Gyarados and Arcanine were down to Sleep* –

**OH YOU STATUS HACK FUCKER FUCK FUCKBIT!**

Gary and Misty immediately recalled Gyarados and Arcanine back. Houndoom had regrouped and joined the Stantler’s side, both of them snarling, the Houndoom now dripping black from its eyes.

“Anything else you want to add?!” yelled Misty.

Gary, Misty and Tracey suddenly felt the ground shake with thundering footsteps. The iced pokemon were joined by another ghostly companion from the forest – a Tyranitar appeared, knocking foliage left and right, black oozing from its eyes and its mouth like its ill fated companions, its head twisting around and about on its own, as if some invisible hand was moving it like how one would try to wind up a clock –

“Awesome Misty, thank-you for that suggestion,” said Gary flatly, Umbreon hissed with everything it had.

“You couldn’t be just a Caterpie could you?!” Tracey shouted.

The Tyranitar opened its gaping mouth wide, inhaled, and exhaled a horrible cry –

**BLOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOD!**

**OH THAT’S REALLY NOT NECESSARY, THE POINT HAS BEEN MADE HERE –**

“Uuhh Misty!” said Tracey, pointing behind them, it was the broken headed Sneasel, Mightyena, and Nidorina – “We’re surrounded!”

“**Blastoise!**” Gary called, the water pokemon had just finished throwing a Houndour like a Frisbee into the woods –
“BLAAAAAAAATOISE!” Gary’s Blastoise returned back to its trainer surprisingly fast for its stubby limbs, turning its wrath upon the opposing group by letting loose Surf*–

“Prrrrrrrrriiiiiiiiiigeot!”

Pidgeot suddenly swooped down from the sky, picking up Gary and Misty on its back (Politoed in Misty’s arms and Umbreon in Gary’s) while taking Tracey with its claws before Blastoise’s Surf* wiped their field clean. Pidgeot dropped them off on the roof with Pikachu standing proud, the Primape was nowhere to be seen.

Gary heard a Rapidash whinny and saw it leap up on the roof with Ritchie on its back, joined by his Charizard and Ash’s Charizard. Lopunny leapt up with Mary clinging onto it, her arm slung around its neck. Politoed threw more Scald* into the fray with Pikachu’s Thunderbolts* as cover for Blastoise as it hobbled on over as fast as it could.

Bless the Ranger pokemon made it from the barn!

“Ritchie!” Gary immediately went to him, there was red all down his side! “Ritchie are you okay?!”

“It looks worse than what it is I promise,” said Ritchie sliding off the Rapidash and into a hug from Gary, “Ow” –

Gary turned toward the group, “Listen guys, I have an insane theory for an insane circumstance, this Froslass is playing necromancer in giving these things a share of its life force! That means these things are what it is, knows what it knows! Moves, abilities, typing, all of it! That’s why they have a problem with metal! They’re now part ice type and weak to it!”

Tracey gawked, “But how can these pokemon, undead pokemon mind you, be so familiar with alien typing?! It’s crazy!”

“There’s definitely some intelligence behind them,” added Misty, “Could Froslass be controlling them?!”

“I would not be surprised, it’s a ghost pokemon after all,” said Mary, “it can do whatever it wants with the dead. We can only stop them.”

“Fighting zombie pokemon that advance like they’ve been trained for combat,” said Ritchie rubbing his arm, “A Ranger’s work is never easy.”

Pidgeot flew in front of the group throwing up Protect* followed by a Heatwave* that both Charizard’s joined in on as Blastoise leapt itself up onto the roof, shaking everyone almost to their knees. The cabin’s walls gave a groan, shuddering slightly.

Mary, Gary, and Ritchie traded glances

“Then lets show them some real smarts,” said Mary brandishing her Keystone carrier on her glove.

“I couldn’t agree more,” said Misty stepping up, brandishing her own Keystone carrier by taking her hair down and wrapping her Mega-Tie around her wrist, “Pidgeot, I would be honored to fight with you.”

Pidgeot nuzzled Misty heartily, “PRRRRRRR! PIIDGEOT!”

The ice zombie pokemon were amassing and regrouping, heading towards the cabin all together. Rapidash reared and threw out a Hypnosis* attack, but it didn’t stick to a single iced pokemon. Gary
looked at them all and felt sorrow for what was done to them, the least they could do was send them back to the grave instead of them being forced to maraud about like this…!

The iced pokemon snarled and growled, ice attacks bubbling up in their throats –

Gary looked to his Blastoise, Mary her Lopunny, Misty to Pidgeot, and Ritchie to both Charizards, “Both of you with me,” said Ritchie snapping on his Mega-Bracelet, “This for Ash!” Both Charizard’s, especially Ash’s, roaring back with gusto –

The Mega Users held up their pendants – “MEGA-EVOLVE!”

As the Mega Pokemon took to their powerful forms exploding forth from the aura of transformation energy, the ground shook violently, making the cabin creak and moan, blowing out the glass - the ground erupted with rocks and dirt and snow thrown up high into the air as a Steelix rose up from the ground, jaw broken askew, eyes glowing and dripping black, roaring menacingly with frozen breath –

WELL ALLLLLLRIGHTY THEN!

Gary gulped, *That won’t have too much of a problem with metal* – The Steelix dropped its broken mouth open let lose Blizzard* –

“LOOKOUT!!”

Mega-Lopunny, Pikachu and Rapidash reacted fast enough to throw up Protect*, but the attack Froze* Mega-Pidgeot, Ash’s Mega-Charizard X, Umbreon, and Politoed!

“UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUGH!!” yelled Misty –

YOU FUCKING HAX STATUS HACK FAKER HACK FUCKTURD PIECE OF SHIT!

Ritchie’s Mega-Charzard’s Y Drought* Ability materialized for only a moment, the rage of the snowstorm was too much to overpower –

“Hi-Jump Kick*!” yelled Mary.

“Hydro Pump*!” yelled Gary.

“Charizard use Heatwave*!” yelled Ritchie.

Mega-Lopunny’s attack centered on Steelix, snapping its head at a right angle, knocking its bottom jaw clean off –

Haha! Scrappy* Ability! YOU CAN SUCK A DICK –

Mega-Blastoise blew back half the field, but Mega-Charizard Y’s attack never materialized, it was Disabled*!

“Take’em out fast Mega-Lopunny!!” and Mary’s pokemon tore open the field, landing each and every one of its attacks into a face or limb of an iced pokemon, breaking off a limb here and there! Mega-Blastoise and Mega-Charizard Y entered the fray unleashing Fire Blast* and another Hydro Pump*; Gary called out Audino,

“Audino, quick use Heal Bell*!”

Audino steadied its fearful self and prepped the clerical move, “AuuuidoIIIIIIIIIIIIII” – the pokemon
flailed its limbs about and pointed to the sky, something was flying right towards them!

Pikachu and Rapidash threw up another Protect* - Rapidash’s protect failing – the flying pokemon, a Fearow, rained down another Blizzard* on the team with the Steelix moving its broken head to add to the freezing barrage with another Blizzard* that Froze* Rapidash with Pikachu just taking pure damage, knocking it down to the edge of consciousness – Mary’s Mega-Lopunny leaped directly over Steelix, knees bent forward, and came crashing down on the steel type’s back with a critical hit High Jump Kick*, snapping the steel snake pokemon’s head to the ground –

“Audino! NOW!” yelled Gary.

Audino steadied itself again, its wobbly knees hindering its attack performance when suddenly Fearow zipped up right in front of it, Gary threw himself in between Audino and the Blizzard* attack – but Gary was yanked away by Ritchie, and Audino was pulled away by Misty. Pikachu took the Fearow down with a perfectly timed Thunder*, but Misty’s legs had caught some of the Blizzard attack, causing her to trip with Audino over the ice –

The Sneasel leapt up past the roof of the cabin, aiming for Audino, twirling past Pikachu’s counter Thunderbolt*, Misty shielded the pokemon with her own body, but the attack never made contact with her, instead Sneasel sliced through Tracey’s shoulder –

“TRACEY!”

“MEGA-LOPUNNY!”

Gary and Ritchie looked down at the field – Mega-Lopunny had taken an Ice Beam* and was Frozen*! The Steelix raised its tail to smash the pokemon – Mary jumped down and raced over towards her pokemon – Rapidash freed itself from the icy prison with Flame Wheel* and quickly caught up to its desperate comrade knocking iced pokemon left and right and whinnied wildly to draw the Steelix’s attention –

Pikachu tackled the Sneasel off of Tracey and attacked it with all the electricity it could muster – but that too finally became Disabled* upon contact and Pikachu was knocked back into Tracey –

THIS ISN’T FUCKING WORKING! EVERYONE HERE IS FUCKED!

And then a mysterious robotic like soft voice broke through the chaos as if on speaker – “Rangers! Assistance is here!”

An Aqua Jet* attack, or what could barely be seen as Aqua Jet* since the attack was so incredibly fast – struck the head of the Steelix almost completely shattering it – the shockwave of the lighting speed attack blew most of the iced pokemon off their feet and forced everyone on the rooftop to shield themselves –

“SKAAAAAAAAAAMORYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!”

Skamory swooped down in time to knock Steelix’s falling body away, giving Mary time to recall Mega-Lopunny, hop on Rapidash and get the hell out of dodge! The Steelix’s body flailed almost uselessly about, what was left of the pokemon’s eye hardly operational –

Another lightning greased Aqua Jet* struck the field again from the returning side, the shockwave knocking the iced pokemon to the opposing part of the field, breaking off limbs, horns, and ice chips from their remains, but they still weren’t going down – more ice attacks began to bubble up from their core. One pokemon, a poor Gloom, unable to harness the freezing core within it any longer, practically exploded from the Blizzard* attack wanting release in its gut –
This is insane Gary! Now they’re walking ice bombs?! If they decide to blow together you all are finished no matter what!

Swanna swooped in throwing out a Hurricane* to provide further cover for Rapidash to return with Mary to the roof. Mary grabbed what looked to be paw broken off on her jacket and threw it off.

“I don’t think–!” but Mary never finished her sentence, above them all, Chandelure appeared in a crack of fire and roared –

“CHAAAAANDEELUURRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRREE!”

The iced pokemon instantly froze under the intense heat and ghastly light radiating from Chandelure, all deathly blue eyes fixated on the fire and ghost type burning its flames to an intense fever pitch. Never mind Heal Bell* from Audino, all pokemon were thawed, wobbling to their knees, or in Politoed’s case, falling flat on its face. The good ghost pokemon raised its limbs, and the bodies of the iced pokemon followed the command in standing straighter, and then Chandelure lowered itself, and the iced pokemon followed, lowering their heads, dropping to their knees, or flat-out letting themselves fall onto the ground. Silence, save for the winds of the storm.

Misty and Tracey, despite his injury, were stunned with the rest, “Amazing…” said Misty, her voice almost a whisper.

“That’s a ghost pokemon for you,” said Gary almost as breathless.

Ritchie turned to Mary, “Mary, has, Chandelure ever done this before?”

Mary was still fixated on her pokemon floating above them with complete and total command over the would-be zombies.

“Chandelure….”

“Rangers!”

Everyone looked up to the robotic voice as a large figure with wings almost completely covered in ice and snow landed hard on the roof, the figure abruptly shook off the snow and ice, pulled up it’s goggles and revealed itself to be the Top Ranger’s Dragonite!

“Extreme apologies, I would have been here sooner, but Froslass’ mirages around the valley impeded my ability to navigate, I had no choice but to rely on Chandelure’s navigation.”

“It’s talking,” said Tracey faintly.

“I have a prototype poke-translator around my throat,” Dragonite pulled down its scarf to show, “Mind you this is a prototype device, so if my voice suddenly changes or stops altogether, I apologize, and will use Sign Language to communicate.”

Ritchie and Mary nodded, but Gary just blinked in being out of Sign Language know-how.

What, Rangers prepped what.

Mary stepped up, “Now what about these, Froslass mirages? You said they were around the valley? Like self-sustaining mirages?”

Which takes an incredible amount of power like holy shit, typically when ghost pokemon make mirages they are at the center of it, but self-sustaining mirages? That is almost unheard of!
“Yes, I can only assume they were traps by the way they were aimed at distracting its desirable prey. I was able to see through them, eventually, and of course Chandelure was a great help. For the most part however, I can say they were annoying, to myself at least.”

“What did they consist of?” asked Ritchie.

Dragonite couldn’t help but side glance at Gary, it straightened its posture, “I would rather not say in present company to avoid emotional distress, I will say they were made with Mr. Ketchum in mind.”

HAHAHAHAHAHAHA PREVENT EMOTIONAL DISTRESS, GARY YOU FEEL LIKE SCREAMING, WHAT KIND OF MIRAGES, WHAT, WHAT, WHAT?????

“Now,” Dragonite motioned to the group, “In light of the recent scuffle, I must insist I take you all over to the Tohjo Station or to a hospital immediately.”

Scuffle it says. It called that a scuffle. Right, cheerio then good fellow.

Dragonite motioned towards Ritchie, Ritchie looked at himself and realized his clothing was still showing quite a bit of his blood – “Oh, yeah, I’m fine Dragonite, it was a nasty bite and then something slashed me but I’m fine” –

HAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA –

“The Tohjo Station would be best as our place is now somewhat wrecked,” said Mary.

“Indeed,” said Dragonite, “but I see you all have sustained injuries, those must be taken care of first. I don’t suspect this one group of deceased pokemon to be the last. I encountered a group of flying deceased pokemon during my flight and it was quite the challenging encounter, one I do not wish to repeat, especially with injured in tow.”

Audino chirped, finally snapping its nerve into place whilst using Heal Pulse*, and to a lesser extent, Heal Bell* on everyone. The thawed pokemon were still wobbly but grateful for the second round. Tracey rubbed his shoulder, blood still showing through his shirt, Misty wrapped her arms around him, pulling him close, Tracey hugged her back warmly, Misty giving a deep sigh of relief in return.

“Impressive healing technique Audino,” said Dragonite, “You can even do Human Health Transfer, that is an excellent skill to obtain.”

“Audino is awesome, I knew you could do it,” said Gary patting his pokemon on the back, Audino bent with shame, but Gary pulled it into a hug.

Misty removed one arm from Tracey to recall her pokemon, “Return Politoed, you were awesome out there!”

“Umbreon, Audino, Mega-Blastoise, I couldn’t be a prouder Trainer, return and take a good rest!” After recalling his group, Gary pulled up Arcanine’s pokeball and said to it, “You too old friend, rest easy now.” Arcanine shook its pokeball in happy acknowledgment.

Ritchie gave their Ranger pokemon pats of reassurance, “You all were amazing, absolutely amazing!”

“And you Dragonite,” said Mary, “Thank-you so much for assisting us.”

“Of course,” said Dragonite, “However Chandelure is the real star here.”
“Y-yeah…”

The iced pokemon may have been nothing but statues for how still they stood.

Ritchie placed a hand on Mary’s shoulder, her Lopunny reverting back to its normal form and looking on with concern, “Mary?”

Mary placed her hand over Ritchie’s, “I’m okay,” she looked up to Chandelure, “Chandelure! Do you have them under control?”

The good ghost pokemon barked back in acknowledgment, turning towards Mary with a smile. Mary sighed, smiling back, albeit weakly at her companion. Chandelure then cocked its head, and lowered itself down to Mary, sniffing her mid section – “Hey buddy! Watch your flames please!” Chandelure continued to sniff Mary’s side, Mary just sighed, “Please keep the zombie pokemon under control, yeeeeees I have a stomach, what of it?”

Chandelure barked at Mary.

Gary and Ritchie made it over to Tracey and Misty, “You okay?” Gary asked, “And here we all thought Ash was the reckless one.”

Tracey smiled, “Yeah, yeah I’m good,” he said, “A little numb though…”

“Numb?” questioned Dragonite.

“Let’s get back inside the cabin,” said Ritchie, “Patch you up a bit more, well, with the supplies we have left.”

“I am carrying medical supplies as well,” said Dragonite, “I am also trained in First Aid.”

“Did I mention how awesome you were?”

Mary was suddenly by Tracey’s side, “Where were you hit?”

“My shoulder” –

Mary quickly pulled down Tracey’s shirt from his collar, revealing a strange vein-like bruise, Mary cursed under her breath –

“What is that?” asked Misty.

Mary pulled up her shirt under her jacket and showed a bruise with a similar vein-like pattern, “Chandelure sniffed it out on me, we’ve got Disable* in us” –

“What?!”

Dragonite stepped up, “This must be taken care of immediately.”

“We have Mental Herbs,” said Ritchie before quickly realizing himself that he had been in close contact with the iced pokemon along with Gary and Misty – Ritchie pulled up his sleeve where the Stantler had bit him but he showed no sign –

“All of you,” Mary motioning to Ritchie, Gary, and Misty, “Let Chandelure check you out now.”

Mary informed them Disable* only gets in if they were hit by a Disable* attack, were in direct contact with Cursed Body* pokemon, or very close association, whiiiiiiich they all had. Chandelure
sniffed them all down, the three receiving clear reviews much to their relief.

“Alright, come on, everyone back inside the cabin!” said Mary.

The pokemon helped their human counterparts down from the roof and back inside the cabin. Chandelure stayed outside still holding the iced pokemon frozen in time. Everyone re-entered the dark cabin, some stumbling as in Tracey’s case, the broken windows letting the temperature of the cabin match what was outside.

Mary tried switching the power back on, but it did not return, “Well that was a long shot anyway,” she hissed, “Ritchie” –

“I’m getting the herbs now!” Ritchie replied snatching up a flashlight and flying to the back, digging through their recovery items in storage.

A groan came from outside snapping up everyone’s attention, the Ranger pokemon at the ready, but Chandelure wasn’t reacting with a flurry of flames. Mary recognized the shuffling steps as the door was knocked open with ease –

Mary jumped up, “Aggron! Oh thank-goodness, I didn’t know where you had went!”

Aggron forced itself through the door, holding up a small patch of black fur in its claws while giving a disproving growl.

“You went after the Zoroark?!”

Aggron ruffled itself, letting the hair fall from its hand, with its other hand, it showed the case of a Note.

“Oh my god, YOU TAGGED IT?!” Mary hugged her pokemon as hard as she could.

“We can communicate using the portable com I have with me,” said Dragonite taking the com out of its pack.

“How long will it take to synch up the Ranger Cloud Database?” asked Mary.

“Not long, I don’t expect there to be many updates, I am about as updated as possible with information regarding Ash Ketchum’s recovery.”

“You’re amazing,” said Gary.

Once the com was done updating Dragonite handed it over to Mary who quickly got in contact with the Kanto Branch themselves, a silver haired male Ranger answered on the other end,

“Mary! We received word you all were under attack! What is going on out there?! Any injured?!”

“This ghost type has gone off its damn rocker! Radio all satellite branches in the connecting region of Kanto and Johto and get them to shut off this entire region, lock it up, and round up everyone in that Oneling group!”

“Will do Mary, but about that Oneling group – we sent a team to them, and, they’re gone” –

“What do you mean they’re gone?” Mary growled, Gary and Misty shared anxious glances –

Ritchie stomped up alongside Mary with a jar of leaves in hand – Mary snatched the jar up and left Ritchie with Dragonite’s com, “We were just attacked by dozens of dead frozen corpses of pokemon
that knew my name, knew Gary's name, could speak, and fought like they just got out of a Trainer’s Corp! I can’t explain it, except that Froslass came from that Oneling group and, has taken Ash – and if that is what just one of their members can do, I shudder to think of the others!"

You shudder to think of what it has done to Ash! How did those monsters know your names?! Knew about the cabin?! HOW?! HOW?! These are questions we can fret and fret terribly about now!

“No, no,” the silver haired Ranger looked unnerved, “Understood mate, our Trackers have been after them, we’ve got more back up on the way! I suspect Dragonite has made it you all?”

*Weeeeeell it would have been nice if they had been here just a tad bit sooner,* Gary hissed internally.

“I am present,” said Dragonite waving, “We must report however that Mary and Tracey have been infected with Disable*.”

“Do you all have Mental Herbs at the ready?”

“Yes,” said Ritchie.

“Tracey!” yelled Mary, “Come here!” She was mashing the leaves with a wooden masher.

“Oh my god those smell terrible!” said Misty helping Tracey over with Gary.

“Yeah well they save lives,” said Mary as she ground up the Mental Herb leaves into a paste, “It’s hard to tell how Disable* is going to react, it doesn’t work the same for humans, it’s very, very dangerous – if it wasn’t centered on a body part – that weird bruise means it was sloppy – which leaves it to roam inside of us, inside of a person, effects can range drastically–”

“Drastically how?” asked Misty; Gary could hear the fear rising her voice.

“It can range from simply making our entire body numb to focusing on an organ – it could center on anything inside our bodies, our lungs, our spinal chord, our heart, and stop it in an instant” –

“Oh god,” Misty held onto Tracey tighter and Tracey hugged her back.

Mary finished the paste mixing, she scooped it up along the back of the spoon, “Okay Tracey this is going to taste really bad, but you have to hold it on your tongue – do NOT swallow it, Ritchie, time us” –

Mary swabbed the spoon across her tongue, her eyes instantly watering, then she picked up another spoon, and scooped some up on the back for Tracey. He opened his mouth and she swabbed it quickly on his tongue, clasping her hand over Tracey’s mouth as Tracey upon contact with the paste gagged making much distressful noises, tapping his foot fast on the ground, hands patting his thighs, anything to help deal with the god awful taste! Tracey’s squirming a stark contrast to Mary’s stone reserve in staying almost completely still with keeping her hand over Tracey’s mouth.

You’ve honestly wondered how much of a badass Mary really is, and in contrast to Tracey’s squirming it’s not that hard to measure! But still major props to Tracey after risking his life to protect Misty!

“Oh okay now spit,” called Ritchie; Gary crinkled his nose.

Number one, it does not help those herbs smell like death mints, number two it helps even less that Mary has to go and chuck up a loogie to go out with her herb – Tracey is green enough – and
Mary wiped her mouth as Misty helped Tracey sit back upright, his legs were still shaking. Mary cleared her throat, “Right then, we should be good in about an hour or so, hopefully, I mean we weren’t hit repeatedly with it.”

“Or?” said Misty.

“Or it was nice knowing all of you.”

*For once Gary, you are not staring down the Misty Glare-o-death.*

“CHANDEEEEELURE!”

Everyone looked to the field through the windows in time to watch the Steelix (or really what was left of it) fling it’s body straight up, throwing the remnants of its head back, screaming a guttural roar, black gushing up through its opened throat, spraying everywhere – and then it fell flat to the ground along with the other undead pokemon dropping like lifeless porcelain dolls, parts of them shattering like glass that hit hard enough.

Chandelure lowered itself near the ground, letting loose an intense Inferno* attack that burned every single body into oblivion and cinders.

Everyone gawked with mouths open.

Ritchie slowly turned to Mary who was looking at her pokemon in a new, frightening light. Ritchie gulped, “I guess, that is just…ghost pokemon protocol?”

Dragonite composed itself and cleared its throat, even though it was the translator that spoke for it, “What has expired must return to the grave. Chandelure has performed an act of mercy.”

Mary nodded slowly in agreement, “Yeah…Ghost pokemon, can shepherd the after-life, or…”

The cinders of the remains of the zombified pokemon flickered one by one like twinkling stars, until the harsh wind silenced them all.

***

Ash and Bergmite looked on in a trembling and shocked silence. The ice that created the cavern gave a creaking chilling moan with much smaller bits falling loose like snow. The movement made by the ice and ghost pokemon was complete. The dark patches and their dead cargo were gone. Ash could only imagine they must have been done away with by the Froslass’ energy to who knows where, and for whatever reason.

Froslass was hovering above the newly opened abyss, its seemingly frail body shaking, arms still outstretched, head down. Its eyes were completely shaded black, opaque, with an oil-like oozing liquid dripping off its cheeks and out of its mouth. It slowly relaxed its arms, “Can you see now” – it’ voice sounded exactly like a little girl’s, it raised its head to look at Ash, Ash frozen to look into it hollow eyes, “I’m, I’m not a m**onSteR.”

Ash gulped.

“I….I never…..aSked for th1s.”

“…Froslass….”
“I...” Froslass took a deep, shuddered breath, “used to have a real name, like you.....I don’t even
know your name...What is your name?”

“...It’s Ash.”

“Ash....that is an interesting name.” Froslass floated over in a straight line to inches before Ash’s
face, very much to his discomfort, “......Ash....sorry.”

Ash felt a tight little grip snag him by the scruff of his collar and yank him towards Froslass’ wide
opened razor sharp mouth, it’s needle point teeth chomped down on the side of his neck – Ash threw
himself back, his hands immediately going to the side of his neck while trying to kick the Froslass
away, but the pokemon released on its own, dropping itself into the black abyss, laughing manically.
Bergmite barked frantically while trying to wedge itself out of its hole –

“I’m okay!” Ash yelled knowing very well he was most not okay, “It’s alright Bergmite! Just, just,
give me a minuet” – keeping one hand on his bleeding neck, Ash tore off a piece of his shirt,
scooped up some ice, and quickly placed it on his wound, he gathered more ice to pack it with his
free hand. “It’s okay Bergmite, it missed my jugular.”

Not by much Ash, FUCK. Still Crunched* the side of your neck through, OW – at least it wasn’t a
serious attack, otherwise da-nanana – you wouldn’t be speaking! Ever again! Ow, ow, ow...yeah...
that wasn’t a serious Bite* at all, its teeth are just sharp as hell...

After a few moments of gathering himself while calming his breathing, noting Bergmite looking on
with utter worry, Ash began to wonder about the Froslass, it hadn’t come up from the deep yet.

Not that it may ever come back up from the deep end, ha ha ha haaaaa...ha....

Still holding pressure on his neck, Ash inched himself to just barely look over the ledge, and spotted
Froslass on its back, laying on top of water which had frozen upon contact with its body. Its eyes
were still pure black with a wide, wide slightly bloody grin across its face; he could hear it giggling
softly,

“I just need a break~” Froslass called up towards Ash and Bergmite, Ash squinted and titled his
head, its voice! That sounds like – ! –“Buuuuut I’ll be back up there sooon~!”

It’s using your voice Ash!

“Um Froslass?”

“Yeeeeeeeessss~?”

UUUUUUUUUUUUUUGHH THIS IS SO WEIRD TALKING BACK TO YOURSELF, well not-
not you, it’s using your voice, BUT YOU STILL REAAAAAAALLY DON’T LIKE THIS AT ALL
–

Ash held a berry over the side of the cliff, “You want a berry?”

“Na-ah,” Froslass shook its head childishly, “I’m good for now! If I get hungry again, I’ll just drink
your blood, and eat more of you! I can sound like you now, isn’t that neat?”

Ash shook his head, “No, no, not really...”

“I think it is great! Next time I should just take every last drop!”
Ash leaned himself back up against the wall with a shudder rolling through his body.

_FuuuuuuuuUuuuuuuuUck – this thing is losing its damn mind, well scratch that, it has lost its damn mind, and is now getting even crazier! Son you’re not running out of time, you are out of time, unless you do some major psychiatric good speak with this pokemon, you’re dinner._

Ash got an idea, “Froslass, where is my com?”

“It’s in the snoooooow,” came its/ his voice from the abyss.

_You really want this thing to stop using your voice, ugh._

“Froslass, can you bring my com back over here? I want to show you something.”

Silence. Too long for Ash’s comfort frame of response, and then, “Okay.”

Ash waited a minuet, gathering his nerve to look over the edge again, ever so slowly, and saw that Froslass was gone.

_Holy shit it worked. Now question is if you can reach through to it, along with sending a warning to the base com to Ritchie and Mary... There’s no way in hell you’re going to let them walk into a trap if you can help it, and maybe, somehow get your real position out there? I mean it worked so well the last time... LOL._

Ash looked up and was suddenly face to face with Froslass, it face still dripping black and red from its mouth and eyes. It held up his com, “Here it is. If you want to call out to your humans, do not bother, I already have. They will be in my trap soon.”

_Well alright then!_

Ash clenched his fist, “Froslass, can you promise me you will not hurt them?”

“Why would I promise such a thing?”

“Because you said you were not a monster, and monsters hurt people and pokemon for their own gain and games... You might not be able to become human again, in the way you want, but we can help you Froslass, my friends and I, we’re really good at helping people and pokemon.”

_Says you as you hold your bleeding neck._

“I will become human again, just wait and see.”

Just the thought of Gary in Froslass’ grasp gutted Ash’s heart.

_You have to get through to it, if your friends and family are going to have any chance... you may very well be sacrificing yourself at this point, this is such a risk..._

Ash began to feel faint again, he tilted slightly but righted himself quickly, *Not now, I need to keep it together a little longer…!*

Froslass poked Ash hard in the chest, “So what do I do with your com?”

“Op-open up the app screen.”

“Mmmmkay, done.”
Ash pushed himself to sit up more, his vision was blurring, “I want you to open the shortcut box that, has, a box” –

“A box on it?”

“Yes, that one, open it, and put in my password, first part is ‘pika’ all lowercase, and then ‘chu’ all uppercase, and then 10, 18, 1996.”

Real creative that one.

Froslass complied, then tilted its head, “Now what?”

Ash gave a nervous smile, “That app is like a big giant storage cloud, just, look around, I, want you to look at the videos, and I would very much like that you stop taking bits of me for yourself, I can share myself better with you this way. These videos, they are about what’s really important to me, and I think they’ll give you an idea too!”

Froslass just glared at Ash, narrowing its eyes.

“Just, look through them, please?”

Froslass scratched its nose, scrolling through the library, and finally clicked on a video to play.

Ash immediately recognized which one it was from the opening sounds, him piddling around in the kitchen followed by soft footsteps over the carpet, “Heyyyyyyyyyy.”

Gary in the video grumbled, Ash knew he was over his desk writing up a report, not even looking up, “Mrmrmrmrmrm.”

Ash mouthed along with the video, he could play it for himself in his head, “Here we have, the Science Pokemon.”

Gary looked up, “Science pokemon.”

The video nodded in place, Gary couldn’t stop half of his mouth from curling up into a smile. Ash’s voice from the video continued, “The Science Pokemon, a, stubborn and confident breed, this Science pokemon is about to reach a milestone in the field of biolu, bio, lumon, burrito – the bright stuff” – Gary was laughing, “but little does it know” –

“Oh? Little does it know?” said Gary, the com zoomed in on Gary’s mouth.

“His smile is already the brightest thing in the world.”

Ash closed his eyes as the sound in the video played out, Gary smirking so hard, and blushing so red, he gets up from his chair and pulls Ash in the video to him, the video suddenly cutting out as the com flailed around with muffled laughter. Ash’s neck tingled, still remembering the ghost of the kisses placed.

Froslass played another video, again Ash recognized it instantly. He and Gary were strolling through a park, they both take a seat by a tree, the com turned to catch them both in the frame. Ash was leaning on Gary and Gary was pulling out a book, settling down. Gary looks up, “Are you filming?”

“Mh-hm!”

Gary gave a half smile, “You’re filming me read?”
“I’m filming the day, today was good day.”

“Yes it was,” Gary leaned over and kissed Ash square on top of his cap, making Ash sink down blushing into Gary’s lap.

“Ooooh today might be a great day now” –


Froslass played another one, this one of Ash, Gary, and Ritchie walking through the woods, “Is he filming?” asked Ritchie,

“He’s filming,” said Gary, “I blame Misty’s influence.”

“Hate the game, not the player,” said Ash.

“Wrong situation context,” said Ritchie turning around, walking backwards.

“Ritchiiiiiiiiiiiiiiie,” rang Gary’s voice, the com video turned back and forth between Gary and Ritchie with Ritchie walking proudly backwards on the trail and Gary looking annoyed.

“Ranger Senses,” said Ritchie spreading out his arms and moving them mysteriously, “Ash, are we not trained to be in tune with all of nature?”

“Yup!”

“Are we not the fastest rising team in Kanto?”

“Yup!” Ash in the video turned around and walked backwards too, the com facing Gary who continued to look annoyed, but this time with just a hint of a smile, “Ranger Senses,” said Ash.

“Well can these Ranger Senses tell me if the connection between genome sequences of city pokemon are directly a result of their environment, or evolution line?”

“Uhhhhhh” –

“It is a possibility of the environment!” piped Ritchie, the com turned towards him, turning Ash back around while Ritchie was still walking backwards, “The pokemon Klink only appeared about 100 years ago, resembling an object that has only been constructed by the human species and no other! Also pokemon like Trubbish and Vanillite bring up serious questions on the impact of humans upon nature, with nature now seemingly imitating human devices, rather than humans imitating nature devices – thus opening up the theory that the genetic make-up of pokemon are brought forth not only by nature, but the greatest factor in the health of our planet, which is human evolution and consumption!”

Gary slow-clapped, “Wow Ritchie.”

Ash clapped his hand on his arm that held the com, shaking it a bit, “Ranger Senses!”

“Ranger Senses!” smiled Ritchie, “Booyah!” –

“Ritchie!” –

“OOF” – Ritchie walked back into a tree but quickly righted himself, “But, ow, we Rangers are still developing eyes in the back of our heads…”
“Yes, it’s a progressive skill,” giggled Ash, “Mary has that one mastered though.”

Froslass skipped around to another video, this one was of Gary sleeping in the bed, with Ash singing, poorly, in the background, “Wake me up, can’t wake up me inside, I can’t wake up, can’t get up, saaave me, call my name and save me from the sleep” –

“I don’t think you could have said those lyrics more wrong,” came Gary’s voice, both he and Ash started laughing – Froslass played another video, this one had Ash sitting far away with Gary up on a podium speaking, there was sniffling in the background, the com shook slightly.

“What’s wrong honey?” it was an older woman’s voice from off-screen.

“Nothing mom, I’m just…”

“Proud?”

“Yeah, he worked so hard for this.”

“Aww, my sweet boy.”

Froslass played another video, meanwhile Ash’s body was relaxing to the voices of his beloved; his hand that was placing pressure on his wound fell away from his neck.

To be honest Ash, after all of this, you can hardly remember what you were so upset about in the morning, why you were so upset to begin with….what happened that turned your insides so sad? What happened to that resilient, cheerful, rambunctious child? Teen? Adult? Well, blossoming adult.

Ash swallowed, Froslass was engulfed in watching the videos.

“Froslass…Why don’t we….Let’s call them, and talk to them, how does that sound? Is that okay?”

It would be best to call Mary, she would know how to handle a ghost type.

Froslass did not respond, it was utterly captivated by the home videos, the smiles, the laughter, the atmosphere of love, pure love. It watched them intently, moving from one video to the next. Ash noticed the black tears that streamed down its face were draining the darkness from its eyes; they were beginning to return to their pale blue hue.

Its working then isn’t it? This is buying you and Bergmite time plus its calming Froslass down. They’ll find you, they will find you, and they better find you soon, you’re really starting to not feel well –

“My name….my name….”

The Froslass’ hands were slightly shaking holding the com.

“My name….my name…..”

Drowsiness overtook Ash like a wave, his entire body settling upon the ice.

Not good, stay awake Ash, stay awake!

But Ash couldn’t help it, he too was losing himself to the sound of the videos, Gary’s laughing voice alone was enough to send wholesome warm vibes throughout his body. Ash couldn’t fight to keep his eyes open any longer. The last thing he saw before his eyes closed was Froslass’ tears turn clear, its eyes fully returned to their pale blue color and concentrated on watching the videos with a blank
gaze, silently crying.

Chapter End Notes

We're in the later half of the story now, thank-you for sticking around this long, I greatly appreciate it!

11/2/15 And yeah, like stated above, chapter 8 will come out when its finished and finished RIGHT, it is the chapter with...."a certain confrontation" and that must be done well. On that front, I might release 8 and 9 together, it might be a terribly long wait, perhaps a month or longer, but I want this done right, honestly I'm REALLY embarrassed about the errors in editing in chapter 7, I know I'm a better writer than that, and I certainly want to be better for anyone that give my stories a chance.

1/2/16 I hope everyone enjoyed the rewrite, as you can see how horribly rushed this chapter was before, bleh X
Frozen Heart

Chapter by SilentAvera, Singing Woodpecker (SilentAvera)

Chapter Notes

FINALLY. I do apologize for the long wait, but I just had to make sure I gave this chapter my all. Also please read the notes at the end after you’ve finished the chapter owo;;

Also the reboot of Ch 7 is done, and will be the only chapter to need a retcon, because two weeks was really pushing it to get that chapter out, and I’m sorry unu;;

It is nighttime, or rather it’s been nighttime, like actual evening-night, it was hard to tell with the storm keeping the sky locked up, even though the storm has weakened, but bottom line is that means it is colder outside – oh and how wonderful the Tohjo station has an annoying ticking clock too, good, good yaaaaaaaaay….also the Tohjo station is bigger than what you remember. Especially since Tracey, Misty, Pikachu and a majority of everyone’s pokemon were practically forced to leave to Viridian Memorial and the Viridian Pokemon Center earlier.

Gary rubbed his head, the ticking of the clock wasn’t helping his headache simmer down any easier. Audino jumped onto the couch by Gary’s side, nuzzling into him, Gary returning the affection with some petting.

Before you guys could even trek on over to the Tohjo station, Tracey suddenly felt light headed and his chest was hurting; Pikachu was looking a little south too. Chandelure went to sniff them and found the Disable* had returned, but what was more alarming was Pikachu suddenly falling ill to it as well, something that is exceedingly rare since Pokemon’s bodies are infinitely more adept at expelling the attack within a couple of turns, so to speak. Chandelure did a couple more sniff-by’s and it was decided to send some of Mary’s pokemon, (Lopunny and Aggron) Tracey and Misty would have their pokemon checked as well, and your pokemon too just to be safe, only Audino is by your side now. No one wanted to take any chances with what Froslass’ power could do, as it has, for the umpteenth time, showed its powers are fucking scary, and has demonstrated it can manipulate attacks outside of their usual manner and method.

The Ranger pokemon staying behind were at the lowest risk from Chandelure’s check, thankfully Dragonite and the Charizards are still able to put up a hell of a fight. Mary’s Skarmory is looking more fired up as well with Swanna.

Of course Dragonite offered to take the injured to Viridian memorial itself but Tracey and Misty insisted it stay to assist in Ash’s rescue because who the hell knows what else can happen. So with everyone’s pokemon in their pokeballs, Tracey and Misty hitched a ride on a sleigh Dragonite managed to salvage from what was left of Mary’s station to be pulled by Rapidash – who by the way, turns out is very, very good at sleigh pulling and jumped off so hard on the start that Tracey fell out, so, he’s also going to have his back checked. Oy vey. OKAY SO, Gary, now that you have all of this recapped in your mind, you’re good? You’re feeling more stable? Hahahaha no of course not, but you know Viridian Memorial is a damn good hospital, and that’s where Ash is going to be taken, so it only makes sense to have the whole gang there and yeah Gary I don’t know what else to say, I
mean even as your inner voice I’m getting tired of hearing yourself speak all internally and shit, but that doesn’t mean you’re gonna stop, weeeeeeee.

The silver haired Ranger, as Gary learned his name was Thomas, handed Dragonite and Ritchie a pair of goggles, “Alright Dragonite, Ritchie, these goggles should help the two of you and your pokemon see through these, mirages.”

Oh yeah, those mirages…you finally got some info out of Dragonite on them, it said they were like walking into someone’s mind, they were like memories, very personal memories. UuuuurrriUUUUUUUUUUGGGHHHHHH – the way this, MONSTER, is exploiting Ash makes your insides burn in the most terrible of ways.

“I can safely deduce after that impressive beam of light was when the self-sustaining mirages gathered more power,” said Dragonite, “Chandelure was able to burn through them however, but all the better to have equipment that can stand up to such tactics.”

Ritchie looked over to Mary, “Any luck with the tracker on Zoroark?”

Mary was looking through her com, tapping it angrily as she scanned through, “Nope. It’s as we thought, Zoroark looks to have ripped it off, but we can give an educated guess on its trajectory that it was heading towards the area where Froslass is.”

Yeah that just, makes you feel so reassured huh Gary? What if that little shit was working with Froslass this whole time? Now what? Now whaaaaaaaaaat.

“It has no chance of leaving this region at least,” said Mary, “our branches were able to respond despite the weather and have set this area on lock down. Psychic pokemon linked into the borders are going to know what passes through.”

If only they could link into Ash and find out where the fuck he is, but nuance. Hell, Thomas’ Alakazam tried getting a reading on the region earlier, but something was screwing with its ability to, so fuck it, fucks it all, this Froslass is just, IT IS JUST A TURD, that’s what it is, a big turd. UuuuuuuUUUUUUGH – it is just ever so evident that Ash needs to be rescued…You have this terrible theory that the ice zombies were not only filled with Froslass’ life force, but somehow….Ash was in them as well.

“How about those whereabouts on the Oneling group?” Thomas asked.

Mary threw her hands up in the air, everyone feeling her frustration. Ash’s Charizard growled impatiently.

“Gary?” came Ritchie’s voice, a troubled trill came from Audino.

Gary looked up from zoning out, on his com was Ash’s profile. Ritchie motioned with a sad look to Gary’s face and Gary quickly wiped his cheek and discovered a tear.

WERE YOU ACTUALLY CRYING???? UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUGH – YOU HAVE REACHED A NEW TIER MISTERY OAK, ZONING OUT AND CRYING YOU’VE COME SO FAR, IT SURE IS NICE TO EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS ISN’T IT? MAYBE IF YOU HELPED ASH EXPRESS HIS FEELINGS INSTEAD OF WAITING FOR HIM TO COME AROUND NO ONE WOULD BE IN THIS FUCKING MESS –

Gary wiped his face further, but only more tears fell, “I’m…”
Gary felt Ritchie’s arms wrap around him and pull him close. Gary leaned down slightly and rested his chin right in the crook of Ritchie’s neck and shoulder as his vision grew blurry. His hands shook as they returned the gesture. Gary shut his eyes, turning his head down to muffle his sob into Ritchie’s shoulder; Ritchie began rubbing the small of Gary’s back.

*They can be so alike, so alike it’s not even funny, but that is not Ash’s scent, that’s Ritchie, and that would be too much of a low for someone like you to sink Gary, so do not even entertain the thought for one second.*

“Hey…Dragonite, Mary, Thomas and I are leaving soon, once Mary finishes coordinating with our sister station the plans, we’re going, we can’t wait any longer, not after that display of power. Aside from a rescue mission, this is also to neutralize Froslass who has shown itself to be a threat to Kanto and Johto, well, everywhere really, and once Froslass is taken care of, we’ll be free to find Ash if he isn’t where it is.”

As much as Gary wanted to be relieved that the rescue mission was finally, FINALLY underway, his inner alarm bell sounded off hard, “You all are walking right into a trap…”

*And after Mary was so diligent about not putting Ash in harms way? To gather information? This is still very much a hostage situation so what the hell Mary – OH YEAH WE WERE ALL ALMOST KILLED BY ICE ZOMBIES THE SITUATION HAS SOMEWHAT CHANGED DUMBASS.*

“Aow c’mon you know between Ash and I, I’m the better trap dismantler, there’s not a poacher’s trap I can’t disarm, and yeah – it mainly just is setting the trap off, but” –

Gary pulled away from Ritchie grabbing him by the shoulders, “You’re going to use yourself as bait aren’t you?”

“Yup.”

Gary’s knees knocked lightly against Ritchie’s, “How” –

"Ash would have done the same for me, if I have to – OOF”–

Gary pulled Ritchie close so hard, and filled with so much guilt.

“I think we’ve been given a very adamant push to giving an aggressive and immediate response to our dear little ghost type,” said Mary, “This is where we have to trust in ourselves and in our pokemon. Gary,” Mary tilted her head down slightly in an apologetic tone, “I’m sorry if my tactics as a Team Leader have frustrated you” –

Ritchie gave Gary several reassuring paps to the back, and they pulled away gently. “I-it’s okay Mary,” said Gary, “I know, and, I don’t think I’d ever forgive myself if my, eh, more than ‘edgy’ attitude pushed any of you to do something reckless.”

*LOL, COUGH, RITCHIE HERE, COUGH COUGH COOOOOOUGH WHEEEEEEEDDDDDDDDDDDZZZZZ!!!!*

Mary nodded to Gary and stood up straight, “So then, aside from these mirages, we could also be up against more zombified pokemon, and then there’s Froslass itself and who knows what kind of tricks it could be harboring up its sleeve, it’s already proven its powers to be frightening enough in their own right, not to mention we’re going to be handling this while in an all out blizzard if Froslass decides to up the weather shenanigans, so, we have to make Froslass come to us,” Mary tightened
her gloves, “this time, we’ll be the ones doing the trapping.”

“Right,” said Thomas, “My Alakazam knows Disable* so we can also dish out some of its own
medicine back, another teammate also has a Beheyeem knowing Imprison* and Disable* so we can
also go for some shut down.”

Mary nodded in approval, “Our first team is going to neutralize as many possible realms of Froslass’
threats, that will include fellow Rangers, and Dragonite. Then Ritchie is going in with his Charizard,
Ash’s Charizard, and my Chandelure to draw Froslass out.”

*Turning up the heat, and with Ash all in the middle.*

“The data gathered from Skarmory and Swanna before their retreat shows, wait for it, more snow
and ice, however judging by the geo-scan and knowledge that Ash fell into a cavern, assuming that
is where he is, there must have been a collapse, and the remnants of the crevice opening has been
covered up by the storm.”

“So,” said Gary, “what you’re saying is that Ash could be in this bubble of ice which can go at any
moment.”

“That is correct. If the water rises any further it will only destabilize the ice formations more, but we
managed to get a Water Team from Kanto to deal with those unstable formations. The plan is they go
in and get Ash out from underneath as Froslass is pulled away from above and neutralized.”

*Well that sounds all well and good and all, if not risky as hell.*

“Who’s Water Team?” asked Dragonite.

“It’s Max’s,” said Mary, “Dewgong and Sneasel, and on such short notice we should consider
ourselves lucky.”

_Huh, Gary, you remember Max, even though you only met him like one time, you remember him
and his stupid glasses and his stupid pony tail and crooked smile because he hit on Ash once, just
once. You made sure it was just once._

“Should Alakazam or any psychic pokemon be impaired from using Teleport* from Froslass’
powers, the helicopter shouldn’t have any trouble in transporting Ash to Viridian Memorial, better
safe than sorry.”

All the while Mary was speaking, her Chandelure kept getting progressively closer, until Mary could
hear its flames, “Oh my goodness! You know the safe distance mister!”

Chandelure sniffed Mary and barked.

“You can’t be serious,” said Ritchie.

Mary looked beyond done, “Where is it Chani? Where do you sniff it coming from?”

Chandelure barked at Mary’s leg, she pulled up her pants in time for everyone to see a newly
manifested Disable* mark actually move towards her knee – “Well” –

Mary’s knees suddenly gave out, making her stumble forward with Thomas catching her, “WELP!”
said Mary loudly near poor Thomas’ ear, “The Disable* has at least latched onto THAT instead of
any vital organs, yippe, okay so, Dragonite, Ritchie, you both are going to lead the team. I will stay
behind with Gary.”
“I’m going to stay by you,” said Thomas, “in case Alakazam and I need to rush you to the hospital.”

“Honestly you should go to the hospital now,” said Dragonite.

“I am not going anywhere,” Mary said in a simple tone that threatened death and destruction to any and all who challenged her, “The Disable* has centered in my legs, the feeling will come back soon, I can serve as a coordinator at least, HERE.”

_Well alright then._

“I really feel I should stay here with you however,” said Thomas.

“One of those, psychic feelings?” said Ritchie raising an eyebrow, appearing by Mary with some Mental Herbs.

“Yes,” said Thomas flatly, his Alakazam huffed as well.

“Fine,” Mary spat, snatching the Herbs from Ritchie and just stuffing them in her mouth _chewing them up._

Gary felt a little pat on his leg, it was Audino, chirping sternly, and then it pointed to Mary.

“You want to try something?” Gary asked, Audino’s eyes looked back with determination, something Gary rarely sees. “Mary, Audino wants to try a transfer method on you.”

“What transfer method?” said Mary with a mouth full of Herbs, eyes watering. Alakazam used its powers and let Audino’s intent be known through everyone’s mind, Mary stopped chewing and spit the Herbs out into the trash with another gross loogie, “Oh my god, you think you can pull the Disable* out of me?”

“That’s, Audino that’s amazing!” said Ritchie.

“Also practically unheard of,” said Thomas.

Audino shook its head, and looked to Gary who understood, “Audino wants to try, go ahead Audi.”

Audino chirped loudly, and waddled its little self up next to Mary. It looked back to Gary, who nodded, “Go ahead Audi, you can do it.”

Audino placed its hands on Mary’s knees, and closed its eyes. The pokemon used Heal Pulse*, its body glowing slightly pink, but Mary wasn’t feeling her knees being healed so much as a strange force literally reach in through the very sinews of her veins, muscles, and tissue.

“Oh my godness Audino,” Dragonite breathed, “Oh my goodness, do you, even understand what you’ve accompl” –

“Shhhh!” tutted Gary, “Audi needs to focus!”

Audino’s face was strained, its hands were shaking, but the Disable* mark was retreating!

Mary suddenly pushed Audino away, “Audino wait, if this is a new healing ability you’ve attained, just wait, we don’t know what your endurance is on it yet” –

Thomas stepped forward, “But Mary” –

“But nothing, Audino just might be the key in saving Ash’s life, we don’t know what Froslass has
done to Ash, and I don’t want Audino using this technique up on me. We’ve got to keep all options out on the table, if we’re able to get Ash out of there with little effort then fine, but I think we should be prepared for the worst.”

Audino looked at its hands, then up to Gary, who looked at his pokemon with great reverence, “Audino, do you think you can go out onto the field?”

“We won’t let anything happen to you,” said Thomas, “You can bank on that promise.”

Audino’s tiny hands clenched, it looked up with determination and trilled strongly.

“How are your legs Mary?” asked Ritchie.

“They feel like they’re hella asleep, but that is light years better than before,” she replied, “Now, let’s modify this plan a bit…”

As the Rangers discussed their plans, Gary pulled out his com with Ash’s profile still on the screen…..*Soon sweetheart….Soon….*

*****

Froslass rubbed its eyes with both its tiny hands, leaving Ash’s com to hover near it with its powers. Its eyes were hurting, be it from the excessive crying or of the bright light via the com from watching the home videos ever on end. It looked up towards Ash who was still very much passed out, slumped down at a slightly odd angle. Froslass rubbed its eyes again, wiping away the last of the clear tears, blinking to set its eyesight right. It grabbed the com from the air and selected another video from Ash’s library to play.

The video begins with it being jumbled about as Ash ran about a house, a voice was singing in the background but finished before Ash arrived in on Gary cooking in the kitchen.

Ash was panting, “Gary, one more time, pleeeeeease? I want to get it on film!”

“Ash I sing for you all the time” –

“Plllleeeeeeeeeyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy yyyy
“Wi~se me~n say, only foo~ls ru~sh in,

But I, can’t, help, falling in lo~ve, wi~th yo~u…

Shall, I sta~y? Would it be~ a~ si~n?

If I, can’t, help, fa~lling in love, wi~th yo– ”

The video was suddenly interrupted with an incoming call from Gary. Froslass blinked, watching Gary’s icon flash across the screen as the com vibrated in its hands, until it lit up with the message ‘Missed Call’, and minimized itself.

Froslass looked up over at Ash while the video on the com continued on its own, the ice and ghost pokemon narrowing its eyes, studying Ash’s lifeless form, and Gary’s voice chimed in, “Ash? Are you okay?”

Froslass looked back down at the com seeing the video had finished, and then the screen lit up with another incoming call from Gary.

Froslass hovered over to Ash’s side, “Look Ash, its Gary!”

There was no response from Ash, much less movement.

Froslass pulled Ash’s hair hard, so much as to pull his head up with the tug, but there was still no response.

_He’s dead…You killed him, _came Bergmite’s voice, _You horrible miserable monster! You killed him! You killed the poor human!_

_Oh shut up_, said Froslass, _He is still alive, I can hear him breathing, it is faint, but he is hanging on….Oh, it is so beautiful how he, BursNs._

_YOU ARE CRAZY! _Bergmite screamed stomping its little feet.

Froslass changed into Gary, kneeling in front of Ash. It cleared its throat, attempting to speak, “Ash? Ash can you wake up for me?” It was close to Gary’s voice, but not quite, “Ash? Sweetheart? Can you hear me? I want you to wake up now?” It was better, but still not quite, if it could have taken a taste of the real Gary, like it had Ash, it would have had him down pat. Froslass!Gary cleared its throat one more time, “Ash, want me to sing for you?” _There it is._

Ash stirred ever so slightly, but with that stirring came several creeping thick coughs coated in phlegm from Ash’s lungs, he stirred more, his body moving slightly, till eventually he tilted himself too far over and slid down onto his side.

Froslass!Gary huffed, changing back into its regular Froslass form and set the com down next to Ash. It crossed its arms, looking down just over the edge of the gaping crevice. Ash began coughing again along with a sickening gurgling sound –

_He’s choking! He’s choking!_ screamed Bergmite, _Pick him up now! NOW!_

Froslass took its time turning around and moving Ash upright into a slumped sitting position, patting his chest to calm the ailing Ranger’s lungs. Froslass crinkled its nose, there was something leaking out of Ash’s nose and the corner of his mouth. Froslass stuck out its tongue, it wasn’t mucus or blood, but a _black_ substance. Ash was slightly conscious for a moment, and faded just as quickly back into unconsciousness.
Well now, commented Froslass, *Even I’m not sure how to fix that.* Froslass placed its hand on Ash’s head and pushed him over onto his other side.

*I’m going to make you a promise Froslass,* said Bergmite wiggling restlessly in its trap, *I am going to avenge that human, if it is the last thing I do.*

*By all means then,* Froslass whipped around, holding out its wrist as Ash did when he offered himself, *Go ahead then,* it sneered.

The buzzing of Ash’s com came again, Froslass looked down slightly to see the device move around a bit on the ice from the vibrations, then set its attention back to Bergmite, *Come on then, strike me down oh mighty protector,* but when it noticed Bergmite’s eyes growing wide, it did a double take noticing Ash’s hand trying to reach out for the device, shaking, quivering, the young man could barely even move. Froslass felt, *feels* Ash’s burning, *burning* desire to answer it, to talk to him, to reach Gary, his Gary, his name flashing across on the screen, such burning delicious emotions – Froslass watched in amazement, it watched Ash burn.

Bergmite could only watch in horror as Froslass moved over Ash with its mouth watering and its eyes wild.

***

Gary grasped his com in his hands, holding it up to his mouth. His com began buzzing, and when he read the flashing name across the screen in his mind, it only took microseconds to process the miracle caller before he screamed, “ASH?!”

Ritchie dropped the equipment he was packing – everyone in the room stopped what they were doing to look up, Mary rolled herself on her chair straight over to Gary in one push, coming by his side in an instant as Gary answered, practically screeching into his device, “ASH?! ASH CAN YOU HEAR ME?!”

Silence.

Gary was shaking almost uncontrollably, “Ash, Ash, please, talk to me, TALK TO ME!”

Silence.

Mary attempted to move the com her way with little luck, Gary’s grip was like a vice, forcing her to lean over instead, “Ash, we need a sign right now, tap the com’s mic if you’re able, let us know you have some motor function in you.”

Silence. Silence filled the room with nothing but the softly whirring static of the com itself, until, there came a single, small, “Hello?”

*Gary, that is not Ash’s voice.*

“Hi. U-um…”

Gary’s brow furrowed, his body was completely still allowing Mary to place her hand over his own, glaring at the rising whispers in the room to shut the hell up, she tilted the com more her way, “Who is this? Where is Ash?”

“A friend. Ash is unconscious. Where did Gary go?”

“I-I’m right here, please, who are you? Is Ash okay? Why is he unconscious?”
Can you really be talking to it? Are you really talking with IT—

“I told you I am a friend, I am calling because I have chosen to do so.”

In the background Gary and Mary could hear a pokemon barking.

“Who are you?” asked Mary more solidly, “Is that pokemon making noise a threat to your situation?”

“It is hardly a threat at all, it is a Bergmite, and a very stupid one at that.”

Gary heard a piece of furniture get violently kicked, he looked up to see Ritchie (half rubbing his leg), Dragonite, and Chandelure putting on the rest of their gear as fast as they could, Thomas with two other teammates were helping the Charizards suit up with Swanna –

**FUCKING, FINALLY, GARY, GARYYYYYY LOCATION FUCKING LOCKED —**

Mary’s frantic movements of her hands with her own com and papers were disguised under the cover of her calm voice, “A Bergmite huh? They’re pretty rare for this region,” she circled a point in red on a map and hands it over to Ritchie who snatched it up and was out of sight without a second word –

*I MEAN IT’S NOT LIKE WE DIDN’T HAVE BERGMITE LOCATION MEMORIZED BUT OKAY —*

Gary felt like he was having an out of body experience, he had no time to even give Ritchie a glance of ‘good luck’, the rescue team had swiped themselves up their gear and were gone in record time out the door: Ritchie, Dragonite, Chandelure, Swanna, and the Charizards along with three other Rangers and their pokemon to come in on air support, –

“You must be Froslass then,” said Mary, she motioned Thomas to patch through to the main Kanto branch on the base com. Gary watched as she signaled with her own com it was go time for the Kanto Water Team sending them Ash’s location.

“How do you know I am a Froslass?”

“Well, we are Rangers after all, it would be pretty sad of us to not be able to collect intel from our own backyard you know?”

“That is true,” said Froslass, “I have learned from Ash that Rangers are very resourceful.”

“I must say, we are kind of already acquainted, that was an impressive show of power with the zombie army you made.”

“Oh so that’s where they all ended up, and they are not zombies,” said Froslass, "they've been brought back to life, but this is good, you can back me up and tell Ash the dead can come back to life, that my efforts are not in vain.”

**SERIOUSLY???????? IT IS TRYING TO REVERSE ITSELF, OH NO, OH NOOOOOOOOOOO Bitch you’re are going to fucking double die —**

Gary cleared his throat, there was so much he was burning to say and his mind was going at a mile a minuet, Mary placed an arm around his shoulder looking at him, almost pleading with her eyes to let her lead, but Gary just had too much bottled up inside –

“I bet you must hate me,” said Froslass.
“YES, YOU” –

Mary wrapped an arm Gary’s middle and squeezed hard to subdue him, knocking the wind clean out of his lungs, Mary then fiercely whispered in his ear, “Ash is its hostage Gary Oak” –

“Monster? Demon? Freak? I’ve heard them all before, but, I would like to give Ash credit for not once calling me any of those names. He gets it.”

Mary continued to whisper harshly to Gary, “We have to keep it occupied until the team gets there, we cannot let it do further harm to Ash, much less entice it to do so, now get a grip on yourself Gary Oak” –

“And I get him. In a way, we are not so different from one another.”

OH GOD THIS IS GOING TO BE THE TEST OF YOUR LIFE GARY OAK – YOU KNOW WHAT JUST LET MARY DO THE TALKING, JUST LET HER FUCKING DO IT LIKE YOU PLANNED BECAUSE YOU ARE NINE TIMES OVER VENGEANCE READY TO TEAR THIS THINGS ASSHOLE OUT ITS BRAIN –

“We even bleed the same now.”

Mary took control of the com from Gary’s weakened hands, “What do you mean you both bleed the same?”

“A part of me is inside of him, and a part of him is inside of me. I shouldn’t be surprised this would happen, but it confirms something for me at least…You see, when I first met Ash he was in bad shape, he would have died if I didn’t help him, so I used Pain Split* to heal him, and the trade off happened, so I feels he kinda owes me you know?”

Gary felt an anger he didn’t know he could feel ignite his nerve endings, and before he could even begin to check his emotions again Mary did that for him with another sharp squeeze; she pressed on picking up on a hint of remorse from Froslass, “Froslass, what is your ability?”

“It is Cursed Body*, and I think it suits me.”

Gary was shaking.

This pokemon used Pain Split* on Ash, a dead pokemon, a Cursed Body* ability pokemon, shared its life with someone living like Ash – that means his body has been introduced with a conflicting bio-code – this would weaken him over time as his body tries to remedy it, or…accept it – no, his body must be FIGHTING to stay alive against this pokemon’s influence on top of merely surviving! That is your Ash, Gary, he really is Superman! He should not be alive at all! Oh, god, what if he isn’t –

Gary could tell the cogs in Mary’s head were turning just as rapidly unlike his own that were about to derail, yet they both felt to be on the same page – Audino was going to be crucial to Ash’s survival!

“Which brings me to my point of how we bleed the same,” Froslass continued, “We’re both in pain, and I did not realize that until I learned more from him, but, if you must know, in a more literal sense, he is bleeding black, he was coughing earlier, and it dribbled off his mouth and down his nose.”

OH NEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE
“Yes.”

“Why,” Gary shook—

**FUCK. HE’S BEEN INFLUENCED BY CURSED BODY, AND DISABLE*, IT’S ALL IN HIM, IT’S ALL IN HIS BODY HOW HAS HE EVEN MANAGED TO HANG ON THIS LONG???? IF, HE HAS??? WHY IS HE NOT TALKING IS HE DEAD, IS HE DEAD, IS HE DEAD –

Audino was shaking in fear by its trainer.

“Oh Gary, I can feel you from here,” said Froslass in a stilted way that took both Gary and Mary off-guard, “I can feel how you burn, I should have sampled you when I had the chance, your love, your anger, your desire, I, I can’t almost stand it!”

WHAT. THE. EVER. LASTING. FUCK – okay. Okay. In the long, long offshoots of conversation to be having with this damn thing, you really can only think of one more option that is more horrible than what has just been presented. No, no wait you can’t.

“He is a fighter,” said Froslass, “so naturally, I had to take actions to subdue him.”

Gary almost broke his com with how hard he grabbed it out of anger, Mary finally yanked it out of his hands with her own rage fueling her strength –

”* How many times did you use the attack on him?*” asked Mary in as calm a manner as she could muster.

“As many times as I needed to put him in his place. I am in need of his life, and once I am done with him, you will be free to collect him.”

LOLOLOLOLOLOL – BITCH YOU JUST WAIT – RITCHIE AND THE TEAM ARE GOING TO FUCKING END YOU.

“I am excited to meet you all.”

“Likewise,” said Mary, “But first, I must ask for your assistance in helping asses Ash’s wounds, and it sounds like he is in pretty bad shape despite your help. You stated you used Pain Split* on him, that Disable* was used on him multiple times, and now he is unconscious and is bleeding black. You must understand that his life is in imminent danger. Disable* in any form can have terrible side effects on humans, and it looks like Ash is suffering from the worst of it.”

Mary going over Ash’s condition hit Gary like a truck – he saw Mary typing on her own com a message to all members of the rescue team that read ‘Ash has no time, severe Disable* injection/ biocode manipulation, respond with immediate methods when able.’

“I am aware of what Disable* can do,” said Froslass, “I am right here, I will not let him die as long as my conditions are met.”

**OH FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCK**

**YOUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU** –

“Understood,” said Mary, “We will agree to meet your terms, thusly, will you assist us in assessing Ash’s condition?”

“Sure, why not.”
"Something is not right here Gary, why is it going along with you all so easily?"

As the team cut through the stormy night, Ritchie read the update and felt something deep in his soul throb in pain. He gripped his Charizard’s harness, his pokemon feeling his ambition cut through his absolute fear of losing his best friend – “Zippo!” Ritchie gripped his Mega-Bracelet, his Charizard glancing back full of drive knowing what its nickname signals, “Let’s give this EVERYTHING WE HAVE!”

Charizard roared setting off its Mega-Evolution, its Charizard Y form blasting through the barrier of transformation energy, but now in addition to its Mega form, its ability Drought cut through the storm with ease, and on its face, horns, and wings were markings in connection to Ritchie’s appearance.

“Incredible”, Dragonite commented, “An Affinity Evolution on top of a Mega-Evolution!”

"Together Zippo, we’re going to bring Ash back, even if we have to go through hell itself!"

Mega-Charizard Y’s booming roar shook the landscape before it – until an orb of light exploded in front of them from out of nowhere, and absorbed all of Charizard Y and Ritchie into it!

Chandelure and Ash’s Charizard barked in alarm, Dragonite and the rest of the team stopped dead in their tracks as other mysterious orbs of light burst out from the darkness –

"Ritchie!"

“STAY BACK!” Dragonite ordered to the other Rangers, “These are the mirage traps!”

A sudden eerie song filled the stormy air, calming the storm gracefully until the snow and wind was but a gentle breeze…

Dragonite and the other Rangers were on edge, “This is new,” Dragonite hissed, “These traps are stronger than the ones I faced before, alas, we have already lost the upper hand!”

“INCOMING!” yelled a Ranger – Dragonite spotted an iced dragon kin, an iced Dragonite along with several other zombified flying pokemon attacking from above –

“I assume you know how to use the com right?” asked Mary, “I would like you to face-time us, and show us Ash himself.”

“Give me a minuet,” Froslass responded.

Gary and Mary could hear the muffled movement from the com’s microphone till Gary’s com received a face-time request from Ash, Mary tapped the accept button.

The screen lit up with it pointed at the snowy and icy ground, part of Froslass’ flowing body could be seen, the com was tilted up to show Froslass’ face for a split second before it was turned over to Ash, “Well, there he is,” said Froslass.

This is the first time you’ve seen him since the morning, and oh Gary the change is night and day.

An audible gasp escaped Mary. Gary looked at his lover half slumped over, unconscious, half dead with a small stream of black down his nose and the side of his mouth.

“This is good,” came Froslas’ voice unusually chipper, “I think he can hear us, he is breathing more profoundly, can you see his chest rising up and down?”

You can.

“Froslas,” Mary’s voice was exceedingly calm, “Lift up Ash’s jacket and shirt, I need to see his skin underneath around his chest area.”

“You do know Gary is present, do you not?” responded Froslas.

“If he is coughing up black, the Disable in him is most likely centering around his chest area, I need to see the extent of Ash’s condition.”

“Very well.”

Gary could see Ash’s jacket with his layered clothing getting pulled up from Froslas’ powers, and then his heart crashed through the floor. Ash’s chest was almost all blackened over with thin wispy veins reaching every which way, they surely must be reaching up his neck and arms –

Mary mouthed ‘Oh god’ – “Froslas, this is very serious for Ash, he is in a life and death situation, you understand that don’t you?” –

“I think I made that it clear that I do.”

Gary’s mind was on autopilot, he watched Mary screen shot the image and forwarded it to all rescue team members with the caption, ‘Water Team have resuscitation methods at the ready, all Team Members, Froslas must be neutralized as quickly as possible, Ash has no time’ – but a returning message came with a loud jingle, and Mary prayed Froslas wasn’t paying too close attention –

The feed from Ash’s com turned towards Froslas’ face, partially showing the collapsed and sealed ceiling, “Now that I have done something for you, I want Gary to do something for me and Ash.”

“What is it?” asked Mary as she read through the Rescue Team’s update.

How can he even still be alive. How is he alive, how can he be surviving Cursed Body influence and multiple Disable attacks that are centering around his chest….

“Gary.”

Gary watched Mary send another message to all Team Members, ‘Leave Ritchie and Charizard’s recovery from the mirage traps to Chandelure, and Chandelure alone. When combating the iced pokemon’ –

What, Ritchie is gone into a mirage trap what – WHAT MORE ICED POKEMON WHAT –

Gary suddenly received a sharp pinch from Mary –

“Gary. What are you looking at?” hissed Froslas.

Gary mind forcefully pulled itself from the black depths, “I” –

“Let me guess,” said Froslas raising its head, “There are people on their way here now, is that right?
That is fine. Send as many as you like.”

“You must understand Froslass, we only wish to proceed as peacefully as possible,” said Mary tilting the com so only her face would be showing, Gary would give them away too easily, “We are the ones serving you, you have shown us an incredible display of strength and control over your powers, and we must respect that power.”

Froslass narrowed its eyes, “The ability and will to control others for their own personal gain, that is one of the oldest tactics in the book, and I was foolish enough to think I was someone who could rise above it, and well, look at me now.”

A subzero chill ran down Gary’s spine watching Froslass’ eyes turn pitch black with blue pin points of light for pupils –

“I’m sorry you had to endure such cruelty,” said Mary.

“Nuance,” Froslass sneered, “Now as I was saying, Gary, I want you to do something for Ash and I, I want you to help us burn.”

Burn? THE FUCK????

“I’m sorry, our,” Mary swallowed, “Comprehension is faltering, what do you mean by burn?”

“The harder he burns, the better he tastes” –

WHAT –

“Have you been feeding off of him?” asked Mary, “Are you draining his energy? Was Pain Split* not enough?”

“Pain Split* was to heal him stupid. His energy is part of my plan to change back into a human. Every time I feed from him, I regained more of my humanity back, and now, more than ever, I feel it, I feel myself returning!”

Gary felt another squeeze around his waist from Mary, with Gary’s com still focused on her, he was free to look at Mary’s com which had a message Mary had typed out single handedly – ‘This is how Ash survived this long, Froslass has been absorbing the Disable* effects into itself with each attack slowing down the progression, it must be using Draining Kiss*, please be strong.’

Gary almost choked, pleading internally with his eyes, *No, no Mary please, please don’t ask me to do this*–

“Now about what I want you to do for Ash and I, Gary,” said Froslass, “This will help the both of us, I can feel it.”

First it took Ash, then Ritchie, and now, it’s coming for you Gary, oh god someone help us please!!

Ritchie knew right away he was in serious trouble. One moment he was flying on his Charizard, the next moment his pokemon disappeared out from under him as he stumbled off it into a completely dark zone, leaving Ritchie all alone in the darkness. *This, has to be those mirage traps!* Ritchie thought, *Unbelievable, this, it all feels so real, but it’s happening inside my head!*

Ritchie snorted, these goggles didn’t help jack squat to see through the mirage trap, but best to keep
them on anyway. He took a step forward and the scar across his chest ached, *Oh…that’s not good.* Clutching his shirt he took another step forward on the faux solid ground. “Oh…?” A small light appeared before Ritchie in the darkness, blossoming into a forest landscape. Before him, he saw images of Ash looking through his binoc-cam while he himself was curled up on Ash taking a nap; Ash’s free hand gently petting Ritchie side as he slept and drooled over the side of Ash’s leg.

*Hey, Ritchie, internal conflicting voice here, I have some advice, this is in the past.*

Ritchie clutched his chest tighter, *YOU…don’t…These are our memories! Don’t you dare dig into this!*  

*Oh for fucks sake. Nevermind.*

Ash set the binoc-cam down and gently shook Ritchie awake, Ritchie rubbed his eyes and sat up, “Hmmm~?” he hummed.

“I saw it again.”

Ritchie sat up faster, “Moltres?”

“Yeah….And I, I think” –

“Ash, Ash, come on now, honestly it’s favoring you! You gotta put this on file for your candidacy! Don’t you know what this means?!”

Ash smiled weakly, “Maybe it just really likes watching us work?”

“UUUUUUUUUGH!” Ritchie let himself fall over Ash’s lap, “You’re killing me here.”

“Ritchie, what do you think it sees in me?”

Ritchie looked up to Ash, “….What I see in you every day.”

Gary’s hands shook holding his com. “What,” he swallowed, “Do you want me to do?”

“Wake him up. I tried to do so earlier in your form, but there is nothing like the real thing, besides Ash does not find me too appealing when I use your form anyhow. He let me look through his home videos of you guys, and…..”

If Gary and Mary hadn’t known any better, they would have thought the feed had froze, but it was Froslass who was suddenly still, until it blinked, gave several deep almost sputtering breaths – the com shook and tilted down –

“Are you alright?” asked Mary –

“I'M FINE!” Froslass screamed turning the com back up at its face, “Gary, you talk to him, make him burn” – Froslass pointed the com towards Ash, holding it close to his sleeping face.

If only it were possible, Gary would’ve reached right through the screen to caress Ash’s face, instead, Froslass’ frozen little hand reached out just under Ash’s chin and tilted his head up. Gary meant to speak, but his throat had suddenly shut itself. Mary nudged him, so Gary swallowed it down, all of it, his fear, his HATRED towards this monster, and spoke to his beloved, “Ash, Ash can you hear me?”
No response.

“Louder,” demanded Froslass.

“Sw-sweetheart, please, I need to hear you, I need to hear you’re okay.”

Still no response.

“Unbelievable!,” Froslass huffed, Ash’s com was jumbled about, Gary and Mary couldn’t see Ash anymore, only ice and a shaking screen getting shuffled about –

“Froslass what are you doing?! Wait! Let me try more!”

Froslass pulled Ash’s limp body up by the scruff of his collar, “Get up Ash, get up, get up! Your humans are on the com Ash, get up, get up now!”

Ash’s face twitched slightly but for the most part he was still unresponsive.

“Stupid human,” Froslass hissed, “The least you can do is say hello!” Froslass pulled its hand all the way back and struck Ash with a Wake-up Slap* attack across his face, hitting him so hard a tooth popped right out, Ash’s body was thrown from the force to land on his side like a rag doll –

Gary and Mary heard a thick smacking noise off-screen, a gasp escaped Gary –

DID IT JUST STRIKE HIM??!??!

The memory Ritchie was encompassed in suddenly shorted and went out, leaving him in darkness for a couple of seconds until a small pinpoint of light focused ahead. Ritchie adjusted his goggles, and through the darkness, he could barely see Ash, asleep, and transparent – “ASH!!” Ritchie bolted forward, but was stopped in his tracks by another memory that flickered on like a light. This time it was Ash and Gary at their home eating dinner at their table. They were silent, both carrying almost blank looks on their faces –

STOP IT!

Bergmite screamed, ENOUGH! ENOUGH! ENOUGH!

Froslass stop, what are you doing?” Mary demanded back.

The com was picked back up to show Froslass’ face, “He is moving a little now, squirming, try again Gary.”

Froslass hauled Ash up once again into a sitting position with the com placed back near his face; Froslass lifted up Ash’s head with its small hand again, albeit more roughly, shaking him slightly. Gary and Mary could now see a fresh cut on Ash’s cheek where he must have been struck by something, Ash was wincing, a droplet of blood came out his mouth.

Gary and Mary were absolutely fuming internally.

Regardless of this being a ghost type, you’re pretty sure you can tear this thing apart with your bare hands Gary.

Gary felt another squeeze from Mary, it was taking everything he had to keep his composure, “Ash, it’s me, Gary, sweetheart, be strong sweetheart, I know it hurts baby, but please, let me hear you...”
Gary’s voice trailed off, his eyes had clouded over with tears.

Ash’s wincing eyes slowly opened, and then opened wider when he realized he was looking at Gary through his com. He immediately tried to speak, but his throat only gave squeaks –

Gary’s heart was about to explode, “Ash-Ash, I’m here, sweetheart I’m right here”.–

The view via Ash’s com was starting to slightly shake, Ash was still trying to speak –

“Sweetheart don’t push yourself, you don’t have to say anything, I’m” –

“Sorry…” Ash swallowed, forcing his throat to speak again through a whisper, “I’m, sorry.”

Gary physically felt his heart snap in two, and before he had any time to reciprocate, the com was violently shaken and dropped to the ground, facing upwards at the cavern top – there came a quick flash of light and a terrible gobbling sound of Froslass eating something, Bergmite was barking in a panic –

“NO! ASH! ASH!” –

“Froslass!” Mary yelled taking control of Gary’s com, “Froslass, he has done what you asked, ENOUGH!”

Gary and Mary could hear Froslass’ heavy breathing in the background, Bergmite was still worked up into a panic. The com was picked back up showing Froslass eyes wide, almost wild, as if it was barely keeping any sane part of itself intact, “I cannot believe,” Froslass gulped, “the spark alone from you,” Froslass continued to breathe heavily, “This emotion, this is amazing, AMAZING! I can hardly contain this will to live! This unyielding strength in the face of all odds! This is humanity! This is humanity’s greatest spirit! His will to live! With the two of you together, it is unshakable! I am amazed! I am utterly amazed! Love! This is true love!”

It was Mary’s turn to narrow her eyes, the voice of the Froslass had changed slightly, and a horror she had only felt once before began to rise from her stomach, *I know that voice….It…It can’t be….*

Ritchie followed the memory of Ash and Gary’s quiet evening, although somewhat reluctantly as it entered into their bedroom when they retired for the night. After they both slipped into bed, Ash curled up on his side facing away from Gary, and oh, Ritchie felt in his heart the pained look on Gary’s face as he watched Ash settle. Ever so daringly, Gary moved in closer towards him. He leaned over Ash and gave him a kiss on his shoulder, Ash jumped slightly, but Gary soothed him by running a hand all the way down his side.

“Sweetheart, you know you can come to me about anything right?”

“I’m just tired, don’t worry….I can handle it.”

With a hand now unnerved, Mary gripped the com, “Froslass, you used Draining Kiss* on Ash, didn’t you?”

“*Huff, huff*, yes, I did….” Froslass laughed slightly, Ash’s com was titled at an angle showing Froslass, and a part of Ash’s leg that lay so still, “He loves him so much….One time, he even cried
Gary’s name in his sleep. And, then, he offered to let me take all I wanted of him in exchange that I do not harm his friends or family. What do you think of that? That he truly believes such an exchange can be made, much less honored. But, I think he knows….deep down….deep down…..we’re…….” Froslass’ eyes turned sad.

Mary swallowed, “What are you feeling?”

Gary tilted the com towards himself, “Are you happy with what you’ve done?” he spat; Mary nudged him hard in the ribs.

“It…it is funny I am asked that now,” said Froslass, “I am….somber….At first I did not understand, how Ash can love Gary so much, yet still feel so sad inside? But as I absorbed more from him, it feels familiar. It is sad. I think you listened to him, but heard only what he wanted you to hear.”

That sentence fell on deaf ears to Mary as she took the opportunity to further coordinate the rescue team with Ritchie and his Charizard still lost, but each word took a stab at Gary’s already beaten, bruised, and broken heart.

“He just loves so much. When I first tasted him, I could feel it. I could feel a radiating love, and I became, jealous I think is the word. I wanted it. I had forgotten how it was to speak, the more I ate from him, I realized I had forgotten how it was to feel alive. I forgot how wonderful it could feel inside me….. I have come to the conclusion that he is an idiot, much in the way that I was. Like I mentioned before, he let me watch his com videos…..and…..I felt so sad…..a part of him in me was crying so hard it leaked out, and I was sad for him, and I was sad for myself….It is amazing, even if Ash is upset with Gary, he still loves him unconditionally. I can feel what Ash so desperately wants to tell Gary, it burns so much I almost cannot stand it.”

If a bolt were to strike you down dead Gary, that would be merciful for what you are feeling right now.

“I can see how Ash’s judgment would be clouded though,” Froslass continued, “he is sad on the inside, like me….We are not that different….I feel bad for him, and I think he deserves and act of mercy at best after this.”

Mary’s ears snapped up, “And what do you define as an act of mercy?”

“If I truly knew, perhaps I would not have turned out this way,” said Froslass, “Gary, do you remember, that day, when Sylveon died, and Ash came home so upset, and you, were not able to help?”

“How, could you possibly know that,” Gary breathed.

“I told you…a part of him is inside of me, I can feel, what has hurt him the most, what has brought him the most joy…those memories…the ones that, burn….He loves it when you sing to him, why did you stop?”

“I, I didn’t stop, I just, haven’t…I haven’t sung for him recently, I was giving him space…..”

“That’s how it began for me Gary, people, just didn’t want to deal with me anymore” –

“No, no, that’s not Ash and I at all” –

“Then why do I feel so sad when I think about you? Ash is so disappointed in himself, he feels like he failed you in every way” –
“NO! ASH! Ash, if you can hear me, I love you with all my heart, with every bit of it, and I am so sorry—….”

Froslass’ face suddenly turned into a wide twisted smile, “That’s it Gary, burn for me!”

“CHAAAAAANNEEEEERUUUUURE!”

Chandelure let loose a Fire Blast* and Shadow Ball combination, burning away a great chunk of the mirage orb. Faintly through the weakening orb, it could see Ritchie’s and Charizard’s forms suspended inside –

“Keep going Chandelure! You’ve almost got them free!” cheered Dragonite, “We’ll continue to dispel the other mirages and shut down the iced pokemon!”

“DRAGONITE LOOK!”

Dragonite looked up to see the Rangers and their pokemon retreating from what looked to be a conglomerate of the mirage orbs and iced pokemon merging together, the orbs were latching onto one another, absorbing themselves and the iced pokemon like water droplets – the great glowing mass began to pull in the mirage orb holding Ritchie and Charizard, but Chandelure used its powers to hold it back –

The Rangers could only watch as the mirage traps and iced pokemon together formed a monstrosity, that of a phantom monster slightly resembling an Articuno.

OH YOU FUCKING BITCH!

“Froslass, you” –

“You are cruel,” came Ash’s voice off screen.

Froslass blinked, and turned to Ash, “Excuse me?”

“You are cruel,” Ash repeated, his voice was oddly clear, but faint, “If I’m disappointed in anyone right now, it is you.”

Gary watched helplessly as Froslass’ powers curled a grip around Ash’s neck to raise him up, Ash back to wincing in pain, and not only that, Froslass’ hand morphed into that of a human’s. Ash’s com was left to float off to the side from Froslass’ powers, but from what Gary could see, Froslass had changed into him, much to his and Ash’s disgust.

“If I truly were cruel,” said Froslass!Gary –

GARY IT EVEN FUCKING SOUNDS LIKE YOU NOW –

–“I would not have even let you speak to him. Besides, I think it’s time you gave me your due.”

Chandelure had no choice but to leave Ritchie and his Charizard in the mirage orb and help fight the phantom ice and flying legendary. The fire and ghost pokemon teamed with Ash’s Charizard, and Dragonite, all three letting loose a Fire Blast* that blocked an obscenely strong Blizzard* attack that
froze Swanna’s wing, sending the poorpokemon into a dive –

Ash swallowed, his voice still weak, “So that’s it then….” He barely had one eye open, he swallowed again under Froslass!Gary’s grasp, “You’re acting out,” Ash laughed slightly, “That’s all this ever was.”

Gary was sure he was about to have a stroke from the stress with Ash’s small voice breaking through –

**DO YOU SAY SOMETHING OR NOT?? WHERE THE HELL IS THE RESCUE TEAM?!?! HOW MUCH MORE TIME DO THEY NEED – OH GOD HAVE THEY ALL BEEN SWALLOWED UP LIKE RITCHIE?!?!!**

“You’re so angry” said Ash, “…and I can understand why…I’m going to be blunt, because I’m really tired, you’re mad because someone gave up on you, and then, you gave up on yourself, and, you’re trying to fix what has happened but, well, I’m sorry, but what’s done is” –

“You think you know anything about me?” Froslass!Gary hissed, “Sure, fine, I had no one else to turn to, my friends deserted me, my family hated me, and I did nothing but absorb every hateful word they said to me, so yes, I have some anger in me, A LOT OF ANGER!”

Gary could see Froslass!Gary putting pressure on Ash via its powers – “**Froslass, please**” –

“**Even she couldn’t stand me anymore,**” Froslass!Gary shook, its body began to glow –

“**Froslass it’s this anger you need to change,**” said Ash, “**If you’re to rest in peace**” –

“**YOU EXPECT ME TO REST AS I AM NOW?!**” Froslass!Gary screamed, the screen on both Ash and Gary’s com cracked, “**DO YOU REALLY THINK I WILL HAVE COME THIS FAR FOR NOTHING?**”

Ash felt the pokemon’s icy grip tighten around his neck, Froslass!Gary snarled, “If I can’t change back, if you cannot help me, then what good are you to me? I should just kill you right now and posses your body, then I’ll be human again no matter what!”

“**NO!**” screamed Gary –

“**I’ll be the complete ensemble of your love, I won’t need anything else in the whole world, I’ll steal it all, I’LL TAKE EVERY LAST BIT OF ENERGY YOU TWO HAVE LEFT! I will be a part of this amazing love forever and ever and NO ONE WILL EVER HURT ME AGAIN! I WILL ONLY NEED MYSELF!**”

“Froslass,” Ash pleaded, “you can change, but not in the way you think, you can be better than this” –

“I DON’T CARE HOW MY ACTIONS HURT YOU, I WANT TO BE HUMAN AGAIN! IF I HAVE TO COMPLETELY DEVOUR YOUR SOUL” –

"**STOP!**” Gary screamed –

Ash swallowed, “Then go ahead and do it, I can barely keep my eyes open, you think I can stop you now?”
Gary couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

WHERE IS THE FUCKING RESCUE TEAM?! On the other hand where did Mary go –

“My life is in your hands Froslass,” said Ash, “you can easily kill me….but you won’t do it.”

“YOU DON’T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ME! I’LL DO IT! I WILL KILL YOU!”

“If you had such an easy option all along to turn human again, why wait this long?”

“It is not an easy option,” Froslass!Gary spat, “It is a risky move, we could both die for good, but….if the two subjects have been made compatible, say, by sharing life forces, sampling the hosts’ energy, then, the process has a higher chance of success! It’s time, it’s time, it’s time! It’s time for your due to me!”

“So what are you waiting for? There is literally no one to stop you from completing your mission, your dream.”

“FINE!” Froslass!Gary raised its free hand preparing an Ice Shard* aimed for Ash’s heart – “THEN GO AHEAD AND DIE!” –

“NOOO!” Gary screamed –

*Ba-BUMP*

Frosslass!Gary froze, “Wha….?”

The phantom resembling Articuno malfunctioned, allowing the Ranger team to all get off solid fire hits onto it, knocking it back –

*Ba-BUMP*

What, what are you doing?” Froslass!Gary’s form dissolved away back into Froslass, “AAARHG – STUPID!”

*Ba-BUMP*

The Ice Shard* shook in Froslass’ hand, “I…! I will……I will.....”

*Ba-BUMP*

"I WILL……I……I……” With a trembling hand, Froslass touched the side of its face to find a tear trailing down, “Wh-why….?”

*Ba-BUMP*

The Ice Shard* rolled off limply from Froslass’ grip, and shattered on the ground, “What is this?...I….I feel….”

Warm?

“You said so yourself Froslass,” said Ash barely above a whisper, “A part of you is in me, and a part
of me is in you. You kept taking and taking from me….my strength, my passion, my will to live…I
don’t want to die…I want to go home….I want to be with Gary, Ritchie, Pikachu, all my friends and family….I don’t want to die….and neither did you, even though, you were convinced it was the only option left.”

“Stop,” Froslass hissed.

Gary could only continue to watch helplessly as Froslass’ grip tightened again around Ash’s neck, Mary was suddenly back by his side with a more than worried glance on her face at her com –

“You just wanted to be validated” –

“Stop – I don’t want to go back there!” Yet a bolt of remembrance cut through Froslass’ iced memories, its eyes growing wide, its body shivering as a hazy picture of two figures standing opposite one another instantly formed from the dark clouds in its head.

“But you’ve been trapped there, trapped in these terrible feelings, they turned you into something you hate” –

“BECAUSE THEY WOULD NEVER SHUT UP!” Froslass screamed, but its foggy memory continued to focus to the point where the hazy silhouettes became crisp shadow-like figures.

Ritchie almost his ripped his goggles off and wiped his eyes from watching the pain in Ash’s memories, this time it was Ash sitting alone outside on the cabin patio in the middle of the night, looking at his com and crying. Ritchie was just inches from Ash, and it would be silly to even think he could hug him to comfort him. *God….did I even help him at all,* Ritchie thought wiping his eyes again. *Ash I’m so sorry…I’m so sorry…* He looked back up, and suddenly all was shrouded in a dark mist-like fashion. He felt his nerve endings go on pitch as the memory twisted and turned into something out of a shadow play.

One figure was that of a standing young lady, the other was most definitely that of a fox-like pokemon with a fire-tipped stick in its hand, its eyes glowing red with an unabashed pernicious white smile. “I HAD NO ONE!” Froslass’ memory was still shaded, now with the young lady’s silhouette crouched down and bent over, the silhouette of the fox-like pokemon was joined by others too close to discern their own independent shapes apart from a mass of glowing red eyes.

“You did,” said Ash, “You always looked up to your sister, but you secretly hated her for always being favored” –

“BECAUSE NO ONE EVER BELIEVED IN ME! I WAS THE SCREW UP! THE WEIRD ONE! THE LU-LU BASKET CASE!”

Gary heard a pained gasp from Mary and saw her hands clasped over her mouth as her eyes welled up with tears.

“And so those people took advantage of you at your lowest point, they convinced you to do something terrible….”

Ritchie looked on at the shadow memory before him sharpen fully into the shapes of Froslass’ mind,
*This can’t be Ash’s memory, *this must be…!*

“You think you can leave as you are now?”

“I…..can’t….”

“Does this mean, you want to live as you are?”

“I can’t….please….help me…”

“There is no going back now, you have already gone past the point of no return.”

“You won’t even feel the frost enter your lungs, you won’t feel any pain at all” –

“I FEEL EVERYTHING! HELP ME! HELP ME PLEASE!”

Ritchie watched the memory slowly freeze over, and then he felt the cold creeping up on himself, he looked down and saw his own body becoming encased in ice –

Froslass’ body began to glow again, “I DECIDED TO TRUST THEM, AND I WAS STILL MADE A FOOL OF!” the ice walls in the cavern gave thick cracks –

Ash fought to hold out against the pain of his own weight being pulled down by gravity, he choked out, “Lisa–”

“STOOOOOOOOOOP!” Froslass screamed –

Ritchie couldn’t stop the ice from reaching up his body, he couldn’t move, he couldn’t do anything, it was reaching up his neck and soon it would be over his face – *No-no-no-no-no-NO-NO, I can’t die here! I can’t! I can’t, I*–

The young lady’s silhouette faded out of mind and faded back in being held up by the scruff of her neck by an invisible force, the edges of the memory were starting to crack-

“I don’t want to die! I don’t want to die! I don’t want to die!”

The ice had almost completely glazed over the memory, caking on thick, the fox-like pokemon and the legion of pokemon figures behind it faded out and a single silhouette of a Froslass reappeared in their place.

“I….”

The ice closed over Ritchie, sealing off his breath leaving just the burning heartbeat in his chest, *ASH!* 

Everything faded away save for the lone Froslass figure glowing a hazy pale blue.

“I……”

The Froslass’ eyes began to glow, its smile growing, and growing wild, it gleamed and cut through like a cold beacon, it raised its arm, and a new figure appeared where the young lady once was, grasped up by the scruff of his neck –
“I failed.”

“Needy. Useless. Helpess. Stupid. I was never in control of anything.”

“Once again, I made a mistake.”

“It was what they expected of me.”

“I don’t understand what happening inside of me.”

“I was never given the chance to be or do anything.”

“What does he think of me now?”

“What does she think of me now?”

Froslass felt a radiating warmth in its chest, everything, everything it had absorbed from Ash concentrated into a pinpoint of light in the darkness of its soul.

“I didn’t mean it.”

“I didn’t mean it.”

Froslass’ composure crumbled, clear tears freely flowing from its eyes.

“I’m just tired of messing up.”

“I’m just tired of messing up.”

The ice shattered around Ritchie, Ritchie coughing and gasping for breath as cold wind slapped him in the face – Ash’s Charizard and Chandelure were yelling at him as he scrambled with his own Charizard to get their bearings – they were free from the mirage trap, he was on his Charizard Y’s back, he was out in the field with the Rescue Team to rescue Ash – Ritchie’s com was beeping with a message – but there was no time to read it – the phantom-like Articuno was charging right for them!

But Ritchie had quite enough of phantoms –

“ZIPO, USE BLAST BURN*!”

With both a Mega-Evolution and Affinity Evolution along with a powered up Drought* ability, Ritchie’s Charizard let loose Blast Burn* with power of that exceeding Explosion*, which is exactly what the phantom Articuno did as Charizard Y’s attack annihilated it, the remnants of its body glittering down like spent fireworks –

“One hit?!” gasped Dragonite.
“That’s our Ritchie and Zippo!” cheered a team Ranger –

Ritchie gripped his com, fully pulling himself together with his pokemon riling up all their strength. “Mary! I’m here!” he linked over to the Kanto Water Team’s signal, “Sneasel, Dewgong! We’re going in! Begin your dive now!”

Gary was about to jump through the roof, RITCHIE WAS BACK! And the team was moving in! Mary was shaking from Ritchie’s message, she licked her lips to speak to Froslass, to her sister, but her throat had no voice to produce, Gary nudged her hard, but she still couldn’t –

Ash felt Froslass’ grip weaken and his body slide down slightly against the ice. The ice and ghost pokemon trembled, “I can’t…..I can’t…..”

Ash sniffled, “Do you, feel bad for what you have done?”

“I can’t….I can’t…..”

“Lisa?”

“…..I did this….”

Ash felt himself get lowered more, he could feel his feet just touch the icy ground, “It’s okay Lisa, I feel horrible too.”

“……They didn’t feel bad at all…for what they did to me….”

“I’m so sorry this happened to you Lisa…”

“I’m like them.”

“But this,” said Ash, “Lisa, is where you can be different. It’s okay, you don’t have to be this way….We, have to start with ourselves, be honest, and sometimes, a helping hand is needed, even if you don’t think you need it….If I could do it all over again, I would have begged for it…..”

If Gary could have torn a hole in space in time to snag Ash into his arms he would have, “Ash…”

“I would have told him it is not his fault. It’s me. It’s always me.”

“Ash, no, listen to me” –

“Life is so precious, and you had your life stolen from you in so many ways.”

“Ash!”

CAN HE NOT YEAR YOU???

“ASH!” Gary frantically began checking the com but Mary quickly took over,

“No, your voice isn’t going through,” said Mary, “the sound on our side isn’t, working” –

Ash lifted his head slightly, “I’m sorry you had to deal with the worst this world has to offer, because there is so much good in it…. These bad feelings, they can take you very far away from the people you love….like, well…the goodness right in front of me, and, I just pushed him away.”
“I NEVER LEFT YOU! I LOVE YOU, I AM HERE! ASH PLEASE!”

“Good things, you can realize too late, things that you do not get second chances for.”

STOP IT!

Froslass’ grip was shaking, “Then why…try at all?” The little light in its soul was flickering, wanting to become a flame, “What’s the point if the sadness just rules over all?”

“Because you deserve the chance, no matter how small, no matter how hopeless it seems….It can get better, you can be better, I promise, I’ll help it get better for you, somehow, I will.”

“For, me?”

“Yes. You’ve been gone a long time, so, why don’t you come back with me?”

“With you?”

“Yes. Lisa, like how you can feel my sadness, I, I can feel your sadness too….You know what you’re doing is wrong don’t you?”

“…Yes.”

“You understand you have hurt people and pokemon due to your actions?”

Froslass wiped its face but the tears kept coming, “Yes.” Froslass backed away completely from Ash letting him slump down, “I’m…I’m so sorry.”

Mary immediately typed up a message to Ritchie and the rest of the team to not engage Froslass, but the moment she hit Send a message error popped up.

Froslass backed itself away to the edge of the ledge, “Lisa….that’s my name….Lisa.” Froslass looked over at its reflection in the ice, and morphed another form once more, this time turning not into Gary, but into a young woman with long brown hair and tired eyes wearing plain summer clothes. “I’m….Lisa. I’m….” Still looking at her reflection, her hand went over her mouth and Lisa began to cry inconsolably.

What pushed me over the edge…what made me not care anymore, about, anything, it was anger, an anger I felt that trumped everything….But the truth is I, had made a mistake, and now I had to live with it…but I’m not living, not even when I was alive. It was always the easiest to blame me for everything because I didn’t work right. I wasn’t normal, and now, I never will be.

Lisa began to catch her breath, coughing, sniffling, and looked up at Ash with utmost remorse, “I’m so sorry…” Lisa let her head drop into her hands.

Ash gave a slow nod, “You still, must be held accountable for your actions. Lisa, you’ve done unspeakable things…The people and pokemon you hurt, you must answer to….” Ash shifted himself, trying to sit up further, going beyond what his body was ready to commit, “I can only speak for myself, but Lisa, know that I am speaking from my heart, the very same one you can feel, so feel me, the very core of me, when I tell you this.” Ash raised his right arm, trembling, as if his limb was going to break off at any moment, his hand reaching out softly, and he spoke just as gently, “Lisa, I
forgive you.”
Bergmite’s mouth dropped.
Lisa froze.

“I’m sorry, you know I’m always trying! I just, need a little more time!”

“I know, you’re ALWAYS trying Lu-Lu, always trying this, always trying that, but you’re NEVER DOING anything!”

“I’m, trying” –

“Stop saying you’re trying and DO something! Mom and Dad are at their wits end! They don’t know what to do with you! Do you have any idea what you’re putting them through?! What you’re putting us all through?! Do you think time and the world just revolves around you?!”

“I’m sorry” –

“STOP SAYING YOU’RE SORRY. Because you know what? You’re not sorry, if you were sorry, you wouldn’t even BE in this mess again! How many times do we have to do this?!”

“Where are you going?”

“To convince Mom and Dad to give ‘that other daughter’ yet another chance.”

“But what if they don’t” –

“THEN YOU FIGURE IT OUT!”

“I’m so sorry Mary” –

“Sure, Lisa, okay, and you know what? I forgive you.”

The truth is, I couldn’t fix myself on my own.

“Oh my poor sweet child. They just didn’t understand you Lisa, but it is alright, we do. We, your new family understands you, and to prove it, we, as a whole, forgive you.”

“Of course we do, we forgive you!”

“Our poor little Lu-Lu we forgive you!”

A pin drop could be heard in the Ranger’s station, that is until the Ranger from the Kanto Water Team, Max, radioed into Mary’s com, “Seasel and Dewgong have swam through the connecting water tunnel from the lake and are approaching the ice field, Ritchie and his team has still yet to confront the Froslass anomaly –.”
“You know I will always forgive my baby girl.”

“Of course, Lu-Lu, I forgive you.”

*The last thing anyone ever says to me is a lie.*

Ash felt the warmth in Lisa’s heart freeze over, and the small pinpoint of light, the tiny ember in her soul, flickered and went out. The tears stopped, and when Lisa looked up again at Ash, her eyes were black, her expression on edge, her human image cracked slightly off her face revealing her Froslass form underneath.

*They all said they forgave me.*

Froslass’ brow slowly lowered and its mouth curled up into a snarl, “Liar….”

Ash’s outreached hand wavered, “Lisa” –

“Liar…” Froslass’ from shattered through the image of Lisa – its small hands came together to form a crushing grip around Ash’s throat choking the wind out of him,

“Auh” –

“LIAR! LIAR! LIAR!” – Froslass began slamming Ash against the ice wall with everything it had punctuating each screaming word, “LIAR! LIAR! LIAR! LIAR!

“LISA STOP! STOP!” Gary screamed watching in horror as the shaking cam showed Ash getting the life beat out of him–

“YOU LEFT ME – YOU LEFT ME ALL ALONE!”

“LISA I’M HERE!” Mary screamed – Froslass once again froze in place, holding Ash’s lifeless body by his neck, a small patch of blood dripping down from the ice behind him. Froslass looked through Ash’s com, and Mary looked back, “Lisa, I’m” –

“YOU BITCH,” Froslass growled, “I’LL MAKE YOU SUFFER, I WILL MAKE YOU ALL SUFFER!!”

The Tohjo cabin began to moan, lights flickering, the windows cracking and breaking – the walls, the ceiling, the entire building was being twisted in half!

Thomas’ Alakazam was quicker to act than its gawking Ranger, immediately Teleporting* everyone outside and a safe distance away on the mountainside, Gary helping Mary to stand with her legs still having trouble, Mary clutched her com, “All Rangers engage Froslass on sight!”

“How can a Froslass have that much power?!” Thomas gasped watching the Tohjo Station crumble into itself.
Gary only had a split second to react, he threw Mary away from him as Froslass’ ghostly hand reached through his com and grabbed his throat in a near crushing grasp –

WELL ALRIGHT THEN, ODDLY ENOUGH GARY YOU KINDA SAW THAT COMING, BUT POINTS FOR REACTING.

Bergmite finally wiggled itself free from its hole, leapt the crevice, and used a vicious Bite* on Froslass’ lower half – surprising the ghost pokemon enough for it to lose its grip on Ash and Gary, leaving Ash to fall like a rag doll on the ice shelf and Ash’s com to twirl loosely in space from Froslass’ powers –

Gary dropped to his knees, coughing and holding his throat, Audino and Thomas quickly went to his aid –

WAS, WAS THAT THE TRACKER BERGMITE?!?

Froslass ripped Bergmite off its body and slammed it down with all its fury on the ice shelf, but Bergmite’s immense defense allowed itself to immediately pop right back up, placing itself between Ash’s lifeless form and Froslass – YOU ARE GOING TO HAVE TO GET THROUGH ME DEMON!!!! Bergmite roared and its body became incased in a glow!

Froslass drowning in its rage pulled back, its eyes glaring, readying a Shadowball* attack – the Ice Chunk pokemon howled as its body evolved, expanding and filling the space of the cavern quickly – Froslass fired off its Shadowball*, but it was sent right back with Mirror Coat* to explode in Froslass’ face, the ghost pokemon screaming as Avalugg emerged from the light roaring its defiance, its enormous body sheltering Ash underneath. The ice shelf began to falter from the much added weight – Avalugg moved to shift its weight on both ice shelves – a bolt of freezing air was released from Froslass’ body – Ash’s com was finally knocked to the ground, and unfortunately under the landing foot of Avalugg, smashing it flat, the feed to Gary’s com lost.

“NO! NO! ASH!”

Froslass went to strike Avalugg in the face but was met with a Crunch* attack that tore its arm completely off – the ghost pokemon ripped itself away, howling in anger, fear, and pain.

A light shined in through the ice from above, Froslass looked up and bolted through the ice out towards it, leaving Avalugg to try and hold itself steady from the ice cavern readying its final collapse –

Ritchie and the fire pokemon moved themselves right over the covered ice cavern, “Alright Zippo, you’ve got to evaporate as much of the ice cover in one go!” said Ritchie, “Use Hea” –

Froslass zipped up right in front of Ritchie, the two catching each other’s glance for a split second before a powerful Icy Wind* exploded from the ice and ghost pokemon’s body, forcing Chandelure, Dragonite, and both Charizards back. Ritchie braced himself, and the team looked on at the blazing creature before them.

Froslass’ body was engulfed in a burning black and blue aura making it look like its body was on fire, the pokemon screaming underneath the churning flames. A compound aura formed around it –

“BRACE YOURSELVES –!”
A widespread Blizzard* attack coated in the pokemon’s bioluminescence blasted from its body –

Quickly the team shielded themselves with Protect*, Ritchie’s Charizard Y catching a bit of the Blizzard* on its claws, and Ritchie catching some on his pants and coat, each bit touched becoming frozen solid – the Blizzard* pulse reached far, the attack dispelling before it hit the Water Team’s helicopter all the way near the water build up, but the bioluminescence pulse reached further, scrambling all electronic equipment except for Chandelure’s –

“YOU ARE KIDDING ME!” screamed Max in the chopper, grasping the flight-stick with all his strength to keep the machine stable and airborne –

Upon seeing the bulk of the team’s electrical components go out on Mary’s com, Thomas gasped, “This Froslass is unreal!”

“Because it’s not a Froslass anymore,” breathed Gary, still holding his neck as Audino healed him, he was shaking, trembling, “I have no doubt it has undergone another Transformation!”

"Into what?!"

The creature’s new form was revealed. It still had the base body of Froslass, but it looked like it had open cuts everywhere with blue and black flames escaping through, two lengthy cuts on its back had flames large enough to be considered ethereal wings. Its body glowed in an eerie dark light. The two ice horns on its head were now obsidian, and its eyes were still black with white ringed irises. A black substance was dripping down out of its mouth and tear ducts. Its lone right arm now looked like a long blade, like that of a scythe cut from black diamond–

Ritchie gasped, “What in god’s name” –

“DIE,” Lisa uttered –

Sneasel with its breathing device was hooked onto Dewgong’s backpack via its claws, the ice and water pokemon swimming strong through the ice flow, but from up above, bright flashing flaming lights shining through the ice suddenly caught Sneasel’s attention –

They got the Froslass’ attention, said Sneasel, Good grief! It looks like they’re having a war up there with just one teeny Froslass!

That isn’t a normal Froslass! Dewgong hissed, We have to stay focused! Ash has no time left! This ice shelf is going to collapse! I’m not even sure if I can use Horn Drill* to reach him like we intended!

Then what do we do? asked Sneasel –

KEEP SWIMMING! Dewgong yelled, and pushed itself through the crack of a submerged iceberg, Let’s move, let’s move, let’s move!

Hey I’m just a passenger here! Seasel hissed back, hanging on for its worth, feeling the ice get tighter and tighter, its pack suddenly getting caught in a hook of the berg, Ugh! This was a great idea! Dewgong answered by twisting about with a minor Horn Drill* attack, popping them both
free, Sneasel scrambled through the water to hook back onto Dewgong’s back as the Sea Lion pokemon trudged through.

Well you used Horn Drill, bravo! We’re still alive!

There! There I see it! said Dewgong, The crack, the ice is settling in a bowl formation, that’s gotta be it!

Sneasel checked the water-proof com on Dewgong’s backpack, You got it, that has to be it! Let’s do this!

YAAAAAAAAARRRRR! Dewgong charged straight up, using Horn Drill* just enough to ease them through the ice flow and crevice, finally breaching the water inside the ice cavern holding Ash and Avalugg! Dewgong’s powerful stride shot them up a good several meters, enough for Sneasel to flip position, hook onto the ice wall, and climb up with Dewgong hanging onto its pack via its teeth.

Ah! We’re here Ash! Sneasel rolled over onto the ice shelf with Dewgong –

Hello? came Avalugg’s voice.

Sneasel looked up and flinched, WOAH, woah, big guy, I thought you were a part of the cavern! –

FOCUS ON THE TASK AT HAND! yelled Dewgong clapping its flippers, Let’s go! 30 second resuscitation, you can do it!

Sneasel was by Ash’s side in seconds, going to work just as quickly slipping out its medical equipment. It tightened a plastic breathing mask over his mouth and slipped a monitor device on his blackened chest looking for a pulse, Oh man, what did that freak do to you?!

Less talk more work! barked Dewgong.

The chest device came up with a red light, I’m not getting a pulse here, Sneasel took off the med device and quickly slid a rubber base under Ash and attached two small paddles from its pack on opposing sides of Ash’s chest that delivered a shock to his heart, jumping his chest up –

You forgot to yell clear!

I DON’T TELL YOU HOW TO DO YOUR JOB! yelled Sneasel giving Ash several pumps of air from the mask, CLEAR! Sneasel delivered another dose of electricity to Ash’s heart, then tapped the chest device back on, and the red light turned to green, There we go, there we go my boy, now keep breathin’! Sneasel connected the breathing mask to the chest device, fastening them tight. The ice cavern gave an incredible jolt –

Hurry! cried Avalugg, Just take the human and go! I will be fine!

I’m trying! He’s got some head and neck trauma too, geeze! Sneasel began wrapping Ash’s head and neck to seal and brace his wounds as more bright flashes of fire and light lit up the cavern from above, I hope they’re tearing that thing apart!

From the reflection of the ice, Dewgong could see the reflection of the tag Note still holding onto Avalugg, You were the Bergmite! You are a hero!

No, this is simply the right thing to do, said Avalugg, the cavern gave another shudder, Please hurry!

“I’M TRYING! His next stop ain’t the morgue, nope, no siree! Sneasel pulled out a thin stick like
object from his pack, and with the push of a button it popped out into an impromptu stretcher just big enough to fit Ash’s upper half and keep what needed to be still, still – Sneasel worked to set Ash into place as fast as it could, fastening him in tight, **ALRIGHT!**

And then the ice seal above gave way.

Ritchie’s Charizard Y put up another Protect* as a powerful Ice Beam* whizzed by it, a terrible thick cracking sound filled the air catching their attention. Looking down, Ritchie could only watch with Charizard Y as the ice seal below imploded in on itself like a sinkhole, setting off a chain reaction to the other disappearing mountains of snow and ice, all of them crumbling inward – Ritchie checked his com for a signal from Dewgong or Seasel’s trackers, but his device was still jammed from the bioluminescence pulse, “Ash…”

“Ritchie! Go on! You and Charizard go to the pick up spot with Max to protect them!” Dragonite called, part of its left arm was completely frozen over, “*They will make it out if they already haven’t!* My com still has a signal from Sneasel and Dewgong’s trackers!”

“Alright!” Ritchie pulled back on his Charizard Y’s harness and took off like a bat out of hell, Lisa’s eyes following him intently –

Wind whipped through Mary’s hair, she suddenly felt her com buzz almost out of her pocket, but Gary seated behind her snatched it up before it fell, and Mary plucked it from his hand, “*Hello?*”

“Mary! It’s Max, our helicopter isn’t doing so hot, the energy alone from that, *thing*, keeps screwing with our equipment! We’ll hold out as long as we can though, with the last update Sneasel’s med device sent us, Ash is in worse shape than we thought, it’s going to take a miracle” –

**OH SHUT UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUP –**

“We’ll be there in a second, we’re not going to let that thing get anywhere near Ash!”

“Huh – whu?!"  

A bright flash of light appeared before the helicopter, and appearing out of that light was Mary riding atop Pidgeot with Gary bracing her, and Thomas was aboard his Alakazam using Psychic* to fly, its eyes still glowing from having used Teleport*.

“AH! More help the merrier yes!” smiled Max, but quickly saw the distress Alakazam was in as the pokemon grasped its head –

“Easy, easy Ali,” said Thomas as he used a Full Restore* on Alakazam, “You did it my Ali! We’re all here!”

*Fucking hell, Gary, for all your years as a researcher you have NEVER seen the fuckery here as what this Froslass has pulled off, how can it impede psychic pokemon abilities? Like, they would have to be literally injected with a ghost or dark type’s bioluminescence, so how?! HOW? FUCKING HELL MAN!*  

Max pulled up his com in spotting Mary, “Hey, now isn’t the time to be playing hero, I thought you were still suffering the effects of Disable*?”
“I am, but I cannot sit here and let my sister tear this region apart!”

A call was coming through from Dragonite to Mary and Max’s lines – “Hello!?"

“Mary! Max! Ritchie should be meeting up with Max soon to aid in transporting Ash! We’re trying to hold Froslass back, but it is trying to make its way over there! It has an aura barrier our attacks cannot penetrate!”

You honestly don’t know how much of a help you’ll be Gary, but if there’s anything you can do, you can help Mary make sure Lisa is put to rest IF IT EVEN DARES TO COME NEAR ASH AGAIN -. 

“I’m here Dragonite!” said Mary, “Gary, Thomas, and I are here with our team!”

Gary’s pokeball holding Audino began to shake uncontrollably, “Ah, Audino! Not yet, keep your cool Audi, don’t worry, I’ll tell you when we’ll need your help!”

“Gary, your Audino can do human health transfer right?” asked Max.

“Yes!”

Yes, God, please, please give your poor baby Audino the courage it needs right now, because by the face of Arceus you’re running on empty.

Sneasel opened its eyes, it could feel the bottom of Avalugg’s body just barely touching its head. Dewgong! Sneasel called.

I am here! Dewgong responded almost directly behind Sneasel, making it jump, Avalugg! You saved us!

Ungh, perhaps for not much longer, Avalugg replied, its legs were shaking. Before the ice seal collapsed, it had used Iron Defense and was now holding the bulk of the cavern on its back with just barely enough room for Sneasel and Dewgong to make their escape underneath it in the available water flow.

Sneasel looked to med device, the green light was fading to orange, Dewgong! We’re losing him!

Go while you still have the chance! yelled Avalugg.

Dewgong slipped its pack onto its stomach, giving Sneasel room to attach Ash secured on the stretcher to its back,

Alright said Sneasel hopping on top of Ash as added measure to brace him and protect him, it was going to make sure Ash’s breathing mask wouldn’t wiggle loose off his face by holding it down, Sneasel slipped its water breathing device onto its mouth, Dewy, swim us out of here!

I will come back for you! Dewgong called to Avalugg – the cavern gave one last shudder –

GO!!!!

And with that Dewgong shoved itself and its passengers into the water without one look back, swimming for all it was worth using Horn Drill to make a path through the ice flow – feeling the vacuum of the collapsing ice, ground, rock and vortex of water at the tip of its tail trying to pull them all back to the dark depths–
As Ritchie and his Charizard Y joined the pick up spot with Max, Mary, Gary, and Thomas, they watched from afar the second collapse of the ice of the valley, everything sinking ever further, cracking open the labyrinth of ice formations underneath; a geyser in the distance even going off.

Gary and Ritchie finally caught each other’s sight since Ritchie took off, both hoping beyond hope the collapse didn’t spell doom for their best friend/beloved.

Ritchie clutched Charizard Y’s harness, *Please, please, please make it, make it, make it, make it!* he pleaded with any deity kind enough to listen – his chest aching – his com gave a whirring sound, the device reviving itself online again, it was buzzing in with a duel call from Max in the helicopter to him and Mary –

Ritchie and Mary turned towards the helicopter instinctively to see Max through the window frantically waving and pointing down, “WELL?!”

“They’re bringing Ash up! They’ve got him!” and not a second later, Dewgong with Ash and Sneasel on its back breached the water’s surface, Ritchie’s com synced up the med device on Ash, the wireless ECG monitor reporting in weak blips from Ash’s heart,

“ASH!”

Gary kicked Pidgeot to dive down (Pidgeot forgiving the motion, it understood poor Gary), Mary gave the same command but much more appropriately, telling the pokemon to hold back some as to not crowd them, but the same couldn’t be said for Gary who was already trying to climb over Mary – “OH MY GOD GARY COOL YOUR JETS!!” she spat.

Charizard Y couldn’t have been by the Water Team’s side any faster, Dewgong’s leap out of the water was so powerful that it made it half the distance up, allowing the fire pokemon to catch them somewhat gently. Ritchie helped his pokemon support Dewgong upright with its precious cargo and Sneasel, even if it meant Ritchie’s arms to bend rather painfully with the rest of his body curling over Charizard to reach.

Now Mary allowed to Pidgeot to assist in the transport, helping Charizard Y as its wings flapped furiously, Sneasel leapt over to Pidgeot and held Gary back – Audino shook harder in its pokeball –

Max moved the helicopter into position, “Hang on guys, let me get closer,” and with all the expertise of an expert hazard pilot, easily angled the helicopter just right for Charizard to make a soft landing, settling down Dewgong and Ash like a cloud inside the aircraft. Ritchie entered inside off Charizard Y, the fire pokemon backing off into flight as Gary and Sneasel entered off of Pidgeot –

*There he is Gary, there he is, stay calm, stay calm, you cannot lose yourself right now, Ash needs that level head of your’s, ahahaHAAHAHAAHA, them rubbed off traits no?*

The first thing Ritchie’s hands helped themselves to was the straps on Ash’s stretcher, freeing it from Dewgong’s back, “You guys, I don’t, have words,” Ritchie and Gary’s hearts were forever grateful with Ash’s retrieval a success, but in that same frame they were torn to shreds with the brutality of his injuries as the orange light on the med device was fading to red. Sneasel barked for Max to get a move on as it tore open a syringe pack, readying an injection, Gary called out Audino, the normal type pokemon shaking, but ready,
“Okay Audi, listen to the med professional, and do your best, I know you can do it!”

“Auuudino!”

“Alrighty,” pipped Max, “you guys hang on, next stop Viridian Memorial” – Max’s com suddenly rang out,

“INCOMING! INCOMING!” –

Charizard Y roared, signaling the team the fast approaching fight!

Lisa blocked an attack from Chandelure easily, and spotted the helicopter trying to make its get away. With a ghastly glare, she pointed her scythe arm at the helicopter – “Disable*” –

Max watched his controls short out as the engine of the helicopter instantly died, its rotary wings coming to an abrupt halt – “OH CRAP – EVACUATE THE HELICOPTER MY BABY BIRD IS DEAD” –

“What?!”

Ritchie, Gary, and the pokemon felt the last bit of flight momentum leave the helicopter as gravity compelled the natural order – Alakazam used its powers to keep the helicopter steady despite the pounding pain in its head, but it was all for naught, Alakazam and Thomas suddenly froze up from another Disable* attack, Thomas grunted, “Damn that monster!” – and Alakazam along with its trainer fell out of the sky –

“THOMAS! ALAKAZAM!”

Mary dove with Pidgeot catching Thomas, she took the pokemon’s pokeball from its trainer’s hip and recalled it before it hit the ground –

A team Ranger called out its Beheeyem, “Quick! Use Imprison*!”

Beheeyem’s attack canceled out Lisa’s upcoming Disable* attack, Lisa hissed, quickly turning all her fury towards them, unleashing another Blizzard* attack that froze Beheeyem solid! Ash’s Charizard charged in with a Flare Blitz* without a second thought –

The helicopter was going down, Charizard Y immediately yanked out what passengers it could, taking Ritchie, Ash, and Gary. Mary called out her Skarmory to help as Pidgeot picked up Sneasel, Dewgong, and Audino while Skarmory went to the front of the helicopter and wasted no time in breaking the glass to rip Max right out of his seat – the helicopter fell like a rock, exploding upon contact with the ground.

Max recalled Dewgong to help lift some weight off of Pidgeot. Thankfully, it didn’t take long for Alakazam to recover and pop out its pokeball utterly fuming! The psychic pokemon took its trainer back and stuffed a fresh Mental Herb from its arm pouch in his mouth, “AUGH!” –

The other Rangers regrouped over to Mary and the rest, one with an Altaria taking Max from Skarmory, leaving Skarmory to assist Gary, Ritchie, and Charizard Y. Ash was moved onto the fire pokemon’s back, braced and steadied by Ritchie near Ash’s head and Gary by his legs –

“We have to go Ritchie! We have to get him to the hospital!”

The light was almost red!
Lisa let loose yet another Blizzard\* attack – Chandelure, Dragonite, Ash’s Charizard, and everyone else able to attack answered back and blocked the incoming attack! Charizard Y was able to line up a Blast Burn\* aimed over the attack fray and hit Lisa square in the face, but due to that aura barrier, it hardly looked like she took any damage at all!

Pidgeot flew by and dropped off Audino into Gary’s arms, along with Sneasel onto Skarmory. Audino immediately went to work with instruction from Sneasel on what to focus on Ash with Heal Pulse* and human health transfer – Charizard Y motioned to Skarmory, and they attempted to make their get away –

“**GET BACK HERE!**” Lisa fired off a barrage of Shadow Ball\* attacks!

“ENOUGH LISA!” Mary grasped her Keystone, Pidgeot spread its wings wide, joined by her glowing Chandelure as the flying pokemon Mega-Evolved, both pokemon unleashing Heatwave\* joined by other attacks from the Ranger team to cover Charizard Y and Skarmory’s get away flight –

Thomas grasped his own Key Stone and brought forth Mega Alakazam, but unlike his Mega pokemon, Mega Pidgeot and Chandelure were both sporting an Affinity Evolution with markings from Mary!

“Amazing,” commented Thomas, “Not one but two Affinity Evolutions from the same Trainer!”

“Dragonite!” called Max pointing to Dragonite’s perpetually frozen limb, “Buddy! Your arm!”

“Do not worry about it,” said Dragonite, “The freeze is permanent, which anyhow,” Dragonite struck its frozen arm with its good one, shattering the useless limb off, “That was only impeding me.” Dragonite slapped on a med patch from its pack, the patch instantly sealing itself over the stump.

Lisa watched Charizard Y and Skarmory’s forms become smaller and smaller, the defending Ranger team roared their defiance, she snarled, “Look at you all working together, look at you all supporting each other” – her body glowed a ghastly black light – “YOU ALL DISGUST ME!!”

Lisa set off a cacophony of Blizzard*, Hail* and Ice Beams* – all of which were met with blocking attacks with much work coming from Mega Pidgeot and Chandelure – Ash’s Charizard made another reckless dash towards Lisa with a Flare Blitz\* chipping off some of the aura barrier that did not go unnoticed –

“The aura barrier is shrinking!” yelled Dragonite, “We have to keep burning it off!!”

“YOUR FIRE IS MEANINGLESS!” Lisa let loose more ice attacks that were once again answered with by the full power of the Ranger team, Lisa growled at the stand off –

“Fire cannot be frozen Lisa,” said Mary, “And I promise you, everyone here is burning!”

Lisa narrowed her eyes, smiling viciously, “I know, and I can **FEEL IT**” –

“USE PROTECT*!!” – but it wasn’t enough, Lisa used a barrage of Draining Kiss* and pulled everyone’s burning energy into it!

The aura barrier’s power exploded knocking everyone back, the blazing blue and black energy encompassed Froslass again, the pokemon’s form evolving even further, now, it’s small obsidian horns were long and curved, a blue halo appeared over its head, its aura wings were even more pronounced, and its flowing body look like a gown of darkness. Lisa held up her scythe arm and
laughed maniacally!

Max struggled to pull himself together with poor Altaria, he held up his com to check the pokemon, “Un-unbelievable! The aura barrier around it is -250 degrees!”

“That’s colder than the surface of the moon,” said Thomas.

Lisa continued to laugh maniacally, “What do you think? If I can never be human again, I may as well be the best monster I can be! Right Mary? I’m finally doing something! I’m doing something big! I’m going further than any Mega Evolution or Affinity Evolution has gone! I mean just look at me now!!”

Audino was doing its best to keep Ash alive as Charizard Y flew as fast as it could with the weight on its back, the med device threatening to fall red at any moment. Ritchie was clutching Ash’s hand, feeling whatever fight Ash had in him disappear, “NO ASH!” –

“You are not dying today Ash Ketchum,” Gary growled through his eyes welling up, “You understand me?! Not today!”

Audi! You gotta start pulling the Disable* out of his heart and lungs! shouted Sneasel unknowingly digging its claws into Skarmory’s back –

Audino squeaked, I’m trying!

And the light went red; Ritchie’s com reporting the med device flat-lined.

Audino’s mentality snapped into place – it hands were right over Ash’s chest, a bright pink glow surrounded the pokemon’s body. Audino’s hands shook as its aura reached deep into Ash, pulling out as much Disable* as it could out of Ash’s heart and lungs, the pokemon’s hands turning black as it absorbed literal death – Ritchie saw his chance and began to resuscitate Ash with CPR, but Sneasel quickly batted him away. Gary saw Sneasel lean in close off Skarmory and inject Ash with something – Ash’s body seized up with the monitor responding with erratic heart beats going from orange to green, green to orange to red to orange –

In what was a span of only 8 seconds, Ritchie felt every year he spent with his best friend slipping away.

In what was a span of only 8 seconds, Gary felt his future with his dearest beloved slipping away.

Until finally the steady, but strenuous, heart blip rhythm returned.

Ritchie almost collapsed under his relief.

“God, Ash please stay with us!” Gary pleaded, his voice cracking –

Lisa pointed her scythe arm out at the Ranger team, “My power is on par with that of a legendary pokemon! Maybe even further! I could kill you all in one hit! THERE IS NOTHING ANY OF YOU CAN DO TO ME! I’M FINALLY, FINALLY FREE! FREE OF EVERYONE’S JUDGEMENT, EVERYONE’S STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS! I CAN JUST BE ME. MY OWN RULES. MY OWN WORLD!!!”
Lisa’s next ice attack, no one could block, it could only be described as something like Explosion* laced with Blizzard*, it blew the trees back from the valley ridge, it threw land and snow everywhere, and from the aftermath, there wasn’t a single team member standing, everyone was sent hurling to the ground with painful impacts.

Lisa hovered above them, threatening to use her scythe arm, Beheeyem’s Imprison* had worn off by now, they were all at Lisa’s mercy.

Mary struggled to push herself up. Lisa hovered lazily over to her and knocked her back down. “Well Mary? Do something.”

Mary went to push herself up again, but Lisa knocked her back down again, harder this time. “And yet somehow I think mom and dad would still prefer you.”

Mary pushed herself up yet again, and this time Lisa raised her sister with her scythe arm and slammed her down full force.

“For once, I can look down on you,” said Lisa, “Ah, ha. Remember that time, when people called wanted to call me Lucy, instead of Lisa? That’s how my Lu-Lu nickname stuck. I never did like that nickname. And then, everyone wanted to call me Icy, you know instead of Lisa, and then you went out and took a picture of an Articuno for me? Just, did your Ranger thing and got it. ‘Even ice has its beauty’ you wrote, or some poetic bullshit like that to make me feel better about myself, like, trying to tell me I was fine the way I was. And yet everyone kept telling me otherwise, even you. And so, you know, I tried to get you one of a fire legendary pokemon, but failed. I mean they’re legendary pokemon, they’re not exactly easy to find, but you did it. And I couldn’t.”

Mary pushed herself up, “I,” she grunted, “I was there to help you, but, ungh, you just wouldn’t help yourself!”

Lisa just rolled her eyes, “How many times do I have to tell you I tried? You will never understand, and I’m done explaining myself to horrible people.” Lisa raised up Mary by her neck, “How about a little frost bite my dear sister?”

From afar, came the cry of a Zoroark. Lisa looked past her sister, her eyes focusing in on the dark type as it was joined by the cries and yells of Nidorino and Nidorina, Ursaring and Sneasels, Houndooms, Stantler, Nidoking and Nidoqueens, Fearow and Spearows, Victreebels, Steelix, Raticate, Butterfree, and on and on the list went as the pokemon of the region between Kanto and Johto all came forth, led by Zoroark.

Lisa found herself quite surrounded, but merely sneered as the forest pokemon healed the Rangers and their injured pokemon.

“Look at you all working together,” said Lisa, “Look at you all supporting each other. I, personally, cannot think of a better reason to SLAUGHTER YOU ALL!!!!”

Lisa prepared the same Explosion* type attack – Chandelure and Ash’s Charizard rushed it –

Mary was suddenly pulled underground out of harms way – and from up above a fiery, flaming cry rang out over the valley – Lisa looked up in time to see the legendary pokemon Moltres blast a cascade of fire with its ultimate attack, Overheat*, everything around Lisa was scorched to smitherereens, and out from the flames of Moltres’ great attack, stood an extremely pissed off Lisa, but without her aura barrier –
“ARE YOU FUCKING SERIOUS?!?!? AND YET, I AM STILL STA” – Ash’s Charizard used Dragon Claw* and slashed Lisa’s scythe arm off, while Chandelure shot off a perfectly aimed Fire Blast* to Lisa’s chest, blowing a hole almost clean through.

Charizard Y and Skarmory were closing in on Viridian City, Audino was pumping all it had of Heal Pulse* into Ash while simultaneously draining out what it could of the Disable* in him, the black creeping up its hands, the effort keeping him in a range between green and orange, “We’re almost there Audino!” said Gary, “Hang in there! You’re doing it! We’re almost there sweetheart! We’re almost there!”

You are one of the most amazing med pokemon I have ever seen! piped Sneasel.

Ritchie called in on his com to the awaiting med team at Viridian Memorial, “We’re fixing to land soon! Estimated time about fifteen minuets!”

Lisa stumbled back, she was still standing, but just barely. Moltres above looked at her with utmost disgust, fire boiling in its belly, the landscape around illuminated from its fiery body alone.

Mary was brought up safely from the ground, she was saved by a Steelix, but not a wild Steelix, Mary was set down next to Brock and Misty who had rode back in on Rapidash. Brock patted his steel type pokemon, “There’s no way a pretty girl is getting hurt on my watch.”

Lisa bent over, almost bowing in pain… “Ha…ha….even being the worst…I’m still a failure….“

Lisa looked over to Mary, Mary looking back with an unreadable stern expression. “Well Mary? Look up, and…take, a picture…maybe that’s one thing, I did right…”

“….Lisa,” said Mary, “You didn’t, you didn’t choose to be sick, but, you chose to let it rule you.”

Lisa sighed, “You will….never understand….None of you….What was done to me,” an odd black sparkling aura began crackling and popping around Lisa, “If I am going to leave this world, then I can at least deal back, oh, just a fraction of the pain I had to endure.”

Audino suddenly looked up, Ritchie and Gary noticing a strange black sparkling aura crackle around Ash –

“What” –

“NO!!”

A single Ice Shard* manifested quickly before Lisa, she aimed at Mary’s heart, and fired, Zoroark reacted faster than anyone with a Night Slash* that cut the Ice Shard* in half, finishing its slice towards Lisa’s neck –

“WAIT THAT’S DESTINY BOND*!!”
“Now you will all fail.”

Gary and Ritchie watched helplessly as Ash flat-lined from underneath Audino’s hands. Gary didn’t know what to do, Ritchie wasn’t sure of what to do. Audino pressed on, trying to revive Ash with Sneasel over, and over, and over, and over, and over, they wouldn’t give up, they wouldn’t give up.

Gary could see the hospital, they were almost there, and tonight already had so many ‘almost’ moments. Gary felt Ash’s legs twitch, and move slowly. Ritchie looked on wide-eyed in utmost horror. Ash’s entire body was moving. He was clearly flat-lined from the med device, but he was still moving….and then Ash opened his eyes, slowly revealing they were no longer brown, they were blue.

Gary couldn’t think, couldn’t even begin to comprehend, he thought he heard a scream from Ritchie but he wasn’t sure. He had to get closer to his Ash, Sneasel and Audino hissed at Gary, he even felt a jab from Skarmory, but he didn’t care. Ash was moving as if he was in a dream like state, his breathing was ragged, open mouthed, as if he was gasping for air with a rattle in his lungs, his hand reached out blindly to stroke Gary’s cheek, Gary feeling like ice cubes were touching him…he couldn’t think of anything else but to caress Ash in return, Ash’s body feeling like a solid block of ice, his breath feeling even colder on Gary’s face.

Is she inside him now?

*No, no, God, please no, he, he still has to be in there, he isn’t, HE’S NOT*- “Ash, Ash, please, come back, Ash, ASH!” – but all Gary got back in response was ragged gagging breathing and blue, blue eyes wandering about that saw him and didn’t see him – “ASH! ASH!!!” Gary shook him violently, “ASH JUST TALK TO ME!” –

Gary suddenly felt himself get pulled away from Ash, and off of Charizard Y, they had landed on the hospital roof, and the medical team swarmed in. Audino hissing and biting resisting treatment to stay with Ash, its pink aura was now burning like a star. Suddenly one of the doctors fell flat like a rock, another ordered everyone to get back, someone yelled for only pokemon to handle Ash since her hands went numb, an assisting Blissey came up to another female doctor and injected her with something, and she went right back to work on Ash as they rolled him away with Audino still trying to work on him, Sneasel trying to keep up. Everyone just trying.

Gary swayed on the spot, it was Ritchie who was holding him, they gave terrified looks to one another, and discovered they both had frost on their face, frost that could only have come from Ash’s breath.

Gary felt his hands go numb, “Ritchie….” He felt something inside him creeping up like a poison, Gary’s vision went blurry, and then everything went dark.

Misty and Brock watched in somber with the Ranger team as Mary walked over with her Chandelure to her sister’s remains, of which there wasn’t much. The body of the Froslass faded away like broken bits of ash and soot. Zoroark was bowing in submission before her. Moltres let loose a proud song, lifted its head, and flew off into the sky.

Mary dropped to her knees. Chandelure sniffed the snow, unearthing something shiny, revealing a Dawn Stone. Mary moved to pick up the item, holding it as if it was an ember in her hands. She curled in on herself, cradling the stone as if it was her heart exposed.
It was perhaps a minuet before Mary realized her com had been buzzing, dutifully she opened it up, seeing a lone message with no addressing number. Mary opened the message up, her com glitching slightly, and all the message read was, “I’m not sorry.”

Chapter End Notes

Now let me just say I am NOT the type of author to suddenly spring "MAJOR CHARACTER DEATH" as the story progresses. The warnings that are in the story summary are for the story in its entirety, and they explicitly say "near-death experience". Yes things are sucking quite a bit, yes Ash is an ice zombie, and yes Gary has Disable* in him and fainted from it, and you may think oh well Ash isn't technically dead he's a zombie so the warnings still apply, nope, noooo, zombie-ood to me is death, and YES Ash is currently an ice zombie, but no one is doing the forever dying in this story, and this is why I REALLY wanted to post Chapter 9 with this one since Chapter 8 ends on such a fucking sad note, but I can promise you, this story will have a happy ending, and no not one of those "make what you will of it endings" either, grant it there plenty of amazing fics with such endings...I have been hurt too many times ;3; So yeah, I am weak ;; There's still a few surprises left, and what the power of love can do. Also no, Ash isn't going to be brought back like how the undead were in the novel "Warm Bodies", but something good will happen.

So! On that note, I will get Chapter 9 out soon, it's pretty hammered out, but I want to make sure I give it my all =w= b
"It'll be up soon" she said, "Most of it is written out already" she said, and well then life puncted me in the cooter and here I am over three months later 8') =n=;; ANYWHO I also found a really big error in chapter 8 which was only ONE word, a name in fact, in the wrong place, and although it was just ONE word, hooooo boy I'm sure it made some of y'all scratch your head while I over here thought everything was good and peachy 8'lllll. The line was "Ritchie pulled out his com with Ash’s profile still on the screen…..*Soon sweetheart….Soon….*" That was supposed to read "Gary pulled out his com...." How that error escaped me after all this time, and after EVERY careful read, I will never know ;_; I am in fact also a die-hard Leagueshipper, so I'm guessing it was the Leagueshipper in me crying out ;3; And anyhow, I am still very proud of this chapter, I threw my all into it despite being puncted in the bits, so I can just hope its up to the punch bowl - and I went over this one with a fine tooth comb so there shouldn't be any slip-ups. As always, thanks again for sticking around this long, and I hope my story continues to entertain =w=b

It was cold when Gary woke.

He felt as if his body had been on pause and was slowly regaining its functions from an abrupt reboot. His vision was blurry, his throat was raw, everything felt like it had been smashed flat, and the soreness he felt reached down to the bone, but, he was very much alive. After his body completed its safe start, Gary had an aloof sensation that something was missing from him.

You dreamed of him. You dreamt that he was normal, and smiling, and laughing, and perfect.

Gary’s chest became almost unbearably heavy, each breath was difficult. His head was swirling from something pleasant, something he didn’t want to have taken from him so suddenly, a most wondrous feeling that was quickly draining from him as reality sank in.

Pale blue eyes.

Gary took a moment to let his lungs find a rhythm that wouldn’t put him through too much strain. He gathered his surroundings as his vision blurred into focus. He was in a hospital room, he felt his left hand being held. A tuft of black and gold in the left hand corner of his vision revealed Umbreon curled up near his neck. He looked to his right and saw Misty nodded off with her head propped up by her hand, and below that, Gary saw that his right forearm was bandaged. To his left behind Umbreon was Ritchie laying with his head resting on his arm on the bed rail; he was the one holding Gary’s hand. Above Ritchie hooked on an IV pole was a blood transfusion bag that was hooked into Gary’s arm somewhere, then suddenly, a pair of pale violet eyes moved themselves into Gary’s direct line of sight.

Gary was still too out of it to be startled, but was annoyed none-the-less. The pale violet eyes belonged to a medical Mismagius with a prototype translator on its head like a tiara. The pure ghost
type gave a smile, one a little too wide to be considered “endearing”, and whispered to Gary, “The Disable* attack has left your body, I am here to make sure it stays away. I am amazed at how fast you have awakened; you shouldn’t have woken for at least several more days, but here you are barely 24 hours later!”

Hardly any of Mismagius’ words registered with Gary, he was too focused on finding the missing part of his heart before realizing such a concept was absurd since it’s a muscle in his body, and then his memories of everything that happened hit him like a wave.

*Ash…!*

Gary tried to move, but one of Mismagius’ ghostly tattered tendrils stroked Gary’s face, “Shhhhhhh, there is no need to make a fuss, you must rest~ You must let the new blood take its place within you~”

*That’s not creepy at all Mismagius – Gary you’re waking the fuck up right now –*

Gary tried to talk, inhaling a deep ragged breath –

Umbreon, Misty and Ritchie’s heads immediately snapped up, “Gary!” Gary’s Blastoise and Arcanine who also were in the room came into view from behind Ritchie.

“Hey, hey, easy!”

The Mismagius rolled its eyes and left the room, phasing itself through the door. Gary attempted to push himself up, but quickly relinquished the action to the helping hands of Ritchie and Misty since both his arms (one looking to have had a severe laceration, the other a transfusion needle buried in it) could barely muster any strength; Umbreon chided him for even trying. Gary coughed, gagged, swallowed, and managed to grunt out, “What, happened?”

Ritchie swallowed, “It was bad,” there was a distinct waver in his voice. He braced Gary’s back, holding him up as Misty raised the hospital bed up to meet his sitting position, “You had a sudden attack of Disable* from’’ –

"Ash,” Gary breathed, “It, it came from him, didn’t it?”

“Yes,” said Misty, “Mismagius, said you wouldn’t wake up for several more days, but your body was so susceptible to the Health Transfer techniques they were hopeful, but, very cautious, since…”

“Well, I let Audi practice on me a lot, so, there’s that,” said Gary hoarsely, “Ash would let Audi practice on him too…..so…..”

Ritchie finished helping Gary sit up, then retreated slightly. There was a sudden chill in the room.

*Why are they by your side Gary? Why aren’t they with Ash? Why aren’t they saying anything?*

“Ah,” Ritchie started, “How, how are you feeling…?”

*Oh please with the misdirection –*

Gary gripped the bed sheets, slightly feeling the transfusion needle in him, swallowing thickly, “Just tell me,” he shook, “is he dea” – Gary just couldn’t bring himself to say it, but Misty answered him quickly –

“No,” she said sternly, “Gary, your Audino performed nothing short of a miracle, it reversed some
of Froslass’, err, uh, Lisa’s influence in him, giving the doctors time to give his body a fighting chance. It fought to stay with Ash as long as it could, even biting at the doctors to let it work! Gary, the work it performed on Ash, there’s like, only a handful of other pokemon in the world that would be so gifted in Human Health Transfer.”

“I know,” said Gary slowly, processing the information, he smiled meekly, “My little Audi…Where is Audi?”

Arcanine and Blastoise gave somber looks, Umbreon curled itself into Gary’s lap, he could sense it was bracing him for a painful deliver.

“Audino,” Misty started, “Has been placed in a medically induced coma to help it heal from the sheer amount of, Disable* and influence it absorbed into itself from Ash.” Misty shifted in her seat, her voice picked up in tune, “Nurse Joy is very hopeful Audino will recover though, last we heard, Audino’s body was repelling the Disable*, slowly, but, surely. You know they can work wonders now-a-days.”

_In other words that is code for Audino is fighting for its life like Ash. You know Misty is sparing you some details. Audino probably fainted off the fucking table._

“Ritchie, did you get any of the Disable* in you?” asked Gary.

“A little bit, no where near as bad as your attack,” Ritchie visibly shuddered, rubbing his elbows, “No where near as bad as your’s, my, arms were just numb for a bit, but I could still move them.”

_Ah, this party is missing someone –_

“How is Tracey?” asked Gary.

“He’s good,” Misty smiled earnestly, “He can get up and move around if needed.”

Gary gave some pets to Umbreon, he looked to his Arcanine and Blastoise and smiled, “I’m so very glad to see all of you doing alright.” Gary’s pokemon grunted happily towards him. “And, so, how is Ash doing?”

Misty hesitated, then spoke, “Ash’s body is still fighting the influence – the Disable*, stuff, he’s just fighting,” she wiped her eyes quickly giving a thick sniff, “He’s so strong.”

“Yeah,” said Ritchie, trying to keep himself composed.

Misty’s brow furrowed, opting to glance nonchalantly at the hospital bed’s rails, “He’s, not so much as in a coma like Audino, it’s, some kind of stasis caught inbetween a,” Misty looked to Ritchie, “Transformation, you think?”

“Something like that,” Ritchie said quietly opting to glance at the railing as well.

_Well the last time you saw him he looked pretty transformed into your worst nightmare, so this caught in-between stuff is already a step in the right direction to say the least._

Misty looked back down, “As the doctors put it, his body is fighting to stay human, and, despite Audino’s heroic efforts, it’s still going to be a tough fight…. When he wakes up, if he wakes up, or what he’ll wake up as…."

“They’re not sure he’s even going to make it to the next day,” said Ritchie, his composure looking to crumble at any second.
Really feeling the positivity here guys.

Gary swayed slightly, and then quietly said, “Not that I don’t appreciate the two of you with me, but, why aren’t the two of you with him?”

“They're not letting anyone in his room,” Misty answered quickly again.

Ritchie swallowed, “No one but protected personnel is allowed to go in, mainly med pokemon, the…the” –

“His case is so severe,” said Misty, “the influence, or um, bioluminescence from Froslass – Lisa, is that strong, it’s like a cloud, an aura, uh, miasma thing around him, you know, the stuff that you know” –

“To put it simply,” said Gary with his pokemon watching him intently, “Ash’s bio-code has a Froslass’ Cursed Body* ability tangled in it, a foreign bio-code,” Gary took a deep inhale, “and since his body cannot adapt to such influence, it is overcompensating with the foreign code, so, in other words, his body is radiating out the pure essence of the attack Disable*, and any living thing even getting near him is at risk of being stricken with the effects of the attack brought on by the Cursed Body* ability.”

“Yeah pretty much,” said Misty folding her arms and bending over, she rocked herself and exhaled deeply looking at the ceiling.

Okay, so, you could lose the love of your life tonight and Audi. Cool. Wait, you’ve been out for how long?

Gary gave a humorless laugh, “And to think, I was going to cook him his favorite meal when he got back. I was going to reassure him that no matter what was happening with him, I would stay by his side, that I loved him, no matter what.”

Ritchie shifted apprehensively in his seat, his mouth ran dry.

"Did you make those same promises Misty?"

Misty’s mouth dropped. She just as quickly closed it with a click and a wide eyed glare. “Why would you ask me that?” she replied quietly. Ritchie could see her clasped hands, her knuckles turning white.

“Because, I have no idea what to do now,” said Gary simply, yet feeling an indescribable amount of turbulence in his chest, “Everybody breaks their promises now and then, what did you do when you broke your’s?”

“Gary that’s not fair,” Ritchie said quickly –

GARY, SHUT UP.

“The only thing protecting you right now is that you’re in a hospital bed,” Misty growled.

“I’m still waiting on an answer.”

Umbreon glared daggers at its lashing Trainer – “Bre! Breon!”

“Well today I just don’t have the answers,” Mist spat.

“You’re kidding”, said Gary in as great a sarcastic tone he could muster, “I mean before you just
couldn’t stop giving advice, and here I’m honestly asking you for it” –

Blastoise and Arcanine chided him to stop, but it would fall on deaf ears –

“Fine, promise or not, you are the worst thing that’s ever happened to him,” said Misty through gritted teeth, “Ash deserves someone so much better than you and I can’t believe you somehow conned him into thinking you’re a good person – so do us all a favor before you throw another monkey wrench into everything and go crawl back into the hole you came out of” –

“Oh care to join me?”

Umbreon barked at Gary and Misty, but even louder than that –

“STOP IT!!” Ritchie screams, “Please you two just DON’T,” Ritchie curled in on himself, grasping the bed rails, “Just, don’t” – he let his forehead hit the bed rail, losing himself into despair with thick heaving sobs.

Blastoise shot a disapproving look at its Trainer and began rubbing Ritchie’s back, *Gary, you’re better than that.*

Arcanine joined in by nuzzling Ritchie, but it didn’t help, *The first thing when you wake up is get into a fight, that is impressive my Gary.*

Gary couldn’t register his pokemon’s disappointed growling, his mind was still sputtering from actually being yelled at by Ritchie. He looked to Umbreon, who just frowned flatly at Gary and Misty, opting to lay its head near Ritchie to soothe him while licking the top of his cap, but then from its tiny mouth came, *Imbeciles.*

Gary sunk where he sat, shame crippling his gut.

*You fucking started it Gary don’t even pretend – let’s not forget the casualties that happen BECAUSE YOU DON’T KNOW HOW TO FUCKING COMMUNICATE THE MATTERS OF YOUR HEART*–

Gary and Misty quickly shared remorseful glances, with Gary reaching out faster to pull Ritchie close, over the rails, and into his chest, shielding his tumultuous sobs; Misty picked up rubbing the heartbroken Ranger’s back in Blastoise's place while Umbreon found a new place to curl up amongst Ritchie’s legs.

“I’m sorry Ritchie….Misty, I’m so sorry” –

“It’s okay,” she replied, her eyes welling up –

*To say you have been emotional recently is a bit of an understatement Gary, but this just sucks. You shouldn’t spew your shit everywhere just because you feel bad – everyone else is in pain too! You’d be no better than….Right, so, tempers be flaring and nerves are stretched thin since your beloved has been, ‘tortured’, for lack of a better term – and then almost murdered in front of your eyes. Twice. He’s, he’s still hanging in there, this isn’t the end yet. You can be sad, you can be angry, but don’t shit it out onto other people! You’d be no better than….Well….Yeah, Gary, you just don’t have anymore tears to shed with the other cacophony of emotions welling up. At least not right now, you are more than compensated with Ritchie making quite the wet spot on you, and oh hell, Misty is misty-eyed and tearing up harder, and fuck, fuck there she goes, she’s doing the silent crying with her hand over her mouth and Gary you have to fucking snap your spine in place, come on let’s go here, Ash would have them both shooosh-papped and soothed in two seconds you are really are a poor excuse of a person sometimes come on now – they’ve all been doing the same for you –*
Gary swallowed the lump in his throat down, “What, would Ash think, looking at us all completely miserable like this? He would never give up on any of us, so we’re not about to give up on him! He’s going to make it, he’s” –

There came a knocking at the room door followed by the Mismagius phasing through, and a nurse with a clipboard let herself in with a deeply solemn look on her face.

“I deeply apologize for intruding,” she began, “but…”

Gary had never felt Ritchie grasp his middle so tightly to the point where it hurt, Misty was frozen in place.

“I need to do a check up on you Mr. Oak” –

*OH FOR FKCKS SAKE – OH, OH, MISMAGIUS, YOU THINK YOU CAN KEEP THAT SMUG SMILE ON YOUR FACE – GARY YOUR NEXT POINT OF RESEARCH IS HOW TO FUCKING STRANGLE A GHOST TYPE WITH YOUR BARE HANDS –*

“How is Ash?” Gary asked.

The nurse spoke as she helped herself to checking Gary’s vitals without disturbing Ritchie too much (who had quieted down greatly), “Our team has his body sustained, but that is the furthest our operations can manage at this time. So far the Disable* attacks only seem to be working on living targets, so the machines are operating smoothly, but we have medical and maintenance Rotom in his room at all times should the attack be severe enough to effect any type of functionality.”

“That, might not be the only source,” said Gary, “With the Cursed Body* bio-code in Ash, there might be other influences with a ghost type’s bioluminescence being naturally unfriendly to electronic equipment.”

“Don’t worry, we are aware, hence the maintenance Rotom,” said the nurse taking a moment to write something down on her clipboard, “I must say, I am relieved you have awoken so quickly Mr. Oak, are you feeling any numbness anywhere in your body?”

*Only in your soul. Well, your middle is kinda crushed, but other than that and a shattered heart we’re good here doc! You know full and well Ash is dying and all, he be doing the dying thing, that pesky, pesky deathy thing!*

“No, my body just feels heavy, and it’s a little difficult to breath –” Gary felt Ritchie move – “no, no Ritchie you’re fine, my chest is just a little heavy.”

“Understandable,” replied the nurse, “your Disable* attack was in your blood, which quickly spread to your muscles, and despite being brief, it certainly did some work on you. We weren’t expecting you to come around for quite some time, but it’s all for the best you’re awake now.”

*Ah ha holy fuck. How can blood be Disabled*? Oh yeah it carries oxygen and stuff, you know it like just fuels the functions of your body, your organs, all the organs, the major organs, YOUR LUNGS, HEART, AND BRAIN AND OTHER IMPORTANT STUFF HOLY SHIT ARE YOU LUCKY – eyyyyyyyy, is that why you have a transfusion bag?*

“How is Ash?” Gary asked.

“Is that why I have a transfusion bag?” asked Gary.

“Yes, after Ritchie carried you inside, this Mismagius here was able to pinpoint the problem quickly, so some of your blood was drained, in a, rather archaic manner, in an attempt to weaken the Disable* attack, and thankfully it worked.”
Okay Mismagius you get a pass, and, welp, that explains why your right arm is bandaged. Jusssssssssst sliced you open did they? Hm. You know what, you’re feeling kinda faint, nnnnnnnnnnnnnnnlike a lot faint.

Gary leaned back fully on the hospital bed with Ritchie.

The nurse cleared her throat, “The effects of Disable* do wear off, they’re supposed to when the attack is performed right, however with these attacks, they were modified, and even lingered on after you all thought you had the attack out of your system.”

“I know,” said Gary flatly; Blastoise and Arcanine shot Gary more stern looks.

Now is not the time to be a smart ass mister. Suck it the fuck up. If nothing else do it for Ritchie who is still trembling against you.

“Apologies,” said the nurse.

“No, no, don’t apologies, ah, apologize,” said Gary trying to quell the turmoil bubbling in his gut, “I’m just, heh, we’re all just…”

“It is alright,” said the Mismagius still in whisper, “It is okay to feel bad. You must vent. You must release this negative energy, or it will do you harm. If you, or any of you need to scream, need to flounder or flail, I am always at the ready to provide a chant, or controlled illusion to assist in releasing such energy from your body.” The Mismagius went on to look directly at Ritchie who took one glance at the ghost pokemon, and opted instead to bury his face in Gary’s chest.

NNNNN’KAY, but no, no, no, you need to get up and do something, you cannot just sit here with Ash dying and do nothing, you’ve done nothing so far except sit and cry and instigate and possibly get in the way, you have to do something –

“I have to do something,” said Gary. At that point there was another knock at the door,

“Come in,” said the nurse, Tracey poked his head in, then got yanked in by Misty who had jumped up and wrapped him in a bear hug –

“Ow, ow, Misty I’m still quite tender!” Tracey grunted with a half smile –

“Oh, oh, sorry, but perfect timing!” Misty piped, turning to Gary with hope on her face, “Tracey has been assisting the doctors in researching methods of Human Health Transfer!” –

“Oh yes,” the nurse chimed in, “once he was well enough, he knew it would come in handy, so, Mr. Oak, if, if you feel up to it, our doctors would greatly like your opinion, or whatever you feel you can provide with the theory Mr. Sketchit has been placing together in how to proceed with treatment on Mr. Ketchum.”

Ritchie looked up, “Yeah, you, you even helped them sync the med pokemon’s capabilities with what Audino accomplished!”

Tracey blushed and rubbed his head at the praise, “I’m glad I could help, yeah, I mean, I can only get so far, so Gary, I’m so glad you’re okay, and, we could really use your” –

FUCK THAT IT’S DONE, YOU’RE DOING THIS –

“I’m fine right now, thank-you so much Tracey,” said Gary quickly, “I’m ready, also Misty, please hug Tracey an extra tight for me.”
Misty did, gently though, and much to Tracey’s added blushing. They were suddenly joined by Ritchie who bounced off the bed (Umbreon ducking out the way) almost toppling them over –

“I am still sore you know!” Tracey blurted.

_There’s no point in seeing Ash if they won’t let you anywhere near him anyway, it’ll just cripple your insides more, this way, this way you can help him, you won’t be of any help to anyone in being just a blubering mess of sadness or anger outside of his room._

Gary moved to get out of bed, but was quickly reminded that his body was still very much behind what his intentions wanted, making the nurse help him settle back down; Umbreon again chiding Gary for moving fast.

“You won’t have to leave your room,” said the nurse, “I will gladly gather any research tools you need.”

“Yeah,” said Tracey, “I’ll go ahead and bring my stuff over.”

“I’ll help!” piped Misty, and she and Tracey left the room.

“I’ll start with just a laptop, paper and a pen for now,” said Gary, “Thank-you so much.”

“No, thank-you,” said the nurse, she took a small bow and left the room.

Gary looked to his pokemon, “Hey, I’m sorry you guys had to see me act like that,” Arcanine quickly moved over to Gary and licked his face, Blastoise grunted in acknowledgment, and Umbreon, just looked at Gary with a half smirk and placed its small paw over his hand. “Thanks,” Gary smiled sadly, he then cleared his throat, “Blastoise, Arcanine, I need you two to watch over Ash for me, okay?” They grunted, and left the room, smiling back at their Trainer.

The Mismagius floated by Gary, “I would still like to stay by your side, just in case you do have a resurgence of the Disable* attack.”

_Must you insist on talking in a whisper?_

“That’s fine Mismagius, thank-you,” said Gary.

“You can call me Missy if you like,” the ghost pokemon smiled.

_Naaanaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh._

Mismagius motioned towards Ritchie who settled back by Gary.

“Uh….I’ll be okay, ah, Missy, my Sparky will be here soon,” said Ritchie, “Oh, could you tell Brock and Ash’s mom that Gary’s awake real quick if Tracey and Misty haven’t already?”

“Yes, at once,” Mismagius took a little bow of its own and left the room phasing through the door.

Gary felt a bolt of ice dump into his stomach – Ash’s mother –

_Oh boy, Gary…Fuck….F u c k._

“Ash’s mom is here?” said Gary slowly.

“Well of course!” said Ritchie, “She’s outside Ash’s room with Pikachu and Brock. Once she got news from Misty about Ash, she caught wind of Brock trying to make his way over to the station
and hitched a ride with him, but you know, weather happened and stuff. He dropped her off at this hospital after learning this was where Ash would be taken, and she stayed with Tracey while Misty and Brock traversed back to…”

OH...YEAH....Pretty sure after you and Ritchie high-tailed it back to the hospital the Rangers had just a gay ol’ time with Lisa! Swappin’ stories, singing songs, you know after she probably fucked them up their ass –

“Where’s Mary?” asked Gary steadily.

“She’s with the Rescue Team that fought, Lisa….Our people, were hit pretty hard….Cecil’s Beheeyem will never be able to return to work in the field, Swanna’s wing might need to be amputated if they can’t save it, Dragonite lost an arm….” Ritchie’s head tilted down. Gary reached out and placed his hand on Ritchie’s arm. Ritchie swallowed, “So, in short, everyone is trying to regroup and heal.”

….And this all happened because……Because……

Ritchie sighed, “….We still don’t know where the Onelings are, but we have Zoroark in custody.”

“Zoroark??!”

“Yes,” Ritchie nodded solemnly, “It turns out it went back after rallying all the pokemon of the valley to join it to confront Lisa, but that’s not all, Moltres showed up as well.”

"Moltres?” Gary breathed.

“Yeah…Can you believe that? Which means, Spring is here I guess.”

***

Spring is here my ass. It’s still cold as dicks outside, however it’s not like, all stormy or anything. SIGH. Okay Gary, as your inner voice here, I’m going to start doing recaps to help keep your tether on reality in check ‘kay? M’kay, ‘cause shit is gonna go down and you need to be whole buddy, come on now, this isn’t forever. Right so, you’re thankful your blood transfusion is done, yet you’re still kinda sore, especially your arm that was slit open, ow ow o wow…Also it’s night again now. Yay. Ash has been retrieved for a little over a full day, and well, there’s wasn’t a great chance he’d be any better so soon, and he’s not….Sigh…..and…poor Ritchie is passed out on the couch with a blanket wrapped around him. His Sparky is with him at least now, it’s curled up near his chest. You heard Mismagius talking with Sparky about “helper” methods, and learned that Sparky is not only a Ranger pokemon, but a Helper pokemon too! You kinda remember Ash talking about getting Pikachu certified as well since it showed some interest in Sparky’s work…..Wow. Have you really let yourself be that oblivious Gary? Sigh. Mismagius is currently staying by Ritchie’s side as opposed to your’s since its obvious who needs its help more. Mary had carried him into your room after he just keeled over outside Ash’s room. Scared everyone real good he did, they thought it was another Disable* attack, but turns out, it was just stress and exhaustion. God, there might be more than one life on the line here.

Gary rubbed his eyes, the glow of the laptop screen was beginning to annoy him, and he was feeling drained with the information Tracey had caught him up on. Umbreon was curled up next to Gary, purring to give all the support it could.

“I know, it’s a lot,” said Tracey, “And the other med pokemon and doctors I’ve been in contact with from around the region were just, gawking at it all the same.”
“And you are awesome for tackling it,” said Gary, he tapped his pad with his pen missing a sizeable amount of ink, “So, Audino was able to punch through the influence that Lisa set inside Ash with the Cursed Body* ability, then med pokemon and doctors were able to read the bio-code Audino had introduced from your analysis” –

“I had to dissect it quickly, but yeah, we were able to pick up Audino’s trail –

Because Audino did faint off the fucking table. Bless you Tracey, for real man –

– “and then enforce the Protect* attack it injected into Ash to stave off any Disable* attacks from his major organs while the hospital staff did their attempts to revive him.”

Which is nigh un-fucking heard of! Audino, like Lisa, was able to manipulate an attack outside of its usual method! It modified Protect* to act around Ash’s organs, synced it up with Ash’s bio-code for maximum effect, and in turn gave the doctors time to revive him and hook him up to the machines before the Protect* attack wore off so they could give Ash a fighting chance from the Disable* attacks and influence. That is unbelievable. Your little Audi did that Gary. Your little nervous, shy, sweet Audi did that.

“Gary?”

“I’m okay, I’m just, a little overwhelmed, but I’m fine, I’m…utterly amazed at Audi…”

“Audi indeed was amazing, without its help… I shudder to think otherwise…”

Huuuuuuuuuuuuugh, so the nurse, well her name is Layla, Ms. Layla said the machines Ash is on have been doing their job in keeping him alive through the Disable* attacks still festering in his body, and that, they can only hope the effects will not be permanent once the attacks have run their course, because they WILL run their course through a human’s body. Every research trial, every documented case have all met with the same result, the attack will dissipate….Despite the resurgence Mary, Tracey, and your pokemon faced, they have all been given the clear from their med scans, and a thorough check by high ranking ghost med pokemon – mainly Missy, Missy the Mismagius did the thorough scans…..much to your distress…UuuuuUuuuuUuughghghghghgh, why must ghost pokemon be so CREEPY….But whatever man….OKAY so yeah, Disable* will be gone soon, but as for the tangled Cursed Body* influence in Ash, that, that is what you guys need to crack here.

“Let’s dive into this batch of Froslass case files shall we?” said Gary.

“Yeah. Just a bit of a heads up,” said Tracey wincing slightly, “All of these cases are difficult to look at, so, just, be prepared.”

After seeing Ash as an ice zombie there isn’t really much that can gut punch you Gary, alrighty, lets open up his here and oh. Oh. Well. Those are interesting positions for limbs to be in. Nevermind then. Sooooooowoo, current research shows there are very few documented cases of male Transformations driven by a Froslass, and as Mary stated before, only women could Transform into Froslass, as for the men, something much, much worse happened, which you all now know as ice-zombie hell. But when you come down to it, is that even a true Transformation? They haven’t been changed into pokémon….

A picture of a male victim guarding a Froslass den came up, or Gary could only guess it was guarding with the captions, the male victim didn’t have a face, it looked like it was smashed off, but according to the document, it still attacked anyone who came near.
What does this sayyyyyyy…..’Only female victims can undergo a complete Transformation into Froslass upon deathblahblahblahblah we knoooow….Male victims with Froslass’ influence undergo a kind of trance invoked by a Froslass’ ability to display illusions. Recorded cases show the male victims guarding a Froslass’ den, or just wandering aimlessly about after freezing to death. Froslass also have been recorded purposely killing and displaying frozen corpses in their den. Well aren’t you all just blossoming rays of social interaction…..Yeah, these aren’t really Transformations per say, these are poor souls with heavily manipulated bio-codes….

Another case file documented a male victim walking about in an icy region suspected to be a Froslass territory zone, and when recovered was unable to be revived. The picture showed the victim with glowing blue eyes, and the next picture showed them completely black and Gary had to scroll away quickly.

Uuuuuggghhhhh GOD…. Okay lets think here, what is different about Ash in this matter is that he is still alive, somewhat, and that his bio-code is fighting to regain its humanity. These ice zombies were lumped under Transformations as some subcategory, but in truth, they are something different. What designates a Transformation? A human turning into a pokemon, and Transformations Do. Not. Reverse…..These people cannot come back from the dead, and they haven’t been Transformed into pokemon. Still, Ash’s, eh, Sub-Transformation?? was on the err side of severe…His breath was so cold it left frost on your face and Ritchie’s. His bio-code has been directly manipulated…..Hmm…Case in point the poor frozen Sylveon that was still walking around….Hmmm….For the record there are no recorded cases of a pokemon turning into a human. Meep. But now is not the time to wonder of such matters.

Another case file showed a male victim in a Froslass den with glowing blue eyes and icy-like horn growths sprouting from all over his body. Another showed a man with his mouth stretched far passed the human capacity to open with ice spikes jutting from his jaw, throat, and eyes.

OKAY LETS SCROLL A LITTLE FURTHER HERE, SCHIST….Oh.

Gary cleared his throat, “Prominent family in Sinnoh reports missing daughter in the Mount Coronet Range…”

Gary that’s…

“That’s Lisa’s case file,” said Tracey, “We won’t find anything in there.”

….Let’s have a quick change of subject….

Gary made few notes on his pad, then looked over at Tracey, “Hey, how is Azumarill?”

Tracey gave a small smile, “Azumarill is okay….Still at the pokemon center….Heh, if I knew we were going to be up against ice zombies, I would have brought Scizor along from the lab.”

Okay yeah, like honestly, if Tracey’s Mega-Scizor would have been in the ice zombie fight, y’all would have had a MUCH easier time!

“Why didn’t you bring Scizor along?”

“The blizzard, Scizor was there to help Daisy and the lab residents ride out the storm,” Tracey leaned back in his chair and stretched, Gary knew full well that was a cover reason for Tracey’s eyes welling up.

You can read him Gary, he feels like he was utterly useless then, well, he’s in good company isn’t he?
“I cross referenced across multiple regions to see if there was any differentiation in a Froslass’ methods, but they’re pretty across the board,” said Tracey.

“Yeah, but we didn’t deal with a typical Froslass,” said Gary, “Perhaps narrowing down to special circumstance files…”

Aaaaaaand, there aren’t any. Ash is the first for a pokemon of this breed, and you have a feeling he’s going to be dealing out a lot of firsts if everything goes well.

“Well that answers that,” said Gary popping his lips, “You’ve got the method of damage down with Froslass influence, I don’t think we’re going to find anything else in these files, we should start looking into special circumstance Transformation files with Human Health Transfer cases starting with ghost type influences.

Gary you’re already overlooking a key element here, Transformation cases DO NOT reverse, but this isn’t a Transformation case! That is why you all are flying blind. Ash’s case is the first in how these stages of such powerful influence are being reversed on a live subject – and that was helped being reversed by another influence – Audino’s! The fact that he has the chance he can come back is the hope you all are clinging so desperately to.

There came a knock at the door, Misty pushed it open with her shoulder, her hands holding two cups of hot tea, “I thought you two could use a perk up to get those brains a moving.”

Two exuberant noises escaped Gary and Tracey.

Misty gave a half smile handing them their cups, “Tea lovers much?”

“Tea lovers much,” answered Tracey taking a big sip from his cup.

“So,” Gary began grasping his cup, “How is Ash now?”

“No changes, so, stable I guess,” said Misty with a sigh. She caught sight of Tracey and Gary’s screens, both with a grotesque image of a male victim and made a face, “God, what on earth are you two looking at?”

“I can see that, here, let me just” – Misty went for Tracey’s laptop, Tracey relenting quietly letting the Misty run, “This part, here” –

“Which part where?” asked Tracey.

“Case studies,” Gary asked, “They’re not going to be pretty” –

Misty scrolled down a little on Tracey’s laptop, and unfortunately right into another case showing a male victim stumbling about with no arms, “UGH! God, is that what, they can do?”

“All that and more,” said Gary, quickly receiving a ‘DON’T COMPLICATE THINGS AGAIN’ look from Tracey.

Misty waved her hands about, “Okay, just tell me because I need to know, how this works, explain this to me please.”

Still receiving a subtle glare from Tracey, Gary cleared his throat, “Well, it’s” –

“Just give it to me straight” –
Tracey let his head fall in knowing there was no stopping what came next –

“Let’s say you were a Froslass,” said Gary, “You would then go floating about in your territory and if some poor dude came your way, then bam, you’d have an ice zombie slave for your means.”

Gary you fucking sad sap you SO DESPERATLY WANT TO ADD ‘YOU KNOW, LIKE WHAT YOU DID DURING YOUR YOUNGER YEARS’ BUT KEEP IT IN MAN, KEEP IT IN, KEEP THE PEACE!

“But what’s the point of having them in such,” Misty crinkled her nose, “Bad shape?”

“They’re ghost pokemon,” said Gary, “manipulating the dead is essentially what a ghost type does.”

“Uuuugh,” Misty rubbed her hands through her hair, then scrolled through Tracey’s screen more, “This is just terrible….Have they, just, taken people? Deliberately killed them?”

“There are some cases, yes,” said Gary.

“Okey Love, that’s enough scrolling” – Tracey tried to get Misty to give him back his laptop but she growled and he sighed.

“My urge to strangle these ghost types is greatly rising,” said Misty.

“You probably could,” said Gary, “You’re scrappy.”

Misty gave Gary a flat half smile.

“Can I remind you both Ritchie is asleep over there?” said Tracey pointedly.

“I’m not asleep anymore,” came poor Ritchie’s gurgled voice. Sparky began petting him with Ritchie not in any shape to fight off from waking up further. Misty relinquished Tracey’s laptop, quietly slipped over, tucked him back in, and returned just as softly to Tracey’s side, taking control of his laptop yet again.

“Ohay,” she whispered, “This bit right here, saying how a state of mind can strengthen someone’s aura or, bioluminescence? For now, can that be applied in getting some of that influence out of Ash? Can that be done through Human Health Transfer?”

“Yeah, but the only other pokemon so gifted in weaving and untangling is fighting for its life at the pokemon center,” said Gary.

“We need another gifted Human Health Transfer pokemon then,” said Misty with sad eyes.

“That we do,” said Gary.

Mismagius mumbled quietly to itself, “My ears, they burn.”

Gary pulled up a side screen to search listings of Human Health Transfer professionals, growling under his breath with a majority of them, practically all of them, were outside of Kanto.

Job frustrations, when your region is so behind in one of the fields you excel at.

Misty sighed and let Tracey have his computer back, “I’m sorry, I’m just slowing you guys down, please continue, I’m going to be slothing over here,” Misty picked herself up and curled up at the end of Gary’s bed giving a guttural sigh. Umbreon opted to curl up in the middle of the bed with its stretching space shrinking.
Not that you really want to work with Misty present, but whatever, she knows to leave Tracey be when he’s working and he does the same for her when she’s doing the Oceanographer thing for her gym.

“So, how about I take a look at Transformation, and you Human Health Transfer?” asked Tracey.

“Alrighty.”

_I mean it’s only right up your field of expertise Gary with Bioluminescence or as some peoples call it, aurassssssssssssssssssssssssssssssss do–do–do– Pokemon recovery moves used on humans have been shown to have varying effects depending on the skill of the pokemon. Pokemon who have been raised by Trainers have been known to be more effective in practice than wild pokemon who have had little to no experience or exposure with human contact, and thus the human bioluminescence frequency in which health is promoted. Oh Gary, YOU WROTE THAT, LOL, okey, okey lets dig a little deeper heeeerreeeeeee we goooooodddddoo okey. Effects of pokemon Human Health Transfer, oh hell you’re just going to be reviewing some of your work, okay then, all the better, you got this, youuuuuu GOT THIS. Except this part, this wasn’t you. Pokemon with Heal Pulse* and Pain Split* have in some rare and/or extreme cases have been known to transfer type effects and abilities upon healing a human target. Effects can be very subtle to extreme with several documented cases of full type transfer and/or ability transfer in slightly resembling a Transformation – hELLO JACKPOT –

“Tracey, come, come look at this” –

Misty couldn’t help but snap her head up at them –

_People influenced under such circumstances are not undergoing a true Transformation….As pokemon can change other pokemon’s typing and abilities with certain attack moves during battle, the effects never last, the same can be said with Human Transfer Effects. Research of Fairy and Ghost subjects with their Trainers have shown these effects are in no way permanent, and typically will disperse over a time period of several hours, to 24 hours, with one case extending pass the day period…….Well then, Ash would be the second recorded case…

Gary and Tracey looked at each other wide-eyed, the answer they didn’t know they needed had been presented to them on a silver platter.

“Did y’all just find something good?” Misty asked in a high frequency.

“Maybe,” said Gary quietly, he licked his lips and read further, “It says this research was done by Selena Gardevoir of Lumiose City.”

_That name sounds familiar….That name, oh, oh w o w, THAT Gardevoir! Yo, speaking of having terrible communication efforts sometimes, shall we delve into your researching past with that Gary Oak?

“How long was the extended case?”

Gary scrolled through, “40 hours, god, 40 hours…..”

“Forty hours of what?” came Misty’s slightly panicked voice, Tracey motioned for her to come over and began explaining their findings as Gary threw himself into thought.

_Does Ash’s body have another 16 hours in it…? Worst case scenario here, in theory, Ash would need to pull through the next 16 hours to be cleared of this, Human Transfer Effect, unless that’s another first he’ll set. Not to mention this influence was done by a freak of nature. Hmmm…The pokemon ice-zombies of Froslass, they couldn’t have undergone a Transformation because lol they
already are Pokémon – but they were imbued with characteristics and attacks from Froslass, err, Lisa…..Huuuuuuuh, and…possibly, some of Ash’s memories….Human Transfer Effects is the name it’s been given…

There’s no doubt these coming hours are going to be some of the longest hours of your life. The Disable* attacks are still moving through Ash, messing with his organs, his body could literally fail him all at once and no amount of medical equipment or Human Health Transfer techniques would be able to supersede that….As for the influence with the Curse Body* ability, and, who knows what else – if his body can survive the Disable* attack, then it can fight off the Transfer Effects, in theory……Ash will be the first person to survive both…His body would need to warm up, and the only physical appearance of him that changed were his eyes, no grotesque horns anywhere…..It can go away, it can leave him….Bottom line however, no one is sure when he’s even going to wake up, if he wakes up, or what he’s going to wake up as…No, you’re not going to give up!

Ritchie grumbled in his sleep again, Sparky perked up and began petting him until he settled down.

Tracey rubbed his face, “I don’t think we should wait until the effects wear off, Ash needs a more proactive approach now.”

“I agree one-hundred percent,” said Misty, “But how are you guys going to do that?”

“We could try loosening the foreign bio-code in Ash,” said Gary, “We just needs some codes from Gardevoir, some that the med Pokémon here can implement” –

“But, wait a minute,” Tracey scratched his head, “there isn’t a med Pokémon in this city, much less this side of our region aside from Audino that’s skilled enough in that field to follow through with the codes, and Audino, might not recover enough in time.”

Oh but there is one Gary, let’s do it, let’s go into your researching past~

“I’m not talking about complete removal,” said Gary, “I know they can’t do that, I’m talking about our Pokémon here loosening the screws, and then Gardevoir taking them out.”

“Wait,” said Misty, “You, actually think you can get Gardevoir here in time? Isn’t there any Human Health Transfer professional that’s closer?”

“No, this one,” Gary tapped Selena Gardevoir’s name hard on his screen, “What’s stopping us from calling, perhaps the only Pokémon in the world, that can save Ash?”

“Selena Gardevoir of Lumiose City? Gardevoir is in Lumiose City, which is in Kalos, which is” –

“Just a couple of Teleportation* points away from here. Thomas’ Alakazam can have Gardevoir here in no time if Gardevoir is unable to Teleport* itself.”

“Through how many passport and customs checks?” said Misty getting flustered quickly, “You’re asking it, no wait, you haven’t even talked with this Pokémon yet, to country hop over here?!”

“Yes. Did we all just forget I’m a world renowned researcher?”

“Gary” –

“We need Gardevoir.”

“What if Gardevoir refuses?”
“It won’t, I know Ash is high-profile and high-risk, but Gardevoir won’t refuse,” said Gary.

“How can you be so sure? Shouldn’t we propose other top-tier med pokemon?” said Misty, the anguish clear in her voice.

Gary read off his screen, “Number one Human Health Transfer pokemon in the world,” and then looked over to Misty, “Selena Gardevoir of Lumiose City.”

Tracey took hold of Misty’s hands, “Sweetheart, Ash is the first documented case of fighting off this level of influence, Gardevoir is the best bet in making sure he clears this as clean as a whistle. Its research says the effects will wear off, but we know Lisa was capable of manipulating a lot of things, and this we cannot take a chance with by hoping it does what the text says it will do.”

“So, that’s it then, we just put all our eggs onto Gardevoir?” said Misty.

Gary’s mouth was pulled tight, but Tracey answered Misty first, “Gardevoir is a pretty big basket, if nothing else, then okay, Gary and I with the next best med pokemon will begin untangling the code ourselves, the risk we run into however, is” –

“Is tearing Ash’s soul apart,” said Gary, “That’s ultimately what it is going to come down to.”

Misty sputtered, “But Gary, you’re the leading authority on Bioluminescence!” said Misty, “Don’t you trust yourself to save Ash? To at least, help him get through until Gardevoir gets here?”

“It’s not that I don’t trust myself,” said Gary quickly on the defensive, and again Tracey stepped in and finished the answer –

“To put it plain and simple Misty, we’re not pokemon, and the pokemon we need to be so fine tuned in Human Health Transfer, are simply not here. This is beyond the work of human doctors, we need a pokemon that can manipulate the bio-codes about as far as what Lisa and Audino could do, honestly, if I could turn into a Blissey right now to get the job done, I would, but even then I’d need years of training as a pokemon doing Human Health Transfer, and, well, yeah.”

Mismagius dropped a few levels down in hovering, “Sigh.”

“I know Ash’s bio-code by heart anyway,” said Gary, “His soul, his aura, everything. It’s getting the code to let go that is the hard part, its like you’re searching through brain synapses, just the electrical pulse of living, and you only have a split second to make the right decision before the code is manipulated again, tangled up. So, the minuet we get Gardevoir here, the best Transfer pokemon in the world, I have faith it’ll just be a matter of time before that gunk is cleared out of Ash for good.”

Misty just looked at Gary with heavy eyes, Tracey placed his hand over her own, until she said quietly, “Alright.”

“We got him back,” said Gary, “I won’t let him slip away again.”

Tracey scratched his head apologetically, “Heh, I hope Gardevoir accepts the case too” –

“Oh it will,” said Gary, “Aaaaaaum, where is my com?”

“On the table,” said Tracey, “But I’m not sure how functional it is after everything that’s happened, just use mine.”

“Thanks” –
Tracey handed over his com, and Gary signed into his Altaria Storage account, pulling up his phonebook. Scrolling through, he found his contact number to Laboratoire de Imaginaire and dialed it. After three rings there was a quick jingle, followed by a recording, “S'il vous plaît entrez votre identifiant” – Gary entered his Lab ID – “Attendez svp.” There was more hold music until, “S'il vous plaît entrez l'extension de” – Gary entered the extension and waited though several rings, and then,

“Bonjour ceci est Professeur Gardevoir” –

“Bonjour Gardevoir!” said Gary happily, “Cela est Professeur Gary Oak.”

There came a small gasp over the line, “Professeur Oak! Oh! It has been too long!!”

Oh thank god it’s not speaking Kalosian anymore, Gary you’re really, REALLY rusty on it, but the look on Misty and Tracey’s faces are priceless!

“It can talk,” said Tracey, Gary waved him off to hush –

“It has, it really has,” said Gary feeling his nerves on pins and needles.

So eeeeeey, we haven’t spoken in like five years, but could you like come over and, save my boyfriend?

“Time just escapes us my friend” –

IT STILL CALLED YOU ITS FRIEND NYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA –

“Time I’m afraid, is something I am short of,” said Gary.

“Oh?”

“I’m so sorry for calling you out of the blue like this, but I really need your help,” said Gary, the desperation in his voice clear –

“Oh anything, anything my friend, what is the problem?”

Just tell it straight –

“We have, a, patient here who has had their bio-code maliciously manipulated. He has been imbued with Pain Split* by a Transformed Froslass, and his body has been further weakened by multiple Disable* attacks. As a result of their encounter, he –” Gary gathered himself – “he had flat-lined twice and then showed influence in being a male captive of said Froslass. For now, his body is sustained by machines and Human Health Transfer techniques, but we don’t know how much longer he has – his bio-code is radiating out the Cursed Body* ability” – Gary heard furious typing in the background with an odd muffled sound as Gardevoir’s work com was hooked up to something–

“Send me his bio-code, immediately, please” –

Indeed Ash’s bio-code is one you know by heart, however it’s always good to have these things on file!

“This code I’m sending you is the one not manipulated” – Gary pulled Ash’s bio-code information from his Altaria Storage account and sent it to Gardevoir, “And, this is the manipulated code coming next,” Gary tapped Tracey’s com to the laptop’s port, and sorted through the transfer files until he found the data Tracey compiled while helping the med pokemon sync up to Ash, then sent it
through. Gary heard some words escape from Gardevoir he knew it would never say in polite company –

“How long has he been sustained?”

“Over 24 hours,” said Gary.

“A full day” – Gary could hear shuffling on the line, “*I am coming immediately*” –

A squeak escaped Misty, Gary was beaming – “Thank-you, thank-you!”

"*Do not thank me yet,* here, I am sending you a tear-code, any medical pokemon can assist in it until I am there, it will help loosen the tangled code in the patient*” –

**GOD FUCKING BLESS! YES YES YES YES YES!!!!**

Once the message was received, Gary looked up for Mismagius only to find it was already by his side, and in using its ghostly powers, scrolled through the information at light speed, “Memorized,” the ghost pokemon whispered, and then promptly bolted out the room leaving Tracey and Gary in happy shock and amazement–

*Okay Mismagius gets a pass forever* –

“How will you travel?” asked Gary.

“I am capable of Teleportation*, I will do my best to make it over there as soon as I possibly can, ah, err, where am I heading to exactly?”

“Viridian Memorial in Viridian City within the Kanto Region.”

“Got it.”

“Thank-you Gardevoir, I can’t, I *seriously* cannot thank you enough.” In the background, Gary heard Gardevoir calling its assistants over.

“I want you to know Gary, there are ways for bodies to heal, adapt, overcome, but I am in fear for his soul” –

**FUCK** –

“Here Gary, let me give you my personal number so we can keep in contact until I arrive” –

“Okay” – Gary received the number and quick-saved it to Tracey’s com.

“In the meantime I will be coming up with a counter-code as I travel, something to help piece and hold together the patient’s will to live and will send it once completed” –

**Will to live???? WILL TO LIVE????**

“Ah” –

“Au revoir Gary, I will be there within several hours, hopefully much sooner.”

“Thank you, I hope sooner as well, au revoir,” and the call ended.

Gary dropped back against his bed completely drained, likewise with Tracey in his chair, and Misty
on the bed; Umbreon just popped its little mouth.

So….worst case scenario….The Ash that wakes up might not be the Ash that you know….But let’s have some faith here peoples. Let’s have some faith here…

“What’s going on?” came Ritchie’s gurgled voice, he sat up, his hair looking like a Miltank just gave him the ultimate cow lick.

“Our work is pretty much done for us,” said Gary scrolling through Gardevoir’s information with slightly trembling hands.

Ritchie sat up further, “Done how?”

Tracey and Misty motioned to Ritchie, “Come here, come here! Read this part.”

Ritchie stumbled up with Sparky helping and shuffled himself over. Gary gave Ritchie a minuet as he read, watching his eyes go wide as Gary happily sipped some more of his tea.

“And I just finished speaking with Gardevoir,” said Gary, “it is on its way over, and will be here within the next couple of hours.”

“Gardevoir is coming?” asked Ritchie breathlessly.

“Gardevoir is coming.”

“Right now, right now?”

“Right now right now.”

Ritchie’s hands clasped together in front of his mouth, “Oh, oh that is wonderful!” Looking up from the screen, Gary could see the shine of happy-tears in his eyes, “Oh that is wonderful!” Gary and Ritchie shared a big hug.

“I am just so, I have to tell Ash’s mom, oh my goodness! Oh no wait, she might be asleep, oh, but still,” Ritchie gave a deep sigh of relief almost collapsing on Gary.

Let’s not count the eggs now, BECAUSE THE GOLDEN FARFETCHED IS STILL LAYING – I MEAN CAN I GET AN AMEN–

It was then the walls of the hospital building gave a terrific shake, making everyone nearly jump out of their skins with Ritchie leaping up at the ready –

"WHAT ON EARTH" –

The entire hospital gave another violent shake, the windows in Gary’s room cracked. Ritchie breathed Ash’s name and bolted out of Gary’s room before anyone could stop him, Sparky hissing and snapping out right after him –

“RITCHIE!!, UGH! YOU TWO STAY HERE!” Misty bolted out after him – the hospital gave another terrible shake, Tracey and Gary could hear hospital staff frantically running about trying to secure patients – Nurse Layla with a walkie-talkie came scrambling in with a Blissey and locked the door –

DID SHE JUST LOCK THE DOOR???? I MEAN LIKE WHERE COULD YOU GO ANYWAY???? GARY YOU ARE HAVING THE WORST WAR Flash BACKS TO WHEN THE ICE ZOMBIES ATTACKED OH GOD OH GOD WHAT’S HAPPENING!?!?!?!!? RITCHIE AND
“What’s going on?!” Tracey squeaked –

“There is an altercation on the roof, it’s bad” –

“Altercation of what?!”

**IS IT THE ONELINGS?!?!?!? HAVE THEY COME FOR ZOROARK?!?!?!? FOR ASH?!?!?!? REVENGE ON THE RANGERS WHAT WOMAN WHAT IS HAPPENING?!?!?!?**

The lights flicked in the hospital after another terrible shake –

**OH GOD THE POWER CAN’T GO OUT, THE POWER CAN’T GO OUT!!!!! PLEASE –**

All of Gary’s thoughts were consumed by his Lover, and, once again, Gary was in a position unable to do anything for him but pray.

Nurse Layla’s walkie-talkie sounded off with a cascade of voices, “Each ICU patient needs an electric assistant NOW” –

“Reports of electrical surges, someone confirm please!”

“Rotom are in position, the first surge has been handled” –

**OH YEAH MEDICAL AND MAINTENANCE ROTOM FUCK YEAH!!! AND ASH HAS ONE IN HIS ROOM!**

“Get ALL of the Rotom on surge protection now!”

*Besides Gary, if worse comes to worse, Ash will always have Pikachu by his side to power the machines or help with surge absorption—*

The lights in Gary’s room suddenly burned to a fever pitch and blew out, the Blissey catching the glass with the move Psychic* before it could hit anyone, the entire hospital had gone dark –

“Don’t worry,” said Nurse Layla, “The generators should come online any second!”

**Okay. Okay. Okay. It’s still dark –**

Nurse Layla’s walkie-talkie spouted more voices, “Severe damage to the mainframe! Our entire board is fried!”

“Rotom in the East Wing are down!”

“The Rotom handling floors one through 4 are down!”

“We can’t take another hit like that! Someone please respond with updates on the roof!”

**“ELECTRICAL ASSISTANTS NEED TO BE IN PLACE NOW!”**

**“CODING IN ROOM 612 I NEED ASSIST NOW” –**

**“CODING IN ROOM 102” –**

*Gary you’re about to have a fucking stroke, did you ever catch what Ash’s room number was?*
Suddenly the hum of electricity could be heard racing through the hospital’s wiring, and all the lights that were not blown out by the cataclysmic surge suddenly came back to life with an odd pale bluish glow.

_Pale blue is quickly becoming your least favorite color. Like ever. Why are the fucking lights glowing fucking blue—_

Nurse Layla’s walk-talkie continued with its panicked ramblings, “PLEASE RESPOND WITH UPDATES ON THE ROOF, WHAT IS HAPPENING?! 

Gary felt Tracey’s com vibrate with a message, he swiped up the com and saw it was from Gardevoir! Gary opened it up and read it, *Gary! I see what is happening! It is on the news! How amazing and more amazing!* 

**WHAT THE FUCK IS SO AMAZING GARDEVOIR?!?!?! GOD!! YOU KNOW WHAT, YOU CAN PROBABLY FIND OUT MORE FROM GARDEVOIR THAN ANYONE HERE AT THE MOMENT**—

Gary quickly sent a text back, *Please tell me what is going on, we don’t know anything in here!* 

Gary received a message just as quickly, *The reports are not too clear, the camera crews cannot get close enough, too dangerous, there are Legendary pokemon on the roof of your hospital and they were fighting!* 

**WHAT. THE. FUCK?????????? Oh shit Gary you almost sent that to Gardevoir, BUT THE POINT STILL FUCKING STANDS – THERE’S NO WAY, ITS JUST GOTTA BE MEDIA HYPE SO WHAT THE FUCK EVER—**

“Clear, clear, we are clear here,” came Layla’s walkie-talkie —

“Altercation on the roof has subsided” —

There came a fast rapture knocking at the door, Nurse Layla opened up, and a doctor poked his head inside, “Clear, we’re clear here, and your patient?”

"Oh I am just dandy,” Gary spat.

“Um, ditto,” squeaked Tracey.

“Good, Layla, I need you to help me over with room 413, they’re stuck” — and the doctor pulled Nurse Layla away, leaving the Blissey to be on standby with Gary and Tracey. It was then Mismagius phased back into the room,

“What a most stressful turn of events,” whispered the ghost pokemon, “Mr. Oak, I want to inform you that the Rotom in Ash’s room was able to front the surge with Pikachu, and I, well I want to promise you right now I’m going to do everything I can with those codes to help Ash.”

“Thank-you,” said Gary, Mismagius smiled and disappeared through the wall to return to its patient.

Gary gathered up Umbreon in his arms because he desperately needed someone to hold onto for the moment, and then an extremely breathless Ritchie and Misty came bursting back through the door making Gary and Tracey jump out their skins —

“Gary, you are NOT going to believe what is on the roof of the hospital!” wheezed Ritchie.
“Try me,” said Gary flatly holding a bristled Umbreon.

“Moltres is keeping vigil on the hospital roof!”

Gary took a moment, then cocked his head, “Come again?”

“Moltres is here, roosting on the hospital roof, and it’s not alone,” Ritchie slumped against the wall, “Auuuuuuugggggghhhhhhhhh...”

Misty rubbed her hands anxiously, “Gary, did, did you know Moltres has been favoring Ash?” –

“Kept telling him and telling him,” Ritchie laughed emptily.

Yeah, and he just kept laughing it off, so it faded to background noise, and well hello from the other siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiide~

“He told me, a while back,” said Gary meekly.

What does this all mean?

After Ritchie caught his breath, he pushed himself back up and plopped down on Gary’s bed, “So, *cough*, let me break down what happened, my Sparky did the translating, or tried to, it was really just picking up bits and pieces of their, conversation shall we call it,” Ritchie took a deep inhale, “By the time we got up there with Mary and the other Rangers still able to have a go, Moltres and Articuno were already going at it and Zapdos was all” –

“Articuno, and, Zapdos, are here too?” Gary asked in an airy voice.

“Was here, they both have already flown away.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah, alright, “Ritchie continued, “And so Zapdos was all ‘come on guys stop’, but Moltres and Articuno, they were squabbling, about, uh, essentially Moltres was all ‘How many times do I have to clean up your stuff?’ but Moltres didn’t say ‘stuff’ and Articuno was like ‘You think I let this happen willingly?’ and Moltres was like ‘Yeah I do!’ and thats when Moltres and Articuno got into a slap fight and…Gary I couldn’t make this up if I tried.”

“I am, well aware, please continue.”

It is no secret that the Legendary Pokemon are pseudo-gods with knives for nerves, mischievous gods, or Prima-Donnas, or in worst case scenario, ALL OF THE ABOVE. THIS IS A FUCKING HOSPITAL!!! YOU HAVE A SLAP FIGHT ON THE ROOF OF A HOSPITAL?!?!?!! ASH DESERVES MUCH BETTER THAN THAT.

“I swear,” Ritchie laid back on the bed with his arms covering his face in a defeated cross formation, “half the Legendaries are stuck-up brats, and the other half have anger issues I will never understand – anywho – we just know the Legendary pokemon were really, really upset with, Lisa’s evolution.”

“Lisa’s evolution?”

“Yeah,” said Misty, “saying something like, ‘this cannot happen, ever again,’ stuff like that.”

The plot thickens.

“And then, Zapdos got dragged into the fray, and that’s what blew out the power,” Ritchie sighed,
“That’s when Mary’s Lopunny decided to take matters into its own hands and roundhouse kicked each Legendary Bird in the face – and then AFTER that things ended real quick with Zekrom arriving in the nick of time to” –

“Zekrom?” said Gary.

“Yeah, Zekrom, the Zekrom,” said Ritchie, “Anywho, Zekrom, quite literally, knocked some sense into all of them and now Zekrom’s tail, or, butt rather, is powering the hospital until its grid can be repaired, hence why all the lights are this like pale blue color.”

Gary and Tracey just gawked at Ritchie and Misty.

“I need a drink,” said Misty leaning over on Tracey’s chair.

“So,” said Gary, “Moltres and Zekrom are on the roof of the hospital?”

“Yes, just chillin’,” said Ritchie.

“Just chillin’,” echoed Gary.

“I seriously doubt anyone is getting to that roof,” said Ritchie, “besides, I’m sure Moltres would not appreciate any company that is not Ash, it has already tried to roast some of the Rangers and medical staff, it’s not much up for talking at the moment.”

“Spring is literally here in other words,” mumbled Misty.

“Yeah,” said Gary, “No, kidding.”

****

Well Gary. Here we go. Here we go. It’s only been two hours since the Legendary pokemon kerfuffle, but things are still hectic in places around the hospital. Power outages are never good in hospitals. You feel terrible for the poor people affected by it, and just when you were done reassuring yourself that Ash was of the lucky ones and had made it through the kerfuffle just fine – in which just fine is defined as not getting worse, you got the bad news. Ash’s body has very much so taken a sudden turn for the worst. Like, bad, bad worse. The doctors are saying these next upcoming hours are going to be ‘the ultimate test’, and if you could look back and pinpoint a time in your life where you honestly felt like surrendering, that would have been it. Mismagius had come back into your room deep in remorse saying it tried, the medical team tried, they tried but...And that’s when you reached out to the ghost pokemon and hugged it, thanking it for its efforts all the same.

Meanwhile Gardevoir is fuming about being stuck in customs in Sinnoh for not having an accompanying Trainer and is about to break open some heads in having to prove its credentials. You’ve told it you would vouch for it, but there is obviously some TA official with a god complex that you hope gets shit on by an asteroid. At least Gardevoir had come up with some pretty good tear-codes so the med pokemon working on Ash could begin loosening up all that gunk in him...Or they were going to but then he took a turn for the worse, and, yeah, efforts had to be focused on helping him survive. You finally called Daisy to let her know what was going on with your side of things, and well that call could have gone better since you more or less were on the verge of tears the entire time because reasons. Lots and lots of reasons. Ugh.

After some Health Transfer Treatments from a hospital Blissey, Gary was well enough to be up and moving about his room, but he needed more, and he wanted to be alone. Most of the medical staff was too busy dealing with other patients from the power outage to mind Gary from stretching his legs so long as he had Umbreon by his side at least, and he was careful to keep out of their way.
Everything felt much longer than a day passing, even though Gary was unconscious for most of it, but even then he wasn’t too sure of the time, time right now was an enemy.

Umbreon gave a small bark at Gary.

“I’m okay Umbie.”

You know where you’re going Gary?

It was growing quieter in the halls. Before Gary turned down one particular hallway, he pecked over, and saw that it was mainly empty, save for his guarding pokemon, Arcanine and Blastoise, outside of Ash’s room.

Ash’s mom and Brock are probably with Misty, Ritchie, and Tracey. Pikachu might be inside Ash’s room, or it’s with Ash’s mom.

Arcanine and Blastoise turned towards Gary, their faces lighting up upon seeing him, and greeted him happily, both glad Gary was able to be up and moving. Gary smiled back, but couldn’t express the same joy in knowing what was coming.

Gary rubbed his bandaged arm nonchalantly as he walked up to Ash’s room. Knowing he was only going to cause himself pain, Gary walked up to the window and looked through.

It was dimly lit inside. The curtains were halfway drawn, but he could still see somewhat. *Ah, there’s a Rotom,* Gary thought watching the ghost and electric pokemon take readings on the equipment. His hands gripped themselves. Amongst all the medical equipment, there couldn’t possibly be a person in there, much less Ash underneath all those wires and blankets. Gary raised himself on his tippy toes, then felt Blastoise pick him up just above his hips, oh, there, there he could barely see a bit of Ash’s hair, but that was it. He let his ears tune into the beeps and whirring of the equipment keeping his beloved alive, if it could even be called ‘kept alive.’ Blastoise set him back down in feeling Gary slump.

The machines look to be just holding what’s left of him together. You could just put him out of his misery.

Gary let his head fall hard against the glass to knock such a thought out of his head; Arcanine slightly whined at him.

We’re sorry, but your cries for Ash currently cannot be reciprocated at this time, goodbye….Hey, at least your love isn’t lost to the disappearing mountains, he’s here with you, kinda.

Gary took in a shuddering breath, his chest once again feeling like the weight of the world was on it. Umbreon placed a sympathetic paw on Gary’s foot. Gary let his forehead rest against the window and placed a trembling hand on the cold, cold glass. “I’m here…” he whispered, his breath slightly showing on the glass, “Sweetheart I’m here…I don’t, god, I don’t want to lose you…” he swallowed, gathering his breath, “I know, there are times where you feel like you always have to be strong, to be Superman, for me and everyone else, but this time I need you to be, I need you to pull through this….” Gary looked longingly into the room, “Whatever happens tonight, you won’t be alone, and, I’m so sorry you were made to think you were…I love you so, so, so much Ash…I’ll always love you no matter what…So please, please pull through this.”

Umbreon heard a small whine from Arcanine, looked up, and saw the pure fire pokemon almost ready to cry from Gary’s plea. Umbreon sighed.

Whatever kind of mercy Lisa was getting at, you can’t, you just can’t let that win. Maybe, you can
get in the room real quick and squeeze his hand, just let him know he’s not alone in there, under those pile of wires, metal, and whatever else he’s been hooked up to….Ash isn’t exactly fond of needles…He doesn’t know what’s going on…He must be so scared inside….

Gary’s heart acted before his brain, he grabbed the door handle, and expectedly, felt a soft touch on his hand to impede his entry. “Mr. Oak, please.”

Gary crinkled his nose before looking –

**That voice is too mechanical to be human** –

Gary looked and saw a Blissey next to him wearing a poke-translator prototype that had definitely seen better days, “Hey, Bibi!”

*The Ranger Blissey that was registered to Mary’s station! Or, maybe former station since the place has had some recent extravagant and violent renovations.*

“I came from my training as soon as I heard,” said Bibi, “I wish I could have been here sooner.”

“How is he doing?”

Bibi looked down, “He is a fighter, that much is certain, but I expect nothing less of him. I remember his energy when I first met him at the Ranger Trial Runs with Ritchie, there was nothing but determination in them, no matter what pain they had to endure.”

Gary looked longingly through the window again, as much as he suddenly ached to go inside, it was best he went ahead and take his leave. At this point, there was nothing he could to help, it would all be up to Gardevoir now.

“Bibi, thank-you for helping to look after him.”

“Think nothing of it Mr. Oak, we are all doing everything we can” – as Bibi spoke it wrapped its stubby arms around Gary, pulling him into a hug.

*Okay Gary it’s time for another round of ‘Fuck It I’m Sad.’*

Gary collapsed against the pokemon’s soft body, crushed by a resurgence of grief he just could not hold back any longer. Bibi held him strongly despite its soft demeanor, letting Gary’s full weight drop and rest against it. The Happiness pokemon rubber Gardevoir’s back, letting him sob out his anguish. “There, there, shhhhhhh, it’s going to be alright, it is going to be alright.”

Arcanine couldn’t help itself and nuzzled Gary as well, only making him involuntarily sob harder, which then made Arcanine cry; Blastoise held its own and patted their backs.

Umbreon just sat back and sighed, letting them have a moment.

After Arcanine finally backed off with Umbreon’s shooing, Blissey helped Gary stand back upright, he was still heaving, but under more control of himself. Gary swallowed, “Thank-you Bibi, thanks.”

Bibi took Gardevoir’s hands in its own, “I must tell you Gary, help is on its way. An incredible Human Health Transfer user is coming, the best in the world, Selena Gardevoir of Lumoise City!”

*This you know, you done been know because you were the one who called Ms. Gardevoir, but hey, people more than likely saw Gardevoir making its way downtown, walking fast, faces past, and running faster – Ash so loved to make these lyrics go stupid, god Gary ITS KILLING YOU INSIDE*
“You don’t say?” said Gary attempting to look surprised.

Bibi nodded enthusiastically, “Once Ms. Gardevoir was proposed with the case, there was no stopping it from accepting! But please keep this under wraps, there is already enough attention drawn to this hospital with such an aspiring candidate under care and two legendary pokemon roosting on the roof after that terrible altercation.”

*Um yeah Bibi, that's really not going to matter.*

Gary gave a humble smile, “I'll keep my lips sealed.” He suddenly heard a pair of footsteps come trotting down the hallway along with one of the last voices he wanted to hear.

“Hey Gary!” chimed Max.

**Heeeeeeey Fuckface~! Why couldn’t Lisa have frozen your balls off ey?**

“Max, hey.”

“Oh don’t jump all over me now,” Max gave a wink.

**URGE TO PUNCH RISING.**

“Relax, relax, I only mean the best here, heard you, having a hard time and all,” Max ruffled up the fluff around Arcanine’s neck and gave it a good pap –

**GOD HE HEARD YOU CRYING**

**UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUGH**–

Max held up his hands, “I totally get the ‘stay away vibe’ loud and clear, but, well mate let’s face it, you don’t scare me nearly as badly as Ritchie does.”

*Would you like that remedied now?*

“So I can’t just leave you hanging like this, so sad and whatnot. I mean, I get everyone is sad about what’s happened to Ash, and yeah it is a rough go mate, but, there’s no way Ash is gonna die.” Max nodded over in Ash’s direction. “He’s going to be something great that one. Now, I haven’t been on too many runs with him, but from what I’ve seen, I was blown away. Let me tell you this one time, we had a legendary encounter with Cobalion, *and it bowed to him. My. Jaw. Dropped.*”

*A Cobalion....bowed...?....Ash never told you about that one.*

“Now I know no Cobalion is going to do any bowing to me!” Max laughed, “But that just shows what a great person Ash is! I have no doubt he is important not only to you Gary, but to our world in general, and,” Max put his hands on his hips, “it would be an awful loss if he were to leave so soon.”

*Speaking of loss…*

“Hey, whatever happened to the Bergmite that was with Ash?” asked Gary.

“Now that’s a story unto itself,” said Max, “From what Dewgong and Sneasel told me, its not a Bergmite anymore, it evolved into an Avalugg in an attempt to protect Ash.”

Gary’s heart gave a pained pulse. *“It did?”*
“It sure did,” said Max, “Saved the group from the ice cavern collapse too, gave my team enough time for them to get out of there. That pokemon is a hero, plain and simple.”

*This pokemon that you may never get the chance to meet, that was by Ash’s side during his time with Lisa….Oh Gary :(

“Well, where is it now?!"

“Not sure,” Max rubbed his head, “My Sneasel and Dewgong are out looking for it, despite my orders for them to rest but auoh, they’ll be alright. They just can’t pick up Avalugg’s tracker, but a pokemon that sturdy, I doubt its down and out, why, it’s just a matter of time I’m sure till they find ‘em, almost all things in general are just matters of time.”

“Yeah,” said Gary looking back longingly through Ash’s window, “Just matters of time.”

****

Another hour has gone by Gary. Maybe two. You’re not even sure how time is working at the moment. You decided to take a moment to sit outside of Ash’s room and talk to Gardevoir some via Tracey’s com, but you haven’t had a response from it yet, and the worries in your stomach are doing bad things inside, and then Arcanine came over and started nuzzling you and it was so warm, so very, very warm, and before you knew it, you had noddled off on the bench with Umbreon by your side. You awoke drowsily for a moment to find yourself suddenly laying on Misty’s lap of all places, your head on one leg with Ritchie’s on the other. They must have come back to Ash’s room and found you nodded off and curled up and looking so miserable so hey, lets all be sad together. You felt Misty pet you, and honestly you’re thankful for the sentiment, because you are about as spent as spent can get. God you’re so tired.

Gary felt Misty shuffle a bit, Arcanine and Blastoise were making excited noises, and then she shook him and Ritchie gently, “Hey, you two, come on wake up!”

Gary growled and sat up with Ritchie, rubbing his eyes to see Mismagius and Bibi shuffling their way over to them quickly down the hall, they were carrying several travel bags each, and then rounding the corner behind them was Gardevoir carrying the rest and walking with all due swiftness – Gary sprang up like a rocket and bolted over –

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA 8D –

Mismagius and Bibi dodged Gary easily enough, and once Gardevoir saw him, it shed its bags and spread its arms wide, Gary throwing his arms around the Fairy and Psychic type giving it one of the greatest hugs of its life –

“Thank-you, thank-you so much for coming,” Gary managed to grunt out under Gardevoir’s returned crushing hug.

“Oh Monsieur Oak, I wish we could have reunited under better circumstances!”

“Likewise.”

Gary and Gardevoir quickly let go, Gardevoir scooped up its bags with its psychic powers and rushed inside Ash’s room where Bibi had already drawn the curtains shut, and closed the door behind it.

Gary could hear Gardevoir already giving commands for codes through the door and then turned towards Misty and Ritchie who just looked at Gary agape. Gary put his hands in his pockets and
spoke about as evenly as his could even though a well of emotions were balling up in his throat,

“So that was Selena Gardevoir of Lumiose City, the number one Human Health Transfer pokemon in the world, and renowned researcher as well.”

*I am also now wanted in two terminals in Sinnoh, but that is another story.*

Ritchie and Misty jumped at the voice in their heads, but Gary motioned for their calm, *You’ve opened up a Mental Link* for us?* Gary asked internally.

*Yes, I am partially a psychic pokemon after all,* came Gardevoir’s voice in their heads.

Admittedly this is much more impressive with speech as Thomas’ Alakazam only transcribed concepts when it helped Audino communicate its intentions, then again you’d expect nothing less from this past colleague because awesomeness just runs with you on that.

*You can do that while you work?!* said Ritchie, *Amazing!* *Thank-you!*

*Uuuuuuuuhhhhhhhhhhhhh* -

*Use your words Misty,* said Gary.

Misty made a face, *I'm about to use my fist* -

*I like her,* said Gardevoir, *Oh yes, I opened up this channel so I could more properly introduce myself since circumstances are a bit rushed! As Gary stated, I am indeed the number one Human Health Transfer pokemon in the world, and renowned researcher in Human Health Transfer Properties and Transfer Effects. I have performed 386 successful Hazardous Transfers and 151 successful Critical Transfers. As of right now, I will be the lead physician for Monsieur Ketchum.*

*Can you save him?* asked Ritchie –

*I am going to try,* said Gardevoir in a more serious tone, *This is where I must part ways with you all until I am able to give a conditional update.*

*Thank-you so much again,* said Gary.

*Think nothing of it my friend,* and the link was cut, Gary, Ritchie, and Misty feeling Gardevoir’s presence retreat out of their minds.

“Amazing,” breathed Misty, “Ah…..Now what?”

The waiting will be pain to say the least. You honestly want Gardevoir to snap its fingers and make everything better, but patience here Gary, you all have come this far.

Gary fiddled with his pockets, “A wise and annoying person said to me earlier today that most things are just matters of time, so now, we give Gardevoir time.”

“It was Max, wasn’t it?” asked Ritchie with a sling smile.

“It was Max,” Gary begrudgingly acknowledged.

“There’s a waiting room on this floor,” said Misty, “It’s where everyone else is at the moment, we could go there.”
“Sure, alright. Arcanine, Blastoise, can you two still keep an eye on things?”

Gary’s pokemon nodded, and with that, Gary, Misty, and Ritchie with Umbreon made their way to the waiting room, Gary suddenly realizing Ash’s mother would also be there, but it was far too late for apologies now as Ritchie swung open the waiting room door, and the first person to make eye contact with Gary, pushed herself up with Pikachu leaping off her lap, and made her aged steps over to him.

“Gary,” said Ash’s mother tenderly, “Oh it is so good to see you doing alright,” she wrapped her arms around him hugging him warmly as if he was her own.

Feel the shame son, feel the shame rot away to your very core, you know, for neglecting her on things and completely leaving her out of the loop and all, kinda forgetting she even existed but not really but that’s another case of emotional baggage tagged with your grandfather’s passing and we really do not want to get into at the moment and you are the worst boyfriend, it is you–

“Should you even be out of bed?” Mrs. Ketchum asked in a bit more serious tone.

“I can move around,” said Gary, “A Blissey patched me up real good.”

“Well then, that’s good to hear,” Mrs. Ketchum gave another hug, then pulled away from Gary. Wiping a tear from her eye, she sighed deeply, “Misty kept me up to date with, this whole terrible event, I can’t imagine what these past hours have been for you having been wrapped up in his rescue, and everything just, happening the way it happened.”

Gary glanced at Misty, and Misty gave him a big ‘You are Welcome’ face.

You’re pretty sure Misty will hang this huge ass cover story over you for the rest of your life but you honestly don’t care, you really couldn’t think about anyone else but Ash, to a fault.

Mrs. Ketchum patted Gary’s heart, “How are you feeling dear?”

“I’m okay,” Gary answered quietly, but he was well aware how easily Mrs. Ketchum could see through him.

Ash’s mother took Gary’s hands, “Can’t say we’ve really had worse to deal with here, but, when I find myself in a crisis of the heart, we can count our blessings with small mercies, and my oh my, what the mercy you were able to bring in getting the number one Human Health Transfer pokemon in the world to work on my son.” Gary realized how tightly Ms. Ketchum was holding his hands, and felt every truth ring out from her voice when she said, “Thank-you, thank-you so much,” and she pulled him in for another tight hug.

“It’s, the least I could do,” said Gary in a small voice, he felt himself shrink by the minuet, despite Mrs. Ketchum’s frail build, he felt she could snap him in half with how weak his composure was becoming.

Gary and Mrs. Ketchum finally pulled apart with Tracey beckoning them both to take a seat at the table with the rest of them, Pikachu going right back to Mrs. Ketchum lap.

Okay Gary you got this, you can make up for all of this by keeping Ash’s mom in good spirits, you can do that, you got this, just keep her hopes afloat! Yes you’re going to crash and burn but you can do so in that suave Gary Oak style! And for that you have to talk Gary Oak! Talk! Speak! Speak boy, SPEAK –

Ms. Ketchum gave another sigh, “I still can’t believe what’s happening, I keep thinking to myself
“I may not be as good as Mimey,” said Brock, “But I bet I could whip some up with the coffee machine over there after I phenangle with it a bit.”

“Oh that would be wonderful, thank-you Brock,” Mrs. Ketchum smiled tiredly.

So Mrs. Ketchum, Gary is in fact a terrible boyfriend and doesn’t deserve your son at all, it’s all his fault your son is in such terrible shape because he felt like he was pushing him away and Gary did next to nothing to bridge the matter because he wasn’t sure how to approach the situation despite being this big super awesome researcher and oh my god converse Gary converse, don’t let it get weird and for GODS SAKE DON’T LET THINGS GET TO THE PAST–

Mrs. Ketchum rubbed her face, “If I’m honest with myself, I do eventually want an answer as to how such a turn of events could even happen” –

FUUUUUUUUUUUUCK –

“Things like this, just, bad things”, said Ritchie, “for the most part don’t need a reason. Ash and I saw this all the time in the wild. When nature happens, it happens, and you deal with the end result. However, if there’s anyone to blame here, it’s Lisa and her malicious intent. Ash was just scouting, and she took the opportunity to abuse him for her means.”

INCOMING RITCHIE WITH THE SAVE, BLESS, BLESS, BLESS!!!! GARY YOU’RE GOING TO FEEL LIKE SHIT LATER FOR THIS!

Misty shifted in her seat, “I’ll never understand how anyone could be so cruel, how she could do such terrible things.”

“Cruelty, breeds cruelty,” came a voice from the opposing end of the room, everyone looked up, and saw Mary entering the waiting room with her Chandelure, Thomas, Max, and Dragonite, “It’s a wonder any of us survived if I’m being honest.”

Gary winced at seeing Dragonite’s arm with the amputation; the sever was just below its shoulder.

“How is everyone?” Ash’s mother asked.

“Still recovering,” said Mary shortly, but she quickly righted herself with her head tilted down apologetically, “We came here to, shed some understanding with what we were up against. It may not provide comfort, but perhaps a better answer as to why this happened.” Gary saw that Mary was shaking slightly despite her strong composure, Chandelure nudged her slightly, “Mrs. Ketchum, first and foremost, I know there are no words, no reasoning to excuse the actions of my sister,” Mary bowed in her direction, “I deeply apologize for her actions.”

Well Gary looks like you had nothing to worry about in the blame game here, aaaaaaaaaand….not the only one who was avoiding Mrs. Ketchum on purpose or otherwise….:(

“Oh Mary,” said Mrs. Ketchum sadly, “Whatever guilt you feel, please put it to rest, I still have my son, but you’ve lost your sister. I hardly see any reason why you must be so hard on yourself.”

Gary saw Thomas glance off to the side.

Mary swallowed, “The fault still lays with me, your son was under my command, I was responsible for him, and it was my decision to break up the scouts Ash and Ritchie were assigned to, if they were together, this” –
She still can’t let that go either –

Ritchie stood up, “I just got done telling everyone here how the only person to blame for this was Lisa due to her intent, please Mary, stop crucifying yourself!”

“Here here,” said Max, “Mary to be honest I think the entire Team has had enough of this pity party you’ve been throwing.” Max placed a heavy hand on her shoulder, “We’d like our strong lass back, please.”

“I must agree with Max,” said Dragonite, “This self-deprecation is understandable but has no grounds. It is natural to feel responsible for a family member, but you were not the one torturing Ash, you were doing everything in your power to save him.”

Mary was still shaking slightly despite her Chandelure’s loving, and potentially flame igniting nudges, but she eventually managed to say quietly, “If you say so.”

Gary felt, or rather knew Mary wasn’t going to let this go for a while, she had just buried it down to spare the group.

Monsters are not born, they’re made. She blames herself in part for what twisted Lisa to act like that in the first place and yeah man, that’s going to haunt her forever unless she makes peace with it. You don’t know what she did, but you know the guilt.

Mrs. Ketchum beckoned them all over, “Please, please take a seat.” After the Rangers took their seat, Max sliding into his rather ungracefully, Mrs. Ketchum couldn’t help but gravitate towards Dragonite and its obvious injury, “Dear, how are you, doing?”

“I am settled,” Dragonite smiled, adjusting its poke-translator, “I will be getting a prosthetic arm soon, but I must say my Ranger is most distraught,” Dragonite sighed, “much of my efforts to calm her have been in vain, but I am hoping I will reach her soon. None of us are in this line of work without understanding the risks involved to life and limb. I am most grateful our team made it out without any casualties.”

“That we can be grateful for,” said Thomas quietly.

“To say this has raised an alarm in the community is an understatement,” said Max, “We were looking at the footage of the fight our Rangers managed to record on their body gear, and all I can say is everyone is in awe. They’ve never seen such an evolution before.”

Mary cleared her throat quietly, “Lisa was able to manipulate and modify attacks to her means, in a manner that’s almost unheard of…She was a very smart person after all….She was so talented, she really, truly was – she studied all sorts of things, but…..To ever think she was capable of such, ideals…Clearly she had an understanding of how the attacks functioned, and when, she became a Froslass, that arsenal of information was at her disposal in her efforts to change back into a human.”

“We might never figure out how she was able to do the things she did,” said Max, “those powers of restriction, manipulation, I don’t think there’s too much documentation of the sort, at least, nothing a legendary pokemon might be able to pull off.”

“Speaking of the sort, did you all figure out why the Legendary pokemon are staking an appearance here?” asked Brock.

“Just from what Sparky was able to tell us, they were showing great concern over Lisa’s evolution,” said Mary, “Like how there are Mega-Evolutions when a pokemon’s true power is unleashed, and Affinity Evolutions when a bond between Trainer and Pokemon is at their peak, there is another type
of Evolution, the one that Lisa pulled off. That evolution hasn’t been seen, or at least documented by humans for hundreds of years. Sparky translated the Legendaries describing the evolution as something where hatred and anger completely consume a Pokémon’s heart, a Nega-Evolution if you will.”

“A Nega-Evolution?”

“Hey I’m not a master at naming stuff, so take it as you will. Just as Pokémon Mega-Evolve with a bond, it looks like the same can be said the other way, only with so much hatred….”

“We did some history digging with Tracey,” said Max, giving Tracey a wink and earning a death glare from Misty, “And came to the conclusion that this kind of Nega-Evolution probably came into existence in Kalos where Mega-Evolution also originated,” he turned towards Gary, “I would place a bet that Gardevoir may know something of the matter, if only in fairy tales.”

“Perhaps” said Gary, making a mental note to quiz Gardevoir on the matter later, and props to Tracey for again researching when he couldn’t.

Max clasped his hands and hunched over, “The Legendary Pokémon greatly fear this, Nega-Evolution, to the point where we not only got an appearance by all three Legendary Birds, but Zekrom as well. I wouldn’t be surprised if the Swords of Justice will be called to address the matter since Cobalion has showed some favor to Ash as well.”

“We’re not sure why they fear it so,” said Mary, “Lisa did show incredible power with it, but, Moltres showed it could have handled Lisa’s form with ease in taking down her barrier with one blast. And, there isn’t much on the last instance of this type of evolution except that the Pokémon was immediately conquered by Zygarde during a time of war in Kalos.”

Ritchie let his head rest on his hand, “Maybe they fear it so because Legendaries are still Pokémon, and can evolve in such a manner as well, and,” Ritchie gave a deep sigh, “We all know what great tempers they have,” he sank into his chair.

“Now that is a scary thought,” said Dragonite, “A Legendary succumbing to a Nega-Evolution.”

Gary gulped.

*So could that mean nearly every fucking Legendary is a ticking time bomb. Good. To. Know. All Master Candidates may want to rethink their priorities in Pokémon. Bluh. So much for Ash getting rest, no, no son, you’ll tie him to the bed if you have to.*

Mary tapped her cup with her fingers inquisitively, “I can understand the Legendary Birds’ arrival since they’re native to this region, but Zekrom was quite the surprise, never-the-less we’re rather thankful for it in giving the hospital power until its grid is fixed.”

“Oh very much so,” said Mrs. Ketchum, “Honestly I hope those birds’ mothers get after them for spouting such a fight on top of a hospital no less!”

Gary couldn’t help but smile at that, however, an idea crept into his mind. “So,” he started, “If the Legendaries want to take a proactive stance in this matter, shouldn’t they be notified of the Onelings? Perhaps Zoroark should talk to Moltres and Zekrom while they’re still here.” Gary’s words immediately took everyone’s attention, “Look, they’re the ones that sent Lisa over the deep end, and they’re shady enough as it is from what we know, if anyone should be notified it’s the Swords of Justice, and Zekrom can do that easily.”

“Well, they weren’t too keen on speaking with any of us,” said Mary, “But it’s worth a shot if we
can convince them of the Onelings aid in Lisa’s transformation. If worse comes to worse and they’ll only speak with Ash, then, we’ll just have to wait until he’s able to convene with them.”

Brock let out a guttural groan, “Honestly! We’re all just trying to help one another here! They can’t just spare an ear to hear us out?”

Misty crossed her arms, “It’s not like that Brock, they’ll only speak to humans they favor, and anyhow, how many times have these Legendaries been sought out by humans just to prove themselves? For them to even risk coming out in public like this is huge! They’re like celebrities, and that kind of attention can put anyone’s temper on the burner.”

“I suppose,” Brock grumbled, “But if you’re mainly favoring candidates, what can you expect?”

Misty sighed.

“In that instance, the least we can do until we can start up talks is make sure Moltres and Zekrom are left alone,” said Max, “Zekrom already has people staying back with its threat display, but I’m sure some brash Trainer is already drawing up plans.”

“Right then” said Brock, “I’ll help.”

“Me too,” said Misty.

Gary cleared his throat and looked at Brock directly, “A lot of people already think Ash is a candidate, but he’s still working towards his candidacy. Legendaries tend to open up to Master Candidates more because you must have respect for pokemon first and foremost, and Master Candidates tend to do so, now there’s exceptions to every rule, like Ash, and the fact that two Legendaries are here I think says more than enough about how they’re distributing their trust.”

“That, and the fact that Ash reached out to my sister, despite what she….” Mary swallowed, “There’s not, very many people would, could be so selfless.”

Brock sat back in his chair, “Yeah, you’re right about that,” he scratched his head, “You know what, I need to unplug myself from those talk shows that spout all that nonsense, I can’t help but binge them in the morning at the gym!”

“Oh no I got you hooked too!” said Misty with a smile and a nudge.

“I blame youuuuuu,” Brock answered back playfully.

“Oh yes, yes, please unplug yourselves,” said Ash’s mother, “I’ve learned to just turn off the channel.” Tracey nudged Misty playfully. “I can’t stand how they pick apart everyone! Oh the other day I wanted to throw my mittens at this one commentator, she was talking about Ash, and these words actually came out of her mouth, ‘I find it odd his progression has slowed, especially with what he has accomplished,’” Ms. Ketchum made a face, “Honestly, who are you to decide what ‘time’ his future should be? Such arrogance! She even then added ‘he better take some time off and sort himself out’, oh, I about lost my cool there, and came thiiiiise close to writing her a strongly worded letter.”

“I saw that show too,” said Misty with a half smile and an eye raised, “You still wrote the letter didn’t you?”

“Oh that I did, just NOT as strongly worded as it initially was going to be.”

“I sent an email.”
“For the record I shun TV,” said Max, and Thomas let out the biggest snort.

“Ash just needs more time,” said Ritchie, “He’s, had some setbacks, but he has all the promise in the world.”

“Absolutely,” said Ms. Ketchum, “And I couldn’t be prouder…!”

It was Mrs. Ketchum’s wide-eyed frozen glance that put the room on guard, everyone looked and saw that Gardevoir had entered the room with tired eyes, hands clasped, and Gary felt his heart physically stop.

**Were we too late?**

Gardevoir then smiled, and said, “At ease dear friends, I wanted to personally come and announce to you all that I have successfully gotten the Cursed Body* ability under control in Ash Ketchum’s bio-code –”

**THAT WAS FAST – THE FUCK DID YOU DO?? Not that we’re complaining BUT –**

“It is still tangled quite a ways in there, but it is now manageable where his body can fight back, and in time, fight it off. I would also like to announce that the Disable* in Monsieur Ketchum’s body is under control as well, and again to the point where his body can fight it off. Now, we are at the stage in assisting his body to heal, and eventually assisting in the decoding of the invading influence. We are not out of the woods yet, but we’re heading for the clearing. I am linked into Ash’s bio-code, if something goes wrong with him, I will know immediately through my Health Transfer Channel with him….The damage to his body, is, great, but I would much rather be in the position of repairing his body than his soul, of which, has been kept in pristine condition despite such, challenging circumstances –”

**“His soul is safe?”** came Mrs. Ketchum’s voice, everyone could hear the thick tears of relief in it.

**“His soul is safe,”** said Gardevoir, “Now we just have to keep it in his body.”

Gary heard Mary make a soft noise of relief, her hand over her heart –

“**What this also means,”** said Gardevoir, “Is that people will be able to enter his room safely – now, Monsieur Ketchum still cannot be touched, he still cannot be touched, but he can be accompanied, and I do think it will benefit him in healing, along with the will to fight, because right now, I need him to fight as hard as he possibly can.”

Gardevoir turned to Gary who was already on his feet, but then came Tracey’s small voice, “You can talk without a translator – hey! Misty!”

Gardevoir gave a half smile, “I do not need a translator to speak, I am well versed in speaking. Now, for those that wish to see him, I can take two at a time into his room.”

Gary turned to Mrs. Ketchum, but she with Pikachu were already pushing a protesting Ritchie to the front, and then motioned to Gary, “You two boys go.”

“**But, Mrs. Ketchum, are you sure?”** asked Ritchie who was wobbly with emotion.

“**Yes, I haven’t, I wasn’t there to see him when he in as broken a shape as you two did”** –

Gary instantly remembered Ash with pale, pale blue eyes, reaching for him blindly, empty, cold breath –
Mrs. Ketchum’s voice was sterner now, “You two go see him now that he’s better, you need to see that, you two go, go on, don’t worry, I’ll be right behind you when you’re done.”

Pikachu gave a thumbs up, “Pi pi! Pikachu!”

Umbreon nodded as well, opting to stay behind with the group.

Ritchie embraced Mrs. Ketchum suddenly, catching her slightly off guard, she laughed modestly and urged him and Gary on, Gary taking the moment to grab her hand and squeeze it back.

Gardevoir extended the gesture and walked Gary and Ritchie out of the waiting room. As soon as the doors shut, Gary could hear Mrs. Ketchum give an immense sigh of relief, with Pikachu, Umbreon, Brock, Misty, Tracey, and the Rangers fussing over her to take a moment and sit down. Gary wanted to stop and make sure she was alright, but his legs were moving him swiftly to Ash’s room with Ritchie.

*She’ll be fine, you’ll walk her over to Ash herself, you’ll do that, and you’ll make sure she’s right as rain.*

“Gary,” said Gardevoir, “How come you didn’t tell me Ash was your Lover?”

Gary almost bit his tongue, “I, uh, I” –

Gardevoir merely smiled, “I’m not upset or anything, I understand how things may have looked with some making the assumption of you flexing your status to save someone so dear to you, but I want you to know I wouldn’t think of you in that way. I know how you truly work in that big head of yours.”

Gary sighed in defeat, “Well, thank-you Gardevoir.”

“How did you two meet?” asked Ritchie.

Gardevoir clasped its hands together happily, “It was, ooooooh, I’d say about six or seven years ago. Gary was up and coming in his research, still a *Nouveau*, hehehe, and *très confiant.*”

“Okay lets assume I know next to no Kalosian,” said Ritchie –

“Gardevoir knew me when I was still a Novice Researcher, and with my self-confident ways,” grumbled Gary.

“Oh very self-confident,” smiled Gardevoir, “We were a part of the same research group doing studies in Kalos, and I gravitated to him quickly from his charisma, eh, everyone else there, not so much. No other researcher there showed me the respect he did. They saw, well, something beneath them. I know times are changing, but, sometimes I wonder if Gary wasn’t there, would I still have pursued my passion. I may have not said it so straightforwardly before but, Gary, I truly do owe you my dream of being a Pokemon Researcher.”

Gary smiled warmly back, “Think nothing of it my friend, and I’m, sorry time got in the way of our friendship.”

“Time is a great divider, but, also a great mender,” Gardevoir smiled back, “That and you know we live on different continents, but who’s counting miles here?” Gardevoir laughed, “I must say I love these new com devices, so easy to keep in touch! Let’s never fall out of contact again!”

“Agreed,” Gary was grinning from ear to ear.
"By the way, you still have my copy of *La Cage aux Folles*, and I'd like it back eventually."

“Oh,” Gary fumbled, “I’m, sorry” –

Gardevoir gave a soft laugh, “Oh you haven’t changed at all my *cocksure* friend.”

Ritchie let loose the biggest snort-laugh and a poor attempt to keep it contained, “*Cocksure?*”

“*Ritchie,*” –

“Oh no, that is added to my *dictionary* forever, and I will be sure to teach it to Ash, *cocksure, *cocksure* ~”

“*Ugh.*”

“Problem keeping it up gentlemen? Our new lotion will help you rise to the occasion! Introducing” –

“*Stop*” –

“*Cocksure ~*”

Gary face-palmed himself and couldn’t help but laugh.

*Ritchie is totally channeling Ash right now.*

The relaxed mood whiplashed into silence as they rounded the corner to the hallway where Ash was kept. As they approached Ash’s room with Gary’s Arcanine and Blastoise still keeping guard, the pokemon smiled warmly at them, and made way for their entry. Gardevoir placed its hand on the door handle, “Now, remember he’s just sleeping,” it said, and opened the door.

The moment Gary entered the room, it was as if he had entered another dimension altogether, and felt as if his breath had been stolen right out of his lungs. The Rotom that Gary had seen monitoring the equipment earlier was still there, Gardevoir motioned for it to take a step back momentarily, leading them around the bed and equipment where the machines had been pushed aside for space, and there he was, as Gardevoir said, just sleeping.

Just sleeping.

….You still can’t touch him yet….He looks so sunken, so pale, even in this light you can tell. His head and neck are bandaged and braced up. There’s a breathing device on his mouth, and, some other device on his chest, his arms, and, god they have restraints on his arms and legs why…. 

Gary heard Ritchie make a noise, and took his hand into his own. He didn’t need to see Ritchie’s face that he appreciated the gesture, he felt it in Ritchie’s trembling grip.

“He’s trying,” said Gardevoir, “he’s fighting.”

“He…he always said,” said Ritchie in a suddenly hoarse voice, “He could fight the bad guys in his sleep, heh, I’m not surprised.”

Gardevoir came up from behind Gary and Ritchie and placed a reassuring hand on their shoulders, “I will explain anything of the process, what would you like to know?”

“Why the restraints?” asked Gary.
“For caution, in case the influence took over him again like when he was first brought in. Unfortunately I cannot remove them just yet until I can prove beyond any doubt that he won’t be a danger to himself or anyone else, the influence still has the potential to flare up if not constantly treated.”

Gary swallowed, “What Lisa took, is that gone forever?”

“No, like how blood is taken and replenished, so is Ash’s life force, his soul. Those memories are a part of him forever, whatever Lisa ‘downloaded’ from him was just information she was copying for herself, how e v e r, she ripped a lot out of him…it will take time for him to heal fully, from this and, well…Gary.” Gary looked to Gardevoir who held a somber expression. “How much, do you know about Ash’s depression?”

_Ding dong dang, it’s finally been said. The “d” word._

At the mere mention of the word, Gary’s mind went blank, and any response dried up in his throat, “I….” Gary swallowed, “Depression?” Gary absentmindedly grabbed the rail as the weight of Gardevoir’s diagnosis settled in.

_In the end, are you really surprised?…Those dinner plans you had for Ash feel so long ago now. Do you remember what you wanted to say? The exact words? The promise you so cruelly teased Misty with? The very core of the matter you wanted to talk to Ash about….What you, wanted to put into words….What you ultimately blamed yourself for in letting him be…in letting him just…drift away._

“….This is all my fault,” Gary grimaced, his chest ached, he tried to keep himself composed but it was losing battle with his beloved before him hooked up to all sorts of machines –

“No, no, Gary,” Gardevoir turned him fully towards it, “This has been developing for _years_ within him” –

_NOT. HELPING. SELENA. RITCHIE LOOKS COMPLETELY DEVASTATED._

“Years?” Ritchie breathed.

“Yes,” said Gardevoir, stepping back to look at them both, “When he wakes up that must be addressed.”

…So, this has been developing in Ash for….god…y e a r s…..It wasn’t JUST because of you, and well, you may not have helped as much as you wanted, but…all those assumptions about him have been wrong…Misty….God Misty….bless her heart…He must’ve had it with her too, and that made him….That’s not Ash….that’s the sadness….That’s….

Ritchie made a squeaking sound as he wiped his eyes, “I tried….” but he just couldn’t say anymore, Gary squeezed his hand tightly.

_Hell you all tried….Christ….Perhaps you overlooked it for him? As odd as that sounds…If you can honestly admit it to yourself, you overlooked it for him, and watched him fall apart in the blind spot you made in your mind so you would appease him – which sounds utterly horrible – but of course you still tried to help him because you hate how it hurts him so much, and well, how’d that work out? You’re right, as you tend to be, this is all your fault…._

Gary heard a thick sniff come from Ritchie and saw him fighting to hold back tears, “How bad does it really have him then?”

“Ash’s case is not as advanced as Lisa’s, but he has the potential to” –
“No,” Ritchie blurted, “Please, isn’t there anything we can do?!”

“Of course there is, but the change must begin with Ash,” said Gardevoir, “I did a very extensive search in his bio-code, and, well, he’s been fighting something he doesn’t fully understand, and more or less, is simply scared to understand.”

“When, did this all start for him?” asked Ritchie in a sunken voice, Gary felt his grip almost double.

“It’s not quite a start,” said Gardevoir, “It’s more like a progression….It builds up inside, struggle, after struggle. Cases begin in all sorts of ways, from a loss of family member to compromising one’s self worth, which seems to be Ash’s case.”

*Remember after Lisa let the two of you be reconnected, the first thing he said to you was that he was sorry…*

Gary, heartbroken to hear again how Ash thinks of himself, looked to Gardevoir, “After all he’s done, after all the good that comes from him…and he…he needs help…” Gary couldn’t help but tear up.

Gardevoir nodded solemnly, “The bad feelings lie to him, they lie to him in the most terrible of ways, enough to the point where sometimes, it doesn’t matter the source of love, the despair feels never-ending.”

Gary was desperate to hold Ash, he could so easily just reach out and grab him, but he fought the urge with every fiber of his being. He and Ritchie were squeezing each other’s hand so tightly they may as well be leaving bruises.

Gary shifted his stance, with this plethora of information of Ash’s case, he couldn’t help but wonder about the other, *more severe case* – “When Ash and Lisa were talking, they said, there was a part of them in each other, but aside from sharing the Pain Split*, I think they also meant that they could empathize with one another, is that right?”

“Yes,” said Gardevoir, its face hardening, “In fact, as I read the intertwined bio-code, it is my understanding that was why Lisa was able to sync with Ash’s bio-code and do the damage she did. It latched onto the depression building within him and let herself writhe into him via that channel, such a despicable way to exploit him through that pain.”

*Lisa, how could you.*

“There’s still a link in there that is tangled up pretty good with the depression, but now, it will only be a matter of time in unraveling it, and I will need your help for that Gary,” said Gardevoir.

*You can count on it.*

Gardevoir nodded. “Mind you, Audino also used that channel in giving Ash its own aura to protect him and boost his chances of healing, but it did so with the intention to understand, not exploit. It understood Ash’s bio-code perfectly, depression included, and took that into account in trying to give Ash the will to fight to retain his humanity amongst the influence.” Gardevoir turned a little somber again, “He just needs, a little more of a push right now.”

Gary swayed slightly.

*Are you saying he, might give up…?*

“So now,” Gardevoir continued, “we’re here to build on that, in giving Ash the will to fight a little
bit longer, a little bit longer so we can help bring him home.”

“We can’t hold him?” asked Ritchie in vain.

“No,” stated Gardevoir, “But, in turn, this is what we can do…. ” Gardevoir moved itself closer to Ash, placed a hand over his chest, then held up the other towards Ritchie and Gary…. They felt a timely pulse in their chest get stronger and stronger – their breaths caught in their throat once they realized what Gardevoir was letting them feel –

“Is that” –

“His heartbeat?”

“Yes,” smiled Gardevoir, “Despite the odds, despite everything he has gone through, Audino made sure to remind him that he is full of love, and with that, he is, trying not to give up, and likewise, I won’t let him give up. I am confident with our help, he will survive Lisa’s influence till it is dispelled from his body, then, you will be able to hold him.”

Gary and Ritchie could only marvel at Ash’s heartbeat.

“Can he feel our presence?” asked Ritchie.

Gardevoir smiled, “I can introduce it, but I will do so gently, his state of mind is still rather tender.”

From within, Gary felt Gardevoir open up a Health Transfer Channel, but this, felt different from what, say Audino would have done to heal…. Gary felt like he could literally reach out, and touch Ash’s heart.

_Love will help bring him home, right? Show him the way Gary._

Gary swallowed, as much as he hated having others know, much less listen in, this was for Ash, his Ash, and for him, such an inconvenience was nothing. Gary reached out to Ash’s heart, cleared his throat, and inhaled…..

“Like a….river flows….surely to the sea…..

_Darling, so it goes….some things, are meant to be_–

_Take, m~y hand, take m~y wh~ole life too…

_For I, can’t, help, fa~lling in love, wi~th you~…._”

“…Wow,” Ritchie breathed, “The, that video is one thing, but, you, really do sing like an angel.”

_Magnifique,” smiled Gardevoir.

Gary and Ritchie watched Ash’s hand twitch slightly, and then a black tear slid down the side of his face with either of them powerless to wipe it away; Gardevoir ultimately used its powers to wipe Ash clean.

“It’s okay sweetheart,” Gary whispered, “we’re here, _we’re here with you, we’re here._”
They felt Ash’s heart leap, his head twitched to the right, and his right arm jerked against its restraints, Gardevoir immediately sent soothing vibes to relax Ash’s body.

“Is he okay?”

“Yes, a little excited is all,” smiled Gardevoir, “Converse with him, it will help.”

Ritchie swallowed, “Ash, I…I can’t wait to tell you that spring has finally come, and in more ways than one! I, can’t wait to see the look on your face at the surprise waiting for you on the roof of the hospital! Gary and I are both going to say we told you so! Ah, and, everyone is here, Misty, Tracey, Brock, your mother, Pikachu, our Ranger crew! We’re, we’re all waiting for you to come back, we all, just want you back Ash,” and Ritchie couldn’t speak anymore, Gary took over with another squeeze of his hand,

“That’s right, we love you, we all love you soooo much, and we’re, never, ever going to give up on you…”

Gary and Ritchie both felt Gardevoir’s empathy weave around their hearts, Gardevoir then cleared its throat and quickly wiped its eyes, “I will transfer your presences for a little while longer. Ash, wants to come back to everyone too.”

Gary’s heart about melted on the spot. From then on, he and Ritchie decided they would stay by Ash’s side for as long as possible.

Through Ash’s oxygen mask, Gary could barely make it out, but Ash was mumbling something his sleep. Gary concentrated himself on reading the Health Transfer channel, not typically something humans could do per say, but with Audino having practiced on him and Ash oh so many times, Gary would like to think he and Ash could understand, or rather read one another by aura alone, which in retrospect is far from the obvious reality. He knew such a thing was ultimately silly by human standards, that is, until he heard very, very clearly in his head a small and trembling, help me Gary.

His hand, Ash’s hand is shaking. You can’t hold his hand just yet, so you and Ritchie just squeeze each other’s sore.

***

How quickly things can change for the better and worse huh Gary. After y’alls session, Mrs. Ketchum and Pikachu were next, however their session promptly ended as, welp, Ms. Ketchum being the mom she is almost FAINTED in trying to give Ash her own life force, and had to be assisted to another room to rest and gather herself. The fear Ash felt for this mother’s presence suddenly in danger threw a big ass monkey wrench into his healing process, and poor Gardevoir was sent into working overtime in trying to soothe the ailing Trainer’s soul and keep the influence under control with it having new delicious emotional fuel to try and freeze Ash again from the inside out. In the end, Gardevoir called for you, Ritchie, and Pikachu to come back in the room and help calm him as a team effort, it was straight up a scene from a fucking Care Bear’s movie, and not the good one where Brave-Heart Teddiursa beat Dark-Scar Malamar.

Huuuugh, long story short, eventually everyone got to spend some time giving Ash their presence through Gardevoir’s Health Transfer Channel. Misty’s session was, sad to say the least. In the pit of honesty, you really do feel bad about what you said, Mr. Shamey McShame.

After that, Gardevoir made arrangements to have some chairs and a couch added to Ash’s room so friends and family could be with him in-between its healing sessions, also so it could transfer presences at will in-between sessions. There was no mistake in such a treatment in aiding Ash’s
recovery, with how love, really was, healing a broken heart. Has another day passed? Two? Three? A whole week? Who knows, time is funny with things like this.

Gary moved a chair right up next to Ash’s bed, mindful he still wasn’t to touch him, but, somehow in the shuffle of things, he noticed Ash’s feet were uncovered, so he promptly pulled the blanket back over them. Ritchie was passed out on the couch with Pikachu, Sparky, and Umbreon all huddled in a fuzzy ball, Tracey and Misty shared a chair in a cuddled sleep. Gary pulled out his new com and began surfing the web for custom blanket makers. His arm had been fully healed along with the rest of his body, and there wasn’t even a scar with Gardevoir’s help, he could only hope Ash would make it out the same.

Earlier Max had brought over Ash’s Charizard fresh out of the pokemon center, along with Dewgong and Sneasel who had finally, and sadly, returned utterly defeated without finding any trace of the brave Avalugg. Gary hugged them both and thanked them dearly for trying as long as they did, and then Ash’s Charizard bum rushed past him and made a scene in trying to hug Ash while the pokemon, and everyone strong enough did their best to pull it back. Instead to burn off that despair, Charizard, Dewgong, and Sneasel were sent off with Arcanine and Blastoise and the others to help protect the Legendaries on the roof. They were able to speak briefly with Zekrom, but the only information it provided was that it would keep the grounds safe with Moltres. Arcanine informed them of what happened to Ash, and Moltres gave a short answer that was why it came there in the first place, to protect Ash, its favored human, in this trying time, and added that his Lover, who it did know as Gary, did a shitty job in protecting its future endeavor.

The gang decided they would leave that salty bit of information out, but Blastoise threw shade right back at Moltres for making the ruckus that caused Zapdos to accidentally blow out the hospital’s power which threatened nearly every patient’s life. Before Moltres could protest, Zekrom made the comment that if Trainers could be judged for being so shallow, a legendary should not be immune to such shame if they couldn’t act any better.

Moltres poofed itself out and sank in a fluffy ball of anger. Ash’s Charizard then asked the Legendaries if they knew anything about the Onelings, to which Zekrom replied that they did, and that the group was nothing but pure evil if they would exploit people who were emotionally unstable for their own means.

Back within the hospital, Gardevoir finished wrapping up a Healing Pulse session focusing on Ash’s head, neck, and spine. It stretched, read a message off its com, and then motioned for Gary to follow it out the room for a chat to spare the sleeping bunch.

Gary closed the door to Ash’s room quietly, and turned to Gardevoir, “What’s up?”

“I am happy to report that despite our earlier setback, Ash has proven to still be quite the fighter. His body temperature is where it needs to be now, and I am ‘very’ confident his condition can only get better from here.”

Gary would have sunk with relief if he weren’t so whipped by the fates testing him, but the look on his face revealed his thankfulness.

Gardevoir clasped its hands, “Gary, truly, I must commend Audino in its efforts to save Monsieur Ketchum.”

“Yeah, you and everyone keep telling me that,” smiled Gary, “I couldn’t be prouder of Audi.”

“Oh Gary, they probably couldn’t tell you the finer details of its efforts! To give the short of it, Audino should be completely credited for saving his soul. By injecting its own bioluminescence –
the radiance of a soul, into Ash to combat the Froslass’ bioluminescence’s invading influence, that alone did amazing work in protecting Ash – who he is – it did the difficult work if I am being honest here. Its aura separated Froslass’ invading influence from Ash’s soul, leaving his body to fight to regain its human norm, alas, it couldn’t pull all of the influence out, but it did just enough. This was not only a Health Transfer it performed, but a Soul Transfer. Gary, there is only one other pokemon in the world that can perform that skill aside from a Legendary, me.”

Gary leaned again the wall absorbing just what exactly his little Audi did….*Amazing…utterly amazing…..However…* “Well, it might just be you soon,” said Gary, his chest growing heavy, “Last I heard, my Audi, isn’t doing too well…”

Gardevoir nodded up and smiled, looking down the hallway past Gary, “Who is that coming up from behind you?”

Gary’s head whipped around so fast his neck might have broken off if his body hasn’t turned with him – “AUDI!”

Audino was in a little poke-wheelchair, Bibi the Blissey was rolling the pokemon over to its trainer, and Gary immediately plucked Audino up out of its wheelchair, giving it the strongest hug, “Oh my sweet Audi, my Audi, my amazing, amazing Audi!”

Audino blushed deeply, looking at Gary shyly. It then motioned to Gardevoir, Gardevoir nodded and created a psychic link* for Audino to speak to Gary, "You…." Audino began, “never gave up on me…I, I know I’m difficult, sometimes, but you…never ever gave up on me, and, I knew, in my heart, I could do this, when the situation arrived, when everything started happening, I just, knew I could do it for Ash, and that I would never ever give up.”

Gary gave a soft kiss to Audino’s forehead, “And I am so proud of you, but even more so, I am so very, very thankful my Audi is okay.”

“Of course I am okay,” Audino smiled unsurely, “I can’t go making you sad…You have enough to deal with!”

Gary hugged Audino tightly again, “You are never a burden on me, please don’t ever think that.”

“I just, want to be strong like your other pokemon, like Blastoise, Arcanine, Umbreon, Nidoking” – Gardevoir stepped in, “Strength is not only measured in physical merit, this I’m sure you have realized in where your talents reside.”

“Yeah, I-I guess…”

“Audi you’re killing Gary here. Gary, do you give off this, just ‘prove yourself to me or I don’t love you’ aura? How is this coming off at people WHEN NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE FUCKING TRUTH!!!!

Gary moved up his cradled hold on Audino so they would be eye level with one another, “Audino, you remember how I became your Trainer right?”

“Y-yes, I…walked up to you, and, I asked you.”

“That’s right. You didn’t need to prove anything to me, all you had to do was ask, and I said yes.”

Audino looked down, “…I’m glad in the end I was special.”
Gary tilted his head, “What do you mean?”

“Would you have wanted me anymore if I wasn’t, special?”

UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUGH ;O;

“I saw someone who wanted to be my friend, how could I say no?”

Audino bent with sadness and shame, “…I don’t know….I still don’t really understand it myself, but Gary,” Audino gave a most truthful, yet shy smile, “I’m very glad to be your friend. Thank-you for sticking by me…For you, I will continue to learn and grow.”

“Oh my little Audi,” Gary hugged his precious pokemon so tightly, and Audino hugged him back, both then pulling apart and beaming at one another.

“If I may make a proposition,” said Gardevoir, “If I may be so bold as my peer here can tend to be, I, well, I have been looking for someone to become a student of mine, an apprentice if you will.”

Audino’s little hands went over its mouth, “Y-you, think, y-you think I can, th-that” –

Gary sputtered with an open smile, “Gardevoir, really?!”

Gardevoir happily nodded, but then Audino sunk,

“But, but that means I would have to leave Gary!”

Ouch. That actually hurts to think about not having your little Audi around, it’s little chrips, its wobble walk, its persistence, it’s shy determination –

“It would, but it wouldn’t be forever,” said Gardevoir, “But with communication now-a-days, and, eh, once I get my Teleportation hullaballoo settled in Sinnoh, I would gladly assist you in visiting him, or rather, have one of my associates who knows how to deal with Teleportation Terminals better than I can do it.”

Audino looked at Gary with the widest eyes Gary ever did see, and nuzzled into its Trainer’s chest, “M-may…I have a little more time with Gary?”

“Of course, the offer will always be open.”

Audino’s eyes were shinning. Gary smiled warmly at his little Audi, “Whenever you’re ready Audi.”

Audino perked up, “I will be ready, soon, I want, I want to help people and pokemon! I want to bring our region’s talent up! I want to, I, want to…” Audino’ little heart was pounding so hard, it looked right into Gary’s eyes, “I want to be, the very best!”

Gary couldn’t help but hug Audino again as Ash’s words rang through it, “And you will be!”

After their reunion, Gary showed off Audino to everyone that would stand to listen to him. Misty almost crushed Audino with her power hug, Tracey, Brock, and Ritchie praised it as if it was the greatest gift to humanity, the Ranger Team and medical staff revered it, and once Gary reached Ash’s mother, she broke down in tears, and even tried to show her gratitude to the pokemon by getting on her hands and knees, but was stopped, and after a tearful exchange with Audino, she was helped back up into the hospital bed where she was still in need of resting.

Audino was very much wiped after getting so much praise, so Gary pulled up a chair in Ash’s
mother’s room and tucked it in for the night, wished Mrs. Ketchum well, and returned to Ash’s room with Gardevoir doing another check up on Ash; Ritchie once again in the pile of pokemon asleep on the couch.

Gardevoir placed its hand over Ash’s chest, “His lungs are progressing well, I’ll keep him on the machine while I focus my efforts on his head, neck, back, and heart injuries. I can say with confidence no permanent damage will be left” –

“Really? Oh thank GOD!”

Gardevoir smiled, “Come now dear friend, take a nap, I think if nothing else, your voice is tired no?”

“Pbbth, not even a little bit,” said Gary, “But,” he looked over to Ash, “A little nap wouldn’t hurt.” Gary took his position back in the chair by Ash’s bed, settled down, and was out in minuets.

The next thing Gary knew, he heard coughing cut through his sleep, and woke in time to see Gardevoir pulling Ash’s oxygen mask away, Gary shot up –

“What’s going on?”

The light on Ash’s breathing device had turned green, Gardevoir began to disconnect its functions, smiling warmly, “It means he doesn’t need this machine’s assistance anymore, he can breathe on his own now, a very, very good sign indeed.” Gardevoir raised Ash’s head gently to remove a strap, and finally removed the device all together, leaving Ash’s mouth to not fully close all the way but slightly parted, and Gary had never seen a more kissable pair of lips in his entire life.

“Also Gary, I am please to report that the Cursed Body* ability has been purged from Mr. Ketchum’s system,” said Gardevoir as it removed Ash’s neck brace, “You may now show him affection as much as you please.”

WELL HOWDY NOW 8D!!!

Despite Gary’s desperate need to just smother Ash with love, he would wait. For now, Gary leaned in, and gently placed a lingering kiss on Ash’s forehead taking in his scent and how Ash’s hair tickled his lips, “Keep going sweetheart,” and with a nigh shaking hand, Gary reached out and stroked Ash’s head, caressing him tenderly.

He feels warm, thank all the stars in heaven. He’s almost there, he’s coming back to you!

Gary moved to pull Ash’s hand onto his chest, but the restraints stopped him, “Can I?”

“Yes, I was just about to remove them myself,” said Gardevoir putting up the breathing device.

Yes, God, get this off, get these, OFF, get this all off him –

Gary happily removed the restraints and handed them over to Gardevoir. He was careful to not mess too much with the wiring still connected to Ash, and positioned his Lover gently to where he was semi-cradling him, intertwining that once shaking hand with his while stroking Ash’s hair, massaging him every now and then on his temple and knuckles of his hand.

“Gardevoir, please wake Ritchie up, he needs this, badly.”

“I know,” Gardevoir replied in moving over to Ritchie with Sparky, Pikachu and Umbreon already stretching in waking up themselves. Gary saw Gardevoir lean over, Ritchie stirring, and then Ritchie
jumping up and falling off the couch; Umbreon chided him. Ritchie got up, walked over quickly, gripping the bedrails of Ash’s bed, wide eyed, and with a hand ready to reach out.

Ritchie looked to Gary cradling Ash, Gary nodded, and Ritchie intertwined his hand with Ash’s free one, squeezing it, Ritchie again looked to Gary, a tear already fallen off his face, “He’s warm Gary…he’s warm….”

“Yeah…he’s warm….”

Pikachu jumped up on the bed with Sparky and Umbreon, crawled up to Ash, and happily planted itself within the cuddle hold, nuzzling itself right next to Ash’s heart.

“Piiiiii, Pikachu pi!”

Gardevoir stretched itself again, “Now if you gentlemen will excuse me, I am going to get some sweets to mark this occasion, anything specific you’d like?”

“Anything and everything,” said Ritchie.

“Where are you buying?” asked Gary.

“I’m going to have one of my Assistants Teleport us the good stuff from my home Kalos.”

“Oh my god yes,” said Gary and Ritchie together.

“Now, do not try to wake him, he must wake up on his own,” Gardevoir said a bit sternly, “And on that note, I shall return,” it smiled, bowed, and left the room leaving just Gary, Ritchie, and their pokemon with Ash.

Gary laid his head down next to Ash, nuzzling him, a wave of love rising and cresting and crashing over his heart. Gary cleared his throat, kissed Ash again on his forehead, and sang,

“Wi~se me~n say, only foo~ls ru~sh in,
But I, can’t, help, falling in lo~ve, wi~th yo~u…
Shall, I sta~y? Would it be~ a~ si~n?
If I, can’t, help, fa~lling in love, wi~th yo~u”

As Gary sang to Ash, Ash in his sleep turned his head closer to Gary, and Gary could just barely see Ash mouth his name from his slumber.

Ritchie smiled, “You really do sing like an angel.”

Gary laughed quietly to himself, “Now that you have been imbued with this knowledge, you are a part of an elite group of Secret Keepers.”

Ritchie laughed back, “Understood.”

Ash suddenly grimaced slightly, as if he was trying to wake up – Gary, Ritchie and the pokemon watched intently, desperately, but Ash settled back down, fast asleep.
Ritchie sighed, but with a smile, “Sleepy head, don’t ever change.”

“I’m here Ash,” said Gary, “I’m right here, Ritchie’s here, Pikachu’s here, and we’ll be right here when you wake up.” Gary squeezed Ash’s hand, and felt Ash, just ever so slightly, squeeze him back.

As the night deepened, Gary didn’t so much fall asleep as his whole body was focused on making sure Ash would stay warm. He nodded off and on throughout the night. Gardevoir’s routine healing sessions, or nurse Laylah poking or prodding Ash would stir him awake. Gary fully awoke about mid-morning, his hand on Ash’s chest, feeling it rise and fall, rise and fall, rise and fall. He looked around to find that he was the only one in the room with Ash besides Gardevoir, and Gardevoir informed him that the sweets from Kalos had arrived and sent everyone off to enjoy themselves with Ash’s recovery going positively.

Oh please let’s hope Gardevoir brought over French crepes, the French crepes, the most beautiful magnifique pastry on this planet–

And then Gardevoir mentioned ever so simply, “I suspect he will be conscious soon, if not to expel the Disable* residue.”

MAMA MIA –

“He’ll be awake soon?!”

“Yes. Now he might have some trouble speaking a bit, and, he is going to be very disoriented, extremely ‘out of it’ to say the least,” Gardevoir then turned part serious and part antsy, “A word of warning, when Ash wakes up, heeeeeeee, well, to put it bluntly, we might look like monsters to him.”

Eh?

“He was,” Gardevoir continued, “for a short period of time a Froslass’ ghoul yes? Typically they’re hypnotized under an illusion, sooooooo his reality might still be skewered. He’ll be waking from said illusion to say the least, nightmare really, and he will still have some of the influence clouding his judgment. You must remember the last conscious thoughts Ash had was practically being beaten to death.”

God, how could you forget? You watched, helplessly, as Lisa almost killed Ash in front of your eyes by almost beating him to death, and then...through Destiny Bond*. She purposely tried to kill him through Destiny Bond*....You never want to feel that helpless again.

“Ash will need a moment to adjust to his reality.”

“He’ll snap out of it won’t he?”

“Oh yes, yes, I will be unraveling it as he wakes since I won’t know fully what his brain is processing until he starts, well actually using his eyes, and just, just, be prepared for some unpleasantries, and oh – this may be a little, graphic.”

“Graphic?”

Graphic you say?

“If he doesn’t wake up on his own in the next, oh, thirty minuets, which I doubt, the residue regardless is going to come out” –
“Come out how?”

“Vomiting, and he will be vomiting, alot.”

*Oh splendid, this again.*

Gardevoir cleared its throat, “So to avoid him choking, I am going to keep watch for any signs until his body is ready….and poke him, like this, gently, because I would really rather him be awake before the residue is expelled so he has time to gather some sense of himself and what has happened and what will happen to him.”

“Really? What was that thing about Ash having to wake up on his own?”

“He needed more rest then, but now it’s okay,” said Gardevoir all the while gently poking Ash on his arm, “Would you like to join me?”

*This is ridiculous Gary, but FUCK IT, POKE HIM NOW SO LATER YOU CAN POKE HIM WITH YOUR DICK –*

Gary began gently poking Ash on his arm with a flat look.

“Hmm,” Gardevoir stroked its chin with its free hand, “why don’t you sing to him Gary?”

Gary looked at Gardevoir narrowed eyed –

“Don’t worry, I am a good Secret Keeper,” Gardevoir smiled mischievously, but before Gary could retort, he saw Ash’s legs beginning to stir from under the blanket, his face twitch –

Ash looked like he was in pain – his chest started to heave – Gardevoir and Gary moved to sit him up quickly – Gardevoir warning with its eyes to not get in front of Ash, to just focus on sitting him upright – and Ash practically lurched up from their grasp with black spilling from his mouth, Gardevoir quickly moving a container in range, Gary feeling Ash’s chest and stomach muscles contract painfully after stomach full, after stomach full of the black liquid squeezed itself out of Ash’s body.

“Easy, easy, we’ve got you” –

"It’s okay sweetheart, it’s okay, you’re alright” –

*JESUS FUCKING ARCEUS MONTGOMERY BETTA FUCK THAT SHIT IS PRACTICALLY LIKE OIL – TAR???? WHAT THE FUCK ALL THIS WAS IN HIM A STOMACH CANNOT HOLD THAT MUCH OH GOD THERE’S MORE THERE’S MORE STILL COMING FUCKING SHIT HURRY UP ASH, GARY MIGHT JUST PASS OUT FROM THIS FUCK, FUCK THAT IS SO SCARY AND GROSS.fix F**KING SHIT BUCKLES –*

The container was almost full by the time Ash’s body was done, poor Ash still dry heaving and coughing. Some of the black liquid had spilled here and there, making quite the mess of Gardevoir to say the least, but the psychic and fairy type was completely undeterred.

“That’s good, easy now, your body had to get it all out, we’re going to sit up you now, easy does it, there, there, very good.”

Gary still had a good grip on Ash with Gardevoir, the pokemon leaving Gary to prop an extremely woozy and disoriented Ash upright as it began to clean up his face and neck. Gardevoir then checked Ash’s eyes, and although they were still incredibly drowsy, unfocused, and scared, Gary
had never seen a more beautiful pair of brown eyes in his life as they desperately tried to focus
themselves. As Gardevoir worked, its eyes began to glow as it unraveled Ash’s illusion, making his
eyes glow slightly as well in return.

**AND OF FUCKING COURSE THEY HAVE TO GLOW THAT FUCKING PALE BLUE COLOR
WHyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy –**

“There we go, such a handsome young man underneath this mess, *ahem*, my name is Selena
Gardevoir, I am a Human Health Transfer Pokemon, and you are currently in a hospital room within
Viridian Memorial, can you tell me your name?”

“Uhruh…”

*He’s so out of it!*

Gardevoir poured a cup of water, and began to clean out Ash’s mouth, letting the water dribble
down his neck which it quickly cleaned up with a towel. Ash began to shake within Gary’s grasp –
Gardevoir side glanced Gary that he may need to retreat if Ash panicked with the resurgence of the
last memory of his consciousness: getting beaten within an inch of death – he began to drabble
aimless frightened words, his breathing intensifying – Gary felt Ash tense up – Gardevoir took hold
of Ash as Gary, very regrettably, was forced to let go of him.

*God you just want to hug him and tell him it’s okay, everything is okay now! UUUGH FOR FUCKS
SAKE ASH IS RIGHT HERE AND YOU STILL CANNOT REACH HIM JUST YET!!!!*

“You are not within the confines of the ice cavern Mr. Ketchum, you are in a bed, in a hospital
room. This is not an illusion. This is reality. I am going to show you your hand, here, now look, do
you feel that? That slight pinch? That is me, a Gardevoir, slightly pinching your hand. This is real.
This is all real Ash Ketchum. Just keep listening to my voice, you are safe, you are safe here, nothing
here can hurt you, absolutely nothing here can hurt you –”

Ash’s breathing began to slow slightly, but Gary could tell he was still tensed like a string strung
tight.

“You are safe. You are safe here. There is absolutely nothing here that can hurt you, there is nothing
here that can hurt you. Easy, easy, easy there. Now, Mr. Ketchum have you understood what I said?
Do you know where you are?”

Gary watched Ash begin to feel around him awkwardly, touching the blanket, the bed rails –

“Mr. Ketchum, do you know where you are? Nod for me for yes, shake your head for no” –

Then Ash finally spotted Gary right beside him, and his eyes flew wide as their gazes met. Gary
looking into the pale glowing eyes that once again saw him and didn’t see him, a bolt of ice shot
through his veins – Gary shook down to his core, “Ash, my sweetheart, it’s me.”

Ash wasn’t showing the love Gary was practically vibrating with. Ash was looking at him with fear
and Gary felt utterly gutted, his composure crumbling as Ash kept up that heartbreaking look – and
Gary couldn’t stand it, he moved to reach out to Ash, *and Ash flinched*. Gardevoir glanced at Gary,
and Gary retreated back again, his heart completely crushed,

*If you can’t touch him, use your words now Gary, use your fucking words and communicate –*

“Ash, it’s me, its Gary, *your Gary*” –
Slowly, ever so slowly, Ash’s face turned from one of fear, to confusion.

**UUUUUAAAAAAAAA.LA!!! HE’S LOOKING AT YOU LIKE HE CAN’T FIGURE YOU OUT, GOD IT’S THAT SAME FUCKING LOOK!!!**

“Mr. Ketchum, you are not in the ice cavern anymore. Froslass, Lisa, is gone. You are in a hospital room within Viridian Memorial. That is indeed Gary by your side, it is not an illusion.”

Gary couldn’t help himself, he reached out again to Ash, cupping his cheeks with both hands, and this time Ash did not pull away, “Sweetheart, please,” Gary’s eyes were welling up fast, “It’s me, it’s your Gary.”

“Aaaaand, there we go,” Gardevoir whispered, its eyes stopped glowing, and likewise, Ash’s eyes stopped glowing. They grew slowly wide again, not in fear, or confusion, but realization.

Ash mouthed, “Gary…”

A few tears escaped Gary through his laughing smile, running his hand through Ash’s hair, “Hey Ashy” – they pulled each other into a hug so hard and fast it was impossible to tell who went for it first, “Shh, shh, its okay, *hicc*, you’re okay now, I’ve got you, I’ve got you, and I am never letting go,” Gary choked through his tears before he just couldn’t speak anymore, too overwhelmed with the sheer happiness of Ash back in his arms.

Ash’s head was a swirl of emotion with bursting up top the tremendously joyous feeling of finally, *finally*, being reunited with Gary. He was crying so hard his throat wasn’t making a sound, all that escaped him was wobbly inhales and sobs against Gary’s chest.

Gary showered the top of Ash’s head with kisses. It was impossible for them to pull each other any closer but they tried none-the-less, Ash’s face slipped up at a new angle, allowing Gary’s lips to kiss whatever they can reach, a tear stained cheek, just above Ash’s eye, his forehead, the crook of Ash’s smile, his nose, all of him, everything, every little bit was a working miracle. Ash tried to return the showered affection with nuzzling, but no, he needed to express it clearly, he needed to say it, he had to say it –

“I – I vuh, Iv –“

“Mr. Ketchum please, be mindful of your voice,” Gardevoir moved to use a therapeutic Heal Pulse* on Ash’s throat –

“Sw-sweetheart it’s alright, you don’t have to push it, it’s okay” –

*No, hell no, Ash you did not just come back from the fucking after-life to be stopped here, don’t focus on the vocals, you have air in your lungs and that can work just the same –*

It was just barely a whisper, but Gary heard every syllable when Ash looked up to him and breathed, “I love you,” Ash swallowed, “I love you, I love you, I love you!”

Ash repeated the phrase over and over as Gary peppered him with more kisses, until their mouths met, Gary sweeping Ash up into the most passionate kiss they ever shared, or, it would have been if Ash was able to return Gary’s affections with as much gusto as he did, Gary could feel Ash trembling in just trying to keep up with his fiery pace.

“I, shall just excuse myself over here,” said Gardevoir pointing awkwardly out and side-stepping away.
When they finally broke apart, shuddering and breathless, Gary returned the declaration, “I love you too,” resting his forehead on Ash’s, nuzzling him ever more, Ash able to return the simple affection in kind. He tried to reach up and touch Gary’s face, but Gary took his hand instead and kissed it too.

“You’re alive Ash, you’re alive, and you’re back with Gary…All these doubts will be put to rest, I promise you.

“Gary, Gary,” Ash whispered, his throat pulsed in not to push it too much, “I thought, I was so scared I’d be taken away.”

“Me too,” said Gary, “But we’re together now, you came back. You fought, and you came back.”

“I, I heard you, I did, from the dark place, I heard you singing, I heard you crying, and I, I just had to get back to you…I just had to…”

The dark place? You mean like, when your eyes were just closed right and not some ethereal purgatory in the confines of your mind?

Ash looked up to Gary, “Did she hurt you? Are you okay?”

Gary couldn’t help but laugh, “I’m fine,” he stated fully, “I think you had it a little worse than I did Love.” He stroked Ash’s hair gently again, just marveling at the miracle in his arms.

Ash’s eyes began to flutter shut, letting his body rest fully back against Gary, and Gary felt Ash lightly touch him across his chest,

“This is real?”

“This is real,” smiled Gary, settling to where he could stroke Ash from his head all the way down his side, the both of them quite entangled in the other.

Ash swallowed, “You’re here…”

“And I’m not leaving your side.”

Ash tilted his head up, eyes half lidded, and their lips met again, Gary moving softly and slowly, savoring each and every sound their contact made until they gently broke apart, gazing into one another.

Gary touched their foreheads together, “I’m here Ash, I’m here with you, and I’m not going anywhere, I promise.”

A wobbly sigh escaped Ash before he nuzzled himself fully into the crook of Gary’s neck.

There’s still a shit load you guys need to talk about, but for now, you both really needed to get your honest-to-god declarations out. You stupid love birds. Why must the pain make it real?

Gary then heard an even wobblier and wet “Thank-you” breathed onto his neck followed by other drabble too sobbed to understand.

This will all be put to rest Ash, please, give yourself some time.

Gary held Ash tight and close, “I’ve got you, I’ve got you…”

And you Gary, remember to give credit where credit is due.
Outside Ash’s room, Ritchie and Mary were sitting on the ground in front of the door wiping away tears of joy; a bag of sweets laying almost in shambles between them.

Misty and Tracey rounded the corner of the hallway and spotted them before rushing up –

“Is Ash” –

“Give them a minuet,” Ritchie croaked, wiping his eyes on his sleeve, “He just woke up.”

“He’s, he’s awake,” Misty breathed leaning into Tracey.

“Yes,” said Ritchie with a waterlogged smile, “He’s okay. Mary and I were about to enter the room, when she saw through the window Gardevoir” –

Thud. The room door bumped against Ritchie and Mary’s backs, both of them scrambling up and promptly jumping out of the way. The door opened again more cautiously with Gardevoir’s head popping out.

Gardevoir cleared its throat, “I assume by your tears you’re all aware Ash has returned to us. Now, he’s, still quite out of it, but he’s aware of his surroundings. I’d like to take each of you in one at a time, I do not want to over-stimulate him too much aside from what, *ahem* Gary has already done.”

Misty and Ritchie laughed, Misty wiping away a tear of her own, “Ritchie you go,” she said.

Ritchie looked to Mary who was already shoving him inside and almost into Gardevoir. Before Mary could turn to Misty, her com began to buzz, “I’ll be right back,” she said, and quickly stepped away to an empty room.

After scooping Ritchie in, Gardevoir motioned for Tracey and Misty to have a seat outside and closed the door, but more importantly, the couple was already rushing to Mrs. Ketchum’s room to inform the rest of the group.

Gary was cradling Ash, stroking him from his head all the way down his side with Ash’s eyes already closed again. Gary noticed Gardevoir letting Ritchie in and motioned for him to quickly come over.

Ritchie walked as if the ground was slick, moving quietly a few paces in front of Ash’s bed, “Ash?”

Ash stirred a bit.

“Ritchie come on, get over here,” said Gary.

“If he’s asleep, I can wait” –

Ash perked up, their eyes meeting, “R-Ritchie!”

Ritchie didn’t need another word, he strode up to Ash’s side and despite Ash’s weakened arms, he pulled Ritchie down into a hug. For a second Ritchie held his composure, until Ash whispered to him, “Sorry, I slept longer than I meant to,” and Ritchie almost collapsed on top of Ash, hugging him tightly as if he was the most precious thing he could ever hold.

“That was too close,” Ritchie breathed.

“Yeah…”
Ash swayed a bit, and Ritchie pulled away, “Lightheaded?”

“A little,” Ash smiled weakly leaning fully back against Gary, Gary leaning back against Ash in turn with a loving sigh into his hair.

“Oh, ah, I, have something for you,” and Ritchie pulled out Ash’s hat from his deep pants pocket.

“My hat!”

Gary moved back a bit, letting Ritchie place it on Ash’s head, all of them sharing the widest grin, “There, where it belongs,” Ritchie rustled it on Ash’s head before taking his free hand and squeezing it deeply.

Gardevoir stepped up to Ash’s side with a beaming smile, “All in all, dare I ask, how are you feeling Mr. Ketchum?”

Ash pulled Ritchie into another hug with Gary who cuddled them all together with Ash snuggling into the deep of the embrace, smiling, “Warm, very, very warm.”

“No, no I understand,” said Mary into her com shortly as she paced around an empty patient’s room, “The only remains are the,” Mary swallowed, “the, the Dawn Stone, but if they need it, that’s fine, I’ll, I’ll explain it to my parents, we’ll, we’ll bury something else.” Mary ended the call abruptly, fuming, and seething internally. She reached into her pocket, then her other side pocket, then checked herself frantically practically stripping down to her shirt and shorts, shaking her clothes out hastily, but the result was clear, Lisa’s Dawn Stone was gone. Mary ran out the room screaming for her Chandelure.

Chapter End Notes

THEY'RE BACK TOGETHER FINALLY YAAAAAAAAY 8D Also no one is doing the forever "dying" thing, so yeah ewe. There's also something to note that may help view this story in a different lighting, and that is the element of the Unreliable Narrator. As you guys can see, some of the story's narration comes from the character's Inner Voices, and mainly Gary's at that - the inner monologue is told through their filter alone, their understanding and views, which can be wrong, or very, very, vERY wrong such as how Gary and Misty perceive one another with skewered information, or how Gary was so desperate to find Ash that he would burn the whole region down, but ended up not doing 'anything' of the sort. Alot of stuff/truths will get laid out in chapter 10 - and when that will be, soon I hope __. So thanks again for sticking around this long, I hope to be back soon with the penultimate chapter OwO
**Flurries and Hail**

Chapter by SilentAvera, Singing Woodpecker (SilentAvera)

Chapter Notes

READ ME PLEASE: Okay...I know its been a while, like, QUITE a while, and I'm sorry - and I can't thank you guys enough for having such patience for this story, I only want to bring my best out, and sometimes that calls for some hefty writing, in other words, chapter 10 became SO LONG that I had to split it up into THREE parts, three separate chapters, over 50 pages each!...Y e a h, all of my notes compiled for chapter 10 alone were 50 pages long owo;;;;;; This chapter evolved ALOT, and many, many changes were made and rewritten again and again - this part that I bring to you now is just one third of the absolute behemoth the chapter turned into. Chapters 11 and 12 will be posted together (hopefully), the "true meat" of what chapter 10 was supposed to be. Y’all have waited long enough, and I want to get something out, so I can at least post this one now. The progress on 11 and 12 are going very smoothly, so I don't foresee another super long wait, but then again my foresight hasn't been accurate with this story, like, at all, and its one year anniversary is coming up! Although I doubt I'd get 11 and 12 out by then ;n; so this will have to do for now. Thanks again for sticking around this long =w=b

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I’m so happy,” said Ash.

The hugging trio of Ash, Gary, and Ritchie were melded tight. Gary rustled Ash’s hat while pressing a kiss to the side of his face, pulling a small muted gleeful squee from him, “Me too Love,” Gary whispered into his ear.

Ash felt Ritchie’s grip suddenly increase with a thick sob – “I looked and looked when you disappeared,” came Ritchie’s muffled voice, his face buried in Ash’s chest – “*hic* – I, I wanted to tear the entire valley apart to find you, I’m so so so sorry it took so long for us to get to you” –

“But you did get to me” –

Gary patted Ritchie’s head with the arm reached around Ash’s back, prompting him to look up at them both with a thick snuffle, “The point is we’re all together now,” said Gary, “and that’s not going to change, not ever.”

“Not ever,” Ash echoed warmly, “I mean, like, we’ll be double teaming on scouts for a while, I’ll put it that way.” Ritchie's smile was muddled with a laugh, he leaned up and nuzzled Ash, smearing his tears.

Gardevoir smiled warmly at the trio’s embrace, but its head snapped up upon hearing a distant scream outside in the hall; the loving group too lost in their affection to have noticed. “Ritchie, keep watch for me will you?” said Gardevoir sharply moving towards the door –

Ritchie barely looked up from hugging Ash, “Huh?”
“I’ll be right back,” Gardevoir stated and exited the room, locking the door with its psychic powers behind it.

Ritchie stood up, his brow furrowed at Gardevoir’s actions until Ash wiggled up almost bopping him in the chin, “My pokemon! Pikachu and Charizard, are they alright?! Are they okay?! Our team –”

“They’re fine,” said Gary, “Don’t you worry, they’re here somewhere in the hospital, but I bet you anything they’re stuffing their little happy faces with sweet treats.”

“This I can confirm,” said Ritchie wiping his face on his sleeves, “Pikachu was downing a whole clafoutis last I saw!”

“Oh thank heaven,” Ash breathed falling back on Gary yet again, but then just as quickly sprung back up, “Ritchie! There was a Bergmite with me! The Bergmite you tagged to find me! It found me! Did it make it out?! What happened to it?!"

“Ah, well, Ash, um, it….” Ritchie couldn’t look Ash in the face and glanced off center, Gary gave Ritchie a pleading look, “It, it evolved into Avalugg!”

“It evolved?! Ash perked up, “That’s awesome! Where is it?”

“Um…”

Ash gripped the blankets, “Is it hurt?”

Gary wrapped his arms delicately around Ash’s middle, “Max said that his Dewgong and Sneasel looked and looked for it, but, they were unable to find it” –

“Are they still looking?” Ash pressed.

Gary hugged Ash a little harder, “I don’t think so sweetheart.”

“Oh no, no,” Ash looked desperately back and forth between Gary and Ritchie, but their sad expressions were the same, “Please, please don’t tell me”–

“Oh sweetheart,” Gary hugged Ash deeply again.

Ash perked up at Gary, “The tag,” then looked to Ritchie, “the tag just might too damaged for its signal to read right” –

Ritchie grimaced at Ash’s desperation in grasping onto any shred of hope. He sat himself next to Ash’s hip, taking his free hand again, “Probably, but, believe me, Dewgong and Sneasel just would not come back until they had found Avalugg, they tried, they did everything they could for a pokemon so brave…they said the reason it evolved, was to save you, to protect you from Lisa.”

“It did?” Ash squeaked, “It did that for me?”

Ritchie swallowed, “They tried Ash, they stayed out as long as they could and then some, but, the conditions just got too dangerous, you know how the area gets in the Spring with the ice flow, and the geysers, and the disappearing mountains melting, too many hazards, even for ice types, they just had to pull back.”

Ash sunk against Gary, Gary tenderly resting his head on top of Ash’s with arms wrapped around his waist.

Ritchie squeezed Ash’s hand harder, “I’m so sorry Ash…”
Ash swallowed a sob down, “Don’t be, it’s not your fault,” but another sob bubbled right up his throat, “I thought I reached her….” Ash broke Gary and Ritchie’s grip by dropping his head in his hands, “If it’s anyone’s fault it’s mine” – Gary quickly pulled Ash into a tight, tight protective hug – “Ash, look at me,” Gary tilted Ash’s head up to where they were eye level, “You cannot blame yourself for this,” he cupped Ash’s cheek, his thumb rubbing lightly against him, “It’s not your fault either,” he caught a tear, and wiped it away. Ash let his head be held by Gary’s hand before his eyes dropped and looked away in shame; Gary sighed internally, leaning in to let his forehead touch Ash’s, feeling his boyfriend’s wounded thoughts.

You’re not going to reach him fully so fast Gary. Sure you both are back together, but it still may take more time to really bring him around. This won’t be something fixed overnight. This may not be something “fixed”….You wish you could enter his very mind and wipe all the bad thoughts away that hurt him so, but that’s not really fixing anything either….

Ash’s room door suddenly received feverish knocks from little paws with a voice screaming outside, “PIKA PIKAAAAAA PI PI PI PI PI PI PI PI!!”

Ash quickly snapped to attention, “Pikachu!”

Ritchie scrambled over to unlock and open the door allowing a little yellow bolt to shoot across the room and straight into Ash’s gut, “OOF, ow, P-Pikachu! Hey, my little buddy it’s okay, ow, ow, it’s okay, I’m okay! I’m okay, ow, ow wow, my stomach, ow…”

“Are you okay?” asked Gary with a slanted smile.

“Yes, yeah, I’m good, heh my little buddy, you still pack quite the punch!”

“PIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIPIKAPI!”

Gary smiled watching Pikachu obsess with sheer joy over Ash, nuzzling and rubbing all over him, turning its stomach up with its little body every which way for pets and more pets and skritches, that is until Charizard came storming in, knocking poor Ritchie flat onto the ground – Gary immediately threw himself over Ash and Pikachu squashing the both of them – “NO CHARIZARD BIG BOY BAD BOY, BACK! BACK PLEASE YOUR CLAWS – NO FIRE! STOP!” – Pikachu squeezed itself free and began hissing up a storm at Charizard to calm down as its flaming tail caught fire a chair (which Ritchie quickly ran over to douse) and knocked some of the equipment about – Ash let out a yelp of pain causing Charizard to freeze in place instantly before it was violently yanked back by Gardevoir who teleported in – “YOU WILL CONTROL YOURSELF, RIGHT. NOW.” Gardevoir raised Charizard up with its psychic powers as if it was about to slam some common sense into it with the nearest wall – “Gardevoir wait! Everyone just wait!” Ash yelled, his voice cracking slightly as he pushed himself up from under Gary. “Ow…” Ash shot Gary a frustrated look for squashing him, but Gary returned his mild glare with concern, and helped Ash sit up further–

Gardevoir let Charizard fall hard to the ground as it checked the door to make sure it was good and locked again and secure. Charizard grumbled hauling itself up, walking cautiously over to Ash’s side under Gardevoir, Ritchie, and Pikachu’s sharpened scrutiny.

“I’m sorry,” said Gardevoir flatly, “but waiting is not a luxury we can enjoy at the moment, the entire hospital has just been placed under lockdown.”

“Wh-what?” Ash blurted –
Gary and Ritchie shared alarmed looks – “What’s going on?”

“We have strong reason to believe the hospital has been infiltrated by a lethal intruder”–

“What?”

“Ash, Gary, I don’t believe you two are aware of this matter, I was just informed as well, but there was a remnant of the Froslass’ body that was retrieved by Mary, a Dawn Stone, and that Dawn Stone has just been snatched from her by what could be a Oneling or a Oneling supporter” –

WHAT THE FUCK –

“What was she doing with it to begin with?!” Gary hissed –

Ritchie shook his head in disbelief, “No, no, it was supposed to have been turned over to the League”–

Gardevoir crossed its arms, “Mary swears up and down that whatever took the stone from her would have had to have killed her if they tried to take it in a fair fight, something snatched that stone right out of her pocket, alas, what is done, is done,” Gardevoir looked directly into Ash’s eyes, “Now Ash, your friends and family are safe, everyone is well protected and secure as we are here. I will not leave your side until this thing is caught, and the Dawn Stone retrieved. I have my senses working on full if anything living tries to come near us, we have the hospital pokemon searching, Missy the Mismagius is working on scouting for non-living presences, and the Rotoms are working details in de-scribing auras to make sure no presences of ANY kind, somehow, try to manifest in further within this facility. We’re not going to leave anything unturned, no matter how absurd the precautions may seem.”

No by all means, take every precaution necessary because if Gary has to bust a cap in someone’s ass, they ain’t ever coming back, this is your only chance to take that individual in ALIVE –

Ash was just left agape at the situation, his head spinning trying to comprehend the vast mood swing from such joy, to such peril, but he managed to say, “Who else is here?”

Gardevoir answered, “Your friends Misty, Tracey, Brock, the whole Ranger Crew and your mother” –

“MY MOM?!” Ash’s body immediately reacted to get up, but Gary held him fast –

“Everyone is safe,” Gardevoir reiterated placing a hand on Ash’s chest, “I promise you this, the hospital pokemon are more then ready to put up a fight if needed” –

I mean yeah sure no one wants a repeat of what happened with the Legenday pokemon scuffle-woo, or the grudge match against Lisa because they both ended SO WELL –

“Have the Legendary pokemon been informed?” Ritchie asked quickly.

Ash gawked, “What legendary pokemon, what?” –

“Sweetheart just calm down, please,” Gary could feel Ash’s heart going a mile a minuet, Gardevoir with its hand over Ash’s chest gave him a cautious Heal Pulse* -

“To put it bluntly Mr. Ketchum, yes, there are indeed Legendary pokemon here with us,” said Gardevoir, “Moltres and Zekrom to be specific, Moltres has a desire to oversee your health. And yes, Ritchie, they have been notified. Before I Teleported* back, I heard Zekrom was using its electricity
running through the hospital as a detection grid, and Moltres had forced itself inside and started roaming the halls itself, so should the fire alarms go off, *that might be the reason why,* the psychic/fairy pokemon side glanced Charizard who glared back.

Gary leaned back, pulling Ash back with him in an attempt to force him to relax –

*Ripe f*ucking chance bruh, Ash feels like he’s ready to rocket off of you – he’s about to ignite into a full blown panic mode and that is a mode that has honestly scared you in how utterly helpless you are in aiding him–

Gary placed his hand on Ash’s forehead, rocking him gently back and forth, although he could practically hear the raging tempest of frantic emotions buzzing in Ash’s head; Ritchie was pacing off to the side,

“*I know Mary turned that Dawn Stone over to the League, unless they gave it back? What sense does that even make?*”

“Perhaps as something to bury,” said Gardevoir, “That was all that was recovered, was it not?”

Gary felt Ash harshly swallow, “That was all that was left of Lisa? Just, a *stone*?”

“Yes,” replied Ritchie and Gardevoir.

*That’s? Kinda odd, and alarming? When ghost pokemon ‘die’ they disappear, they don’t leave any trace behind….uh huh unless….*

Ritchie turned sharply on his heels, “I don’t understand how this thing got in, there’s security here, because *hello,* famous researcher and famous potential candidate, unless they just didn’t take Zoroark’s warning seriously, which *rrrrrrghhhugh,* Ritchie’s expression grew more frustrated as his thoughts collected themselves, “It virtually said ‘if it failed in bringing Lisa back, another more, and I quote, ‘dangerous’ pokemon would have been sent’ –

Gary grimaced, as much as he wanted to quell Ritchie’s nervous banter, he was also equally invested in finding out how this turn of events came to be.

*Okay Gary so um mayyyyyyybe you should have been inquiring about the other happenings outside of Ash’s predicament with the whole, you know, potential direct threat to his life and all?*

“They haven’t been able to find any trace of the Oneling group yet, so I bet that’s what gave them an out to be sloppy,” Ritchie spat –

“Ritchie,” came Ash’s voice, it sounded weaker. Ritchie immediately stopped pacing and saw Ash reaching out his hand to him, “Come sit here, you’re going to work yourself up into a fit –”

*SPEAK FOR YOURSELF –*

Ash then gave an apologetic smile, “and I’m not exactly in the best shape to be your sparing partner.”

Ritchie groaned with his own internal apology, his shoulders slumped, and he promptly took a seat by Ash. Ash’s Charizard however gave a growl as its own internal fire heated up.

Gary motioned for Ritchie’s attention, “Did Zoroark give any indications on what type of pokemon it could be?”
Because if it’s another FUCKING ghost type –

Ritchie clasped his hands a bit nervously, “It just said a higher level pokemon than itself, although it thinks it would have been a Transformer” –

FUCK –

Ash’s eyes grew wide, “Uh oh” –

“Uh oh is right,” said Gardevoir, “Considering this pokemon snuck in so effortlessly, it must be a very talented Transformer” –

“Don’t give the security too much credit here,” Ritchie said sourly, “I’m sure it just used any other tactics a Transformer would – use Transform*, make itself a benign subject matter, and move when no one is looking, rinse and repeat.”

“I bet it would be a Smeargle then,” said Gardevoir, “With the ability to freely use other movesets along with Transform*, it could have used Psychic* to nab the stone right out from Mary.”

Gary shifted to help Ash lay down more, or try to, Ash was determined to sit up as much as his still battered body would allow. Gary looked to Gardevoir, “Gardevoir, you said Zekrom was using its electricity as a detection grid right? So then whatever it is, is staying put, or, mh, it’s somewhere the electricity can’t reach, or, pfft, if it’s a ground type…my bet is it’s a Claydol then.”

Ash’s hand went to the side of his head, “Uuuugh…I don’t feel good.”

Gardevoir placed its hand on Ash’s head, giving him another Heal Pulse*, “Not surprising, you did just wake up, what you need is rest, and lots of it.”

No shit Sherlock.

“Well that’s not happening,” Ash laughed emptily, “Unless you can just knock me clean out.”

“I can,” Gardevoir smiled, “I can put you right to sleep with Hypnosis*.”

“No,” Ash said flatly.

“Ash,” Gary shifted uncomfortably,

God it kills you to say this Gary, but you can feel him getting wobblier next to you –

“Ash, maybe, you should be asleep for this” –

And there’s the look, yup, that’s the look alright, oh and from him AND Ritchie –

“Are you serious?” said Ash, “You want me, to be, asleep for this” –

Gardevoir turned Ash to look at it, “Listen, you have just come out of a life and death ordeal and you are no where near 100%. I am still turned into you via a Health Channel*, and you are on the verge of passing out whether you want to admit it or not. So I can put you to sleep via Hypnosis* now, or we can all talk about very boring science subjects and you’ll fall asleep on your own.”

“For the record I like science,” Ash retorted, “I’m dating a researcher.”

This boy 8/
Gary couldn’t help but giggle from the flat look on Gardevoir’s face, “*SIGH* Talking it is then! Gary, shall we entertain our guests on the algorithms of categorizing bioluminescence according to evolutionary dispositions?”

Ritchie perked up, “Oh? You mean about sub-grouping the habitual impact of aura permeance in relation to subjective and/or ephemeral environmental triggers?”

Gardevoir blinked.

“I are like a science too,” said Ritchie in jest, “Show ’em Ash, use one of these, them’s ten dollar words!”

“Pulchritudinous,” said Ash, he turned to Gary with a half smile, “Gary, you are absolutely pulchritudinous.” A lone eyebrow went up from Gary….. “That’s it, that’s all I got,” said Ash, followed by a yawn he struggled to choke down.

Okay yeah let’s all make small talk while there’s an armed intruder somewhere in the fucking hospital, good deal, cool beans everyone.

“Well, there is one science topic I do wish to indulge to you Ash,” said Gardevoir, “You had some very, very special help in aiding your recovery.”

Gary immediately perked up, “That’s right! Oh Ash, our little Audi!” Ash looked back at him with earnest interest, “Audi, our little Audi learned a new Human Health Transfer technique and simultaneously performed it on you and perfected it! Audino modified attacks and even injected its own bioluminescence into you, and saved your soul, Ash, Audi used its very own soul to protect yours!”

Ash took a moment to process this, his hand coming up halfway to his mouth, and said quietly, “…..I wasn’t alone….the light…”

Gary tilted his head, “The light?”

“The light,” Ash looked around to everyone, “In the dark place, the light let me hear…!...Oh, Audi…” Ash’s hand went over his heart, “That was you…!” Ash’s face slowly went from awe to a deeply appreciative smile, “I, I knew Audi had it in ‘em, Audi just needed a little point in the right direction and…” Ash’s voice trailed off, Gary read Ash’s new expression as something he had just realized internally, but there wasn’t much else to decipher, Gary could feel Ash getting wobblier by the minuet albeit from his ever increasing exhaustion and attempting to process so much in such a short amount of time.

Charizard came up to Ash with the biggest, saddest and most worried of eyes.

Ash gave a small slanted sigh, braced himself against Gary and held out his arms to Charizard, “C’mere big boy, easy, I’m alright, see?” The moment Charizard’s snout made contact with Ash’s hands, the fire pokemon let out a yearning sigh of relief nuzzling into them. Ash beckoned the pokemon closer to where he could wrap his arms around its head in a tight hug, “I’m okay big guy, it’s okay, hear that?” Charizard pressed its head on Ash’s chest, listening to his heart beat, “Nice and strong, like you! Ehhehehe, hey, see my arm? It’s just wires, they’re helping my body be okay, like how when I take you to the pokemon center, same thing with people! So, I’d also appreciate it if you didn’t knock around anymore equipment, watch your tail buddy,” Charizard grumbled apologetically, nuzzling Ash softly, Ash gave it loud paps on its chest, “We’re all gonna be, ah,
“augh, ack” – Ash dropped Pikachu - his entire body seized up, his eyes started to roll into his head – his hands shook uncontrollably – Gary about jumped out of his own skin –

“ASH!!”

Gardevoir immediately made space for itself with one arm and removed Gary and Pikachu with the other, almost throwing them into Ritchie and Charizard –

“PIPIPKA!” –

“ASH?!”

Gardevoir had one glowing hand on Ash’s chest, the other on his head, its entire body glowing a pale aura in contrast to Ash’s body looking like it was having a seizure, “His body is having a violent reaction” –

“TO WHAT?!”

Gardevoir gasped, “Oh god” –

‘OH GOD’ IS NOT WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR –

The majority of Ash’s body had stopped shaking under Gardevoir’s control, only his hands still looked to be trembling, he was gasping for air, eyes tightly shut –

“Ash, listen, listen,” said Gardevoir strongly, “I need you to focus on my voice and inhale and exhale, inhale and exhale, okay? Follow me, inhale and exhale, inhale and exhale” –

“Hurts, *gasp* to” –

“Push through it,” Gardevoir urged, “Inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale, I can’t breathe for you – I need to focus all my efforts on the Link* inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale–”


Ritchie and Gary clung to one another with Charizard threatening to crush them all under its nerves, Pikachu was at the ready if it needed to become an impromptu crash cart, Ash’s ragged breathing filled the room until shuffling sounds outside with detached voices alerted everyone –

“It’s in the hallway!” –

“CORNER IT NOW!!” –

Charizard, absolutely enraged, tore out of the room and into the fray – Gardevoir split its concentration and slammed the door shut with its powers before Ritchie could follow through –

“Ash needs you here!” shouted Gardevoir, “Ritchie, Gary, I’m going to open up another Channel*” –

They didn’t need to be told twice, instantly they were by Ash’s side as a terrifying screech from outside burned through the air with the sound of heavy objects smashing about the hallway – Ash suddenly let loose an anguished pained scream that absolutely tore through everyone in the room, his hands gripped the bed sheets as his back involuntarily arched with his legs kicking out from a cruel bolt of pain that shot through his body, he swallowed thickly between gasps, a hand reaching out blindly, “GARY” –
Gary grabbed Ash’s wavering hand, “I’m right here Ash, I’m right here” – something heavy got slammed against the window of Ash’s room shattering it – Gary and Ritchie threw themselves over Ash to protect him as Gardevoir threw up a Reflect* against anymore flying debris, moving itself into the line of fire, using its own body as shield – its aura glowing to a fever pitch – a grumbling roar pulled itself free of the blinds leaving whatever turmoil was happening outside free to enter –

“The both of you keep him focused on breathing,” Gardevoir ordered, “You need to help him shoulder the turbulence” – Gary and Ritchie felt the Channel* open up between them along with an indescribable amount of fear, anguish, and adrenaline surge into their systems –

**KEEP IT TOGETHER GARY! YOU CAN’T IMAGINE WHAT ASH IS GOING THROUGH RIGHT NOW – GOD KNOWS HOW MUCH MORE HIS BATTERED BODY CAN TAKE –**

Probably against better judgment since Ash was currently a ball of random flailing limbs – even with Gardevoir actively working on Health Transfer* with him – Gary scooped Ash up in his arms with Ritchie to help hold him still, and together, they helped Ash shoulder the turmoil within, “Just keep breathing Love, just keep breathing, in and out, in and out, in and out, you’re doing so well, so well Love, keep breathing, keep breathing, in and out, in and out, follow my chest, feel me breathe” – another pokemon ran screeching by, the room briefly illuminated by sounds of roaring fire –

**THAT HAS TO BE MOLTRES OH MY GOD – or Chandelure –**

And sure enough what followed was intense, intense heat bursting in through the window, setting the blinds and curtains on fire and almost scorching Gardevoir’s back – the psychic and fairy type immediately put them out with its powers and returned right to work on Ash whose movements had gone from jerky pained driven convulsions to a sudden awkward dream-like manner – Gary and Ritchie feeling static coming from Ash instead of any kind of emotion –

**NO, NO, NOT AGAIN – NONONONONO –**

Gary gripped Ash’s hand tighter only to feel all the fight that he had drain out in a second, Ash’s hand moved blindly to touch Gary’s face absentmindedly, and then he opened his eyes, his left eye that beautiful brown, but his right eye was blue –

Gary and Ritchie were in horror, “Ash?”

Ash’s eyes shut tight again as another bolt of pain shot through his chest, “GARY!” he cried out in terror, and again the turbulence Ash was being tortured with blindsided Gary and Ritchie hitting them like a crashing wave, but together they recovered fast –

*He’s still in there, still in there, you don’t know what the fuck that was, BUT YOU ARE NOT GOING TO LOSE HIM AGAIN –*

“Stay with us, stay with us” –

*I’m try – trying, I love you, I love you, I’m sorry*–

**“STOP IT” –**

A short scream came from the end of the hallway, followed by something getting violently smashed into a wall, and Ash’s body fell limp along with Gardevoir’s knees giving out, it catching itself on the bed rails as its shining aura broke contact, “Oh thank heaven,” Gardevoir choked out – Ash was still breathing heavily, but Gary and Ritchie could feel through the Channel* that whatever was torturing him had vanished as quickly as it had arrived.
Gary hugged Ash as tightly as he could with a few relieved tears escaping him, “My sweet beautiful Ash, god almighty are you okay?!” –

“Uruhh…”

Ash opened his eyes showing they both were their wonderful brown and nothing more, whatever blue hue his right one had was gone.

Eyyyy we need a solid 24 hours where absolutely fucking nothing goes wrong please. Starting now.

Gary pressed several kisses to the side of Ash’s head while Ash just let himself be controlled by Gary’s limbs, his body was completely and utterly spent, his mind blank except for feeling Gary and Ritchie’s concern and love through the Channel*.

“They got it,” came Gardevoir’s voice, its hand was pressed to the side of its head, “I can hear, *cough* thoughts, they got it, they got that fils de pute!”

“What was it?”

“A Smeargle,” said Gardevoir, “I was right, nasty little thing, it Transformed into Moltres and all hell broke loose and, and, ah, I can hear Mismagius got some good clean hits off it, and that it, it,” Gardevoir made a scrunched up face, “It swallowed the stone” –

Fucking keep it, Arceus Schist –

Ash coughed in Gary’s cradling hold, *Water…*

Gary felt Ash stirring against him, “Sweetheart?”

Ash swallowed, mouth pulled tight, *Water, please. I need water, water, please* -

Gary, he’s not moving his mouth, you’re hearing his thoughts, yoooooo –

Gary, too exhausted to be concerned, (and mainly thankful he can assist Ash in some way), looked to Ritchie (who was still collecting himself), “Ritchie, could you pour Ash some water please?”

“Huh? – Oh yes, yes” – Ritchie brought the pitcher over and poured out a cup for Gary, his own hands still slightly trembling from the whole ordeal, “Here ya go.”

“Thanks,” Gary propped himself up single-handedly, then propped up Ash, “Here Love, here you go,” Ash, very droopy and slipping further out of it, tried to take the glass himself, but his arm barely budged.

*Bluh,* *Ash let himself be guided by Gary as he helped him drink down the cup of water. Once he was done, Ash coughed a little more and forced his mouth to work, “I need to, I need tolet everyone, know, that I’m, oh-kay, I needtoh, let, mom see lem-o’kay….” And Ash fainted on Gary.

“Aaaaaaaaaand he is probably going to be out, for a while,” said Gardevoir, “Likewise, I’m sure I will pass out momentarily as well,” Gardevoir sank down into a chair, “That terrible pokemon is in custody, danger, has been, averted” –

More voices came shouting down the hallway, Gary could hear rooms being checked for any damage done –

“I’m going to crash and sleep for a million years,” said Ritchie who let himself fall like a rock on the bed near Ash’s legs, “Oof.”
Okay yeah, but where is Charizard, and like everyone else? Where did Pikachu slip off to, when did that happen? How much of the hospital did Moltres accidentally set on fire? Where the hell, what the hell – okay, no you know what, fuck it, too much has happened too soon, there goes Ritchie passing out on y’alls bed, fuck it, you’re so done with tonight, you’re done with it, Ash is safe, Ash is safe in your arms, you know y’alls friends and family are safe from Gardevoir’s promise, your pokemon are more than capable of taking care of themselves they are totally fine, fuck everything else, you’re free to pass out too Gary and – welp, you’re still connected to Ash via the Health Transfer Channel*

Gary’s consciousness came and went throughout the night. He felt the bed being rolled about and moved, whispers, shouts, feet trotting on floors, changing light sources, opening and closing doors, but as long as he felt Ash in his hold, all was right; reality could move as much as it wanted around them. The voices that punctured his sleep were many, Gary immediately recognized one as Ash’s mother –

“We could hear him screaming all the way in our room, please tell me my baby is okay, is he okay? Is he okay?!” –

– and others from Misty, Tracey, and Brock -

“How could something like that EVER get in?!” –

“I don’t care what evidence they thought made it, EVEN, REMOTELY, okay to” –

“Look at him! Does he look like he can defend himself right now?!” –

They can handle whatever fight that is Gary, just go back to sleep, go to sleep and be with Ash, they got this, whatever that may be.

Gary felt small paws curl up on his side who he knew had to be Umbreon, he felt gentle hands on him at one point in adjusting the pillow and blankets, the soft trills letting him know that had to be his little Audino, and yet the contact that mattered the most was the body spread against him, the arm around his middle, and the head on his chest.

At one point Gary awoke enough to take measure of the new room they had been moved to while he was out, essentially it pretty much the same, minus the obvious damage the other floor had suffered. Ritchie was back asleep on another couch with Sparky (and awwww Audi too~!) curled up on his chest, although a part of Gary wished he had stayed on the bed with them, it’d be a tight squeeze, but they would all fit, even with Pikachu and Umbreon curled up near their feet together.

Blargh Gary, of all the times to not have your com, they look so cute together right now, god, Ash would’ve loved to have that as a background for his com! Ah wells, it’ll happen again. And this next com you’ll buy him will have all the media applications, all of them, ALL OF THEM, so he can media to his heart’s content <3

Chairs were placed back with people asleep in them, Tracey and Misty were curled up together on one again. Mrs. Ketchum had her feet propped up on another one, head leaned back, and sleeping with her mouth hanging absenty open.

Gary could help but chuckle to himself, *He gets it from somewhere.*

Outside of the room, through the window, Gary could see Blastoise, Arcanine, and Ash’s Charizard, *Oh thank goodness,* Gary breathed, glad to have the reassurance they were all fine, he could also
see they were playing a game in trying to keep a spinning ring on a stick…Or they were just really, really bored.

A sharp snore to his right revealed Brock drooped over on his arm in another chair, and right in front of him was Gardevoir, who was awake, and reading a book. Gary didn’t want to draw any attention that he’d awakened, so he closed his eyes, leaned his head on Ash, and let his body relax in being engulfed in the warmth of togetherness in the room. As the night deepened, and interruptions faded, Gary’s body finally let go of all tension, and allowed itself to rest enough to where he could dream.

In his dream, his eyes opened right into Ash’s. Ash looked back at him wearing a purposeful skeptical look with pursed lips that melted into a smile, and then bubbly laughter. Gary couldn’t help but laugh back, grabbing him in a tight hug that led him to sweep Ash’s feet off the ground into a whirl, making the reality around them blossom into a spring-esque meadow landscape like paint dipped onto a wet canvas. Ash landed back on his feet a little less than gracefully, both actually hearing grass crunch underneath him – Ash stumbled against Gary, prompting them to touch their foreheads together for balance; locking their hands and eyes in place, gazing into one another.

*I missed you so much. So, so, so, so, much!*

*I’m, sorry, I…didn’t mean to, to leave….Can you forgive me?*

*I was going to ask you the same thing, and of course. I’ll never let you go again. I promise. I’m so sorry, I’m –*

Ash’s smile had faded into a frown, and then into glance past Gary. Gary turned, and on the horizon of their dream, dark whispering tendrils gathered, slowly rising into rumbling thunderheads overtaking the painted landscape, threatening to wash everything away. Ash looked to Gary with a mix of worry and apprehension, Gary pulled Ash closer in response as he glared at the changing landscape.

*Gary, I, feel strange –*

Gary turned back to Ash and saw the iris of Ash’s right eye turn a bright pale blue – together, they felt the air turn, and it was getting, very, very cold.

Gary awoke suddenly, likewise in his hold, Ash turned up his head, barely able to open his eyes against the ever rising waves of rest his body much demanded, but in that sliver of an opening, Gary saw, much to his aching relief, they were both that beautiful brown. The quiet of the room against Gary’s quickened breath, of the reality around them, quickly anchored them down. Gary gave a deep sigh of relief, and pressed a kiss to Ash’s forehead, “I love you,” drawing from Ash the sleepiest of smiles. Ash mumbled incoherent sweet nothings as he snuggled into the crook of Gary’s neck, giving him a soft kiss in return while taking a big inhale of his boyfriend, falling right back into sleep with a loving sigh.

*Now is a good time to remember how awesome neck kisses feel Gary, never mind y’all just had another trippy shared mind moment because neck kisses feel so awesome, so totally awesome, and Ash gives some of the sweetest neck kisses ever, not that you’d be an expert on those things because*
hello, only one relationship ever here, but oh my goodness yes, this all started from your height
difference when you’d keep your lips just above Ash’s reach, so he attacked your neck instead,
mmmmHHHHHHHMMHMMHMM, yes, and you love how gentle the kisses can be at first, as if he’s
searching for a sweet spot and the moment you yield is when he fully presses on with those sinful lips
and oh so very skilled tongue, leading up to a lick and a bite, and a kiss, and bite and lick, and a
kiss, and god you love it when he marks you up that you belong to him, to him and no one else – you
need more of that, you NEED it – and you are totally growing a boner here Gary, but that’s okay
you are a beacon of self control, just reel it in buddy –

Gary felt someone sit on their bed, he looked, and it was Mrs. Ketchum holding a cup –

**REEL IT IN YOU ASSHOLE** –

Mrs. Ketchum felt Gary’s look and gave a sigh of relief seeing him awake, “Gary, darling, are you
alright?” She helped herself up, set her cup down and hobbled to move closer to him –

Gary tried to sit up a little more, crossing his legs, “Yeah, yes, I’m fine, we’re both fine, Ash is
alright, he’s just, very, very tired right now.”

“Oh I know,” Mrs. Ketchum replied clasping her hands, “Gardevoir, explained the whole, ordeal
to us.” She looked with deep worry to her sleeping son.

Speaking of which, where is everyone? When you woke up there was a full house, but now it looks
like the only one here is Ash’s mom, and oh, there’s Gardevoir over by the window mixing
something in a bowl –

“How is everyone?” asked Gary.

Gardevoir walked over with the bowl, “Everyone is helping with the clean up and repair of the
hospital at the moment, the busiest, and only major hospital in the city isn’t exactly able to up and
transfer overnight. Anywho, are you feeling any aches? Any tension anywhere?”

“Me?” Gary asked, Gardevoir nodded, “No, why?”

“Because it has come to my attention that getting that lingering Link* under control in Ash had a few
side-effects with the Health Channel*, but nothing that won’t wear off in time.” Gardevoir placed its
hand on its chin, “For starters, when Ritchie woke up, he said he had a case of the chills, and was
running a small fever, nothing major, hm,” Gardevoir placed its hand on Gary’s forehead, “you may
have already slept through it.”

“I guess so,” said Gary, “I feel just fine.”

“Well thank goodness for that,” said Mrs. Ketchum, and added with a weak smile, “I don’t know
how much more my poor heart can take….or my son’s for that matter…”

Gary looked to Ash still ever sleeping, “Gardevoir…what was that last night with Ash? What the hell
happened to him?!”

Gardevoir and Mrs. Ketchum shared a sad and worried look, “It is…that Link* that is still lodged in
Ash’s biocode” –

“Please explain,” said Gary.

Gardevoir gave a deep sighing breath, “The Link* is essentially a small chunk, the last remaining bit
really, of the Froslass’ influence, but it’s a, little more than that, its more like a direct cut of its own
soul.”

Gary…Gary –

Mrs. Ketchum’s worried visage only deepened and she lowkey grasped her dress.

“My deciphering of the Link* revealed that the reason it’s latched on so tightly was because the Froslass manipulated it through Ash’s own guilt.”

“His, his guilt?”

“Listen, I know he feels, responsible, for, well, things.”

Gary then immediately thought of Mary’s own guilt and felt sick.

“It’s not his fault,” said Mrs. Ketchum quietly, her eyes welling up.

“I don’t want to alarm him,” Gardevoir continued, “and we certainly don’t want to make it worse by making him feel alienated, we need to slowly help him understand and accept what has happened to him. We’ll start like before, loosening the screws, and then I’ll be able to untangle that last bit of influence, and he’ll be free of it forever.”

What he won’t be free of is the sadness, however. That’s not going to go away. In fact this all may just make it worse no matter how many precautions are taken.

Gardevoir’s look turned more serious, “As to why the Link* reacted so violently with the stone, gives much concern,” Gardevoir sighed, “The only thing left of the Froslass’ manipulation of Ash is the Link*, there is not another, ‘stone’ inside of him as several other doctors and Health Transfer pokemon speculated with me–”

Oh well thank god for that at least ;O;

–“Ash would more than likely be dead if that were the case”–

OKAY THEN 8’D

Gardevoir crossed its arms, “We can safely assume that Dawn Stone is not your normal Evolutionary Catalyst, I have a hunch that with the Froslass’ undeniable insanity and understanding of compound bio-structures, it somehow saved itself a backup! Since this was a Transformed pokemon, a Dawn Stone was not needed for its evolution, yet one was present at the Froslass’ demise. I can only guess that at one point in its existence, it may have consumed a Dawn Stone, or absorbed one, and so, before its body disappeared, it saved itself to the stone”–

“Are you saying Lisa’s soul was the stone?”

Did it save itself a backup in Ash, god what were those wizard books you read some years ago –

“To put it simply, yes, that is a real possibility. What sense can we make of the occurrence that after Zoroark landed the supposed ‘killing’ blow to Froslass, that a Dawn Stone would just, appear in the wake of its demise?”

Gee I don’t know! Let’s take a gander at it shall we?! A ghost pokemon’s lifespan, if that’s what it even can be called, is very, very weird, they can’t really die since they’re, technically, dead, research has shown that they just, in time, like fade away. Lisa was so adamant on becoming human again, she would have done anything, so, perhaps…perhaps she even planned for this outcome if she
couldn’t take what she needed from Ash…..? Maybe that’s giving her too much credit, maybe you’re all giving her too much credit. You all are terrified for Ash plain and simple.

“This is absolute mad scientistry – if the stone had gotten to him, *if it would have made contact, I believe*” –

*But this is all just speculation right?* blurted Gary, “Who’s to say that stone had Lisa’s soul inside of it, or, or, that, that” –

*Gary you know better from the dark side of research, the stuff you would never, EVER dabble in.*

“Mary talked with the captive Zoroark, and confirmed that Lisa did all sorts of experimentation with their leader, of which included, such, theories.”

Gary just gawked at Gardevoir.

Gardevoir looked very pained in what it was going to say next, “It is my belief the Smeargle was trying to get close to Ash last night, hence why he had such a violent reaction…I looked through Ash’s bio-code while you two slept, and, I used Dream Eater* to steal away any unpleasant Night Terrors that tried to disturb the two of you,” Gardevoir shuddered, “It’s understandable why he was tortured and reacted with such violence. There is no doubt the Link* lodged inside him assisted with the reaction, and the stone’s presence resonated with the Link* to trigger….Something I’ve only heard of from some twisted minds in the science community…” Gardevoir looked right into Gary’s eyes, “You noticed a physical change in Ash, right Gary? Just for a moment, a split second” –

*Pale blue eyes.*

“His right eye was blue for a moment,” said Gary; Mrs Ketchum rubbed her temple in anguish, “Gardevoir, the Link*’s reaction was strong enough to elicit a physical change.”

“This is true,” Gardevoir nodded sullenly, “Let’s put it this way, that Link* needs to come out, and as soon as Ash is strong enough, we’re all going to work together to pull it out of him. I need some more time to understand what’s fully going on inside of him with it, until then, we just need to fill Ash with as much love as possible.”

*24 hours, All. You. Fucking. Want. IS. 24. GOD. DAMN. HOURS. WHERE. NOTHING, GOES, WRONG. AND THAT, I GUESS, MARY NEVER BROUGHT THE STONE NEAR ASH? PROPS TO THAT? BECAUSE HOLY SHIT HOW WOULD ANY OF YOU GUYS HAD KNOWN TILL IT WAS TOO LATE –*

Mrs. Ketchum took a seat in an adjacent chair, “I’m glad that despicable creature that stole the stone is in custody.”

“Yes, and there’s not much to say yet on how,” Gardevoir sighed, “Interrogations are going. I know the Rangers’ authority only goes so far here, but I’m sure law enforcement is trying to make up for how that thing slipped through in the first place.”

Gary caught a sour whiff of the mixture in the bowl, “What’s in the bowl?”

“Oh this is going to taste really super yummy, it’s a cleanse pudding, it’s to give a little boost to your body” –

Gary caught a stronger waft of it and retched back, “That is *not* going in me.”

“Well I am still connected to Ash via a Channel*, and I need to save all my strength for him after last
night, so you are going to eat this like it is a crème brûlée."

*There are other Health Transfer pokemon here, and doctors, you’re in a HOSPITAL – boo to your booger pudding I say!*

Gary frowned, but in receiving both ‘knowing’ looks from Gardevoir and Mrs. Ketchum, he had no choice, he took the pudding and downed it as fast as he could, the sour, bitter, and waxy taste making him involuntarily scrunch up his face –

“Oh that is a good look for you Gary” –

Gary glared upon looking up, watching Misty walk in with Tracey. “Ah, I see you had to eat some of the, ‘cleanse pudding’ too,” said Tracey, “Yummy stuff there.”

“How is Ash?” asked Misty.

“Still getting some rest,” said Mrs. Ketchum.

“He might not fully come around till this afternoon,” said Gardevoir, “How are things going?”

“Nothing much to report,” said Tracey, “They’re still trying to get something out of the Smeargle, mainly the stone, but, well, there’s not much they can do. Zoroark on the other hand has been spilling all kinds of beans about the Onelings, including locations where they may have gone to hide.”

“Has anything turned up yet?”

Tracey sighed, “Nope.”

Misty gave a huff, “The Legendary pokemon, well, mainly Moltres is demanding an audience with Ash,” she rolled her eyes, “Apparently it is having a really hard time wrapping its head around that it is ‘on fire’ and machinery can be ‘damaged’ should it not control itself, case in point an ENTIRE hospital floor out of commission!” Misty rubbed her temple, “I swear, that bird is seriously lacking in some self-control. Zekrom put its foot down though and ordered it to stay outside, the hospital has suffered enough!”

Tracey gave a smile, “In some lighter news, Audino has been a big help, it’s been using its healing powers to help with patients affected by this whole mess, honestly Gary, little Audi is working miracles.”

Gary couldn’t help but smile back, “I’m so proud.”

---

*So Gary, the morning, well mid-morning really, has come and gone. Brock came in to check on Ash, as did y’all’s pokemon, Ritchie, Mary, Max, Thomas, and all the Ranger pokemon, Rapidash showing the most control of any fire type you’ve seen around the machinery in the room, it literally almost smothered out its own fire! You’ve never seen a fire pokemon turn down its body flames THAT much, but it was very much appreciated. So far so good, nothing else bad has happened, Ash has just been sleeping at your side, and you’ve been by his side. Gardevoir has done routine health checks and Heal Pulses* on him making sure his body is good enough to, eventually, fight off this, Link* thingie….Ugh.*

As the afternoon rolled around, order was still being restored within the hospital, but the atmosphere was much more under control. Gardevoir and Ritchie sat on the couch discussing literature as Gary
was scrolling about online with his new com for cameras. He felt Ash’s body stretch softly against him, followed by Ash giving the softest and cutest yawn he’s ever seen. Ash opened his eyes, and smiled at Gary, “IMmmmrp, dream, deaming?”

Gary set down his com, “No Love, this is real, this is all so real” – Gary scooped Ash up, and hugged him hard as he pressed a kiss to the side of his head alerting Ritchie, and Gardevoir who quickly scrambled over,

“Ash, you’re awake! Again!” said Ritchie joining in on the hug.

“How are you feeling Love?”

Ash gave a groggy smile, “Ugh-like I could fall back asleep, but I, really, really don’t want to fall back asleep” –

:O!!!!!–

“I mean, oh don’t you two give those looks, pbbth! I want to be awake! Where is everyone? Oh,” Ash’s memory caught up from what happened to him the previous night like a tape in fast-forward, “My mom! I have to let her know I’m okay!”

“I’ll go get everyone right now!” said Ritchie, and bolted out the door.

“I hope you’re ready for a stampede,” smiled Gardevoir, “Everyone has been anxious to see you awake and well.”

“Well, I’m awake,” Ash smiled awkwardly, “I just have to let them all know I’m” – Ash’s hands suddenly clasped his throat, Gardevoir stepped forward and placed its hand over Ash’s using Heal Pulse*,

“I’m sorry to say even with this little bit you might be pushing it some,” said Gardevoir, “Your voice needs rest, you need rest.”

Ash vehemently shook his head, *No! I need to see everyone! Please! Please!*

Gary blinked. Ash’s mouth clearly didn’t move, yet he heard him loud and clear.

Yo Gary –

“I-I know its hard Love, but its okay if you don’t feel up to it now” –

Again Ash shook his head, and let go of his throat to grab Gary’s arms giving him a pleading look, *I’m up for it Gary, please, please, I’m okay!*

Ah ha, Gary, Ash’s mouth is still very clearly closed yet you heard that loud and clear, again. Bruh, you know that Channel* between you two has BEEN closed but even then you shouldn’t be able to his hear his thoooooaughtsss.

“To save on your voice,” said Gardevoir, “I will open up a psychic, err, Mental Link* with whomever you choose to speak with Ash so they can hear you,” Gardevoir showcased its talent by opening up a Link* between itself and Ash to start.

I think we’re covered here Doc.

“But I will be blunt.” Gardevoir continued, “I can feel you’re still whoozy, so don’t feel bad if you need a break, or, just plain pass out with everyone here, you’re still recovering, this isn’t a bad
“thing.”

*I don’t care, if I have to prop my eyelids open with my fingers I will,* grumbled Ash.

Ritchie ran back into the room breathless, “Alright, everyone is on the way!” But before anyone else could come in Gardevoir slammed the door shut via Psychic* with an audible squeal coming from the other side, “Give us a moment please! We’ll be ready in a minuet!” Gardevoir rubbed a Heal Pulse* into Ash’s chest, “To help you bear, all of what you’re going to feel in seeing everyone,” Ash cocked his head,

*I’m not sure I understand.*

“That’s quite alright, just take things as they come,” said Gardevoir.

*Gary if you could, you would use your own heart as a buffer for Ash’s. Speaking of buffers, Ritchie is over by the door peeking out from opening it a bit, and if Misty is on the other side, we’re about to have a recreation of the Battle of Helm’s Deep if Gardevoir doesn’t give the okay for that door to swing open –*

Gardevoir motioned towards Ritchie, “Oh, Ritchie, since you’re over there, could you go get Ash’s mother?”

“Everyone is already waiting outside,” said Ritchie” –

“And we’d like to come in please?!” came Misty’s voice, “It was so nice having that door slammed in my face” –

“Gardevoir I want to live,” said Ritchie feebly.

Gardevoir huffed yet again, placing its hand to side of its head, *Listen well now, everyone, Ash will be communicating to you all via Mental Links* that I will open for him to let him rest his voice, I’m afraid your time with him may be brief, he is still very much exhausted and must rest, now Ritchie, open the door.*

Ritchie didn’t so much open the door as leap out of the way with Misty pushing it open. There wasn’t a tidal wave of friends and family rushing in, especially with Gardevoir glaring at the entrance, the only person to enter was Mrs. Ketchum in a wheelchair with Pikachu in her lap, rolling herself over with her feet.

Upon seeing his mother in such a state, Gary understood why Gardevoir braced Ash’s heart as his composure plummeted like a rock,

“Momma, w-why are you in a wheelchair?!,” he stretched his arms along with his whole body out to her, practically throwing himself, Gary caught Ash with Gardevoir before he fell over the bed rails. Mrs. Ketchum hauled herself up out of the wheelchair, Pikachu leaping from her lap onto the bed – she batted away Gardevoir’s attempts to help, stumbled forward against the rails and wrapped her arms around her only child, her cascading tears of joy muffled in his hair.

Mrs. Ketchum cradled Ash as if she was holding him for the first time all over again, “My baby boy, my sweet boy, my sweet baby boy” –

“I’m okay momma, please don’t cry,” Ash sobbed, “Why are you in a wheelchair? What happened? Is it your heart? Did she hurt you?”

“She tried to take away my only son, of course I’m upset! I almost lost you –”
The sentiment is echoed there, Lisa hurt everyone for what she did to Ash. It's unforgivable. Aw man that look on Mary's face from the doorway is enough to turn the sun blue :( 

“But you're safe now, thank all the stars in heaven my baby is safe,” Mrs. Ketchum pressed a kiss to Ash’s forehead, “My sweet boy, momma was just very, very worried for you, I’ll be fine.”

Ash gave his mother a relieved smile as she patted her son’s head, she turned her attention momentarily to Gary giving him the warmest smile, in which he was able to return, albeit somewhat shyly. Ash sat up from his mother’s hold, “I’m sorry to have worried you so badly…”

Mrs. Ketchum shook her head gently, “We can’t prepare for these things dear, the best we can do, is get through them together.”

Movement out the corner of Gary’s eyes made him look toward the doorway where Mary stood, who was whispering something to Misty as she peeked around the corner – Ash immediately perked up, “Misty! Oh please, everyone, ack” – Gardevoir motioned in an annoyed tone for Ash to use the Links*, *Ah, everyone please, please come in!*

Misty, Tracey, Brock, Thomas and –

UUUUUUGH MAX –

– made their way into Ash’s room, followed by their pokemon: Skarmory, Lopunny, Rapidash, Pidgeot, Sparky, Umbreon, Arcanine, and Blastoise. Umbreon jumped up on the bed with Pikachu taking a seat by it, and Sparky leapt up into Ritchie’s arms.

Ash’s eyes welled up instantly, *Hello everyone, sorry to make you all worry…*

Okay Misty is about to choke or something via snot alone from those internal sobs, get ready to catch her Tracey.

Misty, leaning in on Tracey’s one arm hug, could only wave enthusiastically with her throat swollen from emotion, she mouthed, “It’s okay.”

Brock crossed his arms, choked up as well, “I know they say the good die young, so, can you stand to be a jerk just a little more?” The room shared a chuckle at that.

Suddenly a trill came from the doorway, and Audino came rushing in out of breath, *I’m sorry! I got held up during a Pulse* session, but I’m, *HUFF* I’m here now!* The room parted like the sea, giving Audino a straight line to Ash. Mrs. Ketchum picked up the normal type and set it on the bed next to Ash.

*Um, hi, hi Ash, I, um, I did stuff, to help you feel better*–

Ash gently took Audino’s small hands, *I know, Gary and Gardevoir told me what you did for me. You didn’t just make me feel better Audi, you saved my life. You. Saved. My. Life. You saved my life. Thank-you, thank-you Audi, our special, amazing, amazing Audi!* A

Ash pulled Audino into a hug, *We can’t lose you either,* and Audino bawled big snot bubbly tears
as Gary wrapped his arms around the both them, and together with Ash, cradled Audino, rocking it gently as it sobbed up a storm.

Mary stepped up to Ash, but before she could even get a word out, Ash collapsed against Gary and Audino sending a jolt through everyone’s hearts –

“Easy now,” said Gardevoir pressing its hand to Ash’s chest, “He’s alright, like I said” –

*I know, I know,* said Ash, struggling to remain conscious, leaving Gary to prop him up with Audino, *I’m sorry everyone* –

“Don’t be sweetie,” said Mrs Ketchum, “We’ll go ahead and leave you be now, you get some good rest alright?”

“Okay momma.”

Mrs. Ketchum kissed Ash on top of his head, “My sweet boy.” She helped herself back into the wheelchair, pushing back with her feet to make way for everyone else; Gardevoir motioned for Audino to stay on the bed with Pikachu and Umbreon.

Mary stepped right up to Ash’s side giving him a firm hug, Gary sensing she had a torrent of things to say to him, but the most she got out at the moment was, “Ash, *gulp*, your mission right now is to get better, don’t worry about anything else, I promise you, I will take care of everything.”

Ash gave a very sleepy smile, “Understood Mom 2.0.” Mary smirked.

“Rest well tiger,” said Brock giving Ash a pat on his shoulder.

“Hmm mmmmmmmh Mom 3.0,” Ash was getting sleepier by the second.

Tracey rustled Ash’s hat, “Don’t go having those adventurous dreams just yet, make sure you’re resting in those too.”

Ash playfully rolled his eyes, *Sure Momma 1½.*

Misty gave him a warm hug, she still couldn’t really speak, but managed to force out a whisper, “We’re all here for you, okay?”

Ash perked up slightly for her, *Thank-you…*

“And you are?” Gary couldn’t help but ask.

“Oh I’m the Termominator,” said Misty crossing her arms briefly, “We’ll be back later,” she added softly, and she, Tracey, and Brock took their leave with Brock taking up the reins in pushing Mrs. Ketchum’s wheelchair out with them.

Lopunny, Rapidash, Pidgeot and Skarmory went up to Ash’s side and leaned in for pats from him, Skarmory gave Ash’s hand a soft love bite, *Tough as the hide on my back and nothing less.*

*I try to be,* Ash smiled weakly back, *Hey, when I wake back up, I want to see everyone okay? Please give my best to Dewgong and Sneasel, and all the other Ranger pokemon.*

The Ranger pokemon grunted happily back, Lopunny giving Ash a bunny nose kiss and an endearing tug at his cheek, *Ow ow, Lopunny, I’m not made of rubber!*

*You know what I love most about these Mental Links*?* said Lopunny.
*What?* asked Ash.

*I get to tell you how much I love you!* and Lopunny tickled Ash’s sides making him squirm in squeaking laughter against Gary.

“Easy there,” said Gary, “I’ve got the market cornered on tickling rights.”

Pikachu sighed with Umbreon; Audino blushed.

*Lopunny!* Ash’s laughter settled into giggles as Lopunny pulled back. Lopunny looked to the bed group and Charizard giving them air bunny nose kisses, Pikachu and Audino gave a few back, but Charizard grumbled in not being able to move its nose much at all, Umbreon just stuck its tongue out.

“I think my pokes are taking a nap themselves,” said Max, “but I’ll be sure to bring them by tomorrow.”

“Yeah, we’ll bring everyone on over,” said Mary looking briefly to Thomas who nodded, “You get some good rest now, let’s go guys,” and Mary walked out with Thomas, Skarmory, Rapidash, Pidgeot, Charizard, and Lopunny who took Charizard’s hand as it looked longingly back at Ash.

*I love you,* said Charizard.

*Love you too big guy,* Ash smiled as his exhaustion won out. Pikachu patted Ash’s leg, their bond long reassured.

Max purposefully stayed behind however until he was the last to leave; Gary and Ritchie growled their disapproval internally. Ash’s eyes were already closed as he nuzzled into Gary, not even registering Max’s lingering presence.

Max shimmied his way over to the bedside, and pulled from his pocket a pair of ‘soft’ handcuffs, “Now, don’t shoot the messenger Gary, I’m delivering these on account of a favor, but you can use these bad boys to keep your peace in place should the ol’ boy get a bit, restless.” Max gave a wink, “You can vouch for me on this one right Ritchie?”

**LEAVE NOW BEFORE THE WRATH OF OAKDOM CONSUMES YOUR PATHETIC SOUL.**

“Max out,” and Max promptly left the room under hissing glares from Gary and Ritchie and an apologetic look from Gardevoir.

.............*You’re so going to use those later on though........Just saying.*

Gardevoir closed the links, rubbing its head a little, “Whooof, I might be pushing it myself a little.”

“You’ve been working on Ash around the clock,” said Ritchie, “You’re constantly connected to him, you might want to take a nap yourself, when was the last time you actually slept?”

*But you all understand why it is hesitant to do so with that damn Link* stuck in him.

“I take micro naps when I can,” Gardevoir answered back, “But if I need a moment, then I would prefer it if Audino took over for a little bit.”

Audino piped up, *Oh! Oh of course! Yes, I can do it! I can do it!*
“Thank-you,” said Gardevoir.

Ash hummed slightly as his body further relaxed, Gary felt Ash was trying to say something, but all he was picking up in his mind were feelings of love, love, and more love. Gary settled down with Ash in his hold, and Ash smushed himself, mainly his butt, right into the groove of Gary’s body, mainly his crotch. Gary couldn’t help but smile, a bit naughtily, as he placed a kiss on the back on Ash’s neck and his shoulder, sending those vibes of love right back to him. Ash then turned himself around (mainly by flopping about) to where he was facing Gary and Gary pulled him close to where he could feel Ash’s breath on his neck.

Agaaaaaain with the neeeeeeck kisssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssss.

Gary saw Ash’s feet uncovered in the shuffle, so he fluffed the blanket up with his legs to cover them. Ash sighed into Gary’s chest, giving him a departing, “Thank-you,” as he fell deep into sleep.

Anytime,” Gary whispered back.

Eyyyyyy, you are getting very, very, very, sleepy yourself here, are you sure you’ve been disconnected from Ash via the Channel? Well, that, and, you’ve kinda been hearing Ash’s thoughts on and off. Like, what gives here?

Gary watched Pikachu and Umbreon curl up together near their feet. Ritchie pulled up a blanket for Gardevoir, who sat back on a chair and was out in seconds; Audino promptly took up in being connected to Ash via a Transfer Channel* in its stead. Gary watched Ash peacefully sleep until a tug on his heart finally beckoned him to do the same.

Again Gary didn’t quite get a continuous streak of rest as he awoke every other hour or so, sometimes softly, sometimes with a start if a med pokemon checking on Ash’s vitals or a maintenance Rotom made too loud a sound followed by an apology, and when Gary awoke for the fourth time, Gardevoir was up and at it again and asked if he wanted it to use Hypnosis* to ensure at least a six hour streak of rest, but Gary waved off the measure, “I appreciated the gesture, I’m not sure what knocked me out so quickly in the first place.” Gardevoir gave a concerned look, but reassured Gary it would look into the matter.

Gary moved his hand through Ash’s hair, who hadn’t even moved in his sleep, the Ranger still resting serenely against Gary’s chest. It was already night again, another day come and gone.

Bruh what even is time right now.

“He’s safe Gary, that I will promise you,” said Gardevoir, “There’s no way there’s going to be a lapse in security again, Ash’s friends have taken that into their own hands.”

Gary snuggled Ash more, “Honestly though, I just want to care for him, I want to be able to just make him all better – I know, I know that sounds silly given the circumstance, but, that’s how I feel. I want my chance to protect him, to really be there for him, he needs me.”

Hm.

Gardevoir sighed with a smile, “Understandable. I…” Gardevoir’s face turned serious, “When we address Ash’s depression, that is something I promise you will have a hand in.”

Gary made a face from Gardevoir’s tone, “You make it sound like something that is going to hurt Ash.”

HMMMM.
“It may very well,” said Gardevoir, “Remember, ultimately, he’s terrified of what’s happening inside of him. We may not see it on the outside, but on the inside, it is hell.”

Gary grimaced.

*You haven’t really been feeling that from him though through these weird mind exchanges? Well hell that’s a problem in itself, right?*

“This may be something very hard for him to accept, in fact, there is a real possibility it may break off a part of him, but you will be there to pick up the pieces.”

“That does not sound like the most ideal outcome,” Gary muttered.

*You make it sound like Gary is going to have to hurt him, man, fuck that :/*

“No it does not, but that doesn’t make it any less of a possibility,” Gardevoir’s tone turned more serious, “It will greatly depend on how well he processes his illness.”

Gary heard some shuffling over from Ritchie who was in the middle of a nap himself, Sparky perked up and patted his head.

Gary sighed deeply, “I’ll be by his side,” he ran his hand along Ash’s waist, “I said I wouldn’t lose him again, and I’m not, with Arceus as my witness, *I won’t let it break him.*”

*Mind your promises Gary. He’s heard them before.*

Gardevoir gave Gary a soft apologetic smile, “You and those words of yours.”

Gary attempted to settle in watching Ash sleep a bit more, and was finally on the cusp of dreamland again himself, until he felt a sharp jolt to his stomach – Ash woke up screaming and flailing – scaring their pokemon right off the bed, Ritchie tumbled off the couch onto Sparky–

“*Ash!? What’s wrong?!!*”

Gary immediately wrapped himself around Ash’s flailing limbs to little effect – Gardevoir quickly used its powers to subdue him altogether. Ash was breathing heavily, looking alarmed around the room until Gary forced Ash to look at him, pressing Ash’s forehead to his own; he winced through the pain in his gut, “Easy, easy, easy Love, I’m here, I’m right here.”

*Oh my god that HURT Gary, ow ow o wow your stomach OW ow…*

“Pi pi pi pika!” Pikachu, Audino, and Umbreon huddled up to Ash’s side, Ritchie scrambled by the beside with Sparky,

“*Was it a nightmare?*”

*It couldn’t have been, Gardevoir would have gobbled it up? Oh no….*

Ash’s hand went to the side of his head, “I, I, I’m not sure,” Ash swallowed hard, “I was there, back, in the dark place – but, I, I don’t think I was alone…..I know I…wasn’t alone that whole time I was gone –”

“Of course not,” said Gary, “We were all here by your side, and remember Audino” –

“There’s something else,” Ash patted his chest hard, “I, had Audino’s light, and I could feel you guys when I was asleep, but….” Ash’s arms wrapped around himself, “there was something else in
Gary felt him shudder deeply, Ash hugged his chest tensely, “I know, it sounds crazy, but, maybe” –

UUUUUHHHHHH; O; You guys need to tell him about the Link*!

“Maybe you need some more rest,” said Ritchie placing a hand on Ash’s head, “Even though some time has passed, we just got you back Ash, you’ve been through a traumatic experience, and it’s going to affect you in different ways, it’s okay, you’re okay, and we’re not going to let anything else happen to you.”

You done stole Gary’s thunder you smooth talking friendly fucker –

Gardevoir stepped up with a deeply concerned look, “What did you feel while you were asleep?”

“I…. felt…… uh…. um….. um…..”

Gary rubbed Ash’s arms, “What do you remember?”

“I…” *I think there’s something really, really wrong with me….* Ash bent over, “…I feel sick.”

Both Gary and Gardevoir sighed internally, “Then let’s get you back to sleep Love,” said Gary, “let your body rest some more.”

Gardevoir felt Ash’s forehead, “You are feeling a bit overheated, let’s switch these blankets out for some lighter sheets, mh?”

“Okay.”

Gardevoir and Gary traded knowing glances with Ash’s night attack.

WELP 8’) Tick tock you guys, shit needs to come out, and it needs to come out SOON.

Gardevoir brought over fresh lighter sheets and helped tuck Gary and Ash back into bed with their pokemon. Ritchie plopped himself back over on the couch with Sparky, watching the couple from afar.

Gary turned Ash’s lowered gaze up until their eyes met, he stroked Ash’s hair, massaging the side of his head, followed by Gary humming a soft tune, making a wide smile bloom across Ash’s face, “Oh, I haven’t heard that one in forever–”

“Hmm, think you can sing it with me?”

“Yeah, I want to,” smiled Ash, “But I only remember the chorus though.”

“That’s okay, we’ll sing that part together, just follow my lead,” Gary took his queue along with Ash’s hand, pressing a kiss to it; he took a deep inhale giving an earnest smile,

“I know your eyes in the mo~rning su~n,

I feel you touch me in the po~uring ra~in,

And the mo~ment that you wander far from me –

I wanna feel you in my a~rms aga~in,
And you come to me, on a summer breeze –

Keep me warm in your love, then you softlyleave,

And it’s me you need to show, how deep is your love” –

“How deep is your love, how deep is your love,

I really mean to learn, ’cause we’re living in a world of fools,

Breaking us down, when they all should let us be,

We belong to you and me”

Gary continued to hum the song as Ash’s eyes drooped close with him slurring the lulling lyrics, his breathing regulating to a slow and steady pace, “I really, rhuuuullly, like that song,” said Ash drifting back off to sleep, Gary gave Ash a departing kiss on his nose,*And I really, really like, love you.*

Gary’s heart once again melted in his chest.

Maybe this whole hearing Ash’s thoughts is quite the good thing?

“You seem to like the golden oldies, huh Gary?” said Ritchie stretching himself fully out on the couch.

“Well, Gramps had that music playing all the time in the lab, hard not to grow a taste for it.” Gary suddenly felt a presence right to his side and found Gardevoir resting its head on his shoulder, batting its eyes,

“Can you sing me a lullaby too?”

“Oh my god hush,” said Gary playfully pushing Gardevoir off him, “You all are still sworn to secrecy by the way.”

“Suuuure~ Suuuuure~” said Gardevoir, “Hm~ Bonne nuit Gary.”

“Bonne nuit Gardevoir.”

“Bonded nuts,” said Ritchie flatly, making Gary and Gardevoir catch themselves before they could burst out laughing, “Oh pbbbbth, goodnight you two.”

“Goodnight Ritchie.”

Ash stirred in Gary’s gentle hold, waking for a moment. Gary watched him half open his sleepy eyes, lean into Gary’s neck, take a sniff, and then fall back asleep in knowing Gary was by his side, and thus reality was stable

“My Ashy,” Gary nuzzled him and curled up around him as much as his body would allow, he touched his forehead to Ash’s, *Goodnight my Love.*
The next morning came quietly; light entered through the window of Ash’s room at a leisurely pace. Gary opened his eyes to find everything still as a pin drop, as if a place in space and time froze to make a moment just for him and Ash to spend alone in each other’s presence. Gary looked to the couch where Ritchie and Sparky slept only to find it empty, he grumbled internally in knowing Ritchie was probably functioning on about 5 solid hours of sleep, the same strained amount as Gardevoir.

Between Ash and Ritchie, at least you know for a fact that when Ash sleeps, that boy SLEEPS.

Eventually Gary heard sounds outside the room, a voice, a door closing, some equipment squeaking to let him know the hospital was waking up too.

Ash coughed a little in sleep, his arms moving slightly to seek out the warmth that was Gary. Gary pulled Ash back into him, stroking him all down the side of his body. Ash nuzzled into Gary’s neck, taking a deep whiff of his boyfriend again, the familiar and soothing scent lulling him back to a deep sleep.

Gary let his head rest next to Ash, he could feel Ash’s breath on his neck, Ash’s body stretching flush against his own, his leg rubbing Gary’s nonchalantly, his heartbeat, that beautiful heartbeat pumping against his own.

Sooooooo, about them handcuffs?

Gary swallowed, his thoughts taking a quick trip to the gutter…he wanted to kiss Ash, everywhere, he wanted to feel that sweet breath get harder, he wanted to rub his hands all over Ash’s body, spread open Ash’s legs and of course he wanted to put his dick up Ash’s ass and make him scream with pleasure – the contact they had denied themselves for so long out of such a terrible and unnecessary discourse. Gary looked down at Ash’s unbearably kissable lips, and felt himself getting hard, again.

C’mon now son, reel it in, reel it in.

Gary heard a sound towards the foot of the bed, he looked and saw Gardevoir reading yet another book off to the side in a chair.

BOY YOU GON’ GO TO CHURCH –

Gary bombarded his mind with every sobering thought he could imagine, unstuck himself from Ash (it didn’t help Ash in his sleep CONTINUED its relentless urge to suck up every ounce of Gary’s warmth) and said in a bombarding/ slightly squeaky voice, “Eeeey, good morning Gardevoir!”

Smooth.

Gardevoir looked up, and waved gently. It closed its book and walked over to their side, clearing its throat, “Good morning, sleep well?”

“As well as I’ll ever sleep,” Gary admitted.

Gardevoir crossed its arms, “Sooooooo, as this day begins, I must admit, I am worried about him having more of such odd, sleep terrors. I do apologize for them sneaking in under my radar. Honestly I quite miffed myself that I didn’t pick up on them.”
Maybe because those weren’t dreams per say but mental apparitions leaking through from a phantasmal plain held together by memories and torment? You know, the dark place?

Gary could feel Gardevoir was looking for an opening for a conversation, but with it struggling to find one, it couldn’t be too much of a pleasant topic…

Gary sat up a little more, “So…when should we, you know, do the thing?”

Gardevoir responded with a clouded look, “I mulled that over a bit, asked some colleagues for advice, and we’re all in agreement to wait a couple of days to let the two of you get some time to enjoy this honeymoon stage in reaffirming your love for one another. Really get that foundation solid before doing the,” Gardevoir made quotation marks in the air, “the thing.”

Gary looked to his sleeping Lover and caressed his face, “Yeah, thank-you.”

Uh, there’s actually a lot you guys need to reaffirm Gary, don’t let that bite you all in the ass because oh, oh it will – along with playing this damn waiting game –

“Ahem, anyhow, Gary, I’ll be blunt in asking this, you can hear some of Ash’s thoughts, can’t you?”

Gary looked a little taken back, “Yeah, I can, but, I don’t think he can hear mine. It started happening after the Channel* made with him in getting the Link* under control, I thought it might have been, some kind of fluke because I heard him once before when you made a Channel* between us when he was still pretty banged up.”

“I believe he will be able to hear you once he’s feeling better. Have, the two of you been able to do this before?”

“No, never, heh, otherwise I don’t think we’d have had our problems as much”–

Ah fuck –

“Forgive me for prying but, those problems stem from communication, right?”

Gary felt his face flush, “Y-yes?”

Bio-code reading reveals a lot yoooooo – it knows Gary, Gardevoir now know more about Ash than you ever will and that FUCKING GUTS YOU AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA –

“You and Ash are both very, very susceptible to Human Health Transfer, and I think with me working on Ash, and completing a Health Transfer Channel between the two of you, and once during a very, very stressful encounter, a Human Transfer Effect has been triggered.”

YOOOOOOOOOO-hold up here, are you literally saying your bio-codes are so strained in acknowledging what a piss poor time you and Ash have had communicating that with this opportunity from Gardevoir, it has allowed (possibly) the two of you to hear each other’s thoughts to remedy this? Is that what is coming across here? Is that REALLY what is coming across here? This isn’t science anymore Gary – this is bordering DIVINE INTERVENTION –

Gardevoir merely shrugged against Gary’s sputtered expression, “I am part Psychic* pokemon, and hey, we can speak within minds, and now the two of you, well at least you, can hear thoughts from your Lover. That is the best explanation I can come up with.”

Want to hear a better one? PBBBBBBTH, THERE. RGHGHGHHGHGH, this little Honeymoon phase is probably going to blow up in each of your faces if YOU Gary screw up this new ability like
how you screwed up caring for Ash! – Then again, oh lord, the poetic justice of Ash not telling you things, and now you can hear some of his thoughts!

Gary saw Ash’s legs stir, but his movements quickly stilled once Ash was able to curl himself around Gary, yet again.

God, this hurts.....You never meant to hurt him, and you just KNOW he NEVER meant to hurt you....He’s virtually pining for you, even in his sleep! He wants you to so badly....and yet with what he thinks of himself....You just, you want to be there for him, but not like this, it's not right. No matter how badly you truly wish to know what’s going through his head, you guys just need to talk to one another!

“I expect the Transfer Effect to wear off soon,” said Gardevoir, “Perhaps given another day since you two are so compatible with Human Health Transfer.”

Well thank god for that at least.....On the other hand.......No no no no, see this is what is going to get you in trouble Gary, you want to help Ash out, even if it means going behind his back, but wellllll howdy now how has THAT been working out?????? NOT VERY GOOD.

“Can you just, take it out of me now?* Gary winced, “I don’t feel right in being able to just hear his thoughts, I just, we just need to talk to one another.”

“As you wish,” said Gardevoir, “Just lean back a minuet,” Gardevoir raised its hand towards Gary’s chest, and Gary felt a light tug on his mind, “Can’t say that the Effect won’t be triggered again though as I continue to work on Ash” –

UUUUGGGGGGGGHHHHHH SURE FINE, OKAY THEN –

Gardevoir’s free hand went to its chin in thought, “I can feel he’s been guarded with his emotions, and something like this, well, I can only imagine he would feel a huge violation of his privacy.”

YA THINK????

“That’s exactly what I want to avoid,” said Gary, “I don’t want to hurt him, I’m not trying to hurt him, I just want to help him and.....um...”

Oh my god are you going to confess it, right here, right now son?

“I-I may have” –

HOLY SHIT YOU ARE –

“Lied to him” –

LALALALALALALALALALALALALALALALALA –

“A couple times, to, to” –

LALALALALALALALALALALALALALALALALALA –

“To...make him do what I thought was best for him.”

:(

“Everyone makes mistakes in the name of love Gary,” said Gardevoir without a hint of judgment in its voice, “The fact that you admit you did something wrong, speaks volumes. You don’t want to feel
like you’re manipulating Ash in any way, shape, or form.” Gary felt Gardevoir’s hand on his shoulder, “Right, should this flare up again, I’ll take it out of you immediately.”

“Thank-you,” said Gary, he looked towards his lover sleeping ever peacefully against him.

…….You would like to know what he really thinks of Spaghetti night though.

“This may also account as to why you’ve been so tired lately” said Gardevoir, “Although I have long closed off the Channel between you and Ash, there is still quite an obvious connection, and with Ash in need of such rest, it is spilling over to you as well.”

So…what else, might spill over? Oh-em-ggee, this is a disaster waiting to happen. It absolutely is. Why do you have this horrible feeling bubbling up in your gut? Hm? Ash isn’t the only one here that’s been second guessing himself, you haven’t been able to protect him ONCE this WHOLE time, and when the time comes for it, when it REALLY, REALLY matters, are you going to be able to do so hot shot? What if you’re the one to wake up with the blue eyes next?!

Ash stirred, and for a selfish second Gary thought he would see those terrible glowing pale blue eyes from his lover all over again, but no, Ash’s sleepy eyes fluttered halfway open, showing they were still brown, much to Gary’s instant relief. “Mwhuts, going on?” came Ash’s very, very sleepy voice. Gary realized his hands were gripping Ash tightly–

“I’ll, I’m, I’m sorry Love, I didn’t mean to wake you,” Gary kissed Ash’s forehead, “I’ll tell you later, it’s nothing important right now,”

You hate how you can lie to him so easily.

Gary massaged the back of Ash’s head, “Go back to sleep sweetheart.”

“Are you sure?” Ash asked groggily.

God, he is, making the effort to reach out to you, and you, have to –

Gary nuzzled Ash, “Yes Love, it’s okay.” *Please forgive me.*

You hate how you can lie to him on a dime.

Ash curled himself up around Gary, “Mh’kay, I love you.”

This hurts, oh it hurts –

“I love you too Ash,” responded Gary, watching him fall back into sleep. He turned to Gardevoir who was rubbing its chin inquisitively. Gary felt Ash’s hand softly grip the slack on his shirt.

*Please don’t be scared of me.*

You heard that Gary.

Gary’s eyes went wide to match the pained spark he felt in his chest.

“Gary….” Gary did not like Gardevoir’s tone, at all.
We can’t have no fucking peace up in this joint fuck you higher forces –

The slightly annoyed look on Gardevoir’s face said it all.

As great a researcher you are Gary Oak, lets face it, you’re lacking in relationship –

Gardevoir pulled out a book titled, ‘Boyfriends, Girlfriends: How Communication Can Reverse A One Night Stand’, Gardevoir had a sharp look in its eyes, “Never fear my friend, I am prepared, and I have many more where this came from.”

Gary went slack jawed at Gardevoir, “Huh?”

I don’t know what’s sadder, the fact that this whole time Gardevoir has been reading nothing but relationship books to help out you and Ash, or the fact that you Gary fucking Oak, never bothered to read one in the first place.

Gardevoir cleared its throat –

You love how your friend does this even though it doesn’t need to use its throat to speak –

“Gary, I’m going to be very, very blunt. Some of the dreams I have devoured from Ash to make sure he gets a good night’s rest, without any, sudden surprises, *AHEM* well – well – he’s horny for you Gary, like, you wouldn’t believe.”

:o

“And it’s not hard, no pun intended, to tell that you desire him as well. You both are in your prime, I have no qualms in looking the other way while you two share some hanky panky.”

:'o

“ – The consummation of your love with one another will not solve any underlying problems, but given that you and Ash are two young men in their mid-20’s, a healthy dose of sexual activity can be very beneficial emotionally and physically in the short term by unleashing endorphins and relaxing the body – and given you two will need all the, assistance, you can get, I, while you were asleep, took the liberty of ordering said, assistance.”

:o

“I also have sent Ritchie to the nearest erotica store, which was surprisingly close, to gather some more, bare essentials, mainly I guess, lube is what you would call it.”

8O

“But as for what I have gathered right now from a trusted source, of which, let me haul this box up here, ouf, I have had to hide this stash that he brought, because I mean, how would this look with me having – ? Oh never mind, anywho! Oh look at this one, nice and thick and flexible – oh! Look, look! Wow this one has so many settings! Let’s try turning this one on – OH WOW, look at it go!”

8D

“I’m so glad Max was so open with his library of devices.”

D8

“Never fear Gary, I know what you’re thinking, and yes they have all been proven effective and
cleaned.”

SET IT ON FIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIRRRRRREEEEE!!!!!! D8> WHO DOES THAT?? WHO DOES THAAAAAAAT 
;;;;O;;;;; THERE HAS TO BE SOME MASSIVE MISUNDERSTANDING HERE GARDEVOIR PLEASE ARCEUS’ ALL-SEEING ASS LET IT NOT BE TRUE -

“I wish I could have overnighted what I bought, but c’est la vie, he really came to the rescue here, and Max has been a HUGE help on gathering, more experimental methods of copulation with these publications, OOF, right here!”

NO, NO, SEND THIS VILE BACK FROM WHENCE IT CAME - ooo oh dear god it has read nothing but cliché sex books and terrible magazines as if a pokemon would understand human attraction WHICH IT CLEARLY DOES NOT–

“I had no idea how adventurous humans could be in terms of mating, but there you have it! I mean relationships can be complex enough, but once you enter in devotion to one another’s bodies, a whole new layer of interaction is unlocked! For instance, *ahem* bondage” –

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA –

“G-Gardevoir” –

“Oh no, lets skip over that, Ash is not well enough to have his tango fully wango’d.”

The fuck –

“But just blind folding him would be a nice way to somewhat indulge him on that front, also….Max gave you those handcuffs, no?”

>:OOOOOO – IT WAS YOUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU –

“But if you two just want to play it safe, since it has been a while, I have made up a diagram of date night choices and the corresponding humping methods - such as if you two do that cute spaghetti eating scene from Lady and the Rockruff, after that you do doggy style! Simple really”-

*WAR FLASHBACKS *-

"And I illustrated them! See look that's you in the throws of passion” –

WHY, WHY, WHY. ARCEUS ABOVE TAKE ME NOW – HEY, HEY ITS BIGGER THAN THAT GARDEVOIR, ALOT FUCKING BIGGER -

“Aaaaand, if that doesn’t work out, there’s always room for a humble, um, ‘blowjob’ or ‘handjob’ as they call it, but one can add a hint of flavor to spice up the friction, you can suck him off with a piece of fruit in your mouth” –

Pls stahp. I beg u.

“Or, you can get creative! You can coat your penis with edible paint and trace it over Ash! You could draw like a heart, or a happy face on his stomach!”

You have to be fucking with us –

“Or innnn, these publications” –
Those are straight up yaoi mangas and by no means have any merit on love making – WHIPPED CREAM/ WATER/ SPIT/ THE UNYIELDING FLAMES OF MOE ARE NOT SUPPLE LUBE APPLICATIONS YOU NIMRODS–

“There is the ‘shadow butterfly kiss’ where you wiggle your buttocks just above the recipient’s lips” –

See now Gardevoir you have done killed Gary’s boner forever.

“Oh this technique sounds interesting, The Over The Shoulder Boulder Holder” –

WHAT THE FUCK DOES THAT EVEN MEAN??????

“Now that, I look through these pages, no, no Ash will not nearly be healed enough in time to try these more athletic combinations I’m afraid, mh, oh! You could spray each other’s nether regions with your favorite scented foods – more to eat without the messy applications!”

OH SHUT UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUP –

It was then Ritchie returned into the room, looking like he had stared into the eyes of the end of all creation itself. Without a word, he held up a plastic bag, full of lubrication wonder and marvels.

If a meteor could just, fall out of the sky right now, that’d be great.

“I have never had so many ‘enticing’ looks in my entire life,” came Ritchie’s deadpan voice.

;o;

As the day progressed, Ash’s room began seeing attention of another kind. With a majority of the chaos behind them, Ritchie Misty, Brock, and Tracey began filling Ash’s room with flowers and gifts from friends and fans from around the world, a much welcomed change of pace minus Gardevoir’s internal attempts to give Gary relationship advice with Gary simultaneously wishing for his head to explode. But watching Pikachu, Umbreon, and Sparky play around the many, many flowers was adorable.

And holy shit Gary this stuff is literally from around the world, like here’s a group of flowers sent in all the way from the Unova region, and oh my god that badass bouquet over there HAS to be from Alola region, and yup, yup, yes it is, damn son that’s gorgeous! But this is so good, this is so great for Ash to wake up in, you just can’t wait till he wakes up and you get to see the look on his face from his room literally being filled to the brim with well wishes! :D

Tracey wiped his eyes from some of the pollen getting to him, “ATCH-CHOO” –

“Bless you.”

Misty sighed, “When this stuff started coming in, we didn’t know, what was going to happen with Ash. Some of the cards were, a little ‘assuming’ of the situation, but I’m pretty sure we removed all of those.”

Good, because you want this room filled with nothing but positive energy and love. Yes. Except you know some of the wreaths are kinda telling they are more of the funeral type eyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy....

Gardevoir entered the room with another batch of flowers, “These are from my region,” it smiled,
“From aaaaaaaah, this one has a Serena, and on the other card it says Clemont and Bonnie, oh! I believe I’ve worked with a Clemont before! Hm~ Small world!” Then it spoke with its mind to Gary, *With all these flowers here, this is a PERFECT romantic setting is it not? Oh you both could play flower love games and do up each other’s hair with petals!* 

That, actually sounds pretty nice if you’re being honest with yourself Gary, you could totally make Ash a bitchin’ flower crown out of bits of this impromptu garden, he will be your prince charming of the flowers :3

“Hey y’all pick up any of the loose petals and bring ‘em here,” said Gary.

“What are you going to do?” asked Ritchie.

“I’m going to help him feel, all rosey inside~”

Misty rolled her eyes, “Oh here we go.”

“Wait, wait, I have the perfect thing,” said Brock digging through his satchel, “I can’t believe I actually have this on hand, here, Gary,” Brock handed Gary a flower headband with long daisy petals sprouting around it.

“Oh my god YES,” Gary’s grin was ear to ear as he held it up and inspected it in awe with Ritchie.

“What did you get that from?” asked Misty faceplaming herself.

“Ah-ah~ The question is not ‘where’ did I get it, but ‘why’ the universe has decided to bestow it upon me,” said Brock with an eyebrow cocked and slanted smile.

“You boys kill me.”

“Should I wear it like a tu-tu?”

“No Gary that’s not going to fit around your waist, it goes around your face, here,” Ritchie pulled on the elastic and it slapped hard onto Gary’s face –

“OW!”

“Sorry” –

Misty crossed her arms with a smirked smile, “Are you going to bloom for him Gary?”

“Bud out” –

Ash began stirring in his sleep from the commotion and everyone quickly settled minus Gary and Ritchie trying to get the flower headband on Gary’s face just right.

Ash rolled to his side, facing the window, he took in a deep inhale, opened his eyes, and from the moment he opened them, there was an explosion of colors all around him. Ash blinked to focus himself and get a grip on the beauty he had awakened into: flowers, flowers everywhere, of every kind, color, and hue in vases, bouquets, stands, and wreathes, and it completely took his breath away.

*Flowers…? Woah…lots and lots, of flowers…..Wait, hold up, am I dead?* Ash finally spotted Misty, Tracey, and Brock off to the side with waiting expectant glances. “Hey guys” – Ash then turned to his immediate right and saw Gary smiling as suavely as he could with the flower band around his face, and Ash’s laughter hit his gut so hard he wheezed till tears came out his eyes, falling
over onto his side, “Oh my *gughGARY!*” Ash laughed so wildly, Gary was afraid he wouldn’t get a breath in –

“Ash, breathe!”

“Pikapi!”

But Ash only squeaked, catching short breaths in-between, “*Ican’t with your face!*”

Ritchie came around and sprinkled petals nonchalantly over Ash, “Oh may he rest in peace, or pieces rather, Ash, your sides are going to fall out!”

“I’m *cough, cough* I’m okay! I’m okayhehehehehehe *cough*.!”

Gary helped him sit up as Ash caught his breath and nuzzled Gary with much gusto, rubbing their noses together,

*Oh I love you so much, I love you so much, I love you so so so so very much!*

Gary felt Ash’s love pour directly into his heart so much that it might burst – he stole a quick peck on Ash’s lips, then a few more on his cheek and one on the bridge of his nose – *I love you too, I love you with everything I am* –

*If you could straight up fuck him right now you would, god help you Gary you want him so badly, HE IS SO ADORABLE LIKE THIS, YOU JUST CAN’T WITH THIS YOUNG MAN LOOK AT THOSE DIMPLES AND THE LIGHT PATCHES OF SUN FRECKLES ON HIS CHEEKS HELP HELP HELP – hold up are you getting el Ash’s thoughts again –*

*I love you so much, I love you so much….I love you so much….* Ash gave a deep exhale in fully recovering, *I….I don’t deserve this.*

“What?”

“Huh?” Ash looked up at Gary, cocking his head –

**CRAP – DON’T LET HIM KNOW, DON’T LET HIM KNOW SUBJECT CHANGE SUBJECT CHANGE –**

“Can you believe how many people sent you flowers?” said Ritchie picking up an armful of bouquets and setting them on the edge of the bed, “I mean look at this man! From all over the world!”

“Literally all over the world,” Misty chimed in, “Sometimes I forget there’s not a place you haven’t traveled to and made a mark in some way or another.”

“Yeah, it’s pretty darn amazing,” smiled Tracey.

Ash took a long scope at his room stuffed to the brim with flowers, “And this is all…for me?”

Gary hugged Ash hard, “All for you, *all of it,*” Ash looked up to Gary and smiled weakly.

*If you say so…*

Ritchie suddenly brought up a vase of flowers to Ash, “Omigod Ash look who this is from!”

Ash narrowed his eyes at the elegant handwriting, then flew open with a big smile, “Awww, Addie
“Addie?” questioned Gary.

“Addie is a Top Ranger Arbok on the same tier as Dragonite, but they’re retired now,” said Ritchie, “Their team dealt with hazardous waste situations, they could even go into contaminated and toxic environments like volcanoes! Those fumes were nothing to them!”

“Wow.”

“Yeah, Addie trained Ritchie and I for a bit,” Ash chimed in addressing the room, “They can be stern with you, but underneath they’re really super sweet, I guess I can call Addie snake mom,” Ash laughed with a snort; his friends sighed.

Ritchie scrolled through his com and pulled up a picture with him, Ash, and a rather large Arbok all together and showed the picture to Gary. Ash and Ritchie were giving the best smiles they could despite looking as if they both were on the verge of death. They were holding up a ‘Pass’ sign while the Arbok behind them was giving a beaming smile as if nothing was wrong with the boys at all.

“This was when Ash and I got our Resistances Certifications and oh my god, that test sucked so hard,” said Ritchie, “We had to take several powder attacks, and then a Toxic* attack. Not. Fun.”

Sparky made a dying face and play fainted onto Pikachu; Umbreon did not approve.

“Good lord,” Gary expelled seeing their worn expressions, “How did that feel?”

“Like dying,” Ash and Ritchie said in unison. Ritchie sighed heavily, “The Testers, of course had medical staff at the ready if and when something went wrong, not everyone passed that day, and plenty passed out, but Ash and I went and passed on our first attempt because we are just that boss.” Ritchie swung his hand around for Ash to catch –

“Yes we were,” Ash beamed back, catching Ritchie’s hand in his, they beat their chests once with their free hand, then cupped their hands over their mouths and did their group’s Ranger howl joined in by Pikachu and Sparky, followed by more howls down the hall from Mary, Max, and Thomas – and then from the other end of the hallway, sounded off another group –

Ash immediately perked up, “Hey are our Rangers coming now?!”

“Maybe!” Ritchie smiled, he went to the door, opened it up, and waved down their approaching peers, “Dewgong, Sneasel! Please come right this way, its Ash!”

UuuuhhhhuurghOOOOOHOHOHOHOHOWOAH, *SHUDDER*, Gary, you’re suddenly feeling some cold fear vibes from Ash for some reason?

Gary looked to Gardevoir, motioning he wanted to speak internally, *Do you think Ash is ready to process this?*

Gardevoir gave a modest look back, *Whether he is ready or not, we will find out as he processes seeing more of the team that helped rescued him.*

Because the Link* is eating at his guilt and there is a big uncomfortable thing known as survivor’s guilt oh boy here we gooooo –

Ritchie quickly moved out the doorway as Dewgong and Sneasel came bounding up to Ash, jumping up on the bed in one bound – “ACK!” Gary cried out – Gardevoir quickly held the bed steady with its powers and a very annoyed expression, but still opened up several Mental Links* for
them to have their time together –

“There’s my snow angel!” Ash smiled broadly ruffling the side of Dewgong’s neck as it nuzzled and nuzzled and nuzzled him, “And my sharp, sharp doc! How are you guys?!”

*Happy we get to talk, like legit talk to you! Mental Links* are so nice!* Dewgong gave Gardevoir a heartwarming smile that quickly softened Gardevoir, *Oh we are so, so very glad to see you’re okay!* Dewgong smiled as it continued to smother Ash with love, *We were so worried about you!*

*Yeah things were pretty hairy there for a bit,* said Sneasel, *But we can see everything here is as fine as daises,* Sneasel gave Gary a wink and patted Ash hard on his shoulder,

*Whut.

*But you pulled through it! And oh my gosh Ash, the things, the AMAZING things Audino did, man I have not seen that type of skill set from a Medical pokemon since, geeze, since, I don’t know maybe Xerneas or something! I can’t stop geeking out over it!*  

*Ash you have to promise me when you’re better that we’ll continue our sit-up contests! This time when I wrap my tail around the bar, I’m going to add extra, extra powder so I won’t slip off.*

*Your head is hard enough to crack the floor though,* smirked Sneasel –

*That’s exactly my point! I can’t have Max keep repairing the tile at our station, none of it matches, it’s all different colors! It looks so pathetic he doesn’t even try.*

*I kinda like the multi-look,* said Sneasel scratching its chin.

_The Donphan in the room is feeling awfully heavy here guys….._

*You know what, I’m just going to learn to lay tile myself, I mean how hard can it be?*

“Dewgong, Sneasel,” Ash’s voice was soft, low, and thick; the chatty pokemon stopped talking abruptly, caught off guard by the sad look on Ash’s face.

_Here it comes. And ah, yes, now is the perfect time for Mary, Max and Thomas to come in along with a few other Rangers and their pokemon that had a hand in the rescue, minus Dragonite, Swanna, and Beheeyem. You can feel Ash’s chest, and it feels like a great big bowl holding sloshing ice water inside of it._

Ash’s look reached all of the Rangers in the room, “You guys….I don’t, I don’t have words to even begin to describe how grateful I am for what you did for me. What, everyone on the Ranger Team, did for me. You rescued me, and you protected my friends.”

“Shoot your friends protected us too,” said Mary crossing her arms, Brock lightly blushed, “It was a team effort, ‘watch each other’s backs, bring each other home,’ and we did, we did all together.”

Despite Mary’s warming words, there was still a chill in the room, but one the ice type pokemon were ready to confront. Gary felt Gardevoir fully open up the Mental Links* so everyone could understand what they were going to say.

Sneasel took Ash’s hand in its claws, *I know you know not all of us are here, you know about Avalugg, right?*
Ash nodded, “I still, have maybe one or two patches missing from my memory, but I know, well, I only knew it as Bergmite, and it was so brave, it was so amazing. It was just trying to help, and….”

*It’s all my fault it’s dead.*

Ash swallowed it down and composed himself, “I want to thank you guys for doing everything you could to try and find it, thank-you,” he pulled Dewgong and Sneasel into the strongest hug.

*It’s all my fault everyone was put in so much danger. No one else should feel guilty over this*

“You’re all amazing, I just don’t know what say, I don’t know how to put it in words….”

Misty took a step to him and added with utter warmth, “It’s okay Ash, it’s going to be alright.”

“Yeah, you know we’re all here for you,” said Brock.

*But I’m responsible for everything that has happened.*

“Ash I know you didn’t become a Ranger yesterday,” said Max, “this is our job, this is our family, we’re not going to leave anyone behind, and we’ll fight tooth and claw if we have to, to get you some closure.”

Gary winced at that promise, as did Ritchie from the side.

“….Thanks.”

*Ooooh that is dangerous to promise, don’t make this harder than it has to be Max, please. God Gary, you wish you could hear Ash’s thoughts now, nice that little ability decided to close up NOW – well hell, even if you can’t hear him, you sure as hell can FEEL him, and you can feel that guilt eating at Ash inside like a poison, like its trying to dissolve everything good inside of him and FUCK THAT, you have to stop this, you have to stop this somehow! That Link* is eating him alive!*

A grunting sound came from the blocked doorway, like someone big was clearing its throat, and the Rangers made room as Dragonite entered –

“Wow hey” – and Ash’s eyes were immediately drawn to Dragonite’s severed arm….. “Dra-dragonite…..”

The mood in the room instantly dropped even lower via Ash’s deeply saddened expression.

*……This is what I made them sacrifice.*
But Dragonite, unphased by Ash’s growing look of despair, walked up to his beside, pulled up a chair, and took a seat, the chair bending with sharp creaks. “Ash, listen to me now, easy, look at me, it’s okay, it’s okay, it’s alright, I’m alright, and, thank all the stars in heaven that you’re alright.”

I’m not okay.

The expression on Ash’s face turned unreadable, blank at best, but he focused in on Dragonite as instructed.

“Now,” Dragonite began, “How is my injury different from your’s?”

Ash’s blank composure sputtered in one of utter bewilderment, “Huh?”

Dragonite repeated the question a little more softly, “How is my injury different from your own?”

Ash gawked at Dragonite, and then said fully, and as slowly as the question was presented, “You’re missing an arm.”

“And you have been beaten, abused, manipulated and emotionally tortured. Now, how are they the same?”

Ash’s expression changed slightly to show a deeply sour crease, “You’re missing an arm.”

Because of me.

Dragonite tilted its head down toward Ash and looked directly into his eyes, “We have both had extreme trauma done to us, different in the application, but extreme none-the-less. I may have to approach things a little differently now, but that won’t stop me from trying, or working with new possibilities. The same applies here Ash,” Dragonite reached out and touched Ash’s head.

That’s not helping.

Dragonite continued, “We both will have to adjust and absorb our new reality. It doesn’t make us any less of who we were, even though, yes I mean I am missing an arm,” Dragonite chuckled and shrugged, “but you get my point, and point being, we still have our souls.”

Gary looked at the small smile Ash was giving Dragonite, however he looked tired more than anything; he felt within Ash, that Ash wasn’t truly listening.

Gary sighed internally, *Sweetheart why….*

“I’m going to give you my personal com number Ash,” said Dragonite, “Whenever you want to talk,
or relate experiences, I’m just a text away.”

“You’re amazing,” said Ash, “Thank-you…”

“Likewise,” Dragonite smiled, “You are tough as nails to have pulled through what you did. You’re lucky to be alive!”

“And,” Ash widened his tired smile a little more, “I’m happy to be so.”

Alright Dragonite! You got the conversation started in Ash! Sort of. Not really. I mean that guilt, hoo-boy that guilt trip sure is a thing…..He doesn’t know about Swanna or Beheyeem yet, ya might want to leave those out for the time being….But, he probably can infer that…y’all done went through some rough patches with good ol’ Lisa….Are you feeling cold Gary, or did the air conditioner kick up in power a bit?

More movement came from the doorway as Mrs. Ketchum wheeled herself into the room, using her legs to roll her in fast, and shooing away attempts to help her; she had a small box in her lap – Ash immediately perked up –

“Momma! You’re still in the wheelchair?”

Mrs. Ketchum gently waved off the concern, “Oh they want me to stay in it a little longer, but it is fun rolling down the hallways that are ever so slightly slanted,” she brought the box to Ash’s attention, “Now dear, I know you are just drowning in flowers, but this piece, now this is from your momma” – and from the box, Mrs. Ketchum pulled out a flower crown, and the way Ash’s face softly lit up into a true smile, melted Gary’s heart all over again.

Gat fammit of course momma has to come in with the flower crown, thy thunder is stolen yet again, never mind we were having a serious feels jam just seconds ago flower crown trumps all–

“Here you go sweetie, and Gary, oh” – Mrs. Ketchum had to do a double take with Gary actually still wearing the flower headband around his face, and she burst into laughter almost twice as hard as Ash did.

“Hm? Oh!” Dragonite so focused on Ash didn’t even notice Gary’s flower headband and gave a few chuckles at it itself.

Ash, now donning his flower crown, gave another true warmhearted smile at Gary.

“Yeah, this is the best thing since sliced bread,” Gary smiled; Brock gave a thumbs up at him.

You know, maybe the universe gave Brock the flower headband because y’all need some relief up in this joint.

Ash’s stomach grumbled, and grumbled loud.

“Oh well ,that will not do, my baby is hungry–” Mrs. Ketchum began rolling herself out the room –

“Mooooom, where are you going?!?” Ash called after her –

“I’m going to cook of course!” she called back, and continued on her way with no one daring to stop her. Ash sighed,

“Knowing my mom she’s probably going to run over their feet till they let her in the hospital kitchen.”
“I would totally not put that past her,” said Misty.

“It’s not hard to tell where Ash gets his fire from,” smiled Ritchie, Ash stuck his tongue out at him.

*Methinks we’ll leave the Flower Prince to pollinate his garden~* said Sneasel catching the flower band on a claw and pulling it – SMACK –

“OW! Buzz off!” Gary hissed, Sneasel giving some mischievous laughter as it slipped off the bed with Dewgong.

*Drat I wanted to use that line,* said Gardevoir.

YOU HUSHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH –

“Alright, we’ll be around,” said Mary placing her hand on her hip, “we’ll give you guys some time to yourselves. We’re going to keep this hospital under wraps.”

“And we’re going to make sure Mrs. Ketchum doesn’t harass the staff too much,” said Brock.

You know Gary, you wonder if they know about Ash’s depression too? Maybe when Gardevoir explained things around after the intruder incident?

The room cleared out with well wishes and loving ‘laters’, Gardevoir with Ritchie went to tending the flowers, and Ash leaned onto Gary giving him a look he couldn’t quite figure out; it looked both longing and lonely at the same time,

“What is it?”

Ash’s mouth suddenly cut into a sinful smirk, “Pollinate the flowers huh?”

“Pluck his petals,” added Ritchie.

“Plow his garden,” added Gardevoir.

“Make his buds bloom” –

“Farm his crops” –

“Take a backhoe to it” –

“Irrigate his field” –

“ALRIGHT YOU GUYS ENOUGH!” Gary hissed amongst giggly bubbly laughter, and in amidst the more lighthearted mood, Gary felt Ash squeeze his hand with Gary returning the gesture.

You just can’t let the sadness win.

****

Ash wasn’t able to eat much of Mrs. Ketchum’s cooking, he could barely stomach the soup.

“Your body is still healing,” said Gardevoir, “Stick to liquids mainly for now, or we can mash up a food if you’d prefer it.”
“No, I don’t want to make a fuss, I’m good with soup.”

But even then, Ash could barely finish his bowl which set worried looks on everyone except Gardevoir who knew better.

*Jezits, you know Ash can down about half a table, and yet now he can barely manage half a bowl of soup? Phuuuuu, he’s got a way to go to recover…Ey where did everyone go?*

Gary quickly deduced with everyone wanting them to have alone time, they must know that ‘honeymoon phase’ Gardevoir spoke of to him earlier was still very much in effect –

*Only you still hope you’ll be enough Gary. It was a team effort to rescue Ash, this will still be a team effort yet. The fact that Gardevoir, and you guess, everyone else, is banking on you to break down the wall that is stifling Ash’s well being is, well, somewhat daunting. These are his friends and family that’s he’s known far, far longer than you and yet, they think you can do more for his emotional well being than they can? There’s something off with that. Is there something you don’t know? Is there something you’re purposely being kept in the dark about?…Oh yeah, its because the main problem, this main healing session, is FOR YOU TWO DORKS TO FUCKING TALK WITH ONE ANOTHER!!!!!!!!!!! KEEP IT UP NERD!*

Gardevoir had to leave the room momentarily for a small break, but in the mean time, told Ash and Gary that the hospital was sending a Massage Therapist pokemon to help soothe out the muscles in Ash’s back which had undergone much restoration from the blunt trauma he had suffered. But upon seeing a medical Sylveon enter the room with a shiny new poke-translator around its neck, Gary could feel a swell of turbulence immediately bubble up in Ash’s chest, and before either of them could speak the Sylveon introduced itself, “Good afternoon gentlemen. I am here to provide massage therapy for Mr. Ketchum,” the fairy type flexed its ribbon-like tendrils.

Ash: 8l

Gary felt Ash receding into him, he wrapped his arms around Ash’s waist, “Um, no thanks Sylveon, he’s good, we’re good here. Please leave immediately.”

The Sylveon suddenly looked very taken aback by Gary’s direct statement, bowed, and excused itself promptly, leaving the room as fast as it had entered.

“….I don’t think anyone here knows,” said Ash quietly, he looked to Gary with an odd curious look –

*OH SHIT GARY HE DOESN’T KNOW THAT YOU KNOW THE STUFF ABOUT THE SYLVEON HE ‘ATTEMPTED TO RESCUE’ FUCK FUCK FUCK FUCK FUCK –*

“I should apologize to it,” said Ash catching Gary off guard, “I didn’t mean to give off such a turned vibe, you picked up on that quick” –

*DISASTER AVERTED, CHEEZITS. But, you know, you should still tell him that you know? Ah crap, then would Ritchie get some heat? BLUH! BLUH ALL AROUND!*

And then Ash added a little shyly, “I am feeling a bit stiff though.”

It took a moment for Gary to switch gears from the internal panic to catching onto Ash’s *come hither* glance, he cocked an eyebrow and added a smooth smile, *Message received* - “I can massage you all the same.”

*You’ve massaged Ash plenty of times before after a hard day’s work, although you’re probably not*
as good as a medical Sylveon, but hey, TRAUMA!

Ash gave a more seductive smile, “I think I’d like that.”

Gary didn’t waste a moment, as carefully as he could, he settled himself behind Ash with him not having to move too much out the way. Ash nudged his butt right smack into Gary’s crotch, very much feeling every bit of Gary even though there were several layers of fabric between them.

“Comfy?” Gary whispered into Ash’s ear, Ash leaned back fully into Gary momentarily pressing a kiss to his jaw,

“Yes, very much so.” Ash sat up properly, feeling Gary’s hands begin to massage his shoulders and back, pushing Ash up a little despite him leaning back on Gary’s hands and enjoying very much every touch, until, “Ow, ow, Gary, s-s softer there, please” –

“Sorry, how’s this?”

“Much, ah, ah, ah, hehe, much better.”

Gary suddenly felt Gardevoir’s presence in his mind, *Gary, you are massaging Ash? What happened to the med pokemon?*

*Ash wasn’t ready,* Gary replied, *I assume you know Ash had a, fairly upsetting encounter with another Sylveon.*

*Oh my goodness they did send the Sylveon,* Gary heard Gardevoir curse in Kalosian, *They must have misunderstood me, ‘SIGH’. How is Ash?*

*He’s doing alright I think, I’m getting him to relax. You know, doing the bonding thing, making our honeymoon phase count.*

*Good, I’ll be back up there soon. Be VERY gentle around his back, shoulders, neck, and the back of his head, some major restorative work has been done in those areas.*

_Because oh yeah, that’s where Lisa banged him up against the ice, over, and over, and over and over, splattering his blood all over the cavern._

Gary swallowed, his gentle hands a stark, stark contrast to the pain his beloved had to endure.

_You can still cause him pain Gary._

Gary shook his head to knock the dark thought out. He pressed a gentle kiss to the back of Ash’s neck and his head, sending a cool chill down Ash’s spine. His gentler massages worked up Ash’s neck and the lower base of his head, “Hey, how’s everything coming back in there?”

Ash was silent for a moment, then, “I, think I have it all back, up to where Lisa grabbed me, and, slammed me against the ice, and, yeah…..” Gary saw Ash’s hands curl to grip the bed sheets, “That dark place…Gary, I think…” Ash shook his head, “For me, I was more scared than anything, I wasn’t going to accept being taken away, but I felt, this, cold around my wrists, like, _like chains_, trying to pull me back, trying to keep me in there…”

Gary was silent for a moment too, then, “Do you want to talk about it some?” he asked gently, but he could already feel Ash’s body tense up, and he felt a great big giant ‘NO’ coiling up inside Ash, and yet –
“I, think I have to,” said Ash, a note of uncertainty clear in his voice.

“Alright then Love,” Gary helped Ash turn so they could face one another, “Talk to me.”

Ash swallowed, “…..Um….Gary…?” Gary stopped massaging to wrap his arms around Ash’s waist.

“Yes?”

“Are…are you scared of me?”

“What? Ash have I, did I give off that impression?”

Seriously what is it with you and all these negative vibes that those closest to you filter out and blame themselves for?

Ash was silent again for a moment biting his bottom lip, “I just need to know. I can tell everyone is kind of, on edge a little? Around me?”

“R-really? What makes you say that Love?”

SMOOTH.

Ash gave Gary a hurt look and turned away.

UGH. STRIKE ONE GARY.

Ash sighed, “I know you all are trying to hide it, but, heh, when one of your friends is a very gifted pokemon watcher, picking up on human body languages isn’t too much of a stretch, and I asked him in the past for a few pointersssss, ssssssoooooo…..”

“No, no sweetheart, it’s not you, we’re not scared of you,” Gary cupped Ash’s cheek, “if anything, we’re scared for you because we just want you to be okay.”

I’m not okay.

He doesn’t believe you. Ow.

Ash looked down and off to the side away from Gary’s hand, “Thing is…” Ash looked pained in what he was going to say next, and Gary felt it making his stomach turn, “I, had a hunch you were, lying to me, about, coming up to the cabin for your research – that wasn’t hard to figure out, but fine, you did get done some research up here, and that’s great, and everyone thinks I’m dumb anyway, so, you know, whatever.”

“Ash I don’t think you’re dumb, naïve sometimes, but certainly not dumb.”

“And it’s okay to try and take advantage of me being naïve sometimes?”

OUCH.

“No, no, and I’m sorry I made you feel that way,” Gary took Ash’s hand and kissed it, “I’m very, very sorry. I regret it so much, I’m so sorry.”
I’m making people act this way.

“…..I’m sorry too….I mean you wouldn’t have, done anything if I hadn’t pushed you to, act like that.”

It’s all my fault.

Gary sighed, “Don’t give yourself so much credit Ash, you and I both know I still have quite a bit of some ‘jerk’ genes still in me, but that’s no excuse, I’m sorry I lied to you, it won’t happen again.”

Ash sighed through his nose, “Don’t make promises you can’t keep. If you need to lie to me, that’s fine.”

Oh my god what is happening up in that head?! This is NOT Ash. This is not Ash AT ALL. Geeze Gary, you need to pull the reigns on this, you gotta tell him, just tell him now.

Gary placed a kiss on Ash’s shoulder followed by a massage in using his thumb in a circular motion, “No Ash, that’s not fine, I’m going to lay all my cards out to you, would you lie to me?”

“No,” Ash responded quickly –

Liar.

“Well then, why should I? We just have to talk to one another, and we have! We’re off to a good start already.”

“I guess? I’m, trying…..I’m sorry, I know I’ve been, very, very frustrating to you, I didn’t mean to be such a burden,” Ash abruptly dropped his head in his hands, “Uuugth, this is so frustrating!”

“You’re not a burden to me, not one little bit,” Gary moved to hold Ash’s hands in his, “These hands have done amazing things, you have done amazing, amazing things, and I’m so very happy that I get to come home, and take care of these hands.”

Ash paused a moment as honest warmth filled his chest, a small smile arose and left as quickly as it came, “…..But, what if this is something you, can’t really take care of?”

“What do you mean?”

What if I never get better.
“Gary, if, if something of me, changed, forever, and, it wouldn’t be able to change back, would you, be okay with that?”

Gary felt a little insulted that would ever had been a problem, “Of course I would. I love you, no matter what”–

“Liiiiike, say, uuuuuum, I, or, err, something, about me, was, was….?”


Liar.

Ash’s hand grabbed his chest –

“Ash?” – Ash leaned himself into Gary from the Link*’s flare up making his core feel like ice,
*GARDEVOIR!* “I’m here”–

Liar.

*Stop it,* Ash hissed internally – of which Gary heard loud and clear –

“Ash what is it?”

“It’s, it’s so cold, but, I, I have it under control, just, nugh” –

Gardevoir teleported itself immediately into Ash’s room and placed its hand on his chest, giving him several Heal Pulses*. Gary set his hand on Ash’s forehead which was covered in sweat; they both shared antsy looks.

“You’re alright, you’re alright Ash,” said Gardevoir, helping Ash get the Link* back under control.

I’m not okay, I’m not okay!

“There we go, nice deep breaths,” said Gardevoir, “Easy up, there, very good.”

Help me please!

“Are you alright?” Gary asked with complete concern –
“I’ll be alright,” said Ash forcing a crippled smile up under a wince of pain, “I just, need more rest is all.”

_Need more fucking rest my ass, Gary, fuck Gary, what are you going to do? What is anyone going to do? How do you approach this? How do you weave into this without getting him hurt? Is there no way around it? Hell, how are YOU going to come out of this? Okay, sure yeah fine, SOME progress has been made today, what that was even I your lowly tell-tale voice doesn’t fucking know. What time is it, its fuck it time, that’s what it is. Let’s go to sleep, just drop anchors today, push your concerns down and hold him, because THAT’S worked in the past! UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUGGGGGGGGTH._

Gardevoir pulled the curtains closed to ease out the daylight saying it too was in need of a little more rest in getting a headache. When Ritchie re-joined with them with their pokemon, he brought out his portable disc player, popped in a movie, and by the time Princess Swanna Lake had defeated Warlock Yveltal and saved her best friend Haley Honchkrow (of which Ritchie would very much argue girlfriend), Ash and Gary had passed out, much to Ritchie’s slight annoyance.

“This is the best part of the movie,” Ritchie grumbled looking at Gary and Ash’s slacked mouth and snoring faces; Pikachu, and Sparky agreed; Umbreon stuck out its tongue.

Misty and Mrs. Ketchum slipped in through the door to see Ritchie putting up his disc player, “They’re asleep again?”

“Just a quick nap,” said Gardevoir, “I know, I’ll give them an hour, hopefully my headache will be gone by then.”

“Yeah, just a quick rest,” said Ritchie, “Anywho I’m ready, which wing did they need us at?”

Misty made a frown as they left, but Gardevoir kept its time promise and woke Ash and Gary gently after an hour’s passing. Gardevoir had made up the restroom with the overflow of flowers, and presented them with some bath towels, “It’s time to take a moment out of this bed, Gary, would you like to bathe A” –

“Yes.” Gary looked to Ash who couldn’t hide his blush under a slanted smile.

Gary and Gardevoir helped Ash inside the bathroom, setting him down on the bath bench, and before Gary could get things started, Gardevoir quickly took him aside as Ash tried to undress himself, “Okay so in chapter 38 in 50 Shades of Indigo” –

“No.” Gary put his entire palm on Gardevoir’s face, entered the restroom and closed and locked the door behind him.

*Just be mindful of his heart rate Gary, try not to tire him out too much*–

“Duly noted.”

_AND QUEUE PRIVACY!

Gary looked to Ash who had taken his shirt off and was using it as an impromptu cover against his chest, in fact, his pants and underwear were already off too and that was the ONLY thing covering his chest, and just barely his crotch. Ash playfully shied away a little from Gary seeing him naked.
“It’s, wow, um, been a while,” Ash admitted.

Y’all gonna fuck who are we kidding here.

Gary let out a breath he didn’t know he had been holding, “And you’re as gorgeous as ever,” he said breathlessly, strolling right over and diving right in with kissing Ash hungrily at the nape of his neck, Ash bracing himself by placing a hand on Gary’s shoulder and the bath rail, somewhat taken back by Gary’s very forward advances, but they weren’t without welcome. Ash felt relief cascading all around inside from a dread he didn’t know he had been keeping – he so desperately wanted this too, but in the back of his mind….

He still wants me…even after…?

Ash could feel Gary’s smile through the panting breath on his neck, and a grin finally spread on him, “Hey, mh, aren’t you supposed to be bathing me?”

Gary continued his kisses, “I’m, getting there.” He paused momentarily to take off his shirt, and began undoing his pants making Ash’s insides flush with heat, and still Gary was taking claim to his neck and anywhere he could reach. Ash closed his eyes to take in the moment, feeling Gary take a seat beside him on the bench, their bare bodies upon contact sending excited tickles up their spines.

“I, ah,” Ash bit his lip as Gary licked a sensitive spot just under his ear, “MMH – ulterior motives here,” Ash couldn’t hold back giggling any further.

“Hmmm~ You are free to turn on the water, Ashy.”

“Really? I think you’re doing just fine with this tongue bath-umn-mh.” Gary went for Ash’s mouth, and Ash, tried, to turn the water on, only managing however to get the shower going with cold, COLD water breaking their kisses – “AIYYYYY” –

Gary quickly fixed the temperature, and set the bath tub to fill up with lukewarm water; Ash giggled, “You should’ve seen the look on your face.”

“Well I’d like to see the rest of you now~” said Gary tugging at Ash’s shirt, and Ash’s smile faded; Gary reading shame from his expression, “What is it?”

“Well…” Ash looked away as he hesitantly let his shirt uncover his chest, revealing faint blossomed scarring across him like a negative exposure of where the Disable* bruising once riddled his body, “Its, my newest scar, ugly, huh?...I mean this won’t wash off…” Ash felt Gary’s hand caress his face and perked up to him, “Like, scars aren’t dirt or anything, its not like I could wash, any of them off, even if I wanted to, and that’s just silly, and, o-oh” – Gary’s other hand removed Ash’s shirt entirely, letting it flop on the bathroom floor from the water it soaked up; the both of them completely exposed to the other. Ash sighed, resting his chin on Gary’s hand, “I’m being difficult, aren’t I?”

“No,” said Gary, “Not at all.”

“Welp, here I am, in all my nakie gloryness.”

Gary tilted Ash’s head up so he could look him in the eyes as he said, “Beautiful.”

Ash blushed earnestly in response to Gary just gushing all over him (figuratively), “Okay Casanova,
are you really here to help me bathe or are we just going to get to the sexy times already?"

Gary’s hand slid from Ash’s face to his chest, feeling his heartbeat, “I’m going to make you feel good, and I’m going to bathe you, with my tongue” –

“Pbbth!” Ash laughed, but he would be lying if he said Gary’s voice and movements weren’t completely intoxicating him into the mood because it has been quite a while – and he so wanted his boyfriend so badly in turn.... Ash trailed his own hand down Gary’s chest, “This is fine though... you know, I’m glad, you still want to touch me like this, even after, sssstuff.”

Gary took Ash’s hands and began kissing them, “There’s nothing about you that doesn’t stir my heart, I love, every, single, bit, of, you,” Gary kissed Ash’s palms, then his wrists.

“You seriously can’t stop kissing me,” Ash smiled.

“Gotta make up for lost time, I don’t want my moves to get rusty now,” Gary’s kissed up to Ash’s shoulder, and trailed towards his neck yet again, making Ash shudder with a wide grinning giggle, “Although, do you want me to stop?”

“Nope!” Ash blurted out, “I want all the kisses, all of them please,” Ash’s voice ended breathlessly as Gary once again went for that soft spot.

“As you wish.”

Gary turned the water off, and helped Ash sit up, the water sloshing gently at their legs. Ash continued to be very conscious of Gary’s touches at the light marks across his chest, trying to push past his hesitancy born from it. Gary felt that pinch of fear from Ash, and nuzzled him to try and help soothe his worries. He moved to cup Ash’s face, tilting his head up and began another trail of kisses down Ash’s neck towards the scarring on his chest, “Gary,” Ash breathed as Gary planted the most gentle kiss he ever gave Ash at the heart of the scarring.

Single handedly, Gary grabbed the washrag, dipped it in water, and began rubbing it across Ash’s stomach, chest, and abdomen in circular motions, sending a pleasant chill up Ash’s spine, and in a daring move, slipped the rag in-between Ash’s legs, making him squeal and jump – Ash quickly closed his legs, “Ah, I think I better do those parts,” said Ash against Gary’s pout, “If you do them,” Ash swallowed, “I won’t want you to stop,” he added breathlessly, “And I don’t know, how much farther I can go, without, puh-popping.....”

_Gardevoir did tell you not to rile him up too much...いませんいませんいませんいませんいません~

“......H-however, I've missed you, I've missed you so much -Gary,” Ash looked to his boyfriend with eyes lidded, face flushed and senses totally drunk on his scent, “I want you” –

Any common sense was flung out the window as Gary passionately kissed Ash with Ash adding fuel to his fire as he kept up with his boyfriend in being almost feral as they matched in intensity. Gary dropped the rag in favor of his hand reaching down in-between Ash’s opened legs and grabbed Ash in full, pulling a choked moan from him as he shifted to lean back against Gary –

Gary pumped Ash’s dick with one hand and held him steady with the other, Ash thrusting his hips in time with his jerks making it easy for Gary to reach his rear and give it a squeeze – Ash bit his lip as Gary took a chomp down on his neck – and Ash just almost ready to turn to putty until there came a sudden rapturous knock at the door, “SOAP IS NOT AN IDEAL LUBE GARY! I AM GOING TO UNLOCK THE DOOR! AND I AM GOING TO USE MY POWERS TO FLOAT OVER THIS CLEAR, EXTRA FRICTION GUARANTEED NAME BRAND LUBRICANT!” –
Gardevoir if you could scream a little louder I'm not sure if the staff in the boiler room could hear you sounding off to the entire fucking hospital that Gary is trying to fuck his boyfriend in the shower?????

"Be sure to completely lubricate your fingers as well, *Ouf*" – Umbreon tackled Gardevoir through the room door.

*Sigh.*

After that disaster, Ash made a fortress up for himself under a pile of blankets, unable to look anyone in the face, especially Gary, who glared and glared at Gardevoir who was just as defeated as the rest of them. Gardevoir rubbed its temple, "I, honestly thought I was talking through the Mental Link*, much, much apologies," the bags underneath its eyes were showing more prominently in the brighter light of the room. Ritchie entered with a quick knock with Pikachu, Umbreon and Sparky but was quick to back out from the atmosphere, however Gary motioned it was alright for them to stay.

"I think you need more rest Gardevoir," said Gary flatly, he couldn’t stay mad at Gardevoir, and it felt less and less justified with the passing of each second, "Here," Gary poured Gardevoir a cup of water, "I’m sorry."

"Oh no you, both, have every right to be upset," Gardevoir took the water and almost downed it in one go, "And I, think you are so right, I need a, bit more rest." Gardevoir set the cup down, walked over to the couch, and straight up face planted into the cushions.

"Now where am I going to sleep," said Ritchie as Pikachu, Sparky, and Umbreon jumped up onto the bed.

"With us on the bed," said Gary, "now curl up like the cuddling pro I know you are."

"Is Ash really under all those blankets?"

"Yes," came Ash’s muffled voice, "Kinda don’t want to be touched right now, but you’re free to sleep with us like Gary said."

Gary sighed.

"Aww, come on Ash, come on out."

"No."

"Please?"

"Pikachu-pi!"

"No."

"Can you at least spare us some blankets?"

"Take from only the top layer, any further will be met with bites."

Gary rolled his eyes with Pikachu, his insides buzzing with annoyance, but Ritchie took what he needed and tried to lay himself out clear from Mount Blanket making Pikachu, Umbreon, and Sparky scooch a little.

"Okay you guys, this isn’t going to work, I can barely fit on here, and then with the three of us, and Pikachu, Umbreon, and Sparky, there’s no way. Ash, Mount Blanket at least needs to come down."
“….Fine.”

Gary scoffed internally, *Oh sure, listen to him.*

*Hey now, watch it, don’t let this turn into a fight later on. It’s the little things that can get such a rise out of him and this stuff is way too petty to even remotely light a match on.*

Audino entered the room, trilling and motioning it was going to make a Channel with Ash in Gardevoir’s stead.

*Aww man, those Mental Links* do come in handy, *but Gardevoir is out like a light :/ It must have called for Audino before knocking out, good play you guys.*

Gary and Ritchie helped uncover Ash from the blanket to discover fresh tear marks down his cheeks, and he only bubbled up more tears once they saw him –

“Woah, woah, what happened?” said Ritchie –

**GOD, DAMMIT** –

*Did he hear me?!*  *“I’m sorry Ash”* –

“No, no, its not any of you,” said Ash trying to wipe his face, Audino hopped up on the bed as best its pudgy body could (Pikachu and Umbreon helped pull it up) and waddled over with concern, sitting in between Gary and Ritchie, “I don’t know why I’m feeling this, I’m just,” Ash let his arms just fall limp, “I’m just, sad.”

“Its okay Ash,” said Ritchie, “It’s okay to be just sad, you gotta let that stuff out.”

“This isn’t weirding you guys out?” Ash sniffed, wiping his eyes.

“No, not at all,” said Gary moving to lay down next to Ash, “Come on Love, lay down with us.”

“Pikapi!”

“Brebre.”

"Audinnno!"

And the young men retired for the night as such, Gary on one of Ash, Ritchie on the other with their pokemon down at their feet, and all under piles and piles of blankets (Audino placing a couple blankets over Gardevoir’s knocked out form and busying itself by mixing and mashing different types of medicine for later).

Ash had his back towards Ritchie, facing Gary, Gary again stroking Ash all down his side, starting up from his hair, then going all the way down to his thigh. Ritchie took this opportunity to comb out with his hands a small bit of Ash’s hair,

“Hey Ash, remember when you had a bit of mullet hair?”

“Yeah, hmp, think I should grow it out that long again?”

“Yes,” said Ritchie and Gary.

“I miss braiding your hair.”
“Alrighty then, I’ll let it grow out a bit more, do you still have those ties?”

“Yup, just tucked ‘em away.”

Gary could feel Ash calming down as they talked about hair, the weather, how the hospital was faring, what his friends where up to, and somewhere down the line their range of talents came into play.

“Ash I really don’t think anyone is going to beat your record of mouthing marshmallows,” said Ritchie.

“Please elaborate,” said Gary.

“When we have our holiday party at the Ranger station, we do all these stupid competitions, and every single one that involves FOOD” – Ritchie pointed to Ash who raised his head in triumph – “They cannot compare to his majesty. Ash has stuffed the most marshmallows in his mouth, has chugged the most dip, chomped aaaaaaaaall the apples, swallowed the most peppers, you name it, there is nothing, Ash, your iron stomach cannot overcome.”

“The peppers did a number on me though, I wouldn’t want to do that one again anytime soon.”

“Trust me, your record will stand.”

“If someone takes it, they can keep that one, oh, ooooh, I think Rose might come after your’s this year though!”

“In her dreams!”

Gary looked to Ritchie, “So what’s your title?”

Ritchie gave Gary a smug smile, “Karaoke.”

“Karaoke?”

“Since Ash and I joined the Rangers, I. Am. Undefeated.”

Gary sat up a little, “So you can sing?”

“Well~ Its more of an impromptu karaoke, we pick a card, and we have to imitate the noise and stuff.”

“Ritchie is really, really good Gary,” smiled Ash.

“I don’t mean to brag and all, but I totally am.”

Ash gave a yawn, his eyes getting droopy, “Hmmmmmm Garrrryyyyyyyyyy.”

“Hm?”

“Ritchiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii.”

“Double hm?”

Ash looked like he was about to say something, but he blushed and suddenly dove under the blankets –
“Oh no you don’t,” said Gary going after Ash, Ash laughing under the blankets, “Get back here” –

“No, it’s duuuumb” –

“Tell us Ash!” –

“W-well, I was wondering if, oh no, no” –

“Is it something you want us to do?” asked Gary.

“Welllll,” Ash only blushed harder, “GUH!” and dove under the blankets again, to which Gary started tickling him –

“AIEHEHEHEHE” –

“Speaketh Ash, I will tickle thy answer out of you” –

“And I will help!” Ritchie chimmed in –

“Okay! Okay! *cough* okay, I, I…” Ash shrunk, “I was wondering, if, you guys together, could,” his voice only grew smaller with each word, “If you guys could, together, sing, me,” until it was barely a whisper, “to sleep.”

Gary looked to Ritchie, “So can you sing?”

Ritchie waved his hand modestly.

Ash had snuck back under the blankets, “You guys don’t mind?”

“Of course not,” said Gary.

Ash reappeared slightly with his nose just above the blankets, “So what kind of request can I make?”

“Anything you want, buuuuut hopefully a song we both know,” said Gary.

Ash perked up, “I know you both know this song, the one byyyyyyyyyyyyyy Sacred Fire Fall~!”

“Gotcha,” said Ritchie, "Alrighty, Gary you start the vocals, and I’ll start the melody."

Gary looked to Ritchie who nodded, “Ready?”

Ash gave a little squee as Ritchie began whistling the intro, Gary took a deep breath, and,

“When it all goes crazy and the thrill is go~ne
The days get rainy and the nights get lo~ng
When you get that feelin’ you were born to lose
Staring at your ceiling thinkin’ of your blues”

Ritchie hummed, and joined Gary for the next verses, keeping his voice reserved,

“When there’s so much trouble that you wanna cry
The world has crumbled and you don't know why
When your hopes are fading and they can't be found
Dreams have left you waiting, friends have let you do~wn”

Gary booped Ash’s nose,

“Just remember I love you
And it'll be alright
(Well I love you~)
Just remember I love you
More than I can say,”

Ritchie imitated the guitar as cheesily he could,

“Maybe then your blues will fade aw~ay”

Ash let out a loving sigh as his eyes drooped with Gary and Ritchie finishing out the entire song, and by the time they were done, Ash was out. Pikachu, Umbreon, Sparky, and Audino clapped for their performance; Ritchie giving about an elaborate bow as he could.

“Hmp,” Gary ran his hand through Ash’s hair, “You’re not half bad.”

“Pbbth, thanks,” Ritchie laid on his elbow, propping his head up with his hand, “I can see why he fell so hard for you now.”

“Oh really?”

“Yeah…” Ritchie dropped his voice down to a whisper, “buuuuut, let me help out a little here. When it was just us, out in the wilds, doing our, Ranger thing, aaaaaand we had a stressful, and/ or not so successful day, we’d take turns helping each other get to sleep, hm~ Ash would tell his stories, and I’d, well~”

“Whistle?”

Ritchie gave a smile as warm as Gary ever had the chance to see, and about as secretly cocky. Ritchie closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and…. 

“Lay down~….
Your sweet and weary he~ad
Night is falling
You have come to journey's e~nd
Sle~ep no~w
And dre~am of the ones who came befo~re
They are calling
From across the distant shore

:O!!!!!

“Why do you weep?
What are these tears upon your face?
Soon you will see
All of your fears will pass away!
Safe in my arms
You're only sleeping”

YOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO GARY –

“What can you see
On the horizon?
Why do the white gu~lls call?
Across the sea
A pale moon rises
The ships have come, to carry you home”

DAYUMN!

“And all will turn
To silver glass
A light on the water
All Souls pass”

MOM HOLY FUCK 8O!!!!

Gary turned to Ash, who looked to be in such a deep and peaceful sleep it would have been a sin to disturb such a precious gift for their eyes to behold.

Ritchie gave a happy sigh, “That is one of Ash’s favorites, I mean I can’t exactly belt it out here, that would defeat the purpose of getting Ash to bed, but, there you have it now~” Ritchie tilted his head down with a most mischievous grin, “Oh you ain’t the only one Gary Oak~”

THIS LITTLE SHIT >:’D

Ash gave a little slack jawed snore, drawing both their attention at his serenely sleeping face, Ritchie’s smile softened, his hand moving some of Ash’s hair out of his face, “And we have entered
full drool mode with Ash ladies and gentlemen, he is out like a light.”

“So you would sing him to sleep? Like me?”

“Oh, you sang him to sleep like how I did,” said Ritchie, “He would tell me his stories, like how he tells you, and I, would sing to him. I still do, well, every now and then. I mean when you’re out there with nothing but the stars as feedback, I could, you know, show him what I could really do.”

....How long has it been since Ash told you a story Gary?

Gary suddenly looked sullen, “….I miss his stories.”

“You both, missed a lot of the other.”

Gary looked to Ash who moved ever so slightly, turning his head a little towards his lover,

“….Ritchie…if, if I fail in” –

Ritchie reached over Ash and flicked Gary’s forehead hard –

“Ow!” –

Gary looked to Ritchie, his face holding a pained expression, “Listen, you’ve done nothing but think about how you can be better for Ash, how you can help Ash, what could be best for him, and sure, you’ve made some mistakes, but my goodness, who hasn’t? One thing you and Ash totally have in common is that you never fail when it matters most. Right here, right now, you both are trying to change for the better, to be better for each other, please give yourself some credit here Gary.”

....Oh.

Ritchie then smiled, “You both are on the right track, and, I’m glad you guys are getting your footing back together.”

Gary smiled back, “Thanks,” and gave a big yawn, “Shoot I think you about sang me to sleep too.”

“Ehehehehehe.”

Their pokemon were curled up and gone, Gary was ready to join them, but first,

“Ritchie.”

“Hm?”

“Your secret is safe with me.”

Ritchie rolled his eyes, “Sorry, but you gotta be at least a level 10 friend to learn my tragic backstory.”

“Where am I at currently?”

“Hmmmmmmm, 8 and a third.”

“Bet I could grind myself up there.”

“Word choices, please mind them.”

“You know what I mean,” said Gary underneath a smirk, “Besides I have a wa~y with wo~rds, it’s
just a maaatter of time~”

Ritchie rolled his eyes again, “Bonded nuts – no! Bonne nuit! Oh hush Gary, goodnight!”

Later that evening, Ash’s mother, Misty, and Brock checked on them once more before settling in for the evening themselves, Mrs. Ketchum taking note that it felt just a little bit chillier in Ash’s room than it did anywhere else. Misty said they probably wanted it that way with them all under the blankets, and with all of them asleep soundly, perhaps it was so. Audino was still on duty in keeping Channel with Ash while poor Gardevoir was still out, and a staff member was kind enough to give it a translator. It reassured Ash’s mother that everyone and everything was totally fine, it was certain its skills would be able to keep Ash well, and should something come up, there were plenty of med pokemon on night duty, and Gardevoir was a douse of cold water away from waking up.

But what Audino’s skills failed to notice, were the two hidden pale blue eyes, glaring at them from the window.

Chapter End Notes

I felt like that was good stopping point before all hell breaks loose, and thus the final confrontation will be what 11 and 12 are about, aaaaaand methinks the content that is developing in there might bump up the rating to Explicit....Again, I hope my story continues to entertain, and, like before, I hope to be back soon, again, with the penultimate chapters, again, chapter-ception owo;;;; Thanks for sticking around, I will continue to do my best =w=\b

Also the songs that are in the story are not hard to find if you want to hear what they really sound like, those be the lyrics, its half of what I grew up on, and some of my own tastes >w>;;;;
Chapter by SilentAvera, Singing Woodpecker (SilentAvera)

Chapter Notes

*crawls* So, many a big thing happened over the past several months that is going to make life very scary for about the next four years, hence this kinda took a back seat as things played out, and why I only have one chapter to present to you all as opposed to two, which I so wanted to do, but real life does like puntin me in the cooter, an this story makes a liar out of me everytime I try to do a schedule, bleh. As for this chapter, it, like the one before it, got the ever-loving shit written out of it, and a certain event that happens at the end of the chapter was supposed to be at the beginning, but in the end, its where it needs to be, likewise with characters getting shifted around, all that good stuff. I am happy with how it turned out however, and I hope it entertains you guys - we finally, FINALLY are approaching the climax of the story! Thanks again for sticking around for this tale :3

Also....the story has earned an explicit rating now due to the later half of this chapter

It was silent when Ash woke.

He was up before Gary and Ritchie, both of whom looked like they had a better chance at actual ‘sleep’ last night with Ritchie drooling all over his pillow and Gary wrapped around Ash like a pretzel. His senses were greeted by a strong smell of coffee, the soft glow of morning, and the sound of Gardevoir shuffling around the impromptu garden of his room, picking up some sort of scraping tool. It shimmied over to the window where it began scraping off what looked to be, ice? Ice that had somehow caked up a layer in the corner of the room. Ash sat up from between them, careful enough not to disturb Gary too much, his boyfriend partially groaning in his sleep, pulling a slanted smile from Ash. On the side table was Gary’s com, a cup of water, a box of tissues, his flower crown, and *Oh, my hat…* Ash ran his fingers through his hair. He saw their pokemon at the foot of the bed sleeping in a cuddle pile, and with his boyfriend to his right, and his best friend to his left, Ash’s core felt so very warm. He remembered that he actually asked the two of them to sing for him last night, and that they actually agreed to the duet. Ash’s face burned from his internal blushing.

Gardevoir looked over at Ash from its scraping and smiled, “Well well, good morning there Mr, Ketchum! Feeling better are we?”

Ash played with his hair a bit, “A little. How about you?”

“Much better, thank goodness,” Gardevoir stretched, “Uuuuuuuuuuuuuuugh, ah~ Hm, I sent Audi off to get some rest of its own, bless its heart, it was up all night watching over us! Rest is so very important, and my goodness I was reminded how very much that rule still applies to me.”

“Is that, ice on the window?”

Gardevoir motioned to the window, “Yes, the air conditioner might have caused it, somehow, there’s
a vent that’s blowing, buuuut, in the opposite direction, so, this is a little weird.” Gardevoir walked itself over to an overhead cabinet and opened it with a jumble of contents and equipment suddenly spilling out – “EEK, ugh!” the pokemon whispered some curses as it snatched up a strap-like piece that quickly grabbed Ash’s attention.

“Gardevoir.”

“Hm?”

“What’s that?”

“This?” Gardevoir held up the strap, “This is a restraint.”

Ash paused, a cold feeling unfurling from his chest – subconsciously he grabbed his wrist, “Was, that used on me?”

Gardevoir paused itself for a second, but it was long enough for Ash to read it calculating on what it was going to respond with, “Yes, to help keep you and personnel safe. When Froslass” –

“Her name was Lisa.”

If Gardevoir made an attempt to hide its disgust, it was poorly done, “When, Lisa, used her powers on you, she did something very terrible to you. For a moment, your body was clinically dead, and you became a Froslass’ familiar. In that moment you were a possible danger to yourself and the people trying to help you.”

The look on Ash’s face instantly turned into a mixture of stricken fear and sickness.

Gardevoir walked over to Ash, reaching out to touch his hand reassuringly, “The restraints were used for safety, that is all, they are not needed anymore, and were put up with all the other supplies.”

“Well yeah, of course,” Ash’s voice was unusually high, he was gripping his wrist harder now which did not go unnoticed by Gardevoir, “I mean if you have the potential to turn into a monster that’s just warranted, right?” Ash felt the absolute need to remove himself from between Gary and Ritchie.

“Familiar is the correct term. What Lisa did to you was horrifying. Personnel were unsure at how the Li – h-how Lisa’s powers would further affect your body.”

“….Did I hurt anyone?”

“No.”

“You’re lying.”

“Oh? How so?”

“I’ve gotten pretty good at telling when people lie to me. It, also doesn’t hurt to have a friend who’s very good at observing pokemon and their movements to give me a few pointers when they’re nervous or antsy, so, you know, experience.”

“It bothers you to have hurt someone indirectly?”

“It bothers me very much because I have done so more than anyone should – so please, just tell me, who did I hurt when I was, that, thing?”
“You did not hurt anyone Ash. I am telling the truth. The effects of the power of a terrible person – who wanted to hurt as many people as possible through you – affected a doctor – it was a very short lived Disable* attack, it made Ritchie’s hands numb, and, I believe Gary got a little sick – that’s all I heard on the matter, and as you can see, everyone is completely fine.”

“….Her power…?”

Gary and Ritchie began to stir from their sleep.

Gardevoir paused again, giving Gary and Ritchie a mental kick to wake them up faster, “A more proper name aside from her ‘power’ would be, the Link*.”

Upon hearing that, Gary and Ritchie woke up as well as their pokemon, Gardevoir quickly motioned for them to listen internally, *Easy, listen here with him.* Ash was intently hanging onto every word Gardevoir said, “Think of it like an evil wisdom tooth. You can still function with the Link*, and it may be painful, but it needs to come out. You will need to help us loosen up the Link* by facing this illness head on because it is feeding off your negative emotions. As long as your emotions are clouded with the lies your sadness tells you, it will be very difficult for the Link* to come out. Our many, many hugs and well wishes can help, but now it’s time to process what is happening to you, and what has happened to you.”

Ash rubbed his elbows nonchalantly and said quietly, “I guess, a more proper name for the sadness, would be depression, right?”

Gary and Ritchie’s hearts gave a painful jolt.

“Yes,” said Gardevoir.

Ash rubbed the back of his head, unable to look at Gary or Ritchie, “Okay, wow, so that’s it then, huh?”

Gary had to speak, “There’s a bit more Ash, it’s just –”

“And you all know, right?” said Ash still unable to look at them, “Not that I blame any of you, I mean, I haven’t exactly been, open…..And it fed off me….I mean how bad was I in that I needed restraints?” Ash swallowed, “And, that horrible attack I suffered w-when that intruder was in the hospital? It felt like my chest was going to explode! I thought it was a dream, some terrible horrible nightmare, but, that really happened, that really happened and none of you held it against me?” –

Gary took Ash’s hand – “What could we possibly hold against you?”

Ritchie looked extremely worried, “Ash you’re not making too much sense right now” –

Gardevoir took a seat next to Ash on the bed, placing a hand on his shoulder, “Ash, take a moment, take a breath” –

“Pikapi!”

But Ash’s internal turmoil only broiled, “It tried to change me, what’s inside me, the attack, the night terror I had, something INSIDE me, is trying to change who I am!” – Ash’s hand went over his mouth as his eyes filled with thick tears –

Gary pulled Ash close, hugging him tightly, “Easy, easy, Love, it’s okay, it’s okay” –

IM NOT OKAY!
Gary heard that internal scream from Ash so clearly his ears rang as if he had really screamed it out loud – he felt Ash tense up, try to pull away from him – Gary was torn from letting him go and continuing to hold him close, but the decision was made for him as Ash just let himself crumple in Gary’s arms.

Ash managed to choke back a sob and steady his breathing somewhat, “I should have those restraints on me at all times” –

“No,” Gary stated –

“You don’t need them,” said Gardevoir quickly added, “You would never hurt anyone. That isn’t you. And like I said, the restraints were only meant for safety. You are not a danger anymore” –

Anymore?! – “we have the Link* under control Ash. The intruder has been dealt with, and the same thing with the Night Terror, it passed, it passed, and you’re still here. Ash, you, are still here with us.”

Gary continued hugging Ash, softly rocking back and forth as his internal thunderstorms clashed and rumbled, staying that way until Ash finally allowed himself to breathe. He pulled away from Gary in wanting to sit up, wiped his eyes some more and licked his lips as his mouth had run dry. Ash turned towards Gary, but kept his glance off center, not truly looking at him, “Gary, did, you get sick from the powers, from the Link*?”

“I did, but they patched me up pretty good, see?”

Ash blew his nose with a tissue and discarded it, “But, you’ve been kinda favoring that arm?”

“Um, have I?”

HAVE YOU???? FUKC I DON’T KNOW IM JUST A VOICE AND IM PRETTY FUCKING SCARED RIGHT NOW FOR THE BOTH OF YOU – GARY YOUR NERVES –

“Guess I have been,” said Gary, his hand was slightly trembling, “I dunno, there was some stuff they had to do to it. I mean look at your own arm with the wires they have hooked up still.”

That will in no shape or form come back to bite you in the ass. Fuck.

Ash’s hand went to the side of his face, an attempt to keep himself held together, but regardless, he teared up again, “I’m so sorry you guys got hurt, if anything happened to you, I don’t know what” –

Gary turned Ash’s face towards him, but Ash’s eyes were still down and away, “Ash listen, I’m fine, I’m here right now, with you, and I’m fine. You would never hurt me on purpose” –

Stop making excuses for this!

Ash noticed Gary’s hand still shaking –

– “this entire debacle was from Lisa,” Gary continued, “and god, what she did to you,” Gary kept himself composed with a thick swallow, “We couldn’t even touch you, much less hold you at first! All we could do was pray and pray you’d pull through, and you did! Together with everyone rallying behind you, your body, your soul held together, and you came back to us.”

:(

“It’s going to be okay Ash,” added Ritchie, trying to keep his own composure against Ash’s
crumbling one, “Please, please stop letting these thoughts hurt you!”

**YOU THINK I WANT THIS?!**

Ritchie suddenly cowered back at the quick glare Ash snapped him over to him, Gary feeling such a spike of anger from Ash, it sent an outright chill down his spine –

**WOAH – WOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAH –**

But the anger left as quickly as it came, Ash looked away from Ritchie, his insides once again wrought with shame; Gardevoir studied his movements cautiously. Ash wiped his face again, somewhat aggressively, with Gary’s rather gentle/ on edge help in snagging more tissues from the bedside table, “Gardevoir,” Ash rubbed his eyes with a thick sniff, his hands landing on his lap hard, “when the Link* comes out, will that, also take out the, them um, the” –

“Depression?”

“Yeah that.”

“No. But, in fighting off the Link*, you will be that much better at handling it.”


*Your hand is still slightly trembling.*

Gary leaned down and touched their foreheads together, eyes closing…..*I’m not scared of you Ash….but I am really, really, starting to get worried.*

Gary nuzzled Ash, and Ash nuzzled him right back but in a more muted approach.

Umbreon gave Pikachu a nuzzle as it could only watch its poor Trainer, “Pika pi….”

*Alright Gary…..its go time…..Don’t let that anger become a thing again. Try to restore that flame in him, try to restore that passionate burning fighting spirit that lit up his youth. Look into those beautiful brown eyes that you would virtually die for and…..fuck.*

Gary sat up a little, “Ash, there’s something else you should know about, and, I just wasn’t sure of how to tell you, or if you even needed to know since I thought I could take care it” – Gary laughed aimlessly against Ash’s tilted look –

*You’re the same.*

– “but, I’m going to tell you, because I’m not going to hide anything from you anymore – Ash, I’ve been able to hear your thoughts, a little? Just on and off – and Gardevoir knows, and we have been trying to stop it – Gardevoir has been trying to keep it suppressed, even trying to take it out, because those are your thoughts, and your thoughts alone, no one should invade that privacy, and” –

Ash and Ritchie shared surprised looks,

“You’ve been hearing all of my thoughts?”

“No! No, not all of them, in fact it comes and goes pretty quickly, but I can, and do pick up on your feelings much more often, that’s, that’s how I knew how upset you were at seeing the medical Sylveon” –

“Ash I told Gary about what happened with Sylveon,” said Ritchie suddenly.
“…Oh,” was all that Ash responded with, followed by, “Can, you feel what I’m feeling right now?”

“A…little?” said Gary honestly, “I feel you’re scared.”

“I’m terrified,” Ash gripped the blanket, “If you can feel me, how come I can’t feel you?! Am I becoming that heartless to you?”

“No!”

“Where would you even get that idea?!” Ritchie blurted, “There’s no one in KANTO with more heart than you!”

You just don’t understand.

Gardevoir stepped in, “Ash it’s more than likely an issue caused by the Link*, hm, still though, his whole mind reading thing is quite odd unto itself” –

Ash dropped his head in his hands with an exasperated sigh and agitation buzzing inside, “Just explain it to me, please, explain to me all of this, what the Link* is, how Gary can hear me, please, just tell me!”

Gary spoke first, “Gardevoir thinks it has something to do with you and I being so receiving of Human Health Transfer, when it opened up a Health Transfer Channel between us, that may have triggered a Human Transfer Effect.”

Ash eyes narrowed slowly in concern, “That’s, the kind of stuff you work on, right Gary?”

“Human Health Transfer yes, but mainly bioluminescence in that field, Transfer Effects is more Gardevoir’s territory.”

“Yes,” said Gardevoir, “What did some major lingering damage to you and your body Ash – well aside from having been bashed repeatedly against an icy wall – falls under Human Transfer Effects. You see, the Link* is like a cut of Lisa’s bio-code, the last bit of her influence – and it is currently tangled up badly within your own code – BUT you are no longer at its mercy, I have tamed it immensely – confined it to its own source, and we have it under control. I cannot stress that enough to you Ash. It is under control. Think of it liiiiiiiiiike, a weed amongst a beautiful garden, it is there, and it certainly can grow, but it can also be plucked out, and I have been maintaining it and keeping it under control.”

Well minus when it went bum fucking crazy with the intruder and Ash’s night terror….Which he has now comprehended a la happened for realsies.

Gary’s insides constricted painfully with worry as he watched Ash trying to process this information –

Was he told too soon???? He does need to know but knowing you really were part monster for a time can doooo thiiiiiiingsssssss –

After a solid minuet of processing, Ash looked into Gary’s eyes and said, “It used Pain Split* on me…and, that” –

“Yes,” said Gardevoir, “That’s what started it, but then, she kept taking it further with Draining Kiss*, which, in an odd twist did work in our favor by slowing the Disable* attacks’ progression that she utterly infested your body with, however” –
Ash gave Gardevior a broken look, “However having my life force ripped out of me has some effects of their own, right?”

“You’re stronger than that,” said Ritchie, a clear waver in his voice –

“Ash you’re going to be alright,” said Gary –

Gardevoir moved softly in taking both of Ash’s hand into its own, “Nothing you can’t overcome. You’re still human Ash, you’re still you” –

“Is she really in me?” Ash’s voice shook, as did Gary’s heart, “A cut of her you said? Like, a piece of her soul right? That is inside me?!"

How compatible. You really are nothing better.

“She is not inside of you Ash,” said Gardevoir, “Lisa is dead. There is but only a tangled Link* left which cannot count as” –

But Ash let his head fall in his hands and the tide of anguish just could not be held back any longer as he sobbed and sobbed and sobbed, heaving, loud, and practically choking to breathe, his tears dripping through his hands. Gary wanted to reach out, hold him, cradle him, but against better judgment, one look from Gardevoir told him, and Ritchie, and their pokemon, this was needed for Ash to process, and Gary felt like his chest had been smashed in with a sledgehammer as he watched Ash, yet again, crumble right before him, and he was unable to do anything about it.

Well bravo everyone, Ash is hella alarmed, feeling very alienated, and is a perfect mess of fear, self-doubt, anguish, and lots and lots of tears! Who knew that Ash would not take this information too well!

Gardevoir gave Ash a moment before continuing on over his crying, “Which cannot count as a complete soul, much like how a single swatch on a blanket is by no means a complete blanket…….Ash. Ash look at me.”

Ash coughed, breathing heavily, a single hand clutching his chest, there were tears still dripping down his face, he snagged with his free hand the entire box of tissues off the table and tried to clean himself up despite continuing to make a mess of his face; Gardevoir waited patiently until Ash, finally, looked at it.

“Ash, the Link*, is under control. Despite as bad as you feel right now, as scared, and alone, and lost, we have it under control. Do you feel cold inside?”

“Yes,” Ash’s voice sounded extremely caked on by tears almost to point Gary or Ritchie or Pikachu couldn’t recognize it.

“Do you feeling it receding?”

Ash paused…..silence, eyebrows furrowed, until, “….Yes.”

Everyone gave a deep internal sigh of relief, “There,” said Gardevoir, “It is because you are letting yourself understand. We will continue to keep the Link* in its place, and we will work on outright removing it and straightening out any roadblocks soon enough when you’ve had a little more time to heal. Listen, we, you, just did something good, the screws are loosening, you may not feel it yet, but they are loosening right here, right now as you process this, as you understand this. You’re facing it right now. You’re letting yourself understand and in doing so, heal, and in double doing so, getting a grasp on what you’ve been scared to confront for so long. It’s okay to feel like this, it’s okay to let
that pain release itself, you have to let the negative emotions go, or they will eat you from the inside out, do you understand?"

Ash still had some tears flowing, but he was much more composed, “Yes.” Ash wiped his face again with another tissue, “Evil wisdom tooth.”

“Evil wisdom tooth,” Gardevoir echoed.

That is an odd metaphor lemme just say, like the weed one was better, but if it helps Ash then by all means…..Like….Gardevoir hasn’t revealed yet that the Link* has latched onto Ash’s guilt and you all might want to keep that to yourselves at the moment because god only knows how that will hurt him.

Ash looked to Gary, and Gary reached out and pulled him close, he couldn’t stand it anymore, he couldn’t stand not comforting Ash anymore, and Ash hugged Gary back almost as hard as he possibly could, Gary praying that Ash would feel his cascade of love and devotion pour into all of the mental wounds cut open from this talk. Gary pulled back briefly, just enough to give himself room to nuzzle Ash, with Ash nuzzling him right back fervently, apologetically, smudging his tears on Gary, both of them locked in each other’s arms until Ash was back at being at ease.

Ash gave a huff sitting back slightly from Gary, his tears were drying, and his tongue idly licked around in his mouth where one of his molars used to be.

“Speashing of tooths, I con’t beweave I’m rhully miffing a tuuth,” said Ash as he moved his tongue about, he sighed, “Bummuh.”

Gary quickly wiped his own eyes while Ash wasn’t looking, “It’s not like we can’t get you an implant tooth,” said Gary looking to Gardevoir nodding back, “You won’t even know the difference, Gramps even had a few, remember?”

“Yuh, buh,” Ash stopped licking, “It just feels weird having an empty spot there, I mean,” Ash wiped the last of his tears away, “did it feel weird kissing me? Because you have been all up in my mouth.”

Gary gave Ash a quick peck on his nose, “Yes I have been, and to be honest Ash, it didn’t phase me not one bit,” Gary leaned in for another quick peck on Ash’s cheek, making Ash give a small genuine smile, “It doesn’t matter if something in you changes a bit, you’re still Ash, you’re still my Ash.”

Ash placed his hand on Gary’s to keep him in close contact and touched their foreheads together, “Still your Ash huh?”

Gary nodded against Ash, “Mhhm.”

Ash gave an honest grin, “I like that,” but then his glance went off side and his face turned somber again, Gary missing the moment as he closed his eyes and nuzzled Ash lovingly, suddenly feeling the gesture not reciprocated.

See, you are trying to make him feel like he’s worth something here Gary, that is your intent here, you are NOT, NOT trying to make him feel like, whatever the hell that heartbreaking look is that he’s giving you, because oh my god Ash stop, sTOP, ENOUGH WITH THAT LOOK GARY READ HIS MIND WHY IS HE SUDDENLY SO SAD AGAIN WE HAD A GOOD THING GOING THERE–

“Ash?”
Gary felt something both boiling and freezing gurgling up within Ash yet again, “The sadness in me, isn’t going to just disappear….It’ll keep coming back…I’ll have to continue facing it, so then, what I felt inside Lisa, it was so overwhelming, is,” Ash swallowed, “Is that what is – is that sadness, in me, eventually going t-to – ”

:____:

Gardevoir squeezed Ash’s hand, “Listen, Lisa did not take care of herself to the point where she felt she couldn’t control or moderate her actions – much less take responsibility for them. She made terrible choices to inflict pain on others for what she was feeling as an outlet. This Ash, this is where you need to take care of your well-being. You said so yourself that you need to be held accountable for your actions. You will also have something that, sadly, Lisa didn’t, you have a support system, and you will get proper treatment, and then the rest, will be up to you. Do you understand?”

“I understand,” said Ash quietly.

It’s sad. It shouldn’t have to be this way. Even I understand that.

Gardevoir placed a reassuring hand on Ash’s shoulder, “What’s done is done. You must be commended for reaching out to Lisa despite the danger.”

Ash grimaced at the comment, “I thought she could have been helped?”

“Unfortunately not everyone can be saved during such a downspell,” said Gardevoir, “She made her choices.”

“She was sick….?”

Like me?

Gary and Ritchie traded glances, and they both were thinking the same thing, but as to how to say it, Gary took the chance in speaking up first,

“Ash”, Gary took Ash’s hand in his lap, “When Ritchie and the team were going in for your rescue, Lisa attacked, unleashing everything she had. She tried to kill him. She tried to kill anyone in her way. She was too far gone to save Ash, at that point she was a danger to everyone around her, so please, don’t beat yourself up in thinking there was something you could have done to help her, you tried, and she chose to do what she did…She almost managed to kill you, twice, purposely, I can never forgive that, I can never forgive what she’s done.” Gary kissed Ash on his forehead again, “She almost took you from us!”

Ash looked to Ritchie who looked utterly worn, “You didn’t hurt our team, our family Ash, Lisa did, so don’t even, don’t even think to compare the two of you together!”

Ash swallowed, gave a sigh, and leaned onto Gary, their hands intertwining, grip tightening.

Ash, at least you helped Lisa see, for about two seconds, that her actions were damaging, no matter how justified she felt they were. There is a big fucking difference between the two of you. Not to mention Lisa also threatened Gary, your Gary Ash. Threatened to kill your friends and family Ash, did Lisa banging your head against the ice erase that little sunny fact? You forgave Lisa for what she did to you, but as for how she hurt everyone? And oh how she hurt them…

But I hurt people too!

“….I can’t forgive that either,” said Ash, “Not what she put everyone through” Ash squeezed Gary’s
hand, “…ever.” Ash suddenly nuzzled Gary deeply, Gary quickly returning the affection – Ash also reached out to Ritchie, who took his hand and squeezed it tightly, Ritchie feeling Ash’s apology within the slight tremors of their grip, “Thank goodness she never got her hands on either of you at least,” he breathed, and then he looked to Pikachu, “Or you, my little buddy.”

“Pikapi…”

“Although, indirectly she kinda did,” said Gary, “She got her hands on you.”

*She also choked Gary through his own com, aaaaaaand his blood got Disabled* through the influence from Ash so there’s that too, buuuut you don’t need to know thaaat…..just yeeeet.

“Let that connection go Ash, you tried,” said Gardevoir, it moved to lean in close, “You’re a good person Ash Ketchum, please give yourself some time to really reflect on these things, reflect on the good that you have done with this world, and for this world.”

“Okay…” Ash looked down as he collected his hands and wrung them together a little.

*Gary.* Gary looked up to Gardevoir as it opted to talk inside his head. *Listen, he has a lot to process, so lay on that comfort as thick as you can, help him absorb and understand instead of piling and blocking.*

*Of course, I’ll keep this momentum going,* Gary responded with determination.

*We got this, you got this, you got him….Eep.*

Ash let out a long, wobbly sigh wiping his face down with his hands, “This, has been quite the wakeup call.”

Gary wrapped both his arms around Ash’s waist pulling him in, “It was a wakeup call for me too Ash…I just, sat there while this swallowed you whole” –

Ash quickly shook his head, “No, no, it was all me” –

Gary knocked their foreheads together a little hard, “Ow, sorry, heh, we’re both hard headed here, more or less – I could have done more, you could have said more, bottom line Ash, I don’t want to lose you, especially not to some stupid incident that I could have helped prevent.”

“Likewise,” said Ash with a small wounded smile, knocking their foreheads together too, “Ow, okay sorry, that one was a little rough.”

Gary rubbed his forehead with a slanted smile, “Remember I don’t butt heads with anything that has horns.”

“Oh pbbbbbbth! Hey, what am I thinking about now? – And don’t use the mind thingie powers, I want you to guess –”

“Well the mind thingie isn’t working right now anyway so hmmmmm,” Gary raised a smile with an eyebrow, “Is it food?”

“Rats, okay point there, anyone could guess that – how about now?”

“Still food.”

“Okay – okay, you’ll never guess this one” –
“Pokemon.”

Ash pursed his lips and squinted his eyes at Gary, “….Are you sure you’re not using the mind thingie?”

“Ash that’s like, 80% of you.”

Ash still pursed his lips, “…..How about now” –

“Egads,” Gary playfully loosed his collar, “I can’t say in front of present company.”

Ash pushed Gary’s shoulder playfully away with his hand, “You’re cheaaaaatiiiiiiiing” –

“How so?” Gary chuckled, he pushed Ash up to face him and touched their chins together with a mewl face, “By knowing you so well?” Gary kissed Ash’s nose, “I have your entire bio-code, your aura memorized, remember?”

Ash blushed and pulled away, “Okay fine, but this has made me realize that I really need to get more hobbies.”

“You still have flower crafting,” said Ritchie, “Remember all those flower crowns we used to make? We need to get back in to that” –

“You made such beautiful ones for all of our pokemon that one time,” added Gary, “Remember?”

“Pikapi!”

“Brebre!”

“Oh yeah…” some light came into Ash’s eyes, he tried to reach for his flower crown on the table, but his sides weren’t having it at the moment, Ash made grabby hands, “Gimme please – ”

“Here Love,” Gary reached over to the table, grabbed Ash’s flower crown, and put it on his head, Ash giving a mewl smile of his own.

MHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHGGGGGGGGGGGGGHE LOOKS SO FUCKING CUTE RIGHT NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOW –

“I’d love for you to show me how to make some really proper ones,” said Gary, “We have plenty of stock here for right now.”

More light came into Ash’s eyes, “Yeah, that’d be great! Oh Gary, I really think you’ll look awesome with bluebonnets!”

“You think so? I think I’m more of a buttercup guy.”

“Hmmmm, that could work, oh! Lilies! And some carnations to really bring out your eyes” –

“Carnations?”

“Yes, oh yes, and oh! Magnolias! You’d be sooooo pretty!”

“Well, I bet I could rock any flower to be honest with you.”

“No, you can’t pull off Rock Soapwort worth a flip.”
“Ey!”

Ritchie, Gardevoir and Pikachu shared an internally deeply grateful sigh of relief as the warmth surrounding Ash and Gary radiated off themselves like a light all its own.

“Hey you think, that maybeeeeee,” Ash poked his flower crown, “Maybe these flower crowns can help my thoughts not be so sad so often, like some kind of good feels antennae?”

Gary poked the crown too, “Couldn’t hurt to try.”

“And then we can get the Link* out!”

“Well Ash, Gardevoir is the number one Human Health Transfer pokemon in the world, if anyone can help clear the Link*’s gunk of out of you for good, it can.”

Gardevoir perked up, “Oh! Quite now Ash, well now after all this time we still haven’t been properly introduced! My full name is Selena Gardevoir, I’m all the way from Lumiose City in Kalos!”

Ash blinked, “Woah, you came all the way over here, just for me?”

“Gary was the one who called and notified me that my services were greatly needed, and I accepted,” Gardevoir smiled warmly.

Ash turned towards Gary just in time for Gary to face-plant yet another kiss right into his forehead, “A lot of people worked very hard just for you Love, Gardevoir, Ritchie, the Ranger Team, Audino,” –

“Oh especially Audino,” Gardevoir cut in –

“Bibi, the incredible medical staff here, Tracey, Misty, and Brock, our pokemon – you’re mom – we all pulled together just for you.”

But I don’t deserve this.

Ash flicked his flower crown, *Work please.*

FLOWER POWER: DIVERSION!

Ash’s stomach suddenly made a terrific grumble, “Ah, I’m hungry.”

“Wow no kidding,” smiled Ritchie poking Ash’s stomach.

“What would you like?” asked Gary.

Ash patted his stomach, “Uuuuum, I’m not sure of what I can handle still yet, I mean I could barely soup the soup.”

Gary grabbed his com, “Tell me what you really want, and I’ll have it delivered via Pelipper’s.”

“….Anything I want?”

“Anything you want.”

“And if you can’t finish it,” added Ritchie with a grin, “I’ll be happy to down the rest!”
Gary rolled his eyes with Umbreon.

The rest of the morning passed peacefully enough, Ash, not being too adventurous, asked for some more soup, however he wasn’t able to finish it again, and Ritchie, like he said, downed the rest. After that, they all sat down in a circle, Gary, Ritchie, Gardevoir, with Pikachu, Sparky, and Umbreon, and made flower crowns, or tried to as in Gary’s case.

*Fucking bend twigs, BEND, BEND TO MY WILL – DON’T LET THE DAYDREAM DIE BY THE HARSH TRUTH OF REALITY –*

“Oh I WISH I had my com,” Ash whined, “– I want a picture!”

“No, this is crap with twigs” –

“It is not Gary, I love it, that’s your first one!”

“I got you fam,” said Ritchie, and he whipped out his own com and snapped a picture of Gary’s sad attempt before he could hide it.

Medical staff came in and out to check on proceedings with Ash, of which Gardevoir spoke with off to the side, Gary looked up periodically and caught center glances, smiles, and one frown. *Wow screw you then.*

Then again, how is the hospital faring with all the turmoil it’s had recently? You know what, if action from you is needed, you would have been told by now. Mary said she would handle everything, and is most likely doing a great job at it too along with Gardevoir, and you know Ash’s friends are doing things, and here you are, just, existing. But never mind, spending time with Ash and making sure he gets better is your top priority here. That is what you are doing.

Huuuuuuuuuggghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

Mismagius stopped by with a Rotom as it did some machine maintenance and made a quick whispy flower bracelet for Ash, “Awww, it’s lovely Mismagius!”

“I want one,” Ritche pouted, and Mismagius made him a bracelet to match Ash’s, “Sweet, twinsies!”

*You stop that >:'D*

Later still, Tracey and Misty joined them with Azumaril fresh out of the pokemon center, followed by Audino, Brock, Ash’s Charizard, Lopunny, Mary, Thomas and –

*UUUUUUUGGGGHH MAX – YOU HEATHEN!!!!!! AND YOUR FLOWER CROWN SUCKS ASS BY THE WAY, IT JUST DOES – IT’S AN ASS SUCKING FLOWER CROWN, AND IT SUCKS ASS –*

“You want some help there mate?” –

*BITE ME YOU FUCKING FLOWER COCK DX<*

– and then Mrs. Ketchum arrived on the scene, and put everyone else’s attempts to shame –

“I’m keeping this one sweetie,” said Mrs. Ketchum, “And I’m going to show it off to everyone in town! Especially that Betty Holly lady and her rosebush garden – well who’s top heavy now Holly~? Ohohohohoho!”
The room looked to Ash who let just his head drop, “That’s nice mom.”

And when night rolled around, Nurse Layla and Mismagius came in to talk with Gardevoir briefly outside the room as the boys were left to themselves once again and settled in for the evening.

Ash rolled onto his back and stared at the ceiling, “Gary, how much longer do you think I’m going to be in here?”

“In the hospital?”

“Yeah.”

“To be honest I’m not sure, but I would think till we get the Link* out at least.”

“I would think so too,” said Ritchie, “You’re the first of your kind with this case, they’re going to keep tabs on you and stuff.”

“Like some kind of experiment then? That’s justifiable at least.”

Ritchie and Gary made a face, Ritchie spoke faster, “I didn’t mean it like that.”

“No, no,” Ash rubbed his face, “It just, I feel off about….about…….causing everyone so much trouble.”

THIS AGAAAAAAAAIN –

“You’re not causing trouble Ash,” said Gary, “What makes you say that?”

“I saw those medical people that Gardevoir spoke with, some of them didn’t look too happy” –

“They could be upset from a whole bunch of things though Ash,” said Ritchie, “Like, maybe their coffee sucked or they stubbed their toe on something, it’s not you.”

“They looked directly at me.”

“So?” said Ritchie, “Can you read their minds? No.”

But Gary, you can read Ash’s right now! AND. *CLAP* HE. *CLAP*. BLAMES. *CLAP* HIMSELF. *CLAP* FOR *CLAP* EVERYTHING! *CLAP* AGAIN!!!

Gary felt Ash clamp up inside.

“Nevermind” –

NONONONONO YOU SPEAKETH –

“Ash what are you feeling?” asked Gary.

“Nevermind.”

BOY DON’T START THIS –

Ritchie sat up, and even though Ash was glancing off to the side, he moved until Ash looked at him, “You really feel responsible for some bad things happening?” Ash was silent. “Why? What makes you feel responsible?”

“Nevermind.”
“Ash,” Gary’s voice was a bit sterner, and he was ready for some pushback if it came, “You have to talk to us, what did we just talk about today?”

Ash made a sour face still looking at the blankets, “That I need to get this stuff out, I shouldn’t hold it in” –

“Because if you do, it will only make the Link* inside you stronger” –

“Listen,” said Ritchie quickly, “I get it, you know I do, but, trust us, there is no reason to place all this blame on y” –

“Are you the one who’s very EXISTENCE is making like difficult for people?!” Ash snapped.

“Wh-what” –

Gary grabbed Ash’s shoulder, “Ash,” –

But Ash shook off Gary touch, “I’m not stupid!” –

“No one is saying you are” –

“The legends wouldn’t have had that fight on the rooftop if it wasn’t for me, that Smeargle wouldn’t have infiltrated the hospital if it wasn’t for me – yes I know what happened – me just being here is giving other people and pokemon cause to do terrible things!”

“But Ash,” Ritchie shook, be it from fear or otherwise, “You can’t control these things that other people and pokemon do! That is not your fault at all! Please, just listen” –

“You want me to get this stuff out, well I’m getting it out!” Ash snapped again, “No matter how surrounded by you guys I am, I feel like I’m completely alone – everyone keeps trying to make me feel better, but I only feel worse! I know that doesn’t make sense, and I don’t, care, I’m trying, I really, truly am, I’m trying and big surprise, everyone’s expectations of what I’m supposed to do, much less feel, are no where what you want!”

“Ash,” Gary placed his hand over Ash’s, “Take a moment, take a breath, no one here is pressuring you to heal faster” – Gary felt Ash’s hand make a fist –

“We just want you to get better,” said Ritchie with a waver developing in his voice, “What is it that makes you feel so alone around us? Do you feel alone right now?”

All Gary could feel inside Ash was a searing, growling anger that was growing more and more irrational by the second –

Ash looked to Ritchie with a blank glare, “No I don’t, and you know what, in fact” –

**Hoe don’t do it** –

“Your existence is” – Gary clamped his hand over Ash’s mouth because if he said what came next he’d never forgive himself –

*Oh my god.*

Ritchie’s expression came to a crashing halt, “M-my existence what?”
Gary felt the searing anger in Ash extinguish instantly with a cold dose of reality – Pikachu and Sparky both looked like they had been slapped in the face by this turn of events with their Trainers –

“No no, Gary,” Ritchie faked a smile, “take your hand off his mouth, I want to hear what you were going to say Ash.”

Gary removed his hand, but Ash was frozen.

"My existence what Ash? Am I hurting you, just by being near you? Do I upset you? My concern for you?”

Gary felt Ash’s insides plummet to the lowest he’s ever felt –

“What the matter, meowth got your tongue? What were you going to say about me?”

And he felt Ash drop even further as the both of them watched tears form in Ritchie’s eyes –

“Can you only say it behind my back? Is that it? What you really think of me” –

SPEAK ASH! TELL HIM YOU DID NOT MEAN THAT RIGHT. NOW!!!

But Ash was still frozen, Gary could feel a tumultuous amount of expression, a shrieking apology, all of it screaming to cry out, but it was all blocked by something so cold –

Gary tried to intervene, “Ritchie, it was an accident” –

“Oh trust me I know all about accidents, I mean, I just exist” –

AH FUCK –

Ritchie, holding a shaken glance, swallowed as a tear dropped off, “Your very existence hurts people huh? What would I ever know about that right?”

Ruh roh ono;;;;;;

Ritchie moved to get off the bed, “Well, I certainly don’t want to hurt you any further,” and swiftly hauled himself toward the door –

Gary looked quickly between Ritchie’s leaving form and Ash’s frozen one, “Ritchie, wait” – but Ritchie was already out the door and gone. Sparky looked sadly to Ash and left quietly after its Trainer.

The silence was screaming.

…..It feels like a constant in the world just crumbled….whereas if Pikachu and Ash ever split, the sky would fall, and thus, if Ritchie and Ash ever split, the seas would boil. Such a turn over changes the very fabric of reality, and the absence in the room is painfully, PAINFULLY obvious….Gary….You know for a FACT that Ritchie is of the LAST people Ash would EVER want to hurt, indirectly or otherwise!

Pikachu looked at Ash with ears flat back. Ash was reeling, he rubbed his chest and felt like something had been stabbed directly through his heart, Gardevoir rushed back into the room, closing the door swiftly behind it, “What on earth happened?”

It finally all came spilling out of Ash, “I didn’t mean it! Oh my god, someone please go make sure he’s okay! Please, please Gardevoir go after him – he shouldn’t be alone” –
“Sparky is with him,” said Gardevoir in a level tone.

Ash dropped his head in his hands, curling up into a ball of shame, “I lashed out, I lashed out like how she did! I know what I need to do, but instead I did that? Hurt him!?”

“Take a breath Ash,” said Gardevoir taking a seat on the bed next to him, “Count inside, decompress yourself.”

“Can you feel if Ritchie is okay!?”

“He needs to decompress too.”

You know what Gary? Ritchie just maaaaaaaaybe has been burying shit down too! Which seems to be the going rate for everyone at the moment because these pent up moments of sheer frustration and grief aren’t going to stir themselves!

Gary pulled Ash into a hug as words and tears spilled out of him, “I hate this, I hate this, I hate this, I hate this,” Ash dribbled over and over into Gary’s shoulder. Gardevoir began rubbing Heal Pulses* into Ash’s sides, Gary feeling Ash’s heart beat with bludgeoning pain. On the table, Gary’s com rang with a text notification. Single handedly, Gary reached for his com and opened it up to a text message from Tracey as he cradled Ash with his free arm,

**Tracey:** What happened with Ritchie?

Gary pursed his lips.

**Gary:** Hi Misty

**Tracey:** :/ It’s me Gary.

**Tracey:** We came upon Ritchie with Sparky in the hallway, Misty is with them, Ritchie is a total wreck :(  

*Goddammit*…

**Gary:** Ash’s venting took a wrong turn.

**Gary:** He had a guilt trip and essentially snapped at Ritchie.

**Gary:** Anger got the better of him.

**Tracey:** Awww :(  

**Tracey:** Well Ritchie is having a guilt trip of his own right now.
Tracey: I don’t think he’ll be back over there tonight…

Ya kinda figured.

Ash’s head moved up, “Is that Misty?”

“It’s Tracey,” Gary responded, “Ritchie is with them, think he’ll be over there with them for tonight.”

“Okay….is he okay?”

Gary: Is Ritchie okay?

Tracey: No, not at all :( 

Gary paused, but one glance from Gardevoir said loud and clear, ‘tell him the truth.’

“No…he’s not okay.”

“C-can I talk to him?”

Gary: Ash wants to talk to Ritchie

Tracey: Um

Tracey: Hold on a sec

It felt like forever, but they finally received a call from Tracey’s com, Gary handed it over quickly to Ash who answered immediately, “Hello? Ritchie?” his voice sounded croaked and shaken.

Gary had to listen very carefully, and after a long pause, he finally heard, “I’m here.”

“Are you okay?”

“Sure. Why wouldn’t I be.”

This is going well. *

*HEADDESK*.

“Listen, I didn’t mean to snap at youlikethat, I’mosososososososorry – I–I didn’t mean it, to come out” –

“It’s okay.”

*HEADDESK* *HEADDESK* *HEADDESK* – the sheer amount of emotion you feel trying to claw itself out of Ash’s gut like some caliginous angsty alien FUCKING HURTS! Your chest feels like its being crushed! Ash feels like he’s going to be crushed! How much he wants to show Ritchie
how sorry he truly is, how he wants to care for him, how –

“You should get to bed,” came Ritchie’s voice, “You need rest.”

Ash had to take a moment to gather his voice back, holding the phone away from his mouth as an unhinged sob escaped him, a crack going right down the center of his complex, “Okay, you too, get some good, good rest okay? I’m so, so, sorry…”

Another pause, then, “Goodnight Ash.”

“Goodnight Ritchie.”

And Ritchie hung up.

Welp.

Ash dropped to the side and would have hit the bedrail had Gardevoir and Gary not caught him, Gardevoir gathering Ash up to curl into Gary’s arms as he cried, and cried, and cried, and cried.

This sucks Gary. This suck ass. God you feel sick. All this turmoil, the way Ritchie spoke, you need to grind your friendship level up big time with Ritchie because as much as you’d like to think he was playing around with that ‘tragic backstory’ thing, its becoming more and more clear that something fucked up did happen to him and that’s super fucking sad for the sadness in Ash to prey upon him like that :(.

Ash coughed and spoke through a sob, “Gardevoir, please, can you make sure Ritchie will be okay?”

Gardevoir rubbed Ash’s back, “Sure thing. Mismagius is on call tonight too I believe, I’ll go notify it.” Gardevoir got up and left evenly, but Ash and Gary saw Nurse Layla going after it before the door closed all the way.

Gary placed a lingering kiss on Ash’s forehead, “Ash, look at me.” And although tear stricken, Ash did, Gary ran his hand through Ash’s hair, “You’ve known Ritchie for how many years now?”

“Um,” Ash wiped his eyes, “Eight.”

“Eight years. And you two have fought before, right?”

“I guess? But nothing, nothing ever felt like what I just did” –

“Ritchie will be okay. You apologized. He just needs some space. We’ve fought” –

“But I don’t like it when we fight, I hate it, I hate it” – Ash buried himself into Gary.

It’s so easy for the anger to consume. You know, you’ve felt it before Gary, even at the loved one you now hold in your arms.

“I don’t like it either, but we’re still together right?”

Ash sniffled, “Yeah.”

“So what happened right now with Ritchie, yes it sucks, but it’s a bump in the road against the miles, and miles, and miles you’ve spent together.”

Ash gave a small sigh against Gary’s chest.
“Let’s get some rest, things will be better in the morning Love.”

Gary heard Ash give another shuddering sigh, “Okay.”

Pikachu and Umbreon settled at the edge of the bed again, Umbreon letting Pikachu snuggle all up against it. Gary felt Ash’s body fully relax against him as he stroked Ash from his head, all the way down his back in smooth caresses till Ash’s breathing came long calm deep breaths, and not long after, filled with exhaustion from the gauntlet of emotions run through him, Gary fell asleep.

***

Gary was up before Ash the next morning. There wasn’t anyone else in the room except for Pikachu and a Rotom, the both of them chatting away in their own distinct language. Ash was curled up around himself like a ball next to Gary’s chest, like a stray creature that found just enough warmth for itself from the bitter cold. Gary could see on Ash’s face dark circles formed under his eyes and tear marks, either stains from last night, or fresh ones from his dreams or otherwise.

*He must not have slept too well,* Gary sighed internally, running his hand through Ash’s black hair, an act so common now, yet not once did it lose its meaning of affection Gary had for Ash.

“Pika pi.”

Gary looked up to Pikachu who pointed to a tray on a rolling table near their bed, and on it, was a small package of chocolate cookies with a handwritten message on the tag. Gary plucked up the small package, ‘Feel better soon Ash, Ritchie.’

*Did they talk?*

“Pikachu, did they talk?”

Pikachu shook its head, and made the motion that Ash and Gary were sleeping when Ritchie must have come in – but Pikachu dismissed the idea that it was Ritchie as well when it signed and spelled out as best it could with its little paws, ‘M, I, S, T, Y.’

“Oh,” said Gary.

Yeah you know some letter signs at least, you may not be fluent at all in sign language, but you know ‘M’ and whatever four letters to follow usually was her 8/ In one particular fight, Ash spelled out her name like that when you were agitated with something she did, and just, glared at you. God that was a terrible fight. Buuuut taht’s in the paaaaaaaast nooooooooooow – untilitearsitsuglyheadathowhorriblehorribleHORRIBLEHORRIBLEHORRIBLE –

“Bre bre.”

Gary was snapped out of the clamp of his mind from Umbreon’s chirp. The dark type jumped up on the bed with Pikachu, giving Rotom a couple chirps to which the ghost type replied with some chirps of its own. Gary smiled at the chattering pokemon, he ran his hand over Ash’s body easily with how tightly he was curled up.

*That can’t be good for his circulation now…*
Gary scooped up Ash, Ash grumbling in his sleep, as Gary repositioned him so his legs and arms weren’t so pent up against themselves, essentially, Gary just had Ash wrap his body around his longer one, Ash almost immediately settling down with the scent of Gary to comfort him once more.

*The height difference you have on Ash, it’s not a large distance by any means, but just right enough for you to rest your head upon his.*

Gary looked up from snuggling Ash, “Hey Pikachu, you saw Misty right?”

Pikachu nodded, “Pikachupi.”

“Did she say anything if Ritchie was okay?”

Pikachu shook its head, and pointed to the cookies.

“She just dropped off the cookies?”

Pikachu nodded.

*Fair enough, I mean you guys were sleeping, and had a hard enough night was it was….Ritchie will be alright, he has Sparky with him, and you know Ash’s friends will be there for him, as well as his mother…..Hoooo boooooy…..Maybe…maybe she, if anyone, can let Ritchie know that Ash didn’t mean what he said….*

The door to Ash’s room opened with Gardevoir entering, looking like whatever rest it managed to catch up on had been drained from it in one fell swoop.

“Gardevoir? You okay?” Gary asked.

“Oh yes, yes,” said Gardevoir waving off the concern, it looked to Ash, “He had a rough night, I’m glad you were able to sleep peacefully at least.”

*D8!!! You must have slept like a rock to not have heard Ash in distress!* 

“What happened?”

“He woke up on and off, too concerned about Ritchie, but Ritchie needs some time right now, *away* from Ash, and Ash felt so *crushed,*” Gardevoir sighed, “This is very difficult for him to process, I knew they were close, but perhaps I underestimated how much….We need to help Ash let what he did go, this is adding to his guilt and that is only going to make the Link* stronger.*”

*FuuuuUuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuck….*

“Maybe if Ritchie would just talk to him” –

“I wish it were that easy” –

“Why isn’t it?! *They’re best friends,* I can’t believe Ritchie” –

*“Do not place any blame on Ritchie,”* said Gardevoir in a sudden stern tone that took Gary off guard, “These matters of the heart are quite the painful ones, but it is an important lesson with what is at stake here.”

Gary dropped his gaze.

*Well….Gardevoir isn’t wrong….You felt it Gary, that rage, that anger that just swelled up in Ash like*
“The pain the sadness exudes can tear down those nearest you, as horrible as last night was,”
Gardevoir took a deep inhale, “it is very important for Ash to process this. I know that he knows his
actions can cause harm indirectly or otherwise, but last night was a grim reminder that those emotions
can still get the better of him. Today will be spent in observing the Link’s further responses to Ash’s
processing.”

Gary let out a sigh through his nose, “…Will Ritchie come by? Eventually?”

“In time, he will,” said Gardevoir, “Just right now, some space is needed. On that note, how are you
doing this morning?”

“I’m fine.” –

LIES –

“Have you spoken with Ritchie?” said Gary.

Gardevoir pursed its lips, “Yes I have, he’s okay, he’s with Mary and Thomas at the moment to
attend to matters dealing with some leads on the Onelings” –

NOPE NOPE NOPE RED FLAG RED FLAG RED FLAG –

“He’s not going to pursue them are they? Gardevoir, god, I don’t know if Ash, or any of us could
deal with” –

“I doubt any of the leads even go that far, all they’re doing is investigative work to help out law
enforcement on the case.”

THANK, GOD, YES, JUST LET THE POLICE DO THEIR JOB –

Gary let out a sigh of relief, “I hope he stops by today.”

“Well see,” said Gardevoir.

Well Gary. The day came, and went. No Ritchie. Plenty of friends and family, plenty of food from
Mrs. Ketchum that Ash couldn’t eat save for barely a quarter of a bowl of soup. Plenty of talking,
plenty of tip-toeing, plenty of this, and that, all served into his bloodstream through a vein of glass
that felt like it would shatter into a gazillion pieces if touched and cut up his body as it was pumped
through every inch of him. Good times! It was really interesting feeling Ash’s emotions strangle
themselves under the guise a smile! NOT. You felt it in Ash that he knew everyone would keep their
distance since he lashed out at Ritchie – but that wasn’t the case at all! You heard it in their voices,
in their actions, how much everyone loves Ash and wants to help him….You’d be lying though if you
didn’t admit that you’re kinda hurt too. You’re right here, but with how Ash was today, you may as
well not have been. He was receptive, and talkative, and ooooooh so distant himself, the ‘I’m here
but totally not here’ distant because it’s the same shit he pulled with you before and you’re not dumb
and/or blind enough to fall for it again.

Gardevoir did mention that the Link didn’t advance, so at least today wasn’t a total loss because
cheezits it sure felt like that to you, especially after Ash asked where Ritchie had been and Misty told
him that he got caught up in his work and couldn’t come by – which would NEVER, EVER have
been a problem before! Considering up till now Ritchie was always just a hair away from Ash! So
Ash replied with a simple “Oh” and you felt Ash’s insides freeze instantly. That was fun! That was
fun feeling Ash die a little inside! But hey it’s all good!
For what its worth, Ash did keep himself together today (SOMEWHA, AHAHAHAHAHAHAHA), despite how utterly, UTTERLY awful he felt, of which, the stupid Transfer Effects kept patching a feed into you all fucking day. Even if he was just choking everything back, Ash did talk, and he was sad, and he did process. It’s a fucking start even under these horrid conditions, you can’t complain. Even if he is forcing himself. Even if he is gutting himself to do so. Even if he bludgeoning himself internally and bleeding emotionally all over you.

You can handle this, right?

Not to mention, but Gardevoir is looking more concerned than usual.

Anywho, the saving grace of the day came at the very end of the day when Ritchie finally made some form of contact by texting Ash through your com and telling him that he was sorry for not coming by. He didn’t mention ‘when’ he would be by though, and Ash didn’t ask when he would be by either. They just texted for a little bit, broken pieces of a conversation, pretending for the other that everything was fine – because you felt, Gary, that Ash could just jump up and scream at any moment! But he didn’t, so, yay, AND SO, at least, he got it through his head that it’s okay for this space. It’s okay to regroup. Hurray, huzzah, toss some confetti because you feel like you could sleep for a hundred years. God you feel like you ran a fucking marathon and all you did today was walk and sit.

But, be honest here, you took a mental beating today and only three people saw through your cover-up: Gardevoir, Mrs. Ketchum, and Umbreon – because goddamit, you’re going to have this bite you in the ass because did you talk to Ash about it? NOPE. Did he ask how you were today? YUP, and you know what you did? YOU LIED. That was the second time Gardevoir looked like it wanted to slap you, the first time was back in Kalos when you forgot to check your privilege in being a human.

****

The next day Gary was up before Ash again and Gardevoir instructed him to get out of Ash’s room for a little bit to decompress himself because the dreams it ate from him were rather concerning. Gary refused at first, until Gardevoir picked him up with its powers and chucked him out somewhat ungracefully, then he had no choice.

“My com?”

Gardevoir barely opened the door and chucked out Gary’s com into his hands.

Well at least Pikachu and Umbreon are still in there with him while he sleeps :/

Irritated, agitated, and everything in between, Gary went down to the floor waiting room already occupied by a couple of other people, members of other families with sick and injured loved ones. He ignored the glances and whispers, and served himself some coffee while brewing in his mind what on earth could be more productive aside from helping Ash, and just as quickly came to the conclusion that he was about to fall ass-backwards into a mental state that would not be productive to anyone.

You know how useful you were before in being a total emotional wreck. Hey, hey Gary, want to hear something funny? You HAVE meds for anxiety. No really you do! You only take them though when things get really bad, but have you taken them since this whole fiasco started? Hm?
Gary looked at his unsteady hand holding his coffee cup, seeing small tremors reverberating in the liquid. Gary took a deep breath, feeling his nerves tingle, as if he was blowing on embers, each outlet threatening a spark, a flame, and then…he felt Gardevoir’s presence enter his mind.

*I’m sorry, but I have to make this clear about decompressing, no one is exempt here… On that note, are you upset with me?*

YES –

*No,* Gary replied. *I understand Gardevoir, really I do, I know you’re dealing with a lot too. Just, please take care of him, and if Ash’s asks, please tell him I’ll be back in about an hour.*

*Will do,* and Gary felt Gardevoir’s presence retreat out of his mind.

Gary finished his coffee, then walked about the hospital hoping to run into friends or family and friends it was in being his own Blastoise and Arcanine, “Hey, you two wouldn’t happen to know if Thomas and Alakazam already left for work?”

Blastoise and Arcanine led Gary down to the third floor and into a much larger break room where some Rangers had all gathered –

*BUT NO RITCHIE GODDAMIT COME ON – well Mary’s not here either, whatEVER – ah AH but there’s Thomas! :D*

“Hey, hey Thomas!”

“Oh, hello Gary, what are you doing here?”

“I need a favor, do you have Alakazam with you?”

“Yes, they’re around, why?”

“Can I borrow them? For just a-about five minuets, are you guys fixing to head out?”

“No, not for about another hour or so, we’re waiting for Mary, what do you need Alakazam for?”

“Just to take me home real quick, I need to get some things.”

In no time Thomas called his Alakazam over, with what Gary wasn’t sure of, perhaps his mind, but Alakazam did as Gary wished, and accompanied him as it Teleported* them back to their little cabin in the woods, just outside the front door.

*It feels cold Gary.*

“Wow, impressive Teleportation* there,” said Gary as he fumbled about his pockets for his keys and was just about to curse himself to high heaven for not having them when he dug deep into his zipped pocket and found them in there, *Thank god* – Gary unlocked their door, swung it open and was immediately hit with a foul, foul smell as if something had died inside, “Oh my god, what is that, stench” – a pinched nose investigation found that it was the groceries Gary had bought to make Ash’s lunch oh so very long ago and not some unpleasant intruder that got stuck inside.

*It feels really cold in here Gary.*

Gary moved to clean up the mess, but Alakazam acted faster and swooped it all up in one go with its
powers and into a garbage bag, “Thanks.” Gary walked swiftly over to their bathroom as Alakazam disposed of the trash, “You know, I trained an Alakazam too, but, one day it got sick, and couldn’t use it powers like it could before,” Gary sorted about their medicine cabinet with a little baggy in hand, “Soooooo I looked into some research with how psychic pokemon produce their power, and stumbled onto, auras.” All the while Gary collected things from their bathroom, Alakazam listened respectfully. “From there the rest is history I guess, bioluminescence, auras, same deal, then bio-codes, and finally, Human Health Transfer. The idea I had originally for Human Health Transfer was not for a pokemon to assist a human, but for a human to assist a pokemon. I guess when faced with a reality that you don’t want to accept, suddenly your horizons get very, very wide. I know in the end I wanted something impossible, but for the research I did do, so much benefit still came out of it, even if, I couldn’t help who I originally wanted to….My Alakazam is fine by the way, it can’t use its powers at all now, but it lives over at my lab and assists in ways that it is able to. I would like to, one day find a way to give Alakazam its powers back, but, it is happy with the life it leads, it promised me that….Kind, of funny, it’s the one with the problem and yet I was the one that needed reassurance everything was going to be okay.”

Gary twisted the baggy and stuffed it into a little pouch with other bathroom items, “Alright,” Gary looked up and saw Alakazam at the doorway with an understanding look, “Hey, thanks for taking me, I’m going to give our a home a quick glance over, pack some much needed clothing, then I’ll be ready to go back.”

Alakazam nodded, and of which there wasn’t much for Gary to check. With their cabin’s location there would be a very, very slim chance of it getting broken into –

And even if it somehow did Gary, you guys’ most valuable items are locked away at your lab, or Ash’s mom has keep of them. Kinda like, even you weren’t expecting to last long out here in the wilds, even with him…blaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah – OH! But there is IS one thing you absolutely need right now.

Gary walked over their bedroom, opened up the top drawer of their nightstand and pulled out a little box.

Yeah, yes, yes, YES, this can totally come in handy!

Gary slipped the box into the bag, did one more quick look over, minus their still broken heating unit, then trotted back over to Alakazam, ready to be taken back to Viridian Memorial.

Once back, Gary couldn’t help but scope the room where the Rangers were for Ritchie again, but still, alas, he wasn’t there, Mary was however, but she didn’t look like she had time to sit and chat with Gary as she conversed with the other Rangers. Gary thanked Thomas and Alakazam again and let the Rangers be (as much as he wanted to eavesdrop there were some odd glances that made him just a tad uneasy). He decided instead to see if he could track down Tracey, Brock, or Misty for some intel on what exactly has been going on without him.

Because you know the last time you skipped out on intel, you abruptly learned that the hospital was placed on lockdown from a fucking Oneling threatening Ash’s life, let’s not let that happen again shall we – texting is a thing though, just send out a blanket message or something –

Gary traversed around the hospital some more, found Audino, found his pokemon again, finally asked some of the staff whose general response was that they were either busy helping assorting resources to the hospital, or with safety measures since apparently there’s a media storm going around about the Onelings?

You know what, color you not surprised. As long as Ash is left in peace let things turn as they may,
cheezits. UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUGH, God even if you ran into Max, that would be fine, come to think of it you didn’t see him with the Ranger group either, hmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm – maybe he and Ritchie are out on a run together, or maybe Ritchie has been kidnapped by the Onelings Gary and no one has noticed yet Gary – what if they’re holding Ritchie captive to make Ash give himself up Gary? What if they’re torturing him right now and NO ONE OOF –

Gary wasn’t watching where he was going and bumped right into a young woman with frizzly, frizzly red hair, amber eyes, and dressed in full Ranger gear, looking in general like she had just headbutted the season of Autumn in the face –

“Oh my goodness, I’m so sorry,” Gary startled –

“Oh you’re fine, you’re fine, Mr. Oak,” the Ranger put her hands on her hips with a slanted smile, “Got a lot on your plate there, no biggie” –

“Still, uh, um” –

“The name’s Rose!”

“Rose? Rose, Rose – hey, you wouldn’t have worked with Ritchie and Ash before have you? Are you the one that does the karaoke?”

“Yup, that’s me! Haha, ah, yeah, I’m totally going to beat Ritchie this year’ –

Doubt it.

Rose cleared her throat generously, “Got my pipes all nice and shiny!”

Don’t care.

Gary titled his head in feign timidity, “Youuuuuuuu, wouldn’t happen to know where Ritchie is currently, would you?”

“Oh totally, he’s helping out a Pewter City League Official, what’s his face, Brock is it, I think.”

Well, well at least he isn’t being tortured except by Brock’s infamous taste in music, may Ritchie’s eardrums rest in peace –

“Hm, well at least he isn’t with Max” –

Rose let out a sudden bark of laughter, “Oh no, not in a million years! Well, at least not now,” Rose looked away, “maybe back then, before, stuff.” and then side glanced Gary. Gary gave a flat look in response.

FINE, YOU’LL BITE, THIRSTY ASS HOE FOR ANYTHING ON RITCHIE’S PAST –

Gary tilted his head again with a fake surprised expression, “What stuff?”

Rose crossed her arms, her demeanor doing almost a complete 180 in tone and attitude, “Two and half years ago, one of our very best, best of the best, top of the Region, a fine, fine Ranger named Dannie, disappeared. They were never found. No body, no answers, no reason. It tore a huge rift between the Kanto, Johto, and Tohjo groups, but Ash,” Rose face softened, “Bless his little heart, I don’t think anybody realized it at the time since Ash was a then newbie with Ritchie, but he kept us all together, or at least the best he could…Sometimes words can do far greater damage than any
physical strike.”

:(

“Rose…you don’t think…”

“Why do you think so many of us volunteered to be here Mr. Oak? If the Onelings did take Dannie away, they’re going to have to stop time itself to get another chance at Ash.” Rose tipped her hat to Gary as she moved to leave, “Be seein’ you ‘round.”

“Yeah, laters.”

….You have a feeling you know too much now…uuuuuugh…...and, the more you think about it Gary, the more you see, like really, really see…there really isn’t much for you to do to help, aside from, kissing Ash’s boo-boos. You could research his boo-boos. Speaking of which, you do need to talk to Daisy again and get some lab stuff in order….you could also talk to Alakazam too.

Gary was on his way to check on Mrs. Ketchum when seemingly out of the blue in the hallway, he came across Sparky!

“Ah, hey, Sparky!”

Sparky, wearing a little med pouch and a poke-translator, turned to Gary with a big smile, “Hello there Gary!”

“Got yourself a translator I see, nice, very nice.”

“Oh this is just lent to me by the medical staff here,” said Sparky, “I’m on therapy duty today with some patients, anything to help out the hospital you know?”

“Yeah, no, that’s great, that’s good news….Um…Sparky, I want to know if, I mean if you know –“

Sparky let out a deep sigh, “Listen, I already know where this is headed” –

“So why hasn’t Ritchie come to see Ash?”

Sparky looked sadly to Gary, “I don’t think you understand how much Ritchie has been hurt by that comment, especially coming from someone whom Ritchie has opened up to the most” –

“But Ash has apologized! He regrets it so much Sparky” –

“I’m sure he does, he made a mistake, I understand, and I, along with Ash’s friends are trying to soothe over his heart, help him to be level again.” Sparky looked down slightly, “I’ve had to double his medication in a span of 8 hours, I haven’t had to do that in about 2 years.”

And once Ash finds out about that, the Link* will kill him for sure :’”’D

“He had a bad, bad episode Gary, really bad, thank goodness Misty, Tracey, and Mismagius were able to help us that night.”

Gary himself felt a tad dizzy with this new information.

“Listen,” said Sparky, “Ritchie will go see Ash soon. He is getting better, shoot, you might see him before hand if he and Brock get back early enough, buuuuuut, well, League meetings tend to zig and zag on topics so,” Sparky scratched the back of its head apologetically, “Who knows?”
“No, I feel you there, thanks for the update Sparky.”

“Oh no problem” – a nurse called Sparky over – “Well be seeing you around!”

“Yeah.”

Gary checked on Ash’s mother still in a room of her own, wondering why she was still ordered for bed rest, but Mrs. Ketchum made light of it all, insisting the doctor just wants to be safe, and before anyone could really spark up a conversation, Gary excused himself in saying that he hoped she would feel better soon, and that there were still some more rounds he needed to make before getting back to Ash –

_BLUH BLUH BLUH WHY IS SHE NOT GETTING BETTER, PLEASE GET BETTER MOMMA KETCHUM –_

Gary back tracked over to Audino and asked it if it could do another session with Mrs. Ketchum and to focus on microscopic wear on her bio-code and to share with him the results.

_You’re not a doctor by any means Gary, but god just please get her better Audino, just get her better please Audio. You know Ash’s bio-code by heart, and if anything, it’s the least you can do to see if there might be something you actually CAN help with, especially with momma Ketchum!_

By then Gary looked at his com and looked again at how an hour and forty-eight minuets had suddenly passed by –

_FUCK WHAT THE HELL –_

Gary half sprinted back to the floor Ash was on –

_FUCKING 8TH FLOOR BECAUSE OF COURSE, OF FUCKING COURSE – FUCK YOU ELEVATORS – FUCK YOU DOOR – FUCK YOU STAIRS DX_

Gary was practically wheezing by the time he made it to the floor Ash was on, never the less, he walked swiftly to Ash’s room, and as soon as he entered, saw a Blissey giving Ash a Heal Pulse* treatment while Ash played a game on a com, most likely the Blissey’s, with Pikachu and Umbreon, all of them jumping up slightly upon Gary’s less than graceful entry; Umbreon pursed its lips and barked at him. As soon as Gary made eye contact with Ash, Ash’s face lightened up like a light switch had been flipped in a perpetually dark room,

“Gary?!”

“I’m *COUGH* fine! Just a tad winded coming up those stairs,*HUFF* one of the elevators was out of order…*HUFF* *WHEEZE*…..I did not think I would get this winded, *COUGH* wow.”

Ash’s face melted into one of deep relief underneath his smile. Gary strode right over, and planted a kiss on Ash’s cheek, “Sweetheart, *cough* I’m sorry I’m so late in getting back, how are you feeling?”

“I’m okay, Gardevoir got called away a little while ago, nurse Layla told it that the legendary pokemon, well, mainly Moltres, is demanding an audience with me, and that they want Gardevoir to help explain to them that, I’m, not, in the best condition, you know?”

The Blissey finished its Pulse* session by giving Ash a pat on the back, Ash gave it its com back,
and the pokemon bid the couple adieu.

"Thank-you," said Ash, "You're very sweet." Blissey smiled, and as it left the room, Gardevoir entered as if perfectly timed, “Oh good, Gary, you’re back,” and was followed in by Misty and Tracey.

Ash looked to Gardevoir, “So, how did the talks go?”

“To put it simply,” said Gardevoir, “Moltres really, really wants to speak with you now, but if you don’t feel up to it, it can wait.”

“It will learn to wait,” Misty added crossing her arms.

“Hm,” Ash looked to Pikachu, Pikachu responding with a look that said ‘I will support whatever you decide.’ Ash then looked to Gary sporting the same supportive look. “Well, they’ve been so patient for this long, the least I can do is go talk to them right?”

“Are you sure?” Gardevoir reiterated.

“Yes,” said Ash, “I mean, its just words I gotta do, right?”

FORESHADOWING 8D

“I can go talk with them,” Ash restated, “Its better than just sitting here….Do, they just want an audience with only me, or can I bring people?”

“You can bring whomever you chose,” said Gardevoir, “They will allow that much, but they do request a small number of humans if possible.”

Bluh.

“Can I bring all of you?”

“Of course.”

Gary looked to Gardevoir, both trading a nervous glance in the undertow, but Gardevoir spoke to Gary internally with a bit of a positive spin, *Perhaps some conversing with them can bring up Ash’s confidence a bit, I mean, what Trainer wouldn’t be proud to know that he has the eyes of so many legendary pokemon favoring him?*

So….How many we talking here? Side note Gary that may or may not have bubbled up for no reason whatsoever, Ash HATES preferential treatment! Well, in a way, like, hell, you know what you mean.

“I’m ready then,” said Ash, “Let’s go.” Ash looked up and there, Gary saw the look that made every evil doer Ash ever came across think twice, he saw Ash’s determination shinning through whatever cloud was hanging above him, “I will go talk with Moltres.”

Damn son. He is amazing Gary, absolutely amazing.

The trip to the roof was a swift one to say the least. With Ash’s room on the 8th floor, it wouldn’t take them very much time at all to reach their destination, especially with Ash still needing a bit of help moving about. Technically he could have tried to move around himself without assistance, but opted for the wheelchair, if only to go “Weeeeeeccccceee~!” with Pikachu down that one hallway his mother had fun with while in her own wheelchair.
You’re going to marry this boy Gary.

Before they took the service elevator the rest of the way, Ash was joined by his Charizard and Lopunny to add to their group of Gardevoir, Misty, Tracey, Gary, Umbreon and Pikachu who had nestled itself in Ash’s lap. Pikachu looked back at him, both trading a nod in the fortitude they would show to a deity of their world.

Or a brat really…..

The elevator doors opened to the roof, the weather meeting them with a slapping breeze, and brisk air; most of the chill made null and void by the spring legendary at hand. Gary wheeled Ash out followed by their group when Moltres’ cry suddenly nabbed their attention to the right, where they were not only greeted by the fire legendary, but Suicune, Cobalion, and the commanding presence of Zekrom.

Gary swallowed, *Ash…*

Ash let out a small breath, placing his hand on Pikachu.

Gardevoir motioned to open up a Mental Link*, but a glance from Cobalion signaled that Moltres was the one in charge of the conversation at the moment –

Moltres snapped its beak, *Whoever we deem to speak with, that is only whom we will speak with.*

Suicune rolled its eyes.

Zekrom crossed its arms as it watched Moltres raising its stance, taking several steps forward and spread its wings wide with a loud booming cry, Gary feeling its burning glare boring straight through him.

“You wished to speak with me Moltres,” said Ash, “Well, here I am.”

Indeed, there you are, the legend replied –

**GARY OOOOOH YOU CAN HEAR IIIIIIT! ITS LETTING YOU HEAR IIIIIIT – and by the look on Misty and Tracey’s face, they can hear it too!**

I have seen you in far better shape I must say, said Moltres, its head tilting down in slight disapproval, its glare still drilling itself through Gary.

Okay what the fuck is your deal here –

“I am only going to say this once Moltres,” said Ash in a rock steady tone, “this is between you and me, and if you continue to glare at my boyfriend, I will end this conversation.”

Each legendary gave Ash a surprised look, Moltres especially looking taken aback.

Ash gave a deep breath through its nose, “Now, what is it you want to talk about?”

*Your health*, said Moltres reaffirming its stance, *I have taken it upon myself to oversee your safety as your body heals –*

Suicune’s snort was not at all hidden, *Sure by fighting with your siblings and knocking out the humans’ electricity –*

Moltres threw a hiss, *As your body heals –*
And Suicune continued, *And blew out a wing of the building with FIRE –*

**AS YOUR BODY HEALS** – Moltres gave a quick glare back to Suicune, Cobalion motioning for Moltres to just continue on with its speech – *AHEM* As, your body heals, from your encounter with a most terrible force, Moltres ruffled its feathers, *I have also, come to publicly apologize to you and your companions, along with my fellow brethren here, for that monstrosities’ appearance.*

Ash gave a surprised look of his own with his group, “How, how did you have a hand with Lisa?”

Moltres’ tone turned dark, *Neither of us ever had contact with that beast, but the form that it took, we know it well. There is no doubt the bond between human and pokemon can generate exceptional feats of strength, and one many Legendaries, such as myself, desire, but likewise, it can also cause intense internal despair, and can result in just as great a power, of which, some you ‘humans’ play with like toys.*

Again Gary was on the receiving end of Moltres’ glare, but Ash stood up from his wheelchair to the surprise of everyone, Pikachu leaping forward ready for any command that Ash gave – Gary quickly steadied Ash by wrapping his arms around him, “Whatever anger you are channeling to Gary, it is uncalled for Moltres! And I will not tolerate you even thinking of blaming him while he is completely innocent of your rage!”

Moltres snarled, Cobalion and Suicune were on the ready to step in, but Zekrom glanced at them to keep their ground as the flaming legendary took several stomping steps toward Ash, snapping its beak, *He watched you fall into despair! The pain that triggered the female humans’ Transformation is not unlike your own, and I will not tolerate such despicable behavior to be given to a human I favor!* Moltres’ fire grew to such an intense pitch it was almost suffocating.

Gary swallowed, he stood tall against Moltres’ accusation, but it helped that he had Ash to hold onto.

**OKAY, JUST HOW FUCKING CLOSELY HAS MOLTRES BEEN OBSERVING ASH???? I THINK BY THE LOOK OF EVERY ‘HUMAN’ PRESENT, IT HAS BEEN PRETTY DAMN NEAR STALKING HIM, HOLY SHIT Y’ALL –**

“How dare you speak, or even think you are entitled to my private life with my loved one?!” Ash yelled, “You are not a part of our relationship! What does this even have to do with anything?!”

Moltres was now towering over Ash, Gary, Misty, Tracey, and the pokemon – Charizard and Lopunny on the ready to challenge the legend – everyone hearing its burning flames flicker and snap. Moltres looked directly into Ash’s eyes, *I can sense that horrible monster’s soul* stuck in you, *she has defiled you, she has ruined your pristine soul! Now you have this ugly mark where there used to be such beauty!*

Ash’s mouth dropped open, Gary feeling the intense burst of pain that struck Ash’s heart like a knife, and Gary snapped just a split second before Misty did, “YOU’RE THE UGLY ONE HERE!”

“PIPIPIKAPIII!!!”

Tracey had to grab Misty, “HOW DARE YOU SAY SUCH A THING!!” Misty’s snarl rivaled the legendary’s, “After all this time I thought you were a creature deserving of respect, that you were actually something GOOD for Ash”, she hissed, “And you claim we ‘humans’ play with ‘toys?!’ You’re disgusting and no better!”

*Moltres, your insensitivity is truly a gift,* said Zekrom looking away in shame.

Moltres turned to its brethren with its eyes absolutely glaring, *Oh and you suddenly claim to be so*
high in your own stature?! How many of us would choose a human with that stain?! What our brethren have fought for hundreds of years to rid the world of?! Who here has chosen a human that is so damaged?!

“SHUT UP!” Misty screamed –

Moltres turned back, holding its head high, I only speak the truth none will admit to, the stain* within you Ash will only get stronger with your despair, but I know for a fact that had this, so called ‘boyfriend’ done his job in satisfying your emotional needs, then you would not have been so weak to fall victim to it in the first place!

Cobalion looked to Zekrom as the shouting match between Moltres and, essentially everyone else, continued, Well this has derailed rather spectacularly wouldn’t you say?

Zekrom inhaled and exhaled deeply, This incarnation still has much to learn I’m afraid.

Suicune looked to Zekrom, Then permission to give our dear ‘Moltres’ a lesson in humility?

“I don’t care if you are a legendary pokemon,” said Gardevoir with its aura burning in anger, “I will not stand by and let you insult a survivor!”

Moltres coolly rebuffed Gardevoir’s threat, Enough with the sugar coating, none of you could hold a candle to his aura even with this blotch in him. *AHEM*, Ash, despite that you are now tainted, I will still wait for your hand once you are dismissed from this building.

Gary felt Ash’s core trembling from a vacuum of torment.

“You think, you’re doing me any favors, by choosing to stand by me?” said Ash, failing to hide with the crack in his voice that he was on the verge of tears.

Cobalion cleared its throat loudly, Ash, it is true we have come here to apologize for overlooking how dangerous the Onelings had become, they groomed a force which we have dedicated ourselves to eradicate by trying to exemplify communication and peace and balance –but that is not the only reason we are here. We all would also like to thoroughly apologize for Moltres’ behavior, and, we would like to throw our bids into being your Emissary.

Moltres sputtered, WHAT?!

“Wait, hold a second, you all, you are letting me choose?” Ash breathed.

Correct, said Cobalion, And should none of us here suit your needs or ideals, well, there are plenty others who would also like to toss their names in for your draw.

Moltres snapped its break in anger, That’s not fair! I claimed him first! Moltres stomped its foot, You’re just mad you didn’t take lead on him before I did! You can’t undermine my choice!

I just did, said Cobalion simply.

And it is for Ash to decide, said Suicune.

Nononononono! I am not going to let you all throw me under the bus for this! Moltres hissed.

The legends entered their own squabbling match minus Zekrom who looked on dully.

“Ladies and gentlemen, the forces that bend the wrath of nature,” said Tracey flatly.
Gary felt all sorts of turmoil boiling in Ash, but all that was quickly overrun by Zekrom making careful steps over to them, its towering presence literally overshadowing Ash’s turmoil as he looked up to the electric legend now close enough for everyone to hear the deep lulling hum of electricity surging through its body like blood, and an even closer look, revealed it wasn’t even stepping on the building at all, but using some kind of electric force to keep its weight sustained off the structure.

Ash gave Zekrom a pained look, “That’s…not the Moltres I grew up with, is it?”

“Correct,” said Zekrom for all to hear, “This incarnation is about five years old.”

“That explains a lot,” Misty spat.

Zekrom sighed, “I’m sorry to say that raising Moltres has taken a back seat to other priorities.”

“That’s a shame,” said Ash.

“It is,” Zekrom nodded.

Ash rubbed his chest, “So, what about Articuno, and Zapdos?”

“Even younger I’m afraid,” said Zekrom looking to the sky, “3 years and 1 year respectively, leaving this Moltres to be the elder reincarnation to look up to. It is not the most desirable of circumstances. Reincarnations typically rely on their siblings for guidance to grow into what their deity entails, but you can see why we, and me being an Eternal legendary, must step in, in this case.”

“Yup…”

“It is rare to have each reincarnated sibling be so young,” said Gary, “Five, three, and a year old….How did that happen?”

“I would rather not get into the details of that, it is painful to speak of,” said Zekrom.

Eeeeey, is that why the seasons are kind screwy right now in Kanto?

For a moment Ash was silent with the news of the reincarnated legendary birds being so young, and then, “They don’t get along too much, do they?” said Ash, “Articuno, Moltres, and Zapdos I mean.”

Moltres so far doesn’t seem like it gets along with ANYONE. Geeze, just get Lugia to lay the smack down and call it a day.

“No, they don’t,” said Zekrom, “We are trying to rally and give them guidance, but, these days we are stretched out enough as it is….Zekrom looked directly to Ash, “It would do them good to have the expertise of a well-rounded Trainer.”

“And, you think I meet those qualifications?”

Zekrom nodded, “I do, and as do many, many others. Ash, we can sense the Link* within you. I understand you are going through a difficult period. If you are not up to handling what we ask of you, no one would blame you. I’m sorry you were put in such a position, but we are desperate, and I know, that is a terrible excuse.”

Ash gave a deep sigh.

Zekrom continued, “Tradition dictates that a battle take place to test the bond between the trainer and pokemon, but I think after all you have accomplished Ash, we can waive that.”
To that, Gary saw Ash make a grimace.

_Hoootooood boy :(

Suddenly Moltres’ and Suicune’s bickering couldn’t help but penetrate the side conversation – Moltres putting itself up to try and make a barrier between Ash and Suicune, but Suicune retained a cool posture.

*Should you choose me Ash,* said Suicune, *I will gladly demonstrate my skills and rid this rooftop of such toxic company.*

Moltres looked like it was ready to blow a gasket, *You two-faced jackals! I will take you all on!*

“That is enough,” boomed Zekrom’s voice with a firm stance, threatening Moltres to move away from Ash, but Moltres just floofed itself up,

*I will help him!* Moltres dared to glare at Zekrom, *Human medicine can hurt as much as it can cure! I can just try to burn the Link* out of him!

“You can do what?”

**HOOOOOLD UP ASH, IT SAID BURN –**

“You think you can take the Link out of me?!”

*IT SAID BURN IT OUT – AND IT SAID TRY AS IN NOT A DONE DEAL –*

Moltres looked with Ash with a deep nod, *Yes! I will set you ablaze and do all I can to burn it out!*

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAGAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGAAAAAAAAAAA D8

Everyone looked horrified. Suicune and Cobalion stepped up to Moltres, with Cobalion making a threatening posture, _Do not make such a rash promise to this young man, the cure you speak could only hurt him further_ –

YOU’RE SETTING HIM ON FUCKING FIRE – grant it legendary pokemon have a masterful control of their elements, so maaaaaybe its not like setting his body on fire, as it is his soul – oh my god that SOUNDS EVEN WORSE –

Suicune grunted in agreement, _Besides, Moltres, you are no where near that level of expertise yet to even try such a technique, however, Suicune turned to Ash, I might be able to provide a similar alternative._

“You, you can take the Link out of me?”

No, said Suicune honestly, _But I can help your aura by giving it a massive boost in fighting it off, and I would be more than willing to share this treatment with the rest of the hospital’s patients._

I WANT TO HELP! Moltres screeched, but Zekrom grabbed it by its head and lifted up the fire legendary pokemon to where they were eye-level, Zekrom giving it a look that it was completely done with its bullshit, _And I will help by guarding this rooftop, that is what I will do._

Cobalion let out a deep sigh.

With that, the talk was done. Ash’s group made their way back to Ash’s room (aka Flower Land) while Suicune spoke with Gardevoir in how to best implement the aura treatment it spoke of.
“I’m going to be honest Ash,” said Misty, still fuming, “I was ready to slap Moltres.”

I kicked it in the face earlier said Lopunny (unfortunately only the other pokemon could understand it), It was intensely gratifying.

By the time everyone returned to the room, Mary was waiting there with Thomas and Max. Mary stepped up first as Ash settled back in bed, “So, you met with the legendary pokemon?”

“I did,” replied Ash, “It was…interesting.”

Max ran his hand through his hair, almost messing up his pony tail, “Mate you just had an audience with four legendary pokemon! You know how many trainers would kill to be with just one?”

“I feel like I’m about to get lectured,” said Ash dully, giving a flat look to Mary, she returning him with a stern one.

Misty and Gary looked to Mary, “What’s this about?”

Mary crossed her arms and cleared her throat, “This is about you Ash. In your field work, you brushed off these encounters, thinking they wouldn’t really lead up to anything important” –

But Thomas suddenly cut in, “Ash! Why didn’t you document that you were being favored by so many legendaries?! Do you know what this could do – going to do for your candidacy?!”

Ash didn’t look so much defensive, or interested, as just plain tired, “I’m not really thinking about my candidacy right now, in fact that’s one of the last things on my mind” –

“We know you need to rest Ash, but this is serious,” said Mary.

Gary you feel sick :D

Ash sat himself up more, “I, just thought they were passing through! Besides, the ones I did make some kind of contact with, they told me not say anything about their visits, and, it seemed rude to document them, even if it would help my candidacy – which that’s NOT how I want to become a candidate anyway – Legends can appear to anyone, not just, candidates!”

Mary and Thomas face-palmed themselves so simultaneously one would think it would have been timed.

Ash continued, “I mean so what? Just because I’ve seen a lot of Legendary pokemon, and talked with them a bit, does not measure my skill as a Trainer, or a Ranger, or, just a person in general!”

At this point Misty had to step in, “Ash you’ve helped save pokemon, legendary pokemon, and people, how many times by now?”

“Oh my goooooooOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOD,” Mary expelled. “You could have been a candidate years ago! And then, probably, a Master!”

“I seriously doubt that,” said Ash with an incredibly sour tone, “I don’t agree that encounters are enough” –

“You have done, SO MUCH, more, than encounters,” said Misty, “These are not just encounters Ash, stop selling yourself short!”

“Still,” said Ash, “It doesn’t feel right to go behind the legendaries if they wish to remain quiet.”
“Well they’re not being quiet anymore,” said Max, “Four legendaries have shown themselves to come to your aide, and what do you think other people are going to interpret that as?”

Ash looked away, “I don’t care what they think.”

**MAYBE YOU SHOULD ASH, FUCK MAN –**

“Ash,” Tracey finally spoke, “We know this, probably isn’t the best time to discuss this, but that’s why we’re all here, to support you, and this is something you really need to start taking a good long look at.”

Mary stepped up again, “Ash, you’re already a target for being one of the BEST potential Master Candidates in virtually the history of the trade” –

“And this,” said Thomas, “Is just adding another plain as day target on your back out of sheer jealousy from other rival Trainers.”

“You think the other Candidates would come after Ash just for that?” said Gary.

**Gary you know better –**

“Oh honey,” commented Max.

“It’s practically guaranteed at this point,” said Misty under her breath, “Ash, you just had an ETERNAL legend practically ask you to raise a Moltres! That is huge!”

Mary ran her hands through her hair, “Oh my god it asked you, it asked you to raise legends” –

“Well Moltres is a complete colossal JERK,” said Misty, “it does need a good butt whooping” –

“Oh no I can agree with you there,” said Mary, “I’ve heard Moltres, well this Moltres is rather hotheaded.”

“Understatement,” said Ash and Gary together, Ash rubbed his face and leaned himself all the way back on his bed, “So what do you guys want me to do here?”

“Go for the candidacy,” said Mary, “I know you became a Ranger to further your training, its not your forever job, but Ash, you’ve had this in you all along, it’s your dream, you’ve had this in you for a quite a while now if I’m being honest – and now, especially while you’re dealing with all of this, this is so much good Ash, a little scary, but mostly good because the entire world knows what you’re capable of, and we all have your back.”

_Ultimately, she is trying to get his confidence up with this, that’s the true purpose of this talk.....but... Mary.....HONESTLY HERE –_

Ash slowly sat up, looking down at the bed, “Mary, I remind you of Lisa, huh?”

Mary looked slightly taken back.

**FUCKING KNEW IT –**

Ash picked nonchalantly at the blanket, “I can do so, so, so, much, and yet, I’m squandering all this potential because I can’t seem to really pull it together. I can do it, I know I can do it...its just not happening. So, do you think by helping me, you can, absolve a little bit of the guilt you felt about Lisa?”
Ash continued before Mary, or anyone else really, could gather up a rebuttal, “If me getting better will help you, then, I just have all the more reason to face,” Ash pointed to his heart, “this right? I have to pull it together for everyone I care about, I have to do it for our pokemon, I have to do it for my region, and, I have to pull it together to help raise Moltres and even, maybe its siblings, I’ve got so much to do, heh, especially with Moltres, it needs a lot of help, like, a lot, a lot of help….Like me I guess…”

But, how can I do any of it if I’m never going to get better? How can I fulfill anything you all want me to be, if in the end, its all going to be in vain? I’m just going to fail, and hurt and disappoint everyone I love no matter what I do.

Ash looked up, “No pressure, right?”

Ah fuck :(  

*****

Well if Mary felt shitty before, you’re sure she’s just feeling absolutely chipper right now Gary. She’s gone to take care of more things, stuff, things, surely nothing you can help with, you’ve got your plate full enough as it is in feeling that Ash is going to emotionally gut himself for the rest of the day. That was really fun feeling those things, even with Gardevoir trying to take out the Transfer Effects, like it said it would, but, also like it said it would, the Effects just keep coming baaaaack.

Speaking of Gardevoir, it finished helping Suicune set up the hospital’s pool into one giant aura healing bath, which is really super fucking nice! Suicune super-purified the pool and infused it with many cleansing properties, and you’d be lyin’ and dyin’ Gary if you didn’t say you’d give your left hand for such a sample! Which amazingly Suicune let you have! Suicune even DARED you to try and figure out its water properties OMG OMG OMG OMG AAAA 8D!!!! But *AHEM* getting back on track, that’s where you find yourself now Gary, here with Ash, in the pool with the water legendary RIGHT THERE, Suicune just, chilling out by the pool, just laying there chilling for all to see – and the patients are all so super fucking happy to be able to have access to such treatment, the doctors and med pokemon and staff are just nearly besides themselves with how much BETTER everyone is feeling after getting in the water, no matter what they’re fighting – you, you yourself feel just outstanding!….And yet, your little ray of sunshine over herrrrrrrrreee –

Ash was floating on his back with the help of a medical Sealeo with Gary, and even though Ash’s body felt pretty darn amazing, making Ash give the quickest of smiles when he first stepped into the pool, the thoughts buzzing his head, were another story. Floating there, Ash was taken right back into floating for his life in the ice cavern when the water was rising, rising, ever rising, threatening to take him to the point of no return.

The Sealeo adjusted its water resistant translator real quick, “Okay Mr. Ketchum, lets try one lap, from one end to the other.”

“Okay.”

*His eyes looked glazed over Gary, where is he?*

Ash moved his hands though the water, pushing him along with the outside encouragement as white
noise, hearing almost nothing, but internally, his thoughts still churned. Water can freeze solid, it can put out a fire, it can even disappear altogether. Right now it’s contained in this pool, and I’m above it…There’s no way I can drown here unless by some freak accident, or I don’t bother to come up for air…There’s no way I can drown here, there’s no way I can drown here…."

_He looks like he’s a million miles away._

Sealeo began to help Ash turn as they neared the end with Gary walking beside them assisting when he could, “Alrighty, one turn down, now lets go to the other end.”

Gary all the while, against Ash’s quiet demeanor, heard laughter and bright cheery voices from the other occupants of the pool with playful splashing, swimming, even a brass little kid who jumped in with all his clothes on; all that happiness brimming against the little bubble of sad that encompassed where Ash swam. Gary looked over to Suicune who was posing with a couple of kids for a picture, they were all sticking out their tongues (even Suicune!), and Gary couldn’t help but smile, “Look Ash, I think those kids asked Suicune for a selfie!”

Sealeo looked over and chuckled, but Ash didn’t so much as glance as his train of thought pulled him ever deeper down, “That’s cute.”

_You didn’t even look :\ Boy, where are you?_

Gary saw Ash’s eyes turn an even further shade of glass, and a shuddering breath escaped him, “Ash?”

“And?”

“You, wanna, _talk_?”

_What does he think of you now?_

“I think, I have to….”

When they reached the other end of the pool, Ash pulled himself upright with Gary’s help, letting Gary hold him close. Sealeo excused itself for the time being to give the couple some space, but said it would be back shortly.

Against the happier sounds from the pool, the mumbling of the water against their bodies and the pool’s marble siding, Gary held Ash, rubbing small circles in his back, “Talk to me Love.”

Gary felt Ash swallow. Ash pulled back, looking up to Gary, but couldn’t hold the glance, and opted to look down and away, “When I was in the ice cavern, I was in a real bad spot. Looking back on it now…\_I realize ‘how bad’ it was…..I’ve, cheated death quite a lot, like, this isn’t even my first time almost freezing to death, I mean, I’ve run the gauntlet of injuries in the physical department, I guess, it was just a matter of time before it hit me up here?” Ash patted his head with a scrunched and confused face.

_He’s having trouble trying to put it into words, you want to speak for him Gary, you want to speak for him so badly so he doesn’t have to suffer through this, but HE needs to get this out, HE needs to speak it, you just stand there and listen and be there for him._

“You’ve overcome all those instances,” said Gary, “And this will be no different.”

Ash looked at his hand as he moved it through the water, watching the flow around his fingers, “It feels different though…I guess because, with everything that’s happened to me……And, what
happened to Bergmite, or, Avalugg…."

Aww man :( 

Ash continued, “So many people and pokemon helped save me, I still don’t know how I can ever fully express my gratitude, but, I can’t thank Avalugg, I won’t ever get the chance to thank it for what it went through with me in that cavern, for me, for someone it just met, against, Lisa…….And what she did, how I remember it, how she made me feel, it was like she was playing with me, playing with my life – my life was just a tool, a means for her. I was injured, I was seriously hurt, and I was trying to get a message out!” Ash stilled and looked up to Gary, “I was trying to reach you guys, reach anyone! But, Lisa found me out. She used Disable* to punish me. Used it on my throat to silence me when I scolded her, I screamed at the top of my lungs, but nothing came out! And then, she Disabled* both of my arms, I couldn’t move them at all…."

As Gary listened dutifully, his insides were utterly FUMING –

**THAT. BITCH** – just, **JUST, keep it together Gary, Lisa is dead, and gone FOREVER, SHE IS DEAD AND BURNING IN HELL** – just, listen to Ash –

“And that’s when, the water began to come in, the water started to rise in the cavern…..I felt so helpless….All I could do was barely float with Bergmite helping me, and then, the overhead walls caved in, and, and we were trapped….we were trapped with the water still rising” –

**JEHUSUS MARCHFITTING CHRIST D8> AND YOUR BABY SURVIVED! –**

Ash held a glance as if he was some livestock looking down the knife edge of a butcher ready to strike, “I was going to die. The air in my lungs wouldn’t be enough, and I was going to die” –

**Oh boy, oh boy Gary reel him back in, reel Ash back into a safe zone, he doesn’t need to burn himself out like this, this is not where the conversation needs to go –**

Gary pulled Ash in close, hugging him harder, feeling him shudder as Ash wrapped his arms around him as well, “You’re safe now Ash, you’re safe right here with me” –

Ash took a deep breath and exhaled all the same, he looked to the water sloshing innocently below around their waistline, “……The water, rose up over me. Pushed me against the ice. All I could do was pound uselessly against it, just, floating until – ow, ow – OW Gary! Too tight!”

Gary quickly let go of Ash, realizing just how hard he was squeezing him after Ash’s story shed such a dark truth, “Oh, sorry!”

Ash rubbed his arms a little, “It’s okay,” and leaned right back into Gary who settled his chin on the top of Ash’s head, “……Thinking back on it now…that’s what it feels like…when the sadness comes, it feels like I’m drowning above water. My feelings push and pull me like how the water pulled and pushed, and shoved me against something I just couldn’t move – and all the while trying not to sink, I didn’t want to let go, the water receded, but my body, was just ready to give in, and I felt myself go under. I went under even as the water went down……That’s when Bergmite, Avalugg, saved my life there. I would have been gone without it, there was no way I’d have made it out alive at that point – I would have drowned if Bergmite was not there, if it hadn’t pulled me up from the water when I no longer had the strength to move.”

… :(

“….I’m still here, and it’s not,” Ash looked up to Gary, Gary looking down to him, “….Gary, is there a right or wrong way to be sad?”
Gary immediately shook his head, “No. People mourn and grieve in different ways, what matters if it turns destructive on the inside and/or the outside, and especially when it’s both, then there could be something deeper.”

“And, if it lingers on and on?”

“That too.”

*It makes you push people away.*

Ash nuzzled into Gary’s chest.

*This is real. This is happening if you don’t get yourself under control.*

Ash sighed, “I’m sorry I was so distant yesterday with you, really, I’m very sorry.”

“It’s alright Ash, there’s been a lot to process, just try not to leave me out of it if you can help it, that’s what I’m here for, I’m here to help.”

Ash gave Gary a very worn smile, “Thank you.”

Gary kissed Ash on his forehead spreading Ash’s smile even further, “Hm, I, just hope, Ritchie will come and see me soon.”

“I’m sure he will, and once we get back to your room, how about you text him again? I heard he was helping out Brock today, might have something fun to share.”

“Yeah, I’ll do that.”

By the time Sealeo wobbled itself back over to the couple, Ash and Gary were both swimming on their backs, holding each other’s hand, so it decided to continue to leave them be.

“Hm, we should go swimming more often,” said Gary.

“The Orange Islands have good” – a shadow eclipsed Ash, making him look up to see Suicune suddenly looming over him, the crystal on its head glowing, the legendary water type standing upon the water as if it were ground, and without warning, it blew a raspberry on Ash’s exposed stomach making him squeal in equal parts surprise and tickled reaction and lose all sense of balance in the water. Gary helped Ash sit up, shooting Suicune a ‘REALLY’ glance, but Suicune responded coolly and for all to hear,

“I’ve been watching you a bit Ash, and you were just looking so sad, so, that was to help make you feel not so sad.”

*They really should just talk like that all the time and not be so damn selective, just saying :/*

The jitters ran up and down Ash’s spine from the raspberry, he gave Suicune an awkward smile, “Um thanks? But that spot is reserved for Gary.”

*THAT’S RIGHT >:O*

“Apologies then,” and Suicune simply.

“But, I still have to say, thank you,” said Ash, “Thank you for doing this for everyone, look at all the smiles you brought around!”
Suicune nodded, “It is the least I can do to show charity. Moltres needs a good lesson in humility. One day it too will be able to heal with its fire, but it still has much to learn. Hopefully my act can at least show a possibility for what its status and powers can do with a constructive approach as opposed to, ‘ahem’ taking it for what you like.”

Ash tilted his head, “I think I understand,” his eyes then looked past Suicune, to a girl on the edge of the pool in summer clothes – but Suicune’s voice brought him back, “I must say, I did enjoy interacting with everyone here. It is good to feel such energy, oh! Today I learned what a selfie is!” Suicune smiled.

Ash looked back past Suicune and the girl in the summer clothes was gone.

Gary what is this icy feeling bubbling in Ash? :D You feel that? Feel those Transfer Effects coming back YET AGAIN? 8D

Suicune gave a more mischievous look, “Oh I bet Moltres would love to hear that ‘Suicune Selfie’ is a thing, that could be one of your human ‘things’ could it not?”

“It could,” said Ash, followed by a delayed smile.

“Would you like one of your own Ash?” said Suicune, “It doesn’t seem fair to leave you out of the loop.”

Ash gave an honest smile, “Sure!”

“My com is with our stuff, give me a sec,” Gary waddled over to the edge of the pool, wiping his hands with his towel before plucking his com out of their bag, and saw he had not one, not two, but three missed calls from Ritchie along with a voicemail –

-*INTERNALLY SCREAMING-*

Gary looked back over to Ash who was talking with Suicune, giving him time to scramble to open up his com and listen to the voicemail – hearing Ritchie’s voice sent both a calming and alarming feeling straight through him – Ritchie sounded very nervous –

“Gary, today with Brock, we’ve found some stuff about the Onelings from the League, some really disturbing intel from Zoroark came through, and its all bad news, I won’t be able to see Ash for a little bit longer – I have to see this out for him, I’m sorry, I’ll try to update you again, tell Ash I said hi and th–” *click* “there are no more messages in your” –

WAIT WHAT’S THE BAD NEWS???? RITCHIE GODDAMIT FUCKING BUTTONS–

Gary immediately tried to call Ritchie, but it went straight to voicemail, he called again, and again it went to voicemail –

GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH
DDDDDXXXXX!!!!!!! Okay just breathe, just breathe, breathe, Ritchie is fine, he is totally fine, he would not do something stupid…… ;_______________________;

Gary called Ritchie again, the line going straight to voicemail, “Ritchie, you call me the minuet you’re able to, please,” Gary half whispered, half hissed.

Loud laughter from Suicune snapped Gary out of his surmounting despair as he tried to pull himself together, and in using an indescribable amount of mental fortitude, Gary shoved it all down in to the pit of his stomach. He sent out a blanket text to Misty, Tracey, Gardevoir, Brock, and Ritchie (just to
make it extra clear), ‘Please tell me what is going on with the Onelings, and let me know you’re okay.’

Gary shuffled back over to Ash and Suicune, if they saw through his façade, they hid it well, “Oh, oh, make a face!” said Suicune, “I’m going to do what the kids call a ‘blep’ face!”

“T’ll do that too,” said Ash, “Gary” –

“Imma just smile that everything is super awesome and lean into you, c’mere love” –

“Oof” –

Gary snapped the selfie, and after inspecting the picture and getting everyone’s approval, by Suicune’s insistence, Gary posted it on his Instacom and Pecker account with the hashtag #Suicuneselfie.

…..Gary, the hashtag #Suicuneselfie is trending on Pecker….

Ash turned to Gary, “You feeling okay? You look a little green?”

“Green? Pbbbth, nah, must be the reflection off the pool water, how about we swim a little bit more hm?”

Ash arched an eyebrow, “Oh-kay.”

This would be of the worst timing for the Transfer Effects to kick in on Ash’s side :D.

“Gary, I’m not sure I want to swim anymore,” Ash patted the water, “I think I’m good with all the liquid stuff.”

“Pish posh, liquid stuff,” said Suicune pawing the water, “how about I show you what this ‘liquid stuff’ can do under the command of a legend?”

Ash’s eyes gave a look of curiosity, but then he arched an eyebrow at Suicune, “Are you showing off for me?”

“……A little.”

Ash sighed with a slanted smile, “Alright, let’s see what you can do.”

Suicune’s crystal started to glow, and began its display of its command and control over water with an elegant bow that doubled as leverage for Suicune to back-flip up into the air, and land square atop a pillar of water that rose to meet it, instantly capturing the attention of the entire pool.

Using Extrasensory*, Suicune manipulated the water around it as if it was an extra appendage, entertaining everyone with demonstrations of attack and defense as Ash watched with utter amazement, a sincere emotion Gary had not had his fill on, and regrettably had to miss out on as he checked his com secretly for any kind of update. He got texts from everyone except Ritchie that they were fine, and that the information about the Onelings was via the Smeargle’s attack they were indeed trying to infiltrate the hospital for Ash which made Gary’s nerve endings feel like they were on fire. Misty also texted back that Mary and the Rangers were laying the smack-down on safety, and Brock then texted that Ritchie was fine, his com had died and he had forgot to bring his charger.

BLUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU
pool should last through to the following night to give everyone in the hospital at least one chance to enjoy it, and after it was heftily thanked by all, Suicune left upon a breeze, its body practically molding into the wind, and was gone.

“I hope it doesn’t get lost in the vent shaft,” said Ash.

“Oh I’m sure it’ll find its way,” said Gary.

Grant it that would be funny as hell to see Suicune’s leg sticking out of a vent shaft after trying to be all super cool, pbbth ‘I have made a miscalculated mistake’~ YOU KNOW LIKE NOT BRINING YOUR FUCKING CHARGER RITCHIE, UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUGGHHHH!!!!!

After Ash and Gary made it back to Ash’s room, they changed into comfortable clothes from home, and despite Gardevoir prompting Ash for a Heal Pulse® session, they both (especially Gary) were ready for nap.

“You two look like you’re about to pass out,” said Gardevoir as it worked.

“I am,” said Gary, laying like a dead body on the hospital bed with Ash sitting up next to him, Gardevoir rubbing a Heal Pulse® all into his chest.

Ash grunted a little as the Heal Pulse® surged into his system followed rapidly by another, “You’re really pushing it in there,” said Ash.

“Well I have to for right now, I’m going to disconnect my Channel* with you for little bit to reset myself, kind of like troubleshooting, a reboot if you will. I’m going to recharge myself and hook back up to you in about, oooooooh, I’d say two hours or so while I’m away at a meeting with some of the staff here.”

“You are really pushing yourself,” said Ash.

“You really are,” added Gary with his eyes still closed.

But you’d be lying if you said you weren’t thankful for Gardevoir going above and beyond the call of duty.

“Two hours is not that long for a full reboot,” said Gary, eyes still closed.

“Oh I’ll be alright, besides, I’d rather get that done during the meeting, oooh which I have in abouuuuut, oohf, 10 minutes, lemme hurry up a little here.”

“Hey, how is the Link*?” asked Ash.

“Still contained, which is very good,” said Gardevoir, “I’m so sorry Moltres gave you such a beating today.”

“Oh, don’t, don’t worry about that, Suicune helped soothe that over,” Ash then touched Gary’s foot, prompting Gary to open up his eyes and look at Ash, “And you.”

“Hm.”

“Hey Gardevoir, where’d Pikachu run off to?”

“Oh Pikachu has been with Sparky,” Gardevoir smiled, “They should be back late tonight however, Sparky needed some extra help with its work, aaaaand, Umbreon is off somewhere with Arcanine
and Blastoise, and everyone else is still off doing loads of other work and whatnot” –

Dance, dance, dancing around the subject, cha cha
chaaaaAA AAAAAAUAUAUAUAUAUAUAUAUAUAUUAAAAGHGGGHHGHHGHHGHHGHHGHHGHC

Gardevoir continued, “While I’m out, if anything, anything happens, there is a Rotom on call on this
door that will come get me at a moment’s notice, there will also be plenty of med staff at your beck
and call, and speaking of Rotom, one will be here in about thirty minutes to do a reading on all the
equipment – and then Audino should be by a little after that or whenever it finishes up its rounds, so
until then, you young men will have the rule of the roost!” *WINK* -

I saw that ene...

“What are they doing?” asked Ash.

“League business.”

“Bleh,” Ash understood.

“And when you’re a Master,” said Gary sitting up to pinch Ash’s cheek a little, “You’ll enjoy allllll
that stuff toooo0000000.”

“Can’t wait,” said Ash flatly, he ‘playfully’ tried to bite Gary’s hand.

“Alrighty, well I’ll see you boys in about an hour,” said Gardevoir, "I’m going to speak with
Mismagius real quick then head on over to my meeting, remember, I’ll see you in a little over an
hour or so! Chow chow!”

“Bye bye!”

BYE FELICIA -

Gardevoir left, locking the room from the inside with its powers.

DULY NOTED! EVERYTHING IS FIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIINE UP IN
HUUUUUURRRRRRRRRRR!!!!

Meanwhile, Ash’s face showed a calming remnant, he stretched out and leaned back, laying down
on the bed next to Gary with his arms over his head, his shirt leaving his tummy a little exposed, “Oh
my gooooodneeessssssssss,” Ash let out an exhale (also could have been a moan) that made a groove
in the pit of his stomach, Gary watched Ash’s stomach muscles rise and fall upon his breathing, “I
did not think I was this tired,” said Ash, “It’s like I have tiredness to spaaaaaaaaaaare.”

Gary looked at the position Ash was in, Ash had closed his eyes, his lips were parted as he breathed,
arms relaxing overhead, that tummy exposed, his head turned leaving his neck unguarded, one leg
was bent up and outwards while the other was sticking out over the edge of the bed giving open
access and Gary’s mind let his hormones quickly hone in on the opportunity as opposed to drowning
in the anxiety that haunted the back of his thoughts.

…..A song from WhiteEkans comes to mind….Is this love~? That I’m fee~ling~?

Using his fingers, Gary walked them over Ash’s stomach, making Ash cringe up with a smile and
squirm at the ticklish touch, “So~,” said Gary, “This spot is reserved for me huh~?”

“Mh hm!”
“Well then” – Gary fully flipped up Ash’s shirt and pounced on his bare stomach with a loud raspberry making Ash’s entire body jump up off the bed with a bark of laughter –

“No’ight f’air!” –

“No air? Lemme give you more then” – and Gary blew another raspberry on Ash’s neck making Ash squeal almost right in his ear – and another on his chest, his cheek, his shoulder, anywhere Gary could reach against Ash’s squirming and laughing, till Gary stopped, letting a very winded and giggly, blubbly Ash catch his breath. Gary held himself up over Ash, watching him, Ash’s eyes closed again, chest heaving, wearing an ear to ear grin that Gary couldn’t help but share in.

Ash’s eyes fluttered open, but only half lidded, mouth slightly parted, looking longingly at Gary; his breathing still rolling in deep, chest moving up and down, up and down, and Gary began to feel quite the need growing down south, but Ash’s legs were clamped closed from the tickling.

Gary bit his lip a little through his grin, “Hey there.”

“Hey there,” Ash replied through his.

Through their searching eye contact and steady breathing, their smiles became muted. Their deepening glances searching for something else.

Gary swallowed. Ash swallowed. This was the one moment they had so desired, a lingering want to have such intimacy, to have a moment like before, to have anything like they had before – especially after everything that had happened – and now here it was, practically handed to them on a silver platter, and yet neither had dared to make a move, lest it somehow shatter such a private ambiance.

*What are you thinking right now?*

A wrinkle in the back of Gary’s mind threatened a wave of tumultuous thoughts with the Onelings, the Link*, their future, of Ritchie, and before his anxiety had a chance to steal him away from Ash, from this wonderful moment, Gary chose Ash, and he prayed Ash would choose him in return too, that he would feel up to it – Gary lowered himself a bit, nudging Ash almost playfully with his nose, question-like, asking without words if he could proceed, if Ash wanted to proceed, and Ash answered full on suddenly by raising his head up and catching Gary by locking his lips in with his in a sudden kiss, Gary feeling a hand on his cheek and another slipping onto his back and that was enough of a response for Gary to lower himself completely on top of Ash, Ash spreading his legs wide open for Gary to slip his hips right into place, both giving a gasp as they came into contact at feeling how their lengths were already hardening through their clothing.

It didn’t matter they were still fully clothed, albeit in night clothes and easily removable, all that did matter was the contact they had now, that they had been so starved for, and neither were about to let go of it – the sound of their kisses smacking and suckling filled the room, Ash pulled away for just a hop second to blurt out in a mangled whisper, “Anal takes too much prep time, we’re on a timer here” –

“How do you want me?” Gary managed to respond –

“I just want you” – like magnets their mouths were sucked back together in a deadbolt lock, Gary trying to process all other manners of sex they could have which just set his insides ablaze in thinking of Ash in all kinds of erotic positions making Gary want him all the more. He urged Ash on by speaking through their deepening kisses, “Let me, hear you, mh – let me hear you please” –

Ash choked back a moan as Gary made a quick beeline for his neck, giving a hard suckling nip,
“Ah – ha, s-someone, *GULP* might hear us – we havetobequiet – Gary, mph!” – Ash put his hand over his mouth, but Gary pulled it away and held it up over Ash’s head as his lips claimed Ash’s mouth desperately, savagely,

*I know you don’t think ‘you’ can sing, but god Ash, when you’re like this you truly do have the most beautiful voice in the world, so sing for me baby, please, let me hear you* –

Ash’s growing panting and breathlessness broke through their kisses as Gary ground his hips into Ash’s, dry humping him about as hard as if he were going to fuck him through the fabric regardless – Ash’s stifled whimpering only grew as he was caught in between fully letting himself go and not wanting to have another embarrassing moment like their terrible bathroom attempt –

“Sweetheart let go,” said Gary breathlessly, slowing down just enough to be coherent, “Have this with me, I want to make you feel so good, no one will know, I promise” –

“The TV,” Ash blurted –

“The TV?” that was almost enough to snap Gary right out of sexy times –

“The TV to drown out our noise!”

Gary didn’t even realize Ash’s room had a TV, thinking about it of course there would be one somewhere, but still, where could the remote even be? But Gary wasn’t going to let this moment with Ash go, so he went for the next best thing, with one arm wrapped around Ash, he snagged his com, flipped open the radio app, set the volume as loud as it could possibly go (which was quite a decent level) and left it to blare out a song by WhiteEkans –

> How can I tell you babe, my back’s against the wall –

> I need you by my side to tell me it’s alright –

Gary turned back to Ash who had a flushed ear to ear blushing grin – “I cannot believe this song is on” –

> ‘Cos I don’t think I can take anymore –

> “It’s fate,” said Gary half in jest and half with meaning it with every part of his heart going right back to vigorously making out with Ash –

> Is this love? That I’m feeling?

> Is this the love? That I’ve been searching for?

> Is this love? Or am I dreaming?

> This must be love, ‘cos it’s really got a hold on me~
....A hold on me....

Ash was now practically putty in Gary’s hands that traveled up and down and all in-between their bodies, Gary lamenting for just one more moment for this throbbing cock that anal sex would take too much prep time, the timer was indeed running before an untimely ghostly or human guest would get a full on view of just how vigorous human mating could be!

There were voices coming and going outside, but Ash and Gary were now completely deaf to any outside interference with the check of being discovered removed, or obscenely put into place and they just did not care anymore as the love song blared out to all corners of the room, dunking them head first into a trance to fuck each other without any repercussion –

Ash clung himself to Gary as if he was hanging off the edge of a cliff, Gary in turn wrapped his arms around Ash, pulling him as close as he could as he ground into him as hard and as frantically as he could. They could have tried to take off their pants and underwear, but it was already too much of a hassle with just a mere thought as the need to fuck each other eclipsed any sound reasoning –

“Gary, Gary, Gary!” –

Ash’s voice got higher with each chant, neither were going to last much longer, Ash couldn’t keep up with kissing Gary while he panted and gasped for air as his orgasm was rapidly building and coiling itself up – Gary, urged on by the need to consume every ounce of this moment, of Ash, sank his teeth into Ash’s neck, sending Ash right over the edge with a gurgled cry, making a complete mess of his pants – Gary feeling briefly Ash’s dick pulse, pulse against him, shooting out his release – Gary pulled Ash’s body up off the bed to sit up partially as he ground up his own coming orgasm, searching to keep that pulse flowing – Ash’s right leg raising up as his body rode out wave after wave of ecstasy being pushed into him by Gary’s hips, his entire body trembling and begging for mercy and none at the same time – Gary joining him just moments after, spilling out rambling words and curses into Ash’s shoulder as he ground out shudders and twitches of after shocks of pleasure as he came all over himself inside of his pants.

They both dropped down gracelessly, Ash on his back, and Gary almost landing square on top of him had he not caught himself at the last moment, both totally out of breath, but both feeling something deep, deep within them connect, resonate, echo, something they hadn’t felt in a long, long time.

There was a swollen silence inside with the blare of the radio app just barely on the outskirts. It almost felt as if their consciousness had seeped into one another’s essence, it felt, if not for a moment, like they were one in mind and body.

A smirk curled up on Gary’s lips as he watched his Ashy try and gather his breath, his eyes closed, perfectly unsuspecting in the moment. Gary knew Ash had a special ‘timer’ of his own, that just before Ash’s body could fully relax from his first orgasm, he could be sprung up again in half the time, and come almost just as hard, but he would have to catch Ash at just the right moment.

It had been so long, yet Gary never forgot the exact science of making his boyfriend scream in absolute carnal desire, he quickly moved himself south, taking Ash’s pants and underwear down with him, giving Ash’s stomach a passing kiss – “Gary, wha” – Ash looked and couldn’t even finish his sentence before realizing his bottom half was totally bare, showing off his flushed and messy nether regions, Gary grabbed Ash by the waist, putting him right into position. Ash felt a kiss pressed to his abdomen – to both sides of his inner thigh – then Gary’s breath on his dick before Gary’s mouth clamped down over him, sending Ash’s back right off the bed as if he had touched bare hot
coals – a moan, a scream was caught in Ash’s open, gaping mouth as Gary bobbed up and down, kissing and slobbering all over Ash’s dick, sucking any matter of rational thought out from the both of them.

Ash’s hips gave an involuntary jerk up, sending him all the way into Gary’s throat, making Gary lurch for a split second, but Gary quickly gathered himself and pinned Ash’s hips down, forcing Ash to find another route to appease the rising, burning coil in his abdomen of yet another orgasm – his hands went to his mouth to stifle a screaming moan that finally broke through his barrier of choked silence. Gary retaliated against him of being robbed of that scream (even though it easily would have eclipsed the radio app) by lifting Ash’s hips up and sending a lone finger into Ash’s ass to push tantalizingly at his entrance – and Ash promptly admitted defeat with his body begging for more. If his hands weren’t allowed to stifle his noise, then they could only propel it, leaving Ash to feel himself up all over since Gary was preoccupied sucking him off.

Gary felt Ash’s dick throb against his tongue, too turned on in the moment himself to think of anything else other than to get Ash to completely lose himself. Ash’s hips moving as they willed against Gary’s grip in a wordless ask to fuck Gary’s mouth, and Gary couldn’t dream of anything better. He shifted himself a bit to allow Ash to move fully against him, even helping him, Gary doing his best to match Ash’s rhythm, lest he would be bumped in the face.

And Ash, prompting open an eye, watching Gary work in-between his legs, watching that mess of brown hair, watching Gary’s lips sweetly tasting every inch of him, popped his cock off again like a bottle of champagne, Gary gulping down every drop Ash had to give, licking and slurping and kissing and sucking as Ash lost himself in mind, body, and spirit in a bubble of bliss. Gary’s own dick had built itself back up in the heat of everything, and as Gary finished Ash off, Gary slipped a hand down his own pants and finished himself off in a couple of jerks, his second batch of cum giving a squirt and dribbled the rest down his hand.

Ash dropped down onto his back utterly spent. Chest heaving, his bare stomach muscles rising and falling, rising and falling…Gary let Ash’s waning cock slip out of his mouth along with a bit of spit and cum that Gary wiped off with the back of his hand before he mindlessly slurped that up too.

Gary, trying to catch his own breath, sat back and admired the sight of Ash being totally wrecked from his hips and hands that were calibrated for no one else, moved for no one else, and served only to fuck Ash till he came apart at the seams.

Gary, still trying to catch his breath, crawled up to Ash on shaken limbs. He leaned down and touched his forehead to Ash’s, “I love you so much,” he gulped out.

“I, love you too,” Ash panted, “I love you, I love you, I love, you.”

Gary went in for another deeply rooted kiss before Ash had to break away again to catch his breath, “Ash,” Gary panted as he tried to move to clean Ash up, snagging some tissues, “Are you okay?”

“What did you feel with me?”

“I’m, I’m good, goooooood, and, dizzyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy,” Ash’s mouth turned up into a smile, opening his eyes to look at Gary give another kiss on his stomach, watching Gary clean up his body, more than tissues would be needed, watching as Gary ‘attempted’ to clean up his own self. Ash rested his arm on his forehead, “You’re so beautiful.”

“Pbbth. That’s my line.” Gary stumbled off the bed (almost face planting into the ground) and went to the bathroom to get a proper manner of cleaning with a damp washcloth and towels, along with a quick change of sheets (Ash all the while sitting cross legged and bare ass naked).
“Should I turn your com off?”

“Yeah, go ahead.”

The silence following was about as deafening as if they were in another realm, albeit it was calm, and peaceful, and very much welcomed.

Next Gary snagged them another change of night pants and underwear, then stumbled back into bed and almost right on top of Ash. They both fumbled with poor coordination and blushes and playful glances of each other’s nether regions still flushed from their fresh love making.

Fresh and clean (as well as they could be), they were well on their way to round three in trading more kisses, light pecks, till there came two taps at the door followed by a, “Maintenance incoming!” and a Rotom phasing in through the door, “Good evening!” It piped, its translator gleaming momentarily, “Just doing a quick survey, and I’ll be out!” but Gary didn’t miss a beat in turning his head and trailing down Ash’s neck to his collar bone, and Ash was too drunk on everything Gary to even care about the Rotom till it blatantly asked him a question, “Oh my goodness! Your heart rate spiked moments ago! What was the cause?”

“My boyfriend.”

Rotom looked to Gary still working over Ash’s neck, “Oh, well then, carry on.” Rotom finished up its measurements, bid Ash and Gary a good afternoon, and phased back out through the door, but not before double checking that it was indeed thoroughly locked.

Gary’s kisses went back up to Ash’s lips, ending in a kiss that melted and melded their hearts into a healing pool of their own, neither even realizing just how achingly relieved the other felt until the connection between them, the Transfer Effect, opened up the gate for a cascading torrent of loving emotion to flood them internally.

Ash broke the kiss for a quick second, rolling his hips up, “MMMMMMmoreugh…” he said in almost a drunken slur.

“I promise Ash, when we’re back home, all night long” – Gary picked their kiss back up for one last hurrah as their strength was rapidly draining from them.

Against a swirling tide of pleasured drowsiness that made them feel like they were falling into one another, their kiss broke apart, arms wrapping around bodies, hands grasping, Gary swung his leg over Ash, and at this point the only way they could be closer together was if they somehow magically fused. Ash nuzzled lovingly into Gary with a deep inhale, catching a full whiff of his boyfriend before planting a couple more sloppy kisses, and shortly afterwards, they both passed out on the spot tangled deeply in one another in both body and mind.

I’m glad I could feel this much with you…I never want this to end.

Audino waddled down the hall with Ash’s room, adjusting its own translator, feeling out Ash’s presence and synching up with his Health Channel effortlessly, *Ah, sleeping peacefully,* Audino chirped internally.

Umbreon, Arcanine, Blastoise and Ash’s Charizard were all outside the room, three of them making comments neither of their Trainers would have ever deemed appropriate –

I know what I’m talking about, said Blastoise, That is what the humans call ‘baby making music’.

But Ash or Gary can’t make a baby, said Charizard, They need that, vaguba thing, Misty has one –
Anyone can make anything if they try hard enough, said Arcanine, *The song is some kind of mating agent they use, perhaps an accelerant for the process.*

Umbreon meanwhile just stared out into space till it was tapped on the head by Blastoise, it only turned its eyes, *What?*

Blastoise cleared its throat, *Can or can’t humans use music to increase the speed of a special seed man?*

Umbreon stared at the three of them before it finally said, *You all are fucking idiots.*

Arcanine rolled its eyes, *Can always count on you for a saucy retort, a simple yes or no will suffice!*

Audino finally waddled up, the pokemon greeting it with happy smiles (even Umbreon giving a small one), “Good afternoon everyone! Just doing a checkup,” it was moments away from unlocking the door via one of the hospital’s skeleton keys before out of the corner of its eye it saw down the hallway a girl in summer clothes. Audino looked fully and the presence was gone, “Did, any of you happen to see that person just now?”

Charizard turned, *What person where?*

Audino pointed down the hallway, “I saw a girl with summer clothes just over there” –

*Might be a visiting family member of some other person* said Umbreon, *Why? Do you feel something?*

Arcanine stepped up, *Do we need to call Rotom or Mismagius?*

Audino squinted at the empty end of the hallway before a nurse passed by, “…No, it…could have been just me.” Audino put its little hand on the door handle – and the door violently swung out, breaking its hinges and knocking Audino square in the face – but it didn’t let go of its grip on the door – in moments measured in heartbeats, before any of Ash or Gary’s pokemon had time to react, on the other side of the door was a see-through ghastly female figure with an icy grip on the door edge – Audino was face to face with a snarling visage with wide pale blue eyes and a mouth that stretched far beyond any human’s capacity to scream – the door slammed shut –

*“ASH!!!!! GARY!!”* Audino felt its Channel with Ash getting iced over from the inside out!

The pokemon wasted no time in trying to open the door that had sealed itself shut, they broke through the window with cold, cold air to greet them –

In the depths of their sleep, Gary’s subconscious had focused on the warmth from Ash’s body, like a cocoon of radiating love. And then that warmth was gone. Replaced much too fast by a void, by cold, Gary’s arms moved about, but felt nobody anywhere near him anymore, Gary suddenly felt like he was being swayed to and fro, as if he was in water, *underwater,* sound was muted and chopping and thick, he opened his eyes to find his dream-self completely submerged in a dark ocean before being taken over by the feeling of free-falling and then landing hard on solid ground. Gary pushed himself up, feeling he wasn’t wet at all, blinking the stars out his eyes –

*“Gary! GARY!!”*

Ash’s desperate voice snapped him to full attention, and like a miracle, Ash was besides Gary, pulling Gary up into his arms, “Ash! Ash, what,” Gary looked around, they were, in the hospital, if,
the hospital had a dark, and scary, and abandoned wing just for scaring the shit out of its patients – Gary and Ash pulled each other close, “Ash, whu–what is this, how did we get here?!”

Ash was trembling in Gary’s arms as they held each other against the dark and threatening atmosphere, “This,” said Ash, “in my nightmares,” he swallowed, “I think, this is the dark place.”

Chapter End Notes

Like I said before, thanks for sticking around this long, it's been a long, long, LONG road to the climax of this story, but I'm glad we're finally getting to it. I am going to finish this story, no matter what roadblocks may come, and I hope it entertains to the end =w=b

P.S. the climax is now in three parts, so yes, the original chapter 10 has been split into four different chapters in all, so technically chapter 10 is halfway done :D

Also the song was by a band called Whitesnake, so in the pokemon world, they are WhiteEkans....I know, I can feel you all rolling your eyes from here >:P
The Warmth of Frost: Part 2

Chapter by SilentAvera, Singing Woodpecker (SilentAvera)

Chapter Summary

To all the cast members of this story: it's time to get fucked up.

Chapter Notes

Oh my sweet jegus god, I cannot express how happy I am in getting to this point in the story with all ten of my fingers and toes intact this far into 2017. Thank-you all for being so remarkably patient. Can't thank you enough. And so, here we reach, the climax.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You really need to wake up right now.

“The dark place?” Gary took in their surroundings of the hospital horror-scape, it looked like they had been transported to a survival horror game, and true to form, were quite defenseless. The only sources of light were dim and flickering bulbs leading to darkness on either end of the hallway with Ash and Gary in the middle, clinging to each other.

Ash swallowed again, “This is it, it changes its form, but I know this feeling, when, I, was on the brink of dying, where I was, where I couldn’t reach out and scream to anyone for help! Of being so helpless, of it wanting to crush me –!”

Gary’s hold on Ash only tightened, *This is the work of the Link*, *he hissed internally, “I’m here now,” said Gary, “and this is just some terrible nightmare amplified by the Link* that we’re going to ride out together, come on Ash, I know this scares you, I know you’re still coming to terms with how this screws with you, but this place is *just the work of the Link*, *is just a manifestation of fear – and I’m not going to sit idle and let it scare you! You’ve got to face it!”*

Right Gary, this IS a dream that you and Ash are sharing right now via those wonderful Transfer Effects – mind trippy experience + 1, what purpose this plays right now, you can only guess! Still, this, THIS is a part of the nightmares that Gardevoir has been eating this whole time?! GARDEVOIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII ;O;!!!

“You’re the bravest person I know Ash,” said Gary, “If I was stuck in this horrible place by myself, I don’t know how I’d do it, but, you were here by yourself, you were already fighting the Link* and you didn’t even know it – and you came back to us! You fought this place when you were in such a state of sorrow and pain and you didn’t give up, you didn’t quit, you heard our voices, saw your memories of everything happy, and you kept fighting to come back to us!”

One of the furthest hallway lights went out on opposing ends of the hallway – the temperature was
starting to drop –

Gary swallowed, “Things are changing now, you know what you have to do, you know everyone here has got your back Ash, lets show this dark place how bright your soul, your heart really is!”

Ash looked up to Gary with a look tangled between awe and fear, another hallway light went out, and the cold ever deepened. A hollow, hollow breath wheezed out from the darkness, Ash snapped a look to it, to face it, despite his body still shaking. Gary kept his arms wrapped around Ash, holding him close from behind,

“Let’s face it together,” said Gary, “I’m right here with you Ash” – another light went out.

In the depths of the darkness, a strange slumping figure looked to be slinking its way toward the shivering couple.

“Gary…”

Gary pressed a kiss to Ash’s shoulder, rubbing/threading in faith with his thumbs, “Trust me Ash, please, I know I’ve shaken that foundation, but, I’m begging you to trust me here.”

“Gary.” Ash was shaking, “My trust in you was never questioned. It was me, all me…just my dumb, stupid head, but, this….” The figure was moving ever closer, another light went out, the flickering electrical specks just barely giving illumination to something snarling and bleeding – *I can’t let this reach you, I just can’t let this reach you! Not again – this can’t happen AGAIN!* –

Gary felt something in Ash come unhinged right out from under his comforting words.

“It’s coming,” Ash shook. “It’s coming and I won’t be able to stop it!”

WAKE UP NOW.

Gary felt Ash twist in his hold, suddenly on the move, pulling, almost shoving Gary with him as he moved to get away, “You can’t be here when it comes!”

Another hallway light went out – it was steadily getting colder –

“Ash – ow! Ash, stop!” Gary planted his feet, “This is a dream!”

“It’s real! MOVE GARY!”

As strong as Gary would like to think himself as, against Ash, against someone who was built out of wilderness, there wasn’t much comparison – even in a dream –

“So help me Gary I will drag you if I have to! Please! PLEASE! I can’t let it get you!”

IT WILL KILL HIM.

“No Ash, ow, you need to stop running away from this! I’m here, I’m right here with you, let’s face
“Gary!”

“I’m not running,” said Gary firmly, “I’m sick of this Link* torturing you – of that monster – of what she did to you” – Gary couldn’t make out the form of the figure moving towards them, but he had a pretty damn good idea of who it was – and here, even in death – even just a mental phantom, she’s still tormenting Ash! Gary’s fist clenched, “If only I had the chance to square off against you, I’d pay you back for everything you did to my Ash!”

If Ash’s crippling emotion was guilt, perhaps Lisa’s was fear! She was a bully, and like with fear, you just have to stand up to it!

Gary felt Ash grab him from behind and bury his face in his back. Gary felt in Ash’s body that he was torn between standing his ground with Gary, and pulling him away again, but where was there to go?

Reel him back in Gary, ground him, be his anchor!

Gary put his hands over Ash’s own clasped around his middle. As much as Gary wanted to take on this battle for his beloved, this was Ash’s match, but he couldn’t be idle either. Gary swallowed. If he didn’t bring Ash back around, the Link* could very well advance from this attack. For a moment, Gary lamented his options before doing what he thought was best – he wrapped an arm around Ash and pushed him to the front, virtually into the open maw of the approaching figure.

“Since when have you ever run from a match?”

It killed Gary to feel Ash’s body turned rigid, but, Ash wasn’t making the move to run away.

Probably because he is either frozen with fear, or in shock that his boyfriend just tossed him to the wolves aka the person that virtually tortured him for a good chunk of time – gg Gary.

Gary then hugged Ash hard from behind, “Just think, of all the times you have stared adversity in the face, and walked away with your head held high. I need you to do that right now Ash. I need you to find within you the courage that has absolutely brought each and every one of your adversaries to their knees. I know you can do this. And I’m right here.” Gary squeezed Ash’s hands, “…I, mean a little more to you than that right?”

Gary felt something in Ash shift painfully.
*Okay that’s a start.* “Just think Love, with what we’ve accomplished, who we are, what we can do, hmp, why, when we’re together, there’s nothing we can’t beat,” Gary hugged Ash harder and let his heart hang out on his sleeve, “I know these demons have run you into the ground, I know she’s beaten you senseless, but god dammit Ash you mean more to me than anything in the entire world and I’m not going to let this take you away!”

Ash heard Gary’s wet hiccup, and felt several tears get pressed into his back.

**What are you doing Ash?**

By now the air was downright frigid, and the figure’s looming presence was still knocking out the lights before it. Ash was left with no other choice. His mind was almost blank, the only thought surfacing from the white-out was to protect Gary. Right then, he would have to confront it. Grant it, exactly how was he going to fight this? This isn’t a pokemon battle, or a fist fight, or even a war of wills, this was confrontation in a league all its own, despite being the most common one of all.

There was nothing to do but talk to it.

Ash gave Gary’s hands a hard squeeze back and took a deep breath while facing the figure head on.

Gary felt Ash’s body shift to stand tall, and his heart almost leapt out of this throat.

“…I know you,” Ash’s hands clenched at his sides, “I know what you want, but you won’t get it, ever….You wanted me to die with you” –

**YES.**

A chill shot straight up Gary’s spine from both the eerily similar voice and Ash’s revelation.

“But I don’t want to. I want to live, and so, every time you tried to lay your hands on me, I ran away!”

**YES.**

The figure was getting closer, yet another light went out, and Gary could just barely see the flicker of two eyes stealing whatever light flashed over them briefly from the dying bulbs –

Ash swallowed, “I’m not running this time, I am terrified of you, I know what you are and I don’t at the same and it’s been driving me crazy! And in turn, I hurt those closest around me!”

Gary could see a hand, a foot, just piece of the body walking, slinking, stumbling its way toward them – and every bit was solid blue like a block of ice –

“This time, you’re the one that’s going to leave! This is my heart, my soul,” Ash gripped Gary’s
hand again, their warmth braving the surmounting chill, “my everything, and I'm, I'm going to show you just what kind of person I am!”

**YES.**

“GET OUT!” Ash screamed, so much so that Gary jumped, the figure still walked, “GET OUT OF ME!” the figure still came, another light went out – “THIS ISN’T YOUR SOUL, IT’S MINE!” – the figure still came, “I SAID GET OUT!” still it came, “GET OUT!” it came closer still, another light claimed – there were only two remaining light sources between the couple and the dark cloaked presence – “Gu, uk” –

“Ash?!”

Ash coughed violently, his hands going over his mouth, his body began to shake and his legs started to slip out from under him, the couple dropped down to their knees – Gary saw plain as day, in the blink of an eye, Ash’s right eye turn blue again followed by coughing up pure black through his hands – “ASH!” – the second to last hallway light burst out in a fantastic explosion of sparks and electrical spitfire – Gary, as he shielded Ash, was able to catch a full glimpse of the figure, however brief it was – and it was not ‘her’ –

**YOU’RE NOT HIM!!**

All that separated the couple from the darkness was a curtain of light. A frozen hand, its fingers crunching from the ice that encased it, reached out to them from the dark, Ash managed to put up a hand covered in black as if to somehow stop the approaching looming doom, “Please,” he gurgled, the icy hand just on the brink of touching Ash – its bitter cold threatening to freeze anything it touched with specks of ice forming on Ash’s palm –!

Gary snatched Ash’s hand away from the figure, pulling Ash completely into him, “You listen to me,” he snarled to the figure with every bit the threat of a protective lover, “I don’t care what form you take – what powers you think you have over him – I won’t let you win, I won’t let you take Ash from me!”

The frozen hand twitched, hanging in the air momentarily, before the entire being lunged for Gary and Ash – oozing black eyes, razor sharp teeth, and all – Gary threw himself back with Ash tight in his grasp out of the monster’s reach just in the nick of time, and in another, both were pulled out of the dream, waking up in a coughing hacking fit, Gary feeling hands pull him back from Ash, but he elbowed whatever poor help in the gut it was that pulled him away and went right back to Ash, who was getting cradled in Gardevoir’s arms, pushing a Heal Pulse* into him –

“OW GARY!”

*Oh, that was Tracey sorry bro X<

“Gary give us a minuet,” said Gardevoir sternly, helping Ash catch his breath. Brock helped Tracey stand from that literal punch to the gut.

Gary tried to take a moment and figure out what the hell had just happened to them both, **but he had to see Ash’s eyes, he had to know he’s okay.** Pikachu, Umbreon, and Sparky were in the colorless room chirping and trilling and barking their happiness with their Trainers conscious again, Audino, Blastoise, Arcanine and Ash’s Charizard were outside of the room speaking with an officer’s
Arcanine, all suddenly looking up to note that their Trainers were alright, all letting out a deep sigh of relief; the officer’s Arcanine barked for their returned attention.

An officer’s Arcanine? Wait, Gary this room, is different, have you guys been moved?

Ash opened his eyes briefly, and much to Gary’s relief again, they both were brown, normal, sane, before shutting them tight as Gardevoir continued to work on his body.

“Thank goodness you two are alright!” said Gardevoir, “That Link* attack was a thick one, but I punched through it!” Ash groaned in Gardevoir’s hold, Gardevoir pushed another Heal Pulse* into him.

Gary looked longingly at Ash, running his hand through Ash’s hair, “What happened?”

DID SOME OTHER FUCKING JERK-OFF MAKE THEIR WAY INTO THIS GOD FORSAKEN PLACE???? HOW DID IT GET TO Y’ALL?????

“Of that, there, is much to discuss,” said Gardevoir as it opened up Ash’s airways a little wider, the poor Ranger still short of breath, “It’s a miracle neither of you suffered cuts or bruises or worse, it was like a tornado had hit your room! Windows blown out, the equipment utterly wrecked – ”

Gary was barely listening however with his attention split majorly in Ash’s recovery, Gardevoir cleared its throat, “Something triggered the Link* again, forcing Ash to have another Link* attack, it was quick, that much I know, and poor Audi got caught up in it, but they’re okay. Audi had hooked itself up to Ash when the attack was progressing and through the reactions from him, it saw some sort of phantom that scared it half to death, making your pokemon react, eh, rashly….” Gardevoir sighed, “One minuet I was talking with the nurses, the other I hear Audino screaming for me in my head that you two were under attack – we thought another intruder had somehow got in! I teleported* to you both but the damage was already done. Your pokemon were inside with you two cradling your bodies, screaming for you to wake up, and Ash wasn’t breathing, scared the life out of everyone! I’ve never aura coded so fast in my life, I was able to piece what happened pretty quickly, however, eh….” Gardevoir just let out a deep sigh, “at least, for now, you’re alright. Property damage is much easier to replace than, well, you.”

Aww but for real, what the hell triggered the Link*? Anybody else got any soul inhabited Dawn Stones laying around? Or was this just a shitstorm of circumstance?......Hm.

Brock, stepped up, “Given after everything that has happened, can you really blame the pokemon for acting the way they did? Ash was having another terror, er Link* attack, I mean, we still don’t understand what it can fully do –”

“Still,” said Tracey, “Poor Audi…”

UUUUUUUUUUAAAAAAAAAAAAAUGUGUGUGUGUGU –

“Gary,” Ash croaked, everyone suddenly looking to him with great concern. Ash reached out to Gary with an unsteady hand to which Gary instantly took in his,

“I’m here sweetheart, I’m right here” – Gary kissed his hand.

Ash opened his eyes again, and the look that he was giving Gary, as tired, and pained as it seemed, was nothing but sheer adoration that sent Gary’s heart tumbling with all sorts of emotion, “Gary,
you’re amazing, amazing – G-Gardevoir, did, you eat the nightmare?” his voice was a little slurred, “Did you feel how amazing Gary was? He helped me stand up to it!”

“I did,” said Gardevoir with an awkward smile against the developing situation, “Gary was very brave.”

“He was the best,” Ash looked to Gary in a dreamily state, “We did it Gary! We fought the Link* together!”

Time out :) Do you hear that? :3 Do you hear that Gary? 83 The sound of adoration, sheer adoration from your beloved, from your boyfriend, acknowledging that you helped him, helped him in a great time of need! YES! YEHEHEHEHEHEESSS! 8D That’s right! 8) That’s right Ash, Gary will protect the ever loving stuffing out youuuuuuuuuuu~! X3 And I, your disembodied internal voice of great insight and non sequitur ramblings will play this moment over and over in your head as you fall in love with this disaster all over again! :D

Gardevoir looked to Gary with a glance that hid a grave undertone in its eyes.

WHY 8D

*Gary,* he heard internally, *The Link*, how it caused this mess, its true you both stood up to it, fought it, but* – Gardevoir’s tone lit a sinking burning feeling within Gary – Gardevoir continued internally, *Um….I’m going run a test on Ash* –

Which test – bio-codes have lots of tests –

“Gardevoir,” said Ash, “If Gary and I can stand up to the Link* now, together, does that mean we will be able to pull it out soon?”

“I certainly hope so,” said Gardevoir trying to keep its voice level, “We still have to figure out what triggered this attack in the first place, and, let me see…” Gardevoir put its hand to the side of its head, “Hm, so far, security has no evidence of another breach, which, makes this attack, a bit concerning. Ash, I’m going to run a coding test on you and see what’s up.”

Gary visibly grimaced

“A coding test?”

Gary answered, “A coding test is like, um, think of it like trouble-shooting a computer, but on a human’s bio-code, the process can, cause a lot of strain on the body…”

“Like pain?” asked Ash.

“More like extreme sickness,” said Gardevoir, “I performed one on you when you were unconscious and still hooked up to all the machines, but now you’re going to feel it, and it is going to suck, a lot. There’s not a lot of medicine I can give you during the procedure, but afterwards we can give you something for the nausea and headaches at least.”

Ash made a face, “Sounds like fun…but…do whatever you need to do, I want this Link* out of me, please.”

Gardevoir nodded, looking much more calm, “Will do. You just hang in there while the procedure is performed okay?”

“And I’ll be right by your side,” said Gary, Ash smiled warmly at him.
“Actually you’ll be outside the room,” said Gardevoir, “I know we’ve, er, I, have broken quite a few standard procedures as it is, but that is one I’m going to need to follow.”

_Blah, whatever._

Ash suddenly jerked up, “So, I had another Link* attack – h-how is everyone else doing? Was anyone else effected by the attack? Is Audi alright? Did anyone get hurt?”

“Slow down Ash, no one got hurt,” said Gardevoir, “well, save the distress put on the two of you, but no one got hurt” –

“What else happened? How come we’re in a different room?”

The room door suddenly opened and Audino came waddling in, its poketranslator crooked, “It was all my fault Ash.”

“Audi?”

“I, um,” Audino looked to be on the verge of tears, “I – I panicked! I thought I saw, some kind of apparition, but, maybe, it was just my nerves! I should have fronted myself better, I let it get the best of me, and – I just had to protect you two, and so I used, an attack, Psychic*, once I got the door open – and, I don’t think I controlled it right” –

Gardevoir’s voice was low, “Audino, it’s okay –”

“You trusted me to protect them, but I failed! I just made it worse!” Audino blurted, “Everyone has just been through so much – I can’t believe I was so stupid – and I just wanted to help and” –

Ash tilted his head, as if some kind of realization popped into his mind.

“Audi, take a deep breath,” said Gary, “Whatever happened, was an accident.”

_This poor hospital, jegus._

Gardevoir coughed.

**WHAT 8D??**

“It was Blastoise and Charizard anyway that essentially wrecked the room with their attacks,” said Brock, “Fire and Water are super effective against electronics.”

_Is that why they’re talking with the officer’s Arcanine? Yeah sorry we broke this expensive ass equipment but we thought our Trainers were getting killed – oh well. Chump change compared to your beloved’s health. Bluh._

“Like Gardevoir said,” said Tracey, “Thank goodness the two of you weren’t hurt in that chaos.”

_Speaking of chaos, we be Misty at? OR RITCHIE HEY YOUR BEST FRIEND WAS IN TROUBLE HERE, and weren’t y’all supposed to contact him? Oh yeah you were too busy screwing each other to high heaven – distance goes both ways y’all –_

Audino just bent with shame, “I’m, I’m sorry, I promise to do better. I’ve already pledged to the hospital to make up and repay the damage, and Blastoise and Charizard are doing the same.”

“Audi let us take care of that,” said Ash –
Gary held out his arms, “Come here you” –

Before Audino could even think to refuse, Gardevoir lifted it with its powers and planted it square in Gary’s arms, Ash joining in on the deeply rooted hug making Audino squeak with heavy thick bubbly tears, “Shshshshshsh, its okay, it’ll all be okay,” Ash cooed.

Look at all this strength his boy shells out in spades to others and leaves next to none for himself anymore. Fucking stroodles man.

There came a soft knocking at the door followed by Officer Jenney letting herself in.

Cue Brock internally screaming. No, he hasn’t grown out of that at all, he would gladly be a cougar’s kitten. Grant anyone would feel safe in Officer Jenny’s arms goddamn.

“Good evening everyone” –

Gary looked out the window with a raised eyebrow seeing a couple stars twinkle faintly.

Evening? Fuck its night already?

Officer Jenny quickly ran her hand through her hair and adjusted her cap, “Good news, we can safely conclude there was absolutely no breach in security,” then a lone finger went to her lips, “however, the cameras on this floor caught some, interesting footage if I may display it to you all.”

Officer Jenny moved to Ash’s bed, took out her com and beckoned everyone to gather around and take a look.

Oh, this must be right when the attack happened so WHAT THE FUCK IS THAT FLOATING THROUGH THE HALL–

An audible gasp escaped the room as the camera caught a strange figure-like mist manifest in and out of view moving through the hallway above the pokemon’s heads, no one even noticing with their attention drawn to Audino and its concerns down the hallway, of which, the camera saw none –

HOW DID NO ONE PICK THAT UP???

“Oh it gets better,” said Officer Jenny, “The hair on the back of my neck stood up, keep watching” –

Everyone watched the pokemon talking with Audino, all still clueless to the floating mist-figure, Audino was getting ready to unlock the door, then the door suddenly opening up and slamming shut, yanking Audino’s body with it via its death grip on the door handle, and then the pokemon went into action, breaking into the room, the mist disappearing. Officer Jenny pulled away with a sigh, Audino tilted its head,

“It’s different watching yourself huh?” said Officer Jenny, “I know Audino, that you want to take responsibility for your actions, but, well, of course you got scared! You all saw that odd presence the camera picked up, and the way that door opened and shut. I’m going to be honest, this is downright creepy.”

Gardevoir made a face, “And yet you all have concluded there was absolutely no breach with that footage?”

“Trust me, nothing got through, we were on the scene in seconds,” said Officer Jenny, “Not even a ghost or psychic type pokemon, or anyone that could use Teleport* or any other such function, there were absolutely no Teleportation* ripples detected by any of our own psychic types, so this is
something else. We were fortunate enough to have a news crew doing a piece on the hospital and actually captured the moment the exterior windows blew out from your pokemon’s attacks, and so far as we can tell, there was no escaping perpetrator from that angle, and from what the hallway cameras captured and your pokemon’s testimony, there was no escape out the hallway either.”

Ash looked distressed, Gary started to feel something cold brewing up in Ash –

NO, NOT TONIGHT GODDAMIT –

“We still don’t know what the Link* can fully do,” Ash echoed, his voice low.

Gary fully turned towards Ash, “Ash, I seriously doubt” –

But Gardevoir was stroking its chin inquisitively, “Hmp, we won’t rule anything out” –

NONONONONO DON’T EVEN IMPLY THAT SHIT – YOU’RE GOING TO TANK ASH’S EMOTIONS AND FUCK FUCK GODDAMMIT GARDEVOR WHY HE’S GETTING COLD ON THE SPOT THANKS A FUCKING LOT –

“Then, am I getting worse, and not better?” Ash’s voice was high with a small tremor, “How come? We fought the Link* together?”

“That’s what the coding test will figure out,” Gardevoir let out a deep sigh, “Ultimately, I am worried that this Link* will start acting like an evolving virus and is building up an immunity to the treatments that Ash has been receiving” –

WELL FUCK IT ALL THEN –

“Didn’t Suicune’s treatment do anything?!” Ash blurted –

“It did,” Gardevoir replied, “The trigger superseded everything.”

“That’s not fair,” Ash replied shortly, “I’m doing everything right aren’t I? I’m processing, I’m trying to understand – so why this?!”

Gardevoir softly touched Ash’s hand, “Treating the Link* will ultimately be tricky because it is tied to your emotions. Processing is not a straight line, it can move every which way but forward sometimes, despite what you feel. The point however is to keep pushing forward, especially when it gets worse. We’re going to figure this out. We’re going to understand and fight back, we just need to size up with what we’re dealing with now. The Link* may not have so much as progressed, but perhaps changed in function. If nothing got in to trigger the Link*, then, it would have to have been something that’s already here.”

Or perhaps, something that’s already inside Ash? Isn’t that a scary thought Gary? :D Or, HEH, here’s a stretch, how about something INSIDE YOU???

Gary felt Ash’s emotional state plummet like a rock on the inside, while on the outside, the hairline fractures in his person were growing with a small tremor in Ash’s hand and voice. Gary quickly took up Ash’s hand into his own, catching Ash’s very, very tired eyes. Gary pressed a kiss to his forehead, prompting Ash to lean fully into him, and letting Gary wrap his arms around his waist.

“So, then, since the Link* is tied to me, how I feel,” said Ash, Gary feeling the vibrations of Ash’s voice on his chest, “Then, could it be that, even if I control myself to not lash out, this, Link* might lash out for me?”
Now we’re getting into dangerous waters here.

“Again, we won’t know anything solid till I perform the coding test,” said Gardevoir, “But even if the Link* has somehow evolved, you and Gary both already showed you two were capable of fighting against it, so there’s still hope.”

Even just standing up to it at least, that says something, it means something.

Officer Jenny tapped her chin inquisitively, “I don’t know much about auras or Human Health Transfer, but, that’s a part of Mr. Ketchum’s recovery right?”

“Yes,” said Gardevoir, “And Ash has a very sensitive heart.”

That he does ;n;

“So I’d appreciate it if you could try to quell whatever other media storm will result from this.”

“Oh no, no worries there,” said Officer Jenny waving her hand, “I’ll do what I can, but what I mean to say, or add on is, maybe that the environment could have a hand in it? Like, the hospital in general?”

“How could that even be a thing?” said Gary raising another eyebrow.

“The staff here have been nothing but kind and tolerant,” said Tracey, “They have bent over backwards and over and under for us despite everything that’s happened!”

Again Gardevoir held an inquisitive look.

“Oh no no no, yes I agree, I mean the people here are true miracle workers through and through,” Officer Jenny crossed her arms, “What I mean to say is, this hospital has been around….There’s been stories and sightings of well, things.”

Padon~?

“Hold up,” said Brock, “You mean like a, a haunting?”

Haaaaaaaa because the last thing you guys need aside from a FUCKING ghost type is a legit haunting from a fucking psychotic type FUCK EVERY OUNCE OF YOUR LIFE – THIS TRAIN DON’T EVER STOP GODDAMN –

“Oh yeah, you should ask the staff about it sometime,” said Officer Jenny, “They say things get really active on the 11th floor at night sometimes, like stuff moving around, but the ghost pokemon never reported anything ever malicious, just annoying. They say its just, people, wanting to let others know they’re still around.”

So much is happening for you to digest Gary, fuck, okay, like, the Link* is a bit of Lisa, and Lisa was a bit of ghost, and now, WAS that Lisa in the footage or something else? Would the Link* have the capabilities of signaling to other presences, perhaps, what’s left of Lisa’s presence? Her soul? Her soul to Ash’s soul? Is that a thing that can happen? But isn’t, her soul, in a Dawn Stone? Did you ever get solid clarity on that? And why happen now? You know what paranormal bullshit will do what it fucking wills, you got some investigative work to do son, and A LOT of it! Bottom line is STILL getting that STUPID LINK* OUT OF ASH!!!!

“Bottom line,” said Officer Jenny, “We can only chase what we can see. Rest assured I won’t let my colleagues ever make such a mistake again, not after the hell Brock and Misty rained down upon
them, but this, might be a little out of what we can wrangle.”

“Who ya gonna call?” commented Tracey dryly.

“Totally,” said Officer Jenny, “When all other probable explanations have been exhausted, well, what else is left? I can tell when some of the staff saw this footage, they were downright chilled. Mismagius and the Rotoms said they would keep their senses peeled for upset presences, if anyone –”

As Officer Jenny talked, Gary felt something, or someone staring at them and looked up, seeing through the window their pokemon still talking with the Officer’s Arcanine and a couple of med staff who were indeed looking in and pointing (much to his relief, how much it would have sucked it if they were ghosts). They were whispering to one another, and then quickly walked off once they saw Gary catching wind of them.

Oh fuck off >:( You could have mentioned your place of business has ghost cooties, or random aura phenomenons as some people call it. You. You wrote that. In a science journal. Dork. Because like, energy doesn’t just disappear. Intelligent energy has to gain its experience somehow, and being born is a good way to do that....Okay but Lisa really is dead, and so....her soul....No, no, no, its in the Dawn stone isn’t it? Isn’t it? ;n;

“You are sure there wasn’t any breach” –

“I would stake my entire career on the fact that nothing got through,” said Officer Jenny, “After that first slip up with League officials dismissing the threat level Brock and Misty had assigned, I have personally bolted down every nook and cranny of this place at the behest of the Elite Four and Champion” –

They dismissed the threat level Brock and Misty assigned 8’D How are they still alive? No you know what Gary, Brock and Misty most likely went over them and went directly to the Indigo Counsel themselves and I bet that shit got straightened up REAL FUCKING QUICK!

“Not to mention the Rangers,” Officer Jenny continued, “specifically that Mary, have done a remarkable job in ensuring a further line of detection and protection, and lets not forget those wonderful legendary pokemon on the roof, especially that big bad boy Zekrom and its impromptu detection grid, I mean” –

Ash made a pained face, “Did Moltres make a scene again?”

“Moltes? No, I didn’t see it,” said Officer Jenny.

“Good.”

Officer Jenny adjusted her cap, “On that note, I think it’s been made clear how much everyone wants to help the Pride of Kanto,” to which Officer Jenny gave Ash a warm smile, “We’re going to protect one of our brightest sons.”

Ash bent out of sudden shyness, his hand moving to pull his cap down from muscle memory, but alas, no cap was on his head.

Officer Jenny moved to leave, “Welp, I’m going to finish up my report and get back on call then.”

“Thank-you so much for everything you’re doing,” said Ash, “And for everyone else helping out too!”
“No problem, no problem,” said Office Jenny, “to you all, good evening,” Officer Jenny tipped her cap, but suddenly looked back from the crease of the door, “And, for the record, I certainly hope its just ghosts to deal with, if you were attacked by a vampire too, then that’s a whole other department~”

Ash tilted his head in confusion, Officer Jenny pointed to Ash’s neck, leaving with a muted laugh and Gary suddenly found himself hotter than the belly of the Cinnabari island volcano –

*Oh whoops <8D*

Ash’s hand went to the side of his neck, “What about my neck?”

Ash looked to Gardevoir, Tracey, then Brock who all suddenly felt it was much better to look literally anywhere else other than Ash, Gardevoir coughed, “Weeeeeeellllllllllll…….”

Sparky made a kissy kissy face to Pikachu; Umbreon did not approve (Audino el blushue~).

Ash looked to Gary and Gary’s face had guilt scribbled all over it –

*Let’s just enjoy these last few seconds of Ash having cherished you –*

“*Who has a mirror?*” Ash asked quickly, Brock pulled out a little mirror from his zippy pants pocket, handed it over to Ash, and as Ash inspected himself his mouth dropped in absolute horror upon seeing a slew of hickey marks dotted across his features –

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGARY!”

“Wasn’t it good for you,” said Gary feebly –

“G-GARY – ?!”

“I’m sorry babe I guess I just got carried away” –

“CARRIED AWAY?! It’s like you spelled out Morse on my neck! You said no one would ever know!” Ash grabbed the sheets of the hospital bed with the dexterity of a pokemon burdened with the Klutz ability, “Give me a scarf! Blankets! COVER! ANYTHING! My MOM is here!!!”

“I’ll – I’ll go get something!” Audino chirped bouncing off the bed.

“Gee,” said Brock, “Let’s lock the door to our room and blare out ‘Is this Love’ by WhiteEkans, no one will ever knooowoow” –

“We didn’t lock the door, it was locked for us, and we didn’t know that song would be playing,” Gary spat. “We just wanted cover for how much sound we were making” –

“HUSH!” Ash screeched.

Gardevoir placed its hand to the side of its head, “Ah, your mom’s coming down the hall with Misty,” and Ash responded with a gasping choking sound –

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA ;);;O;;!! P-Pikachu! C’mere buddy” –

Pikachu shook its head and tsk – tsked its trainer.

“At first we thought the bruising on your neck was a result of the Link*,” said Gardevoir, taking pity on Ash an indulging his frantic attempts to bury himself by psyching over some blankets from the
cabinet (on top of Audino’s pile), “and, perhaps why your breathing was hindered, buuuuuut, welp turns out those bruises were just love bites” –

“Tongue stamps,” said Tracey flatly.

“Vacuum kisses” –

**OK YOU KNOW WHAT AS IF HALF THIS PLACE DIDN’T WANT YOU TWO TO GET IT ON ANYWAY SO SUCK IT!!! DX!!!!**

“I mean, Gary,” Brock started, “Quality over quantity is still a thing” –

And Gary shot Brock look that spelled out ‘I WILL END YOU’ –

“It’s okay Ash, really,” said Gardevoir, “I will explain to your mom” –

“YOU WILL NOT EXPLAIN ANYTHING!” Ash and Gary hissed –

“Come, come now,” Gardevoir continued with a mewl smirk, “In the end it was good for the bettering of your emotional state was it not? Your emotions are deeply tied to the Link*, thaaaaat is encroaching on your bio-code – so! A successful turn of” – Gardevoir’s face suddenly went blank, “Oh my god.”

But before any further response could be produced, Misty entered the room with Mrs. Ketchum walking beside her on her own.

Ash resembled a snow pile, with barely his face showing, giving the most innocent of smiles, “Hi mummyyyyyyyy! Ah,” Ash shot up out of the pile (thankfully Audino had wrapped his neck with several pillow shams), “You’re walking on your own!”

*Probably not for much longer if her heart has to keep dealing with this shit, oh! Gary! Remember you told Audino when it worked on her to share the info of Ms. Ketchum’s biocode! REVIEW THOSE –*

“Oh, hello my sweetie,” Mrs. Ketchum hobbled over and gave her son a tight hug, Ash returning the gesture, “oh why must these terrible things keep happening?!”

The first thing out of Ash’s mouth was, “I’m sorry” –

Followed by his mother’s response, “Oh honey it’s not your fault, I’m upset at the situation, not you.”

Misty had her arms crossed (and eyes quirked in why the hell Ash was ‘covered’ so), “We were hit by a double whammy here, first Ritchie, then you” –

The room’s attention went tenfold, Sparky’s going wide – “Pipipi?!”

Ash gripped the bed rail, “What – what happened to Ritchie?!”

“He told me he was going to meet up with you,” said Brock quickly –

“Yeah well he lied,” said Misty, “Just before this kerfuffle all went up, he apparently went to go challenge Moltres.”

Gary felt Ash’s insides fall, “He did what?”
Misty bit her thumb looking off the side, nodding to herself, “Oh he is going to get it” –

Sparky began chirping up a storm of questions, Audino boiling them all down to, “Where is Ritchie now?”

Mrs. Ketchum stepped forward, “We heard from Mary that Ritchie is currently at the pokemon center with his Charizard that he used to fight Moltres with, it must have been quite the battle.”

Sparky bolted out the room, the other pokemon looking on sadly.

Misty flung her arms open, “He doesn’t even know this happened to you” –

_Hell what is MOLTRES going to do?!

Misty continued with a defeated sigh, “Ritchie was rather upset after I told him what Moltres said to you Ash,” she looked to Brock, “I thought he’d be better about it.”

Brock crossed his arms, “I thought so too, but I guess we were both duped.”

Ash snatched up Gary’s com, Gary swallowed, “What are you doing?”

“I’m calling him, I can’t, believe he did that.”

“I’m not sure if you’ll be able to reach him that way,” said Mrs. Ketchum as the com rang steadily against Ash’s ear, “Mary should be with him, try her number.”

_Their coms better be CHARGED, UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUGH –

“Where did the match even take place?” asked Gardevoir, “It surely wasn’t here.”

Misty turned on her heels, “Mary said Moltres offered to lead them to an open field not too far from Viridian City where it could,” Misty made quotation marks with her hands, “‘prove its worth to its champion’s confidant’, needless to say it fought with every bit of its legendary potential, but, even then, according to Mary, Ritchie and Zippo knocked Moltres’ down a peg, it was a close match.”

Ritchie’s voicemail answer came up, “Hey its Ritchie, leave a message for me – ‘kay bai – beep” –

Ash ended the call and called Mary’s number next.

Misty continued, “Moltres buffed itself faster and caught a few flinches, but even then, Zippo kept delivering an answer to each hit it took, and even got a crit in. In fact, Zippo would have won with the next blow, but Moltres had already stacked itself with Agility* and gave the winning hit despite the recoil it took. They both fought with everything they had, and Moltres took a beating, I mean a royal smack-down. From what I heard, it’s very upset with itself because the match was so close. It should be back on the roof now, sulking, Roosting* itself back up. Hopefully it won’t learn anytime soon what happened with Ash while it was gone, but even if it did, I’m sure Zekrom won’t let it go too crazy,” Misty sighed, “As MAD as I am right now, as a Trainer, as a Gym Leader, what Ritchie and Zippo, especially Zippo, managed to do was pretty dang impressive. Fire/Flying versus Fire/Flying, if Ritchie has used a pokemon with a type advantage against Moltres, I bet they would have won, easily. He just wanted to put Moltres in its place with its uptight attitude.”

_Working together has always been humanity’s greatest strength after-all. And people wonder why there are legendary pokemon that practically salivate over champions? Who wouldn’t want to channel that power for themselves? Especially with Mega Evolutions and Z-moves?_
“I’m not surprised it was close,” said Ash as he listened to the com ring, “I know what he and his pokemon can really do. Misty, you talked with Mary right? She’s not answering.”

“Probably because she is giving Ritchie the thrashing of his life,” said Misty simply, followed by a frustrated sigh running her fingers through her hair, “I wish, I could just, peek into his mind and find out what’s going on.”

*Lord, I’m so glad you don’t have these Transfer Effects :/**

“I’m sure Ritchie, in his own mind, was defending Ash’s honor,” said Brock, “But that wasn’t smart, now rival Trainers are going to think its open season to challenge the legends, and Ash’s position with them.”

**Goddamit Ritchie X(**

“I bet the legends will keep up their threat displays,” said Tracey, “But you’re right, that was not a good move. I mean, we know that Moltres, needs, some work, but how do you think everyone else is going to see it? Ash injured and then his best friend takes on the Moltres for himself? They’ll twist Ritchie’s intentions at best, and vilify him at worst!”

“Who is this, ‘they’?” asked Gary.

“This place has the eyes of Kanto on it,” said Brock in a matter-of-fact tone, “And Kalos with Gardevoir just having dropped everything to come here, and shoot, probably the world at this point.”

Gary gave Brock another sour look, Ash shifted as he turned Gary’s com off with it ringing endlessly.

*Yeah, Mary probably has her come off as to not interfere with her crucifying poor Ritchie.*

“With the news vans coming in and out like clock work I’d say you’d be right,” said Misty.

Ash gripped the sheets, “Then, I’ll just tell them what happened. Ritchie was just standing up for me, that’s all.”

“You want to talk to the press?” asked Mrs. Ketchum.

“Honestly, I really don’t,” said Ash bending a bit, “I’ve liked being out of the limelight, but I don’t want Ritchie to deal with anymore negativity than he has to. I can at least tell people I’m okay myself, all I have to do is talk.”

**FORESHADOWING 8’D**

Gary’s com gave a jingle, he tapped it open and saw a text from Mary, “It’s Mary!”

The room gathered around as Gary read it off, “Please tell Ash that I have Ritchie grounded, he’s fine, Charizard is fine, and I gave a statement about what that match was about, and will continue to ban-hammer any other soul that tries to make a challenge, eom. Ah, she also sent a picture,” Gary opened it up and it showed a selfie with Mary giving a very stern glare with Ritchie right next to her having the shit pinched out of his cheek.

*Please be gentle based Mary ;;;;n;;;;;

Ash winced, “She grounded him? Well, I’m not surprised…. ”

Tracey scratched his cheek idly, “I wonder how Ritchie got passed Mary then in the first place?”
“Whatever, awesome, it’s done and over with,” Misty stretched, “no press, no worry, this day has been CRAZY!”

“I agree,” said Gardevoir, “Lets get things in order for the night.”

Gary nuzzled Ash and asked quietly, “Hey, you wanna call Ritchie? I bet we could reach him through Mary now, or maybe, he’s got his com with him.”

Ash looked at the com longingly, but finally responded, “I’ll give him his space, especially after this. But if he calls me then, yeah, I’ll talk to him.”

Rude hiccup of the evening aside, things fell through rather well with friends and staff alike, although Ash and Gary could hear power drills from the repair work being done in the damaged room. To stomach the sound better, and himself, Ash gladly signed off on payment for replacing the medical equipment that got damaged and authorized a hefty donation as well, making Nurse Laylah who was handling the matter flush and stutter.

As much as you like to spoil Ash with your wages Gary, he’s the one that is actually loaded from his Trainer circuit winnings, and he’s been out of the circuit for what, almost three years? Dayum, well that and he’s still got his income from Ranger work, phuu. It’s not like you’ve got some bank too with your research (especially in aiding the medical field). You both are lucky sons a bitches. 99 problems and they all come from your just incredible mental aptitude 8D –

“I am, reading this correctly, Mr. Ketchum?”

Ash bowed his head, “Yes,” and looked up, “I, also want to apologize for, our,” Ash grimaced and Gary snorted, not caring to hide the volume, “lapse of judgment, we meant no disrespect to the hospital or its incredible staff” –

OHHH COME ON NO ONE CARES ASH NOOOOO OOOOOOONNNNEEEE – point check ASH was the one to take YOUR V-card Gary, grant it you flung it at him BUT STILL.

Ash bowed again, “Sorry for the trouble…”

Nurse Laylah waved off Ash’s shame, “Oh if you only knew what went on between Doctor Macevoy and Isabella in the basement of this place!” Nurse Laylah laughed then cleared her throat, “Still, thank-you so much for this contribution Mr. Ketchum, and for the respect for our facility, and on that note, do you have any requests on how to handle your donation?”

Ash titled his head, “Um, for it to help people?”

“It will do that yes, but do you have a specific field in mind?”

“The field that really super helps people?”

Nurse Laylah quickly glanced to Gary to signal for help.

“Like, which field of medicine Ash? Cardiology? Neurology?”

“Bodyology? Just, anywhere it needs to go,” said Ash, “Anything that is hurting or lacking.”

“General it is then,” said Nurse Laylah, “Again, thank-you so much Mr. Ketchum!”

Mrs. Ketchum returned and stayed with Ash and Gary and their pokemon Pikachu and Umbreon till
it was almost time to turn in for the night. She told Ash that she had talked with Ritchie through her com and Ash flooded her with questions as to how he was acting, of which Mrs. Ketchum replied that he was just, sad, and extremely apologetic.

“I think, in the end, Ritchie will realize that his depression can still get the better of him too,” said Mrs. Ketchum.

Gary’s stomach folded.

So, there’s your confirmation on that Gary. Just, that right there. Didn’t you just learn that Ritchie is on meds too? And that Sparky had to double it? And that he most likely has to take it fairly consistently? And how worried Ash has been about him? And holy shit talk about blind spots for Ash, Ritchie may as well as not even EXIST. Ritchie is sick too, and if you can infer from the information you have, he’s BEEN sick….like Ash, but unlike Ash, he’s been treating his, and it still manages to twist him about. Oh and lets not leave your blooming ass out of the loop Mr. Anxiety, when did you last take YOUR medicine?

As Ash talked with his mom, Gary spent the better half of their conversation looking through the bio-code data that Audino gathered for Gary from its treatment with Mrs. Ketchum, and found nothing out of the norm.

Her soul is super resistant, that’s for sure, she is remarkably strong, strong as a tree with thick roots and able to bend as needed. That’s a mother’s strength for you. Hm.

Gardevoir came back in the room with ever growing bags under its eyes and said it was going to share some intel about the Onelings that came to fruition, of which Ash and Gary had a respectful right to know.

Yeah, that stuff when you were in the pool with Ash. You learned more about the Oneling bullshit alright. At the time, you only knew the bare minimum with the Smeargle going for Ash, but a lot more happened, because obviously it did. Zoroark had been interrogating the Smeargle and it took a little while, but Zoroark cracked open the Smeargle like an egg and got the scoop that the Onelings had their sights set on Ash, and were going to try again. But they were stopped! There was a sting operation set up, and Onelings were nabbed with you and Ash none the wiser. Cobalion helped with the sting, and after that it shipped itself off to do some more work investing them via the legends. It’s really nice knowing that the group is in for some COSMIC JUSTICE – like, wouldn’t it be grand to know that like, Palkia just sent them to the dimension of shit? That would be nice. All in all, YAY YAY, more Onelings are in custody, GOOD!!! As for the Dawn stone that may or may not contain Lisa’s soul, (or maybe a part of it?) still residing in Smeargle’s gut, there still wasn’t much, lest the damn thing be cut open, WHICH, really, that piece of shit wouldn’t be missed.

“Has there been any word on Avalugg?” asked Ash.

“No,” said Gardevoir, “I’m not sure if Max is still looking, especially with Mary pulling a tighter ship now, but I can check if you’d like.”

“No, you don’t have to bother him,” said Ash, “I was just, wondering.”

:(

Ritchie didn’t call, although Ash secretly hoped he would, and eventually Ash couldn’t stand the distance any longer and texted him through Gary’s com, Ritchie texting back a couple meaningless emojis.
With the night rolling in full steam, Mrs. Ketchum kissed both her son and Gary goodnight, and their
pokemon, and hobbled off with the help of a nurse to take her back to her own room to continue to
rest.

....Maybe you should look through her bio-code again....

“I’ll be right here,” said Gardevoir, pouring itself a cup of coffee, “Don’t worry, if a night terror rears
its ugly head, we’ll fight it, all together.”

Ash gave a tired smile, nuzzling into Gary, “Honestly I just want to try to straight conk out,
Gardevoir, could you…?”

“Oh of course, of course, Gary, would you like a Hypnosis* too?”

“Yes please, knock my butt out.”

Gardevoir placed its hands on Ash and Gary’s forehead followed by a simple command whisper,
and nigh instantaneously, both young men were out like a light, falling almost perfectly into place
against one another.

Pikachu and Umbreon cuddled up as Gardevoir took a seat, looking through its com notifications.
Once the room came to a peaceful steady ambient, only then did it notice how cold it had gotten.

Gardevoir groaned, “I was hoping this room’s air conditioning at least wouldn’t be as cold as the last
one. Oh well.”

Gary slept straight through the night, no dreams, no break inbetween, and when he awoke, his body
felt more rejuvenated than he had been in a while. Moaning slightly as he awoke, he saw Ash was
already up with a clear plastic cylinder in his hands holding a tan liquid. He watched Ash take a gulp
before his body movements gave himself away as awake,

“You’re up already?” Gary yawned as he stretched.

“Yeah, doing prep time while Gardevoir is talking with the staff again,” Ash took another big gulp of
the tan liquid (that had to have had quite the sour and bitter taste the way Ash’s face scrunched up),
“Blech, *cough*, hm….”

“What’s up?”

“I asked if, any of the flowers had made it when they cleaned the room out, buuuuut, none of them
did, our flower crowns were toast too, but, my hat made it out! At least.”

“That’s good at least,” said Gary.

.....At least your failed flower crown Gary is now burned out of existence >3>;;;

“Annnndeh, Gardevoir is going to do the code test on me today, sometime in the afternoon I think,
also, I’ve,” Ash fiddled with the liquid in the cylinder, swishing it around, “I’ve been, thinking,
wondering, about what triggered the Link star attack.”

“Don’t dwell on it too much Love,” Gary rolled himself closer to Ash, “Let Gardevoir do what it
does best, let it run the test, then we’ll know. It won’t do us any good to…” But Gary couldn’t finish
his sentence and just shrugged.

“To let it drive me crazy,” finished Ash, “I guess I’ve dodged, bigger bullets before, but this one is
already lodged in me….well, aside from that, there’s also the, the Dark Place…..And, that’s the work
of the Link star right? Like, some form of manifestation of it? I mean I’ve had nightmares before, that,
that’s…..it feels so, real…”

“Yeah, thatsyyyyssssss, our best guessimate so far,” said Gary, “And after witnessing it myself,” Gary
gave a hindered sigh, “I know, I was trying to downplay on it being a dream, but, you’re right, it is
certainly a bit more than that, way more than some vivid night terror.”

“What’s your take on it?” asked Ash, before attempting to down more of the unpleasant drink.

Gary rubbed some more sleep out of his eye and sat up, “Well, the ‘Dark Place’, is probably not that
far off from the Dream World phenomenon that was discovered by scientists in Unova. We’re both
super susceptible to Health Transfer, healing mainly from pokemon energy wavelengths, so its
possible, especially now that we’re dealing with Transfer Effects, and that stupid Link star, that we’ve,
or you have, stumbled into an ephemeral reality that brews upon your emotions, like how a
pokemon’s dreams can hold substance for the Dream World. It’s pretty darn amazing if you ask me,
from a scientific standpoint, but for what it really is, it sucks, a lot.”

Ash shuddered, be it from the drink or an unpleasant thought, “If a pokemon’s dream that enters the
Dream World can hold substance, mine could have too, you really could have gotten hurt!”

Shit so could you!

“Maybe, maybe not, we’re not 100% on that yet, this is all speculation so far,” said Gary.

“Yeah, but, you’re usually right.”

Gary tried to hold down his smirk, “Well yeah, there’s that too. We have clues to the Night Terror
Manifestations, err, Link star attacks, but again, we won’t know too much else until Gardevoir does the
code test.”

“Have you ever done a code test before?” asked Ash.

“Nope. I have worked out systematics and procedure protocols on it, but only seriously gifted Health
Transfer pokemon can do it, err actually apply it, and alas, I am human,” Gary shrugged again, this
time almost cartoonish-like at Ash before pulling him for a deep hug making Ash grunt and scurry to
not spill the liquid, “It’s really not going to be pleasant,” said Gary quietly, “…I wish, I wish you
didn’t have to go through one like this….”

“If it’ll help get the Link star out, I wouldn’t mind being flogged,” said Ash, voice muffled against
Gary, Ash shifted so he could talk better, “I want this, to be over – I want this Link star out of me so I
can, try to move on…” Ash looked down, setting the cylinder container on his lap, “but, I feel like
I’m just stumbling with this, because now, even sleep is a threat….” Ash gave a deep inhale, and
exhale, “And on top of everything, all these dealings with the Link star are tied to my emotions?” Ash’s
shoulder’s slumped, “I’m trying Gary, really, really I am…."

“Shshshsh sweetheart, its okay,” Gary rubbed Ash’s arms and nuzzled him, letting Ash know he was
there to listen, and Ash continued,
“I’m trying not to doubt myself, but its hard, *its so hard* when the pushback is so much, and so frequent.”

“Just talk to me Ash, tell me something, tell me anything.”

“What do you feel of me right now?” Ash asked.

“I can feel you’re scared, and I can feel you want to understand the Dark Place.”

“I do want to understand.”

“Then talk to me Ash, let me help you. Tell me what you know about the Dark Place.”

Ash sniffled a bit, “So….What I know….well, you were able to see it too, a piece of it at least….When, I was first lying in that, state, in the Dark Place, I had no idea where I was, I was moving, through my memories, as if I had somehow gone back in time to them, and then there was just, *darkness*, and no matter what I did, where I ran or what I screamed, I couldn’t escape from it, and just before I was, with her! I remember her choking me and there was so much hatred in her eyes, I couldn’t scream, I could barely think, and then she started slamming me against the ice – *just hitting me and hitting me and I was so scared*, I could feel literally, like, my grip on this earth being ripped from me! I was terrified! I thought *she really is going to kill me* and then, just like that I was somewhere else, I was in the Dark Place….and, I couldn’t bear to think what was happening to me. I, I was, *I was dying*. I was really truly, *dying*, and my brain was remembering all these thoughts, and then just, *nothing.*”

Gary saw Ash gripping the bed sheets so tightly that his knuckles were white. He placed his hands over Ash’s as gently as he could to try and help his hands relax followed by a kiss on his shoulder as he held back his own welling emotions to be strong for Ash.

Ash let another breath go and continued, “…I remember screaming for you. I knew if you’d hear me, you’d come running, so I had to keep going to find you, it’s, silly now that I think about it, given what was really happening to me. I was too scared to think I was on the brink of *dying*, yet all the while, there was this feeling telling me to quit…I think, no, it had to be the Link*...It wanted me to lay down and accept that I would be gone forever, there was no coming back. And…I was on my knees, *but then* there was this *light*, I thought it was you, but it was something else that kept playing over and over happy, happy thoughts!” Ash smiled, “We know now that was Audino’s light and love….It kept me warm while I searched for you, and *still* the bad thoughts kept trying to tie me down, they,” Ash rubbed his wrists, “…they felt like *chains*….it really felt like chains on my body….but I knew,” Ash looked up to Gary, “I had to get back to you Gary! And, then I heard Ritchie, and then I heard you! I heard my Gary, I heard my friends and family and Gardevoir calling for me to come home, so,” Ash gave Gary one of the most beautiful smiles he ever did lay eyes upon, “so I came home!”

And then Gary watched that smile fade and get combed over by regret etched in every line on Ash’s face, “…..And now, home is hurting too. I guess, the Dark Place, is just that, it’s a place, up here,” Ash pointed to his head, “so, I guess that means I’ve just been scaring myself,” Ash’s voice got real quiet, “And I just have to handle myself better, to get control over my emotions, and the Link*.”

“We both know it’s more than that,” said Gary, giving Ash a kiss on the cheek, “It hurts, I know, but I don’t know a single recovery that didn’t overcome their demons without pain. It’s getting a bit hairy yeah, but then again Ash, progress is never a straight line. The fact that…..mh….we buried so much, it was bound to, be messy” –

Ash turned swiftly away from Gary, “I can’t, I can’t *live* with the fact that so much pain is happening
because of me” –

Gary caught Ash’s face with his hand gently and turned Ash back to look at him, Ash nuzzling his hand sincerely, “Ash, remember some things are outside of your control, what you need to focus on now,” Gary slipped his hand down over Ash’s heart, “Is this. You. Gardevoir is going to perform the code test, and then we’ll figure our way out from there, all together.”

“I’m trying Gary, really I am, but please, just, be careful around me, I can’t promise it won’t get the better of me again” –

“Then I’ll keep reminding you,” said Gary, “You’re not alone Ash. You’re not alone.”

Gary have you taken your meeleeeddssssssss?

Gary rubbed Ash’s arms some more, “I’m going to be as close as Gardevoir is going to allow me to be during the procedure, I’m going to be right by your side Ash, even if you can’t feel me.”

With that, Ash leaned fully into Gary, and the couple shared a moment in silence. Gary then watched a small smile curl up on Ash’s lips, “…I do like feeling you though.”

The couple nuzzled each other, Gary angling his face to kiss Ash deeply, but as soon as his tongue reached in and got a taste of the lingering liquid he retched right back –

“Oh my god” –

Ash laughed, “I know it tastes bad” –

Gary wiped his mouth, “What is that stuff, I know the code tests needs an agent, but god almighty” –

“Gardevoir said this stuff was like a pallet cleanser for my body, its supposed to make it easier for them to literally thread through my soul and like see it and stuff, but like, when I was out and Gardevoir performed the code test then, it was just enough to get the jump on things, this time it is going to be super thorough. Like, my body is going to enter some kind of, pins and needles state when everything is going to be on edge, and like, nerve endings constantly screaming, it just sounds like a total blast.”

“It won’t be forever though,” said Gary, “and I am going to snuggle you like you have never been snuggled before afterwards.”

“I look forward to the snuggles.”

There was a soft knock on the door before Misty let herself in, “Well I hope you can also look forward to the press.”

Memo, remember to lock le door at all times >3>;

Ash’s face instantly went sour, “Bluh.”

“What about the press?” asked Gary, “I thought Officer Jenny was going to handle that mess, and Mary already gave a statement about the stuff with Ritchie.”

Ash made an even more sour of a face, so Misty took the lead on explaining things, “Oh she did, they did, this is something else because we cannot seem to catch a break right now, ever.”

Preach =n=
Misty cleared her throat, “Early in the morning Gary when you two were still asleep, we got word on a Top Percentile League Trainer looking to challenge Ash.”

He can challenge my dick :D

“Did, did they forget Ash in the hospital for a reason?” said Gary with about as much as calm and decorum as he could control before would bust a cap in the Trainer’s ass. “They do know he is recovering from severe injuries right? Where is Mary?”

GodDAMIT RiTCHIEEEE thissssss is probablyyy because of yourrrrr stuuuuuuUUUUUUUUU PtiiIIiiiiIIID SSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSStunTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT –

“Oh this dude has been a thorn in Mary’s side and my side, and pretty much everyone who has been trying to keep Ash safe, he is walking a fine, fine line between giving a legit challenge and being a total JERK” –

“No,” said Gary, “There is no legit challenge because if he was really looking to garner points for his League record he would wait till Ash was active again, or a Master candidate, right now, he IS being a total JERK!”

“They’re not just challenging Ash as a Trainer,” said Misty, “they’re challenging for the legendaries too by fortitude. Ash is still ranked in the top one percentile in Kanto, which means his credentials will still be valid despite an extended rest period.” Misty seated herself next to Ash and booped his nose, “Mary has laid down the omega ban-hammer of doom before in making sure the legendaries are left be, but now this jerk actually thinks taking this supposed loophole of challenging you will do something.” Misty crossed her arms with a tired annoyed smile, “and we all know the number one rule of a Trainer.”

Gary was too busy being upset to feel a flame ignite in Ash. Ash looked to Pikachu and Pikachu looked back catching fire as well.

“Because yeah a real Trainer would challenge a bed ridden person, how noble,” Gary spat, “So,” Gary’s temper was absolutely flaring within, “my Ash takes one foot out of our Get Away From Things Forest and he’s jumped on by occult nuts and crappy League peers alike, that’s great, that’s wonderful news to wake up to. They want a battle, I would be MORE than happy to show them MY credentials!”

“Hm, they want a challenge?” came Ash’s voice.

Gary and Misty looked to Ash, head having been bent down; hands balled up into fists on the covers.

“I think, I’d like to oblige them. Pikachu?”

“Pikapi!”

“Can you bring me my hat little buddy?”

Pikachu nodded heartily, “PiKA!”

“Ash, are you sure?” asked Gary, placing a hand on Ash’s shoulder.

Ash placed his hand over Gary’s, “A battle is a battle, and I’m not going to let this obstacle get the better of me.”
Okay Gary, you’d be lying if you said you didn’t have some reserves about Ash, for lack of a better term, ‘accepting’ this asshole’s challenge. You know Ash is an amazing Trainer, legendary practically, and sure, sure he hasn’t really had an ‘official’ match in quite some time, but that doesn’t mean he’s rusty, not by a long shot, it’s like riding a bicycle, you never EVER truly forget how to get up on the bike and crash horribly because you’re suddenly crushedundertherealizationthatifyourboyfriendloseshe’llneverrecoverfromthiseverevereverthisishispassionh –

Gary scanned Ash’s friends and family for any opposing views, but alas, everyone was down for it, even momma Ketchum! And any hope Gary had that Gardevoir would stop this whole battle fiasco cold Pidgey was thrown out the window when it surprised everyone (mainly Gary trying to send a mind signal to stop all this) in fully supporting the idea. Gardevoir clasped its hands together, “Oh how exciting to see a top percentile Trainer in action!” Gardevoir then struck an attack pose, “I’ve always wondered myself what it would be like share in such a decorated Trainer’s aura in the heat of battle!”

GARY IS RIGHT HERE GARDEVOIR >8D

“Alas, I can say that those I’ve been in contact with just can’t compare!”

DX But yeah, Ash is, in another star system compared to you now, Gary. Ploop.

“You’ll be just fine to battle Ash, although I suggest you not induce a Mega-Evolution, or Z-Moves if you have the means,” Gardevoir practically chirped as Ash changed in the restroom with Gary’s help, “Besides, we need the agent to really get in your system and for all the Heal Pulse* energy in your body to subside, this will be a great time killer to say the least.”

“Time killer,” Gary muttered buttoning up Ash’s shirt.

How about an Ash killer? ;o;

“Just be aware Ash,” said Gardevoir, “As the Heal Pulse* energy leaves you, you will start to feel some exhaustion.”

With all this pent up energy you’re feeling from Ash right now you reeeeeaaaaaally doubt that Gary, it feels like Ash is containing an explosion in his chest!

“Aaaaalrighty,” said Gary giving Ash a good over, he had dressed him in modest attire, a black polo shirt and blue jeans, “You are good to go my Love.”

And ah, his hat :)

Ash looked up to Gary with a quiet face, adjusting his collar a little.

“Nervous?” Gary asked.

“No,” Ash replied adjusting his hat with both hands, “Ready.”

Gary pulled Ash close, touching their foreheads together, “No matter what the outcome Ash, I just” –

Ash suddenly gave a quick kiss on Gary’s nose, still holding a quiet expression, “I won’t lose.”
Gary you are caught in-between a rock and a horny place :D Let’s further your arousal by looking into Ash’s determined expression with those big beautiful brown eyes that has ignited the fabric of his soul YES, FUCK YES THAT’S YOUR BABY! And now let’s further your anxiety by thinking about all the terrible ways Ash will destroy himself if this Trainer rips apart his mental sidings 8D.

Ash looked at Gary with a raised eyebrow as Gary’s internal turmoil was poorly hidden on his features.

“Gary,” Ash’s voice was soft, and sweet, and a bit hurt, “Could, you have a little faith in me, please?”

GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA/ DX YOU HAVE HAD NOTHING BUT FAITH IN HIM SO EXCUSE THE FUCK OUT OF ME IF THE PAST ROUND OF DAYS HAVE PUT YOUR ‘SOUND’ EMOTIONAL JUDGEMENT ON ‘CAUTION’!!!! TAKE YOUR DAMN MEDS GARY!!

“Of course I have faith in you Ash, you just, do what you do best, and I’ll be by your side.”

Ash replied with a small genuine smile outside the quiet expression, he tangled up his finger’s with Gary’s, “Mh, let’s get going then.”

At first Ash wanted to walk the whole way, but Gardevoir insisted he use the wheelchair, if not to use it at least for the trip back after the exhaustion sets in.

And to the surprise of no one, minus Ash and his uncanny ability to be completely oblivious, word spread like wildfire through the hospital that Ash agreed to face the asshole Trainer. Like, by the time you all made it down to the first floor there swarmed an audience both within and outside the hospital in the back garden, much to your rising annoyance. Grant it, its not a HUGE audience, although your definition of huge between you and Ash is somewhat different….this is STILL a hospital and you can just tell there was some maaaajor crowd control done here via the police and the Rangers. You can almost, feel, the surge of people, the amount that really wanted to be here behind the gates of the hospital, and you know what, you kinda can with the sea of selfie sticks holding coms sticking up over the fucking garden walls. BLUH. One news crew, two news crew, goddammit y’all can’t just go the fuck away. Whatever, WHO ELSE IS HERE, hmhmhmhm Misty, Tracey, Brock, Ash’s mother, Gardevoir, Mary, Thomas, UGH MAX, and a whole slew of Rangers (minus Ritchie, god dammit) with their pokemon are up in here to support Ash, and here YOU are Gary, pushing his wheelchair with Pikachu on his lap and Ash’s Charizard walking right next to you with Umbreon and Audino trailing just a tad. Compared with Ash’s internal flame, you can practically feel HEAT radiating off of Charizard! Nice?

Gary, Ash, and their pokemon and friends exited the hospital to chilly/brisk overcast weather and a cheering crowd (and a forest of excited selfie sticks peering over that resembled a Battle for Middle Earth fixing to get underway). Gary felt Ash’s inner flame only blaze further from the sudden onslaught of positive energy and he couldn’t help but share in the warm hue. “That’s for you Love,” said Gary. Ash turned back and beamed at Gary, Gary feeling Ash turn into a bright ball of sunshine on the spot.

The flame, his bright eyes, its as if you two have suddenly gone back in time to when you were standing opposite of him in the Silver Conference. He’s still in there.

They made it to the garden where the crowd (mainly hospital patients, staff, and visiting relatives, quite a lot of ‘visiting’ relatives) and several news crews were being handled by Officer’s Jenny’s team and a handful of Rangers, and there, in the area designated, stood the challenging Trainer.
If one were to look up in the dictionary the word douche, this ass-swamp’s picture would be right there next to it with the piercing and undercut and everything – HMP, HMP BITCH >:C
PFFFFFFHUHHUUHUHUHUH, also alsooooooo, you can hear the other legendary flaming douche squawking up a storm from above –

The crowd only cheered harder when Moltres showed itself on the edge of the hospital and blew powerful, spreading flames into the sky, lighting up the day twice over, screeching a defiant cry,

Hmp, okay, admittedly a nice touch to Ash’s entrance, buuuuuuuut HA, if only everyone knew what this damn thing was saying –

Moltes took another deep inhale, and then, BOW BEFORE MY MAJESTY YOU DESPICABLE DISGUSTING HUMANS! I COULD BURN YOU ALL TO CINDERS BUT ON BEHALF OF MY HUMAN I WILL NOT, SO YOU CAN ALL SUCK IT SUCK IT SUCK IT SUCK IT SUCK IT SUCK IT SUCK IT, it squawked; Zekrom, keeping itself out of sight, deeply inhaled and exhaled through its nose.

“I’m going to put some common decency into that bird if it kills me,” Ash muttered, he put down the brakes on his wheelchair and stood up with Gary’s help, Pikachu leaping off to the side to stand firm with Charizard, both pokemon giving a sneering seething look to the opposing Trainer.

The opposing Trainer wore a shit-eating grin and gestured about as grandly as Gary would have, the crowd’s cheers tapering off as he spoke, “Well, well, well! Ash, master-in-waiting, Ketchum, oh and his entourage too, nice, nice good to see you all in spirits and health!”

Everyone minus Ash gave the Trainer a glare, irritable nod of the head, or a scoff as Ash spoke with a smile, “Nice to meet you too” –

“The name’s” –

DOUCHE DITTY DICKLESS DUPREE –

– “Daniel! And I must say, it’s been too long that you’ve not been surrounded by an audience like this, no? You’re welcome~”

HI, THIS IS GARY OAK, WORLD RENOWNED SCIENTIST YOU FLACCID ASSWIPE, HIS SPEECHES AT SUMMITS COVET THE WORLD–

Ash nodded most appreciatively to everyone around, followed by bending just a bit with shyness and scratching his nose nonchalantly, “I’ve gotta be honest, it feels wonderful that you all still remember lil’ ol’ me.”

The crowd burst into a deafening roar at that almost knocked Ash back down into the wheelchair (several flailing selfie sticks lost their coms to the other side of the wall, alas), Gary spotted at least several fangirls and boys about ready to rocket off into space –

“Who could ever forget the Pride of Kanto?!?” said Daniel, still gesturing like a ring-leader, “We get almost no news of you for months and months – and then to go from that to suddenly hearing that you’re in the hospital fighting for your life? The only Trainer of our Region to have gained favor of virtually every continental League and Legend?!!”

Yeah, spit your motive here bitch >:/

Daniel rubbed his chin with an arm crossed underneath as the crowd settled back down, “That won’t do. Not at all. Life is fleeting. Life is precious and pure. You gave so much back to Kanto, look at us
now! And now look at you….It seems only fair to return the favor in your time of need, from one fellow Trainer to another!"

Gary shifted uncomfortably at the implied intent.

*What the fuck has YOUR purpose been?????*

Daniel gestured like a spear point aimed at Ash, “You were on top of the world Ash, you had every League salivating for you to apply to their circuits, *conferences!* There wasn’t a competent Trainer on this PLANET that didn’t know your name! Do you, or can you *even* comprehend how severely *missed* you’ve been?! How *starved* we’ve been without you?!”

Gary slid his arm around Ash about as stealthily as a possessive boyfriend could.

*Dis bitch thirsty AF – but we SEE YOU fucker D:< If you think Ash’s fortitude would be so easily stolen out from under him by your crawling words, you’ve got another thing coming! You know what, legends BETTER be watching! Take notes Moltres! Garyyyyyyyyy your chest is feeling awfully tight right now?! DX*

Daniel then held a daringly angry look border-lining disgusted, “So this *begs* the question, what could you ever have possibly hoped to *gain* by dropping out of the circuits and becoming a *Ranger? A Ranger?*!”

Gary glanced over to Mary, and could only guess that her, and every Ranger in earshot, was trying to dissolve Daniel with their minds. The crowd meanwhile seemed divided with where Daniel was taking his match declaration. Gary on the other hand was feeling Ash grow exceedingly sour inside, “Easy Love,” Gary whispered to Ash. He felt Ash grab his pants slightly, prompting Gary to snatch up Ash’s hand into his own, relenting his possessive hold to one of comfort.

Daniel continued, still with the big gestures, “You just, *disappeared* into the wilderness, you and your world class trophy garnered pokemon – all of you planting trees, picking flowers, and *scrounging around dirt? Are you kidding me?!* That’s no life for a Trainer, especially one as yourself! You walked away from a place where so many Trainers would have given their *soul* to be! And for WHAT?! If you took on any league for the championship title, you would have taken it,” Daniel snapped his fingers, “like that. You’re no where near where you were as a kid.”

“No, I’m not,” said Ash in a low tone. Gary gulped.

During the entre exchange, not once did Ash break eye contact with Daniel. Ash stood up straighter, Gary feeling from Ash that if he wanted to be heard clearer, he would mimic Gary’s posture when he was speaking at a summit, and that warmed Gary right to his core.

“What I’m going to say may shock you,” said Ash, “it certainly would have shocked a younger me, but, there’s more to life than pokemon battling. There’s so much more topokemon and humans, and all that connects us.” Ash let go of Gary’s hand and touched his chest, “My friends, my family, my pokemon, each and every one of them are pieces of my heart. What I wanted to find, I wasn’t going to find it in the circuits and conferences,” Ash crossed his arms, “Forgive me for wanting to explore the beauty of this world, but if I was going advance my understanding of pokemon, then I couldn’t confine myself, *or them*, to a single outlet like battling. So I searched for something more, and becoming a Ranger has been allowing me to do that.”

The Rival Trainer scoffed, and put his hands on his hips, “Well? If you have been so *enlightened*, then enlighten me, and the entire world while you’re at it!”
Gary could practically feel the zoom-in of the camera lenses from every news outlet focusing in, the hush of crowd, the glare and scrutiny of each and every eye wanting an answer for something that never, ever, concerned them.

Ash responded simply, “I needed to remember how to live.”

Daniel’s reaction was just as immediate, “Whut.”

Gary felt what Ash was trying to say, all of it laced in repressed pain, not to mention Ash felt weird saying it out loud in front of so many people for once, so many judging people, his words stumbling in his head and threatening to do the same out his mouth –

*No no no no, come on sweetie, you’ve got this, you’re stronger than you think, you’re so much stronger than you think!*

Ash responded to the rising nerves by clearing his throat against the tilted and concerned faces of the crowd, “I needed to remember how to live. What, I was, going through, up here,” Ash pointed to his head, “that’s, um, the best way how I can put it into wo” –

Daniel barked a sharp laugh through Ash’s response, “Don’t give me that crap you were just,” Daniel made mock quotations in the air, “’exploring’ yourself! That cliché doesn’t befit you – you’re what so many people aspire to be – you, Ash Ketchum, have a duty to our Region whether you like it or not, and this self banishment for whatever silly reason you have deemed viable, is going to cost you dearly in the long run! Now enough with the Ranger getup! The philosophical nonsense! You’re a flesh and blood Trainer through and through and you’re doing yourself no favors by abandoning what makes you, YOU! What you need is a good knock to the cranium before you waste away the rest of your potential on some stupid convoluted feelings! *Come out Clawitzer!*”

Clawitzer appeared from its pokeball, hissing its challenge as it landed on the field.

“All everyone knows what kind of Trainer you are, and you’re not one to let a barrier get the best of you! Especially some transcribed glass ceiling?! Really?! Really. There’s nothing wrong with you Ash” –

By the way Ash flinched, Gary felt a chord had been thoroughly struck, if not by the way both Pikachu and Charizard were now baring their fangs. Ash’s fists were clenched.

“So quit with the mental barrier crap and face reality! What’s the truth really? Are you just going to turn your back on your roots by gardening?!” By, running away from the competition? How is that justified in the least?! Don’t insult us with that nonsense!”

*Ooooooh myyyyyy gooowwwooood. Gary if you don’t murder this piece of filth, you’re pretty sure someone else will :D* Misty is probably thinking of all the ways to dump the body 8D Hey flaming asshole has been quiet all this time and oh, oh, that’s why, Zekrom is by its side now peering over the roof. They’ve been listening, so it seems.

Clawitzer mimicked its Trainer’s gestures at Ash, “Dear, sweet, Ash Ketchum. If you insist on turning away from the circuits, conferences and leagues, then what’s the point? What’s your purpose?”

*WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU TO DECIDE?????? D8<*

Daniel clasped his hands together, “You see it’s just not right to let a star as bright as you get so lost, because then, you’ll only lead others astray with this ridiculous attitude. That is your responsibility as a Top Percentile League Trainer in pushing our region forward. Enough is enough, this is your wake
up call to come back to your real home before its too late,” Daniel’s shit-eating grin returned, “I promise to give you a proper greeting~”

Clawitzer rolled its shoulder with its oversized pincer.

*Oh you son of a bitch 8’)*

There was a brief silence with the crowd seemingly teetering on the edge. Ash’s jaw clenched just momentarily before he gathered his rebuttal, “…..And here, I was thinking I had some validation issues” –

Gary couldn’t help but full on glance at Ash,

8O

Ash continued with a glare that rivaled his Charizard’s, “You claim to know more about my problems than I do, but everything you’ve just said, just laid your own issues out like some smorgasbord of an identity crisis.”

Daniel’s grin was snapped right in two, “*Excuse me?*”

“I get it, misery loves company. I’ve learned that people like taking pieces of others to make themselves feel better about what they’ve become, I mean, I’ve literally had my lifeforce get ripped out of me for someone else’s benefit. What you’re doing right now, really isn’t that much different.”

*YES BABY SLAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAY!!! 8D OH TEA TOO HOT HOT HOT HOT TOTTATATATAHOT –*

Ash continued, “What I don’t understand is why you, or anyone thinks this is such a valid option. But then again, I’m no one to talk on the matter, because I didn’t fight it any better. I let the pain in me grow, I let it get the better of me, and believe me, I’ve paid for it dearly, but I don’t like dragging others down with me, *unlike you,*” Ash shifted to a more confident stance toward Daniel, Charizard and Pikachu roared their battle intent with their Trainer’s spirit, “You don’t know a thing about me Daniel. What I’ve been through, what I’ve struggled with, and quite frankly, I don’t care if you understand it or not. But if you insist on knowing about my problems more than me, then let’s lay it all out right here between us the way Trainers do best.”

Daniel’s grin returned, “And here was I thinking you’d actually back down.”

It was Ash’s turn to toss Daniel a grin, “I think I can spare a minuet for one of my biggest fans.”

Daniel tossed Ash a glare.

*Oooh baby say it slower~ Gary, to you, little is more gorgeous in this world than watching your Ash sans sass and hand out ass~! >8D*

Ash motioned to Charizard, “Let’s go Charizard, flare up.”

Charizard stomped forward flashing its fangs and claws, stretching its wings, fire slipping from its mouth and nose as it flexed and flaunted its power.

Gary heard from above Moltres break its silence by giving an extremely loud exasperated groan/sigh/screech of anguish and ruin. He felt from Ash that the reason he chose Charizard, even though it was at a disadvantage against Clawitzer, was to feel, for a moment, a little closer to Ritchie.
Ash looked to Pikachu and Pikachu nodded back in understanding, giving Ash and Charizard its full support.

“Charizard eh?”

“Yeah, and I’ll do you one better,” Ash pulled out his exceptionally decorated Trainer’s registration card from his polo shirt pocket, “I’ll give you my first official circuit match in three years.”

*When the fuck did he slip that in there 8D*

Gary’s heart skipped several beats as the crowd nearly lost its damn mind with Ash’s offer. He looked at Ash like he had just prepped himself for slaughter. Gary quickly scanned their line of friends and saw Misty with a determined, beaming smile.

*HOW, WHY, AND HOW <8D*

Daniel looked both overjoyed and conceited at the same time with a sneer laced in his ear to ear grin, “Using a Kanto starter, I can respect that. Grant it, why not go all out for your Homecoming match? Why not use one of these Legendary Pokemon rubbing on your knee? Are you not bonded?”

“I am not bonded to any legendary,” said Ash; for some reason that drew a gasp from the crowd.

Moltres flapped its wings feverishly, *YOU CAN STILL USE ME!!! DON’T USE A DISGUSTING OVER-RATED CHARIZARD SC –*

Zekrom’s glare promptly shut Moltres up.

Gary blinked looking at the Dragon legend tower over the Fire legend.

*Ah, yeah Moltres would still be butthurt from its battle with Ritchie’s Charizard, eeyuppers.*

“Well, it’s not like the legends are all powerful anyway,” said Daniel with a taunting shrug, “A simple Rain Dance* and Water Pulse* would shut a Moltres out entirely.”

Moltres practically combusted becoming a flaring torch, *I WILL BURN YOU AND YOUR LINE ALIVE!!!!*

Daniel whistled watching Moltres blow its top on the hospital roof and Zekrom respectfully drag it out of sight with a disgruntled huff, “Hit a nerve apparently.”

“So I’d appreciate it if you wouldn’t egg it on any further,” said Ash sternly, “This is between you and me.”

*Is it getting hot in here, or is that just Ash?*

Gary looked to Charizard who was practically a living flame encased in flesh, both starting pokemon giving each other a good old fashioned stare down; he noticed Charizard’s tail flame starting to have a blue heart to it.

*Hey…Charizard has been warming itself up this whole time as they spoke….Gary, just fan yourself now 83*

“Don’t go slinging that misery you have pent up anywhere else,” said Ash with a hint of a growl in his voice, “You’ve done enough with that mouth of your’s. You know people are watching, so during this match, I want to see the real you.”
Daniel laughed again, but its Clawitzer did not share the same enthusiasm as its Trainer any longer, 
“What else do Trainer’s display, but their true selves on the battle field~? So show me a bit of your real self too. No doubt you are the higher rank between the two of us, so please, set the standards for the match.”

“I’ll waiver my preferences, you can set the standards.”

Daniel finally flashed his Trainer’s card, “Very well then” –

\textit{Which is pretty decorated too, fuck, BUT ITS NOT AS PRETTY AS ASH’S~!!!!!! 8D}

Daniel cleared his throat, “This will be a one on one match with each Trainer using only one pokemon each. No battle enhancers outside of each pokemon’s own movepool and abilities, agreed?”

Ash nodded, “Agreed.”

\textit{One on one? Are you fucking kidding me right now? No, no, let him, LET HIM GET ABSOLUTELY EATEN. This isn’t a match, it’s a damn sucker punch is what it is! And everyone knows to dodge a Sucker Punch*, you DON’T attack!}

Clawitzer and Charizard got into position.

Daniel motioned to Misty and Brock, “If one of you fine Gym Leaders would be an official witness?”

“Oh don’t worry we’re witnessing,” said Misty waving Daniel off quickly as she got into position to officiate the match; Brock had pulled out his own com and was filming,

“Ash is going to want this a la later,” said Brock keeping his grin to a minimum as best he could.

Misty raised her hand, “Trainers, Pokemon at their mark!” Charizard and Clawitzer set their stances – “Begin!”

“Clawitzer, Water Pulse*!”

Clawitzer took dead center aim at Charizard and fired, Charizard spread its wings – its tail flame burst into an inferno, and moments before the attack ever made contact, a white mist suddenly blossomed around Charizard with a loud hissing sound filling the air as Clawitzer drained its attack on the fire pokemon, then stopped in utter disbelief; a trickle leaking out of its claw uselessly.

Daniel’s mouth rightfully dropped, as did a few other people’s.

Charizard blew the mist away with its wings and snorted soot, the fire pokemon had not taken a single point of damage.

“The attack, evaporated?!”

Ash made his move, “Thunderpunch!”

The energy with which Charizard burst from its place of rest uprooted chunks of ground, its clawed hand clenched into a fist surging with electricity – Clawitzer practically screamed in its tiny shrimp voice and jumped behind its Trainer, the both of them falling down on their backs with Charizard stopping and standing just above them, its fist close enough to Daniel to make his hair react to the electricity and stand up on end; Clawitzer clutched its Trainer like he was the only barrier between it
and death incarnate.

Ash sighed through his nose.

Misty looked at Daniel with twice the shit-eating grin he would ever have as she rocked on her heels with her hands playfully clasped behind her back, “Well, will Clawitzer return to the match?” Clawitzer enthusiastically shook its head before Daniel had time to answer – “Then the match goes to Ash Ketchum of Pallet Town and his amazing Charizard by means of forfeit!”

The crowd erupted into deafening cheers.

Daniel let himself fall onto his back with a nigh almost fainted look.

Charizard diluted the Thunderpunch* with a flick of its wrist, looking back at Ash with a wide, wide smile with Ash having already made the walk to its side. He stood above Daniel with resolve in every inch of his being. Daniel quickly sat up to his towering presence, “Still think we were just planting trees?”

Daniel only answered with a downward defeated look. He patted his Clawitzer and recalled it back with a mumble. Charizard crossed its arms and huffed a small flame.

“Listen,” said Ash, “I can take insults all day long, but you didn’t just insult me, you insulted everyone who’s had to fight battles that don’t leave a physical scar. I don’t take kindly to that, but even more so,” Ash then held out his hand to Daniel, “I can’t ignore a cry for help.”

Daniel looked at Ash with wide eyes for a second, “It’s not, that’s not – don’t you twist my intentions around!”

Ash still offered his hand, “Soooooo you wanted to kick me while I was down?”

“NO!”

Ash cocked his head in confusion, “Then?”

“I told you why I came here! And you won, fair and square, there’s nothing left to say!” Daniel pushed himself up, ignoring Ash’s hand, and moved to leave; Charizard and Pikachu growled and hissed at him.

“Don’t,” Ash warned his pokemon (Charizard and Pikachu still mumbled their ill will), “Daniel wait just a minuet,” Daniel, hands stuffed in his pockets, shot Ash back a one-eyed glare, “Are you here with just your pokemon?”

“Yes, Clawitzer, Dragalge, Florges, and Meowstic,” his voice dropped to almost a whisper, “ils sont tout ce qu’il faut.”

Ash gave a look of surprise, “You’re from Kalos?”

“Yes, but my dream carried me here, to Kanto.”

By this time both Gary and Misty joined Ash on either side of him, her arms crossed, his hands on his hips, Ash practically reading their minds to not waste anymore time on Daniel.

“Keep fighting for it then,” said Ash.
“I could say the same to you,” Daniel snapped back, and turned to leave again, declining comment from inquiring reporters and lingering spectators alike.

GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOD
RIDDAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAANCE~!

Gary wrapped his arms around Ash in a surprise hug and kissed him right on his cheek, “Well that’s the end of it then, let’s get you back up to your room now, ‘kay?”

Ash was still watching Daniel leave, “Yeah, okay.” Misty stepped right into Ash’s line of sight, “Do not, waste, anymore brain cells on this matter Ash Ketchum, you do not owe him a thing.”

“Not even two cents,” Gary added, “He was just trying to use you for his own gains.”

You know like a certain troubled snow lady.

“I’m, just trying to understand why,” said Ash as Gary guided him with Misty and their pokemon back over to their group, “I guess, they, he, cling to this vision they have of me? I’ve heard the stories over and over a million times and its so annoying,” Ash rolled his eyes at the memory, “I did so much back then, and everyone was like, ‘any day now’ and I’m like, ‘any day what’? And I have no idea why, but, I seem to be able to disappoint people just by existing because I don’t meet their expectations of, whatever? I really don’t understand how they can put that on me, but they do anyway, sooooo,” Ash shrugged, “I rolled it off then, and I’ll roll it off now, I just don’t understand it.”

You mean like how you rolled it off when you snapped at Ritchie? SIGH. Lord, how can just existing be so fucking exhausting -

“Not important,” said Gary, "Some things we just don't understand, but move on from."

“I just hope he’ll be okay.”

“I’m sure he’ll be just fine,” said Misty shortly.

“Hey Ash,” said Brock as he trotted up with Tracey (pulling up the wheelchair with him), “I recorded the whole thing, when you get your new com I’ll send it to you.”

Ash smiled back, “Really? Thanks!”

“Ooh ooh send it to mine,” Gary chirped.

“Already did bruh.”

“Hey, where’s my mom?” Ash looked about the group.

“She already went back inside with the help of Thomas,” said Tracey, “Feeling a bit lightheaded, but good.”

“ASH KETCHUM WE LOVE YOU 8DDDDDDDDDD!” came one rabid fan’s voice followed by a couple whoops as the Rangers and Officers continued crowd control.

Oh my god leave 8D

Gary couldn’t help but scoot Ash back quicker into the wheelchair, almost shoving him in it.
Brock gestured grandly for Ash (who was blushing a bit and waved back a little sheepishly) –

“OHMYGODHE WAVED AT ME CARYN” –

“Oh my gods let’s go, let’s goooooo,” said Gary as he began pushing Ash’s wheelchair.

“Can you really blame them,?” smiled Brock, “Ash has been out of the spotlight for soooo long and then all of a sudden here he is and more impressive than ever” – he then swooned Ash, “Oh~! I think I got pregnant from that match~!”

“Man shut up,” Ash laughed playfully pushing Brock away; cheers and whoops still trailing them as they left.

Ah yes, you would like to forget your Ash has a rabid fanbase, not that you Gary, had one – have one, has one, but like, his is just, ‘more’ –

“I CAN CARRY HIM BACK :D”

“Gary you better mark your territory,” Misty commented dryly, “Panties and boxers are dropping as we speak.”

“Sssstoooooooop,” Ash commented just as dryly back, his hand went to his head, “Ooooooh…”

“Ash?”

“I don’t, feel so good all of a sudden…” Ash slumped down in his chair, letting his cap turn askew, “Bluh.”

“Yup, that’s the exhaustion setting in,” came a wispy voice with Mismagius appearing before the group, “Gardevoir wanted you to be supervised, just in case,” it winked.

“Thanks,” Ash smiled.

“We’ll be in your room in no time,” said Gary picking up the pace. Mismagius held open the door with its powers letting the cold air of the hospital interior hit them like a blast.

“I’m so done with the cold,” Ash mumbled absentmindedly.

Mismagius led the group back to Ash’s room, “Gardevoir will be ready to do the procedure at about 1pm today and I will be assisting them.”

“Mmmmmmmmmmmh,” was all Ash responded with.

With that Heal Pulse energy leaving him, Ash is deteriorating way faster than you would like him to :D that’s not cool :D but its going to be okay Gary, its alllll going to be okay, and you know why? Fuck it I don’t know why, lets just wait till the next disaster, it’ll probably come bite you in the ass next because somebody still hasn’t taken his meds today and I will be a screeching reminder until you do –

***

– because this procedure is going to be extremely taxing on you emotionally but even more so
physically on Ash and if you hear him screaming in agony again without being able to help and yup yup there it is you’re going to throw up hurry hurry HURRY –

Gary pushed open the door to the men’s restroom (thankfully empty) and flung himself into a stall, barely having time to lock it shut before he turned to the toilet and vomited –

Aaaaaaand there goes your dignity, the only ‘dose’ you’ve managed to take all this time. You know what, just stay here while the procedure is done, its better than pacing the hallway, you can’t be in the room anyway, and you’re going to be absolutely no help to anyone right now in this state. And there goes the rest of your lunch too. Nice.

Ash’s face was scrunched up as he watched Gardevoir roll over one rather large med-machine that loomed over Ash ominously, “Um, how come Gary can’t be here again? Or anyone else for that matter?”

Gardevoir booted up the machine, typing and programming information into its hub, “I have banished us to this operating room because this is an operation you have having, grant it we are not cutting your body open, but your soul, and standard practices of medicine demands only certified personnel stick around for such an event.”

Ash pouted, pursing his lips, “Ah, yeah, that’s a good reason, pbbth, eep” – he slightly jumped as Mismagius appeared beside him with electrodes floating in the air next to it via its powers.

“Shirt off now please.”

Ash removed his shirt watching the ghost pokemon place the electrodes in their respective places.

“Can I keep my pants on?”

“Oh yes, yes,” Mismagius answered with an eye-roll, “these just go on your chest, aaaaand, arm up, arm up, other arm, on your sides here, so we can record the data on how your body reacts to the procedure.”

“Continuing on with your initial question Ash,” said Gardevoir as it scribbled something on its tablet, “When I open up your soul, it is going to try its darndest to get back to you, and could accidentally latch onto other living conduits in its haste, tangling up your code in their’s and that’s a mess all its own. Mismagius and I are going to be inducing Protect* on ourselves to shield our codes from your own, kind of like in the same vein in how Audino modified Protect* to shield your vitals from the Disable* attacks for a bit, grant it what Audino did was exceptional in its own right with using its own aura.”

“So wait, does that mean, like, my body thinks it’s dying?”

“Yes, in short, that’s why you can’t be sedated for this procedure because your body will undergo a rather violent reaction to it as your soul panics. You are going to feel some weeeeeeiiird weird pains and odds are you will be throwing your guts up,” Gardevoir picked up a bucket and placed it in Ash’s lap, “hence this bucket.”

Ash tapped his fingers on the bucket, “That makes sense, I think, good, to know.”

Gardevoir rolled over another large (scary looking but familiar) med machine, “Just remember when this is all done, Gary is going to snuggle you so hard, so so so so so super hard.”
To this, Ash’s emotions calmed down a bit, “Yeah,” a small smiled appeared, “yaaaaaaaaaay….”

Gary meanwhile sat perched on a toilet in a bathroom stall, his arms wrapped around his knees. He heard someone come in, “Gary? You okay in there?” It was Tracey.

“Yeah, yeah, just, let me be here for a bit.”

“Alright, you know we’re right outside.”

Gary was more comforted in hearing the door close.

Mismagius turned on something that made a deep drum-like grunting mechanical noise that almost made Ash jump out of his skin, “Easy, easy, its okay,” said Gardevoir, “that’s the aura enhancer, well that’s what I call it, it real name is stupid,” Gardevoir dimmed the lights with its powers, leaving Ash to have a literal ‘glowing effect.’ Ash looked at himself all agape holding his arms out as they shined!

“I-Is this, is this” –

“That’s your aura,” Gardevoir smiled, “Its like a mini aura-borealis that just shines off you, it’s the radiation your soul emits, isn’t that cool?”

Ash just stared at his arms, watching the beautiful colors coming off him like embers, like a flame.

Ash looked to Gardevoir and Mismagius and blinked, “How come I can’t see your auras?”

“We didn’t drink that lovely tasting agent,” Mismagius replied.

Ash made another face, “Ah, yeah, bleh.”

“Lean back now on the bed,” Mismagius instructed, “relax your body, let it get loose,”

Ash complied.

Gardevoir slipped on gloves made from a material that Ash could only guess at, both pokemon casting Protect* on themselves simultaneously, “A’ight,” said Gardevoir popping its neck, “Let’s do this. Ash, you ready?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be.”

Gary pulled out his com from his pocket and scrolled to Ritchie’s number, hesitant on dialing or texting it, *You should be here,* he hissed internally. In a mental blank spot, Gary hit the call button, it rang once, twice, then,

“Hello? Gary?”

Ash watched Gardevoir’s hand movements, mesmerizing as they coaxed a strand of aura out of a flickering flame of glowing haze. “Keep breathing steady Ash, easy, easy, keep your breathing
easy,” said Gardevoir. Ash took a deep inhale and exhale, continuing the rolling breaths as his soul was laid bare before his eyes. He watched his soul branch out like a lighting bolt in slow motion, like a vein trying to find flesh to curl around.

“Wow” –

“Yup there it goes trying to get back to you,” said Gardevoir as its hand movements swirled, coaxing the spreading aura back into a single shimmering burning strand. Suddenly the strand made a bee-line towards Ash, but Gardevoir kept it aloft, like a blowing breeze on a loose Spinarak’s thread. Despite all the hype of pain, Ash felt quite fine. He just watched Gardevoir work and weave through his soul with utter amazement.

“You do know what’s happening right now, don’t you?” said Gary, anger teetering on the edge of his voice, “Where are you?”

Stay calm :3

“I’m, *huff* running up the stairs, *huff* as we speak! Elevator too slow” –

“Well Ash is already undergoing the procedure so take your time,” said Gary bitterly, “He can’t miss you anymore than he does right now, you can always just text him though.”

Stay. Calm. 83

“Right, just getting it all out there huh? *huff* Righteous wrath of Gary Oak, *huff*, oh I’m shaking,” Ritchie spat back –

Gary had half a mind to hang up, “At least I’m here!”

Gary :’D

“Good god, I don’t need to explain myself to someone who’s security blanket involves pissing on others!”

“At least I’m not a COWARD! You’ve had all this time to see him, and this is what it takes to get you to come around?! You’re not the one holding him as he cries himself to sleep! You’re not the one listening to him rip himself apart over every SINGEL DETAIL” –”

GARY <8’D

“How dare you – you don’t know ANYTHING ABOUT US!”

“You know what just don’t even come then, just go back down the stairs, JUST DISAPPEAR!” Gary hung up and regretted it the moment he did.

8D……Yeah I got nothing because not even I your lowly internal voice has a thing to say to that other than you just marvelously torpedoed your chances of a friendship with Ritchie while letting a very ugly side of you slap your morals a good one. What is Ash going to think of this. What is he going to think of you. He’s having trouble getting himself together but you? What are you doing Gary?

“Alright, thread coded, noooooooow here comes the money shot,” said Gardevoir as its hands began
to make a circular motion, letting the loose point of the thread go back into Ash, but leaving it to circulate independently of his body, as if Gardevoir had made a perpetual river out of the strand that flowed in and out of Ash. “Nice, one line down – okay Ash, you’re going to start to feel some maaaajor nausea as I go through this code, but hang in there, remember if you need to throw up, you do just that, that’s what the bucket is for, we’ll manage don’t worry.”

“Will do.” Ash grunted as he felt Gardevoir run through the aura strand with its psychic powers. It was unlike anything he had ever felt before, it felt like each of his nerve endings were twisting in on themselves, but there wasn’t an ounce of pain, it was more like a rush of adrenaline.

Gary hit the redial button, but of course Ritchie wasn’t responding. He hit the redial button again, but then Gary’s comprehension came to an abrupt screeching halt, he dropped his com, he grasped his chest and stomach as if all the air from him had just been knocked clean out –

*BA-BUMP*

Ash gave a shudder that rocked him to his core, “T-tingly! But, I don’t feel nausea at all.”

Gardevoir raised an eyebrow in response, “Nothing?”

Ash shook his head, “Rien.”

“Hmmm, that, is odd,” Mismagius made notes and did something with one of the med machines as Gardevoir continued working on Ash, pulling a second perpetual mini aura river from him in half the time of the other,

“Could, that be the Link* blocking the pain?” asked Ash.

“We’re about to find out,” said Gardevoir, “Hmhmhmhm, tu-tu-tu~ Following this string here, and, ugh, of course its snagged onto something, lets see where you’re going buster, I’m going to untangle you” –

Gary felt like his stomach was trying to rip itself out his body, he tried to get up but stumbled to the side of the stall wall, he wanted to throw up again and scream at the same time, his clawing against the wall siding helped keep him on his feet – he saw on his com that Ritchie had picked up, but Gary couldn’t even make a sound for how paralyzing the sudden excruciating pain was that attacked his body –

“Really I don’t feel any nausea at all,” said Ash.

“Well I must be getting better at code then,” said Gardevoir without a hint of conviction, “Hm, alright then, I’m going to go a little more aggressive, I’m going to reel this code back in and dissect its feed, its going to be like reeling back in a fishing line, of nerves, getting sliced, but we can do it, ready Ash?”

“Ready!”
Gary tapped on his com manically, but he dropped it again, and managed to twist himself back around to face the toilet in time, his entire body heaving –

“Ah-ah-aaaaaah, oooooo000000oh, almost got it all back in, this one thread is being a little stubborn here…”

“Your skills are breathtaking!” commented Mismagius.

“Thankyou!, Mh-mh, still no nausea Ash?”

“Nope.”

“Amazing,” said Gardevoir, “Typically with this level of aggression I’m showing the patient would be throwing their guts up” –

Gary’s stomach gave another painful constrict, dropping him to his knees –

“Where are you going little thread, you can’t run foreverrrrr~ I’m gonna get youuuuu~ I’m gonna get youuuuu~” Gardevoir tugged the string –

– Gary clutched his chest, vision blurry, he couldn’t speak, he could barely breathe, all his body could do was lurch again over the toilet bowl –

"Gary?! Gary?!” Tracey, Brock, Umbreon and Audino came charging in and found Gary in the last stall – Audino ripped the door off, “OH GOD” –

Ash popped his lips, Gardevoir and Mismagius had gone silent, “Watcha doin’ now?”

“I’m debating how to untangle this piece since this part of the code is all wound up over itself,” Gardevoir replied, “It’s, odd, I can see where the Link* is, but, there’s another strand woven in over here, and its, different…” Gardevoir began tugging the mystery strand when there came a sudden pounding on the door leading to the operation room from friend and pokemon alike followed by loud screeching upset voices from the hospital staff, but even louder than them –

“GARDEVOIR STOP!! STOP STOP STOP STOP!!!!”

All Ash could do was witness. He saw Gardevoir’s train of thought break, and the moment it did, the threads of his soul slipped out of Gardevoir’s powers. What happened next, happened all at once. What could only be described as a bolt of lightning struck from this tip of his soul to Gardevoir and Mismagius, ricocheting off of their Protect* shields, then across the room, and through the door, ending on a pained scream.

Gary could barely process what was going on around him, Audino was helping him sit up, force feeding his body Heal Pulses®, Tracey was there, Umbreon was there, his ears were ringing, if someone was talking, it was all in static, he felt like his eyes were melting with how blurry everything was. He blinked, forcing himself to focus somewhat, he finally registered he had thrown up thick black ooze all over the place, the toilet looking like an exploded ink bowl.

Gary ….it’s in you now.

*****

Gary stared up at the ceiling from the hospital bed he lay in, hands resting listlessly on his stomach with his com on his abdomen. Tracey was by his side (Azumaril was by Tracey), as was Umbreon, Arcanine, and Blastoise. Audino was off to the side, trying to mix something in a bowl, but looked to be failing as it sniffled, tear marks having stained its cheeks.

Ritchie was there. He was sitting on a chair, hunched over, with his elbows on his knees, hands holding up his head. Sparky was next to him, but there wasn’t much it could do.

The air in the room was non-existent. If Gary were to make a movement on the bed, the sound of the sheets sliding against him would be deafening, aside from the thoughts in his head.

Present company excluded, you tried to talk to Ash. You tried, you tried, you tried, you tried, you tried, you tried. That was nice of Gardevoir letting him use their com. You can imagine them cleaning all the tears and snot off of it, like how they cleaned your own. You’re sure you ordered Ash’s new com to come fast when you did. That doesn’t matter anymore though. Not right now at least. Maybe his mom can reach him. Maybe not. You’re a fool for thinking you could have ever brought him back by yourself. He loves you though. He wouldn’t be in as much pain as he is right now if he didn’t. You can’t feel any of it however, in fact you can’t feel him through the Transfer Effects at all. Gardevoir, did something, but it had no choice, not in the moment, not when so much happened all at once. When it put the bits of Ash’s soul back inside of him, it, like, modified Protect®, to, to do something or whatever you can’t really think too hard right now, there’s too much inside….It was one thing for Ash to have been unconscious before, and it is another thing entirely to watch what’s going on around him. You heard him wail ‘rip it out of me, just rip it out me, save him please, I don’t care what happens to me, just save him’. Not to mention, the echo of Ash’s last words as the phone hung up are still bouncing around inside you, words so loud despite how his voice was removed from the receiver, saying over and over, ‘just help Gary, just help Gary, I’m so sorry, I’m sorry’, he practically choked them out over the sobs. You have never, ever, during your time with him, heard him cry that hard and that relentlessly and he was doing it over you. However you can’t say the same for Ritchie. For what it was worth, they did speak briefly through coms, though it was mainly just Ash begging Ritchie to take care of you for him. Having an enormous rounded tip stake impale you in half would have hurt less. Things are very weird right now between you and Ritchie, but Ritchie isn’t going to break a promise to Ash.

Gary’s com began vibrating, he picked it up, saw it was Daisy, then hit the red call button, denying it.

“Gary,” came Tracey’s voice.

“Not now,” was all Gary replied with.
Brock and Misty are being treated right now because apparently they were stuck by some kind of massive, well, the closest thing it could relate to would be static electricity, but only this bolt was Ash’s soul supercharged by the Link* and looking for a, a, how did they put it...some kind of target, or something, latching body-soul kind of thing. Nothing makes sense. Tracey has been worried sick, so it is quite the god send that Azumaril has returned to being a pillar by his side.

Gary heard a com chime and just barely looked over to Ritchie on his own com singly handedly texting someone, and Gary for no reason, wanted to throw a pillow, or anything, at him as hard as he possibly could.

*And you Gary. You’re a mess.*

Gardevoir came silently into the room with its tablet and a blank expression, Gary moved his head to look at them; Tracey turned his body all the way around, wearing the expression ’just say it’, and Ritchie looked up, sporting even larger tear stains down his cheek than Audino.

“Good news, Misty and Brock are both totally fine, codes are 100% clear, mmmmeanwhile Ash is still holding onto his ‘request’ to be, completely isolated, so, theresssssssss, that. I let him have my com for now, he’s face-timeing with his mom, sooooo, maybe she can bring him around.”

Ritchie’s voice was soft, but sounded like it had been drug through gravel, “If Ash felt alienated before, hooooo, booooy.”

*SHUT THE FUCK UP.*

“Um, Gardevoir?” Tracey’s voice was light and timid.

“Hm? Oh, oh, yes, Tracey, you can go visit Misty now” – Tracey left without a word, Azumaril bouncing behind him to keep up.

*Bye.*

“For you Gary, what you have in you is indeed a form of the Link*. However, it’s like a receiver with Ash as the main hub, in, theory. Ash sends out the signals and you get them, which makes how the Transfer Effects between the two of you worked a lot more sense. On that note, there’s a bit of you tangled in Ash, and a bit of Ash tangled in you, kinda like how it was between Ash and Lisa.”

*If you could feel what Gardevoir is feeling right now Gary you’d probably throw yourself off a bridge in its place.*

Gardevoir fought to keep its composure, “As for ‘when’, it got into you…my guess, my hypothesis is, it, rode in on you when you had that Disable* attack transfer from Ash – and that attack got cleared out, but, what it left was this, Link* residue, if you will – like, how peeling tape off of something leaves a little, residue. Something that went completely undetected, by me….’’ Gardevoir swallowed and cleared its throat, “And then, the residue got triggered into life on your end, aaaand, um,” Gardevoir spoke bluntly, “I know what triggered the Link* to do what it did. What I got done with coding test, and with what we know now. What triggered the Dark Place to manifest in that attack, was, the Link* piece in you – and that, that only happened because it was awakened by the Link* in Ash when – when it *changed*, because it did change, into this new form, and, that, that was when you and Ash copulated your love, when you reestablished your bond and love for one another, that’sssss what set it off, what set, everything off.”

Gary blinked once, then twice, holding an equally blank an expression, “I’m sorry, I’m afraid I don’t understand. It got, set off by our, *love*?”
“It was,” Gardevoir swallowed, speaking with its hands about as much as its voice, “such a surge of positive influence, that it flipped to feed off the more abundant source of, of food, if you will because it was going after Ash’s guilt, and in that time, what Ash felt for you, what was going through him, was just, so much more.”

Gary laid back down, staring back again at the ceiling, his voice low and even, “So she’s using our own love against us? How evil can you get?”

“As despicable as Lisa’s actions where,” said Gardevoir, “even I don’t think she had that foresight with how I first analyzed the Link*, it was more than likely a natural reaction as the Link* began to mutate.”

“Mutate?”

“Yes…. ” Gardevoir sighed, “With the aid of the Transfer Effects, it was cumulative event. It wasn’t so much the sexual act itself, like I said it was the feelings you two had for each other, the amount of love – and – and – “ Gardevoir flipped open its notes, “The Transfer Effects on Ash’s side, had finally opened up momentarily, forming a two way street – with both tides of love coming in and out,” Gardevoir snapped its hand, “The Link* was triggered to this alternate stage – and set off the Link* in you – because, um, Ash’s bio-code is attempting to merge with the Link*, that’s not good, not good at all. I’m afraid we’re going to have to do a major procedure to end this once and for all, one I was hoping we would be able to avoid with its…its potential repercussions.”

Gary all the while, as his eyes welled up with this information, looked down at the bed and Umbreon’s paws, a tear finally massing enough to drop off his face. He laughed darkly, “Our love, set it off….”

“Think of it like an electrical current,” said Gardevoir, Gary feeling it was trying to buy time for him to process this himself, “So far, your love, your current of energy as translated by the Transfer Effects was only getting transmitted into Ash, and Ash absorbed it like a sponge, storing it, like a battery, to power himself and to suppress the Link* which has been feeding off of Ash’s guilt. The amount of guilt versus the amount of love Ash has been able to store in him has been flip flopping back and forth, and the Link* is a hungry S.O.B. As Ash’s guilt began to get interchanged with his love, the Link*, still needed a source to eat, and began to adapt….Now that it got a taste of a two way street with the circuit complete and endless amount of emotion able to get transferred non-stop, the new source of power was cemented….”

“Love,” said Gary darkly.

“…If there is even the slightest tear in Ash’s soul…a chink in the chain” –

“Then his bio-code could fuse with the Link*…” said Gary.

*She keeps hurting Ash, no matter what you do, she keeps hurting him.*

“You’re far from out of the woods on this as well,” said Gardevoir, “Good news is that I have the Link* isolated in you, thank the heavens it was no where near as advanced as Ash’s. We need to stop both Links* now from trying to manipulate their hosts.”

*A lot good your meds will do now. Just flush them.*

“This Link* has taken on a life of its own, its like an emotional parasite trying to take over its host….We didn’t see this coming,” said Gardevoir, “I, didn’t see this coming….We’re going to begin prepping Ash for” –
“Code cutting,” said Gary, “……Gardevoir, I want you to give this to Ash,” Gary took off his necklace and handed it over without looking up. Gardevoir placed its hand over Gary’s, Gary still opting to look elsewhere blindly, till he felt something drip on his hand, he turned to Gardevoir and saw it was crying.

“My friend, I am so, so, so sorry. Please forgive me.”

“It’s not your fault Gardevoir,” Gary croaked, letting himself go under to the wave of despair making his voice swollen with pain, “Just help Ash.”

I don’t care what happens to me, just save him.

****

It wasn’t much of a day. You are having more success with Ash via coms at least, mind you he sounds, dead. Lifeless. But he has stopped crying. Either his mother and Pikachu got him to stop crying, or maybe he finally ran out of tears.

Gary and Ash were face-timing each other since Ash still held adamant to being held in isolation from anyone but protected personnel, despite being informed, repeatedly, that he wasn’t a danger. Gardevoir was with Ash, and Gary had Umbreon and Ritchie and Sparky. The com wasn’t pointed directly at Ash, so Gary had this weird off center view with Ash on the side.

Ash tilted his head, the bags under his eyes were enough for a world tour of distress, “Code cutting? That sounds pleasant.”

“It is now, perhaps our only chance to get rid of the Link*,” said Gardevoir, “Err, Links*.”

“If, you waited all this time to use it,” said Ash, “Then it in fact, must not be too pleasant. Fitting.”

“It is not pleasant at all,” said Gardevoir, “Much of it is still based in theory, not practice, because the practice is so controversial.”

“Why is it controversial?”

“Because, in the wrong hands,” said Gardevoir, “you can hurt a person in a way, they could never recover from because they wouldn’t have the capacity, or even reason that they could. Now, grant it codes can repair themselves, and the process can be sped up or slowed down by the patient’s health both physically and emotionally, however, theoretically, with code cutting, one can manipulate a person’s very soul as one desired, they can also amplify or destroy certain traits, or even, create a puppet.”

Ash still had enough feeling to gawk at Gardevoir, “That’s, horrifying.”

“It is, it really is,” Gardevoir replied nodding through, “Code cutting can also block codes from repairing if done incorrectly, in other words, it would result in a tear in your soul, one that could lead to your soul being ripped apart. This would be a major procedure I would be performing on you on par with a Soul Transfer.”

“Does that mean you will have to code cut Gary too?”
“We’re trying to just keep it to one code cutting procedure. Gary’s Link* has been isolated within him and is not feeding off his emotions too much, which is good, although it is no where near as advanced as your own. Based on the data we have collected from your own Link* Ash, there’s a good chance I can pull it out of him without code cutting with a couple more treatments so that is not the issue. The issue is, there is no doubt a connection between the two of you that I cannot suppress even with the full extent of my powers and anything done to you Ash will get filtered to him. Whether this connection is exerted through the Link* or some other anomaly, that is what I’m currently deciphering, and that’s where this procedure is going to get a bit sticky. We need to get the Link* out of you now Ash, but we’re not sure how that might effect Gary’s Link*, and Gary still needs more treatments before he is fully prepped to have his Link* removed. The question comes on who I focus on and operate on first, you or Gary.”

Ash and Gary each said each other’s names simultaneously, Gardevoir pushed down the pain it felt in its heart. Before either Ash or Gary could make their case against the other why their boyfriend should go first, Gardevoir laid out its plan, “So my plan is to operate on you both at the same time.”

*Can’t imagine how that could go wrong.*

Ash looked to Gary through the com, who was failing miserably to hide his trembling, “I don’t need Transfer Effects to feel you’re scared.”

*“Love I am terrified,” said Gary trying to keep himself together.*

*“Why? Gardevoir is the number on Human Health Transfer pokemon, didn’t you call them yourself?”*

*“Even with my skill, a lot can go wrong,” Gardevoir admitted.*

*“Like how?”*

Gary swallowed, “You, won’t be Ash anymore.”

*“As if I’m hardly myself now,” Ash replied quietly, missing Gary’s pained face as he turned off-center.*

*Maybe a new Ash is what everyone needs, you’ve been damaged goods for too long, you’ve hurt far too many people – you haven’t been yourself – the Ash people love – in forever, doesn’t Gary deserve better then this sham of a person?*

*“That’s too crazy to do the both of us together,” Gary blurted.*

*“There is no other choice,” said Gardevoir.*

Ash turned to Gardevoir, “I have faith in you Gardevoir,” he said, “I’m ready, I’m ready to be free of this…please.”

*“I know,” Gardevoir replied, “In theory, you are a perfect candidate for code cutting. With the information I gathered from the code test, I can pinpoint the depth of the Link* that your biocode has tried to merge with, along with the tangled bits,” it looked to Gary, “I truly believe this will work, the Link* will be beaten by working together, indirectly or otherwise, this will be the Link*’s undoing, we’ll use the vices it has placed upon you both against it.”*

Gary didn’t feel any better. He was drowning in worry.

*“Do you have your medicine Gary?”*
“Yeah, yeah, I’m going to take it.”

The com view on Ash’s end titled a little, Gary saw that Ash was wearing his necklace, but another piece of bling, Gary did not approve of at all, Ash had a restraint around his wrist, “Ash, do you have a restraint on?”

“I do as a matter of fact.” Ash replied.

Ritchie who had been silent all this time, finally a spoke up, “Why?”

“It makes me feel better,” Ash replied.

“Ash,” said Gary, “Please take it off.”

“No.”

“It’s just one,” said Gardevoir stepping in, “It’s helping him be calm, there’s nothing malicious in its intent.”

“It helps me feel tethered,” said Ash, “It helps me feel like I’m protecting you all better.”

“By isolating yourself?!” Gary blurted.

“I’m talking to you over the com aren’t I?”

GOD, DAMMIT ASH – HOW TO RELATIONSHIT A THREE PART SERIES BY GARY FUCKING OAK AND ASH DUMBASS KETCHUM.

Ash’s eyes matched the lifelessness in his voice, “Is that not good enough?”

“No it’s not! I want to hold you! I want to kiss you and touch you and feel you against me and make you feel better” – as Gary wobbled out his plea, Ash’s expression never wavered, “We were supposed to cuddle remember?”

“Surprise surprise, I got in the way of that,” said Ash.

The com was off center again, but Gary could see enough of Gardevoir where it rolled its eyes and face-palmed very hard.

“That’s just it Ash,” said Gary, “we can be near you! The only one who might be at risk is me, but I can still be in the same room as you!”

“Ritchie can cuddle you for now.”

“Really,” said Ritchie flatly.

“Please Ash” –

“No.”

“Can you at least take off the restraint for me?”

“No.”

“Please?”

“I’ll take my restraint off when you take your anxiety medicine,” said Ash.
“Okay fine,” said Gary, he leaned over the side of the bed and snatched up his bag, rummaging through it like a rabid Rattata. “I, I put it in a little bag with” – Gary remembered the little box he had plucked from their nightstand – “with, *something*” –

“I hope you find it then.”

*God almighty you can understand why things broke off between Ash and Misty because you know deep down she would not put with this, from either of you to be honest.*

“Gardevoir,” said Ash, “When you code cut me, would you be able to take out the depression too?”

“No,” said Gardevoir, “That would require, changing” –

“I figured as much,” said Ash, “Just, throwing that out there.”

“Remember what I told you before,” Gardevoir leaned in, “As you deal with the Link*, you’ll be that much better at handling it.”

To that Ash gave no response.

“As for having the Link* removed, it will leave a hole in your being that will heal over time, that much we can safely infer in the grand scheme of things. You’ll still be Ash. You’ll still feel things. You’ll still have to learn to live with yourself.”

Ash looked earnestly to Gardevoir, and said in the smallest voice,“….Can I really get better? Do I….Do I really have a chance?”

“Of course, of course you do,” Gardevoir earnestly replied –

“I don’t want to end up how she did” –

“You won’t,” said Gary quickly, “Because you’ll be surrounded by people who love and care about you, we won’t let it take you. *I won’t let it take you…but Ash, sweetie, light of my life, you have to fight it with me.*”

Ash looked to Gary who was begging him with his eyes, and Ash’s heart gave a pained pulse…That Gary was still willing to fight for him, even after the diagnosis, even after knowing this just wasn’t a behavioral misstep and something to learn from, or ‘deal with it’, that this was something lingering and progressive….he still was going to fight to keep Ash.

*You have to take control of it Ash. You’re stronger than you’ve ever thought you were.*

Gary held his com as if he was holding Ash, “Please, Love, don’t shut me out from it, don’t pretend you’re not in pain when you are, or sad, or scared, or hurt, I will carry you when you can’t walk. All that you’ve done for me, all that you’ve done for our friends and family and this world, we’ll carry you too.”

“We will,” said Ritchie, although the com barely captured his voice.

Ash turned his head away, “I’m sorry I’ve made things so difficult, for everyone.”

*This is just so, NOT Ash, Gary, it is just taking you by surprise after surprise after surprise, and this has to be what threw Misty for a loop too! And Lord knows she tried to help, but Ash just couldn’t understand, and they just both, wore each other out as stated before….and now you’re on the same track...*
Ritchie raised his voice, “Ash, I wouldn’t be half the person I am today without you,” he said followed by a deep swallow, “I wouldn’t be, I wouldn’t be here.”

That finally got an emotional response out of Ash, and although the com was off center, and Ash was facing away, Gary and Ritchie could clearly tell he was breaking down.

“You’re exhausting yourself, easy, easy there,” Gardevoir patted Ash’s head, “I know these bad thoughts are winning…But you must realize how hard you’ve been fighting so far. You’re an amazing fighter Ash. You can fight it Ash, and on the days where you just can’t” –

“I will fight them for you,” said Gary.

“It doesn’t matter how much I love you,” said Ash with a shaken voice, “I’ll just wear you out too in the end…..What makes you different from Misty?”

Gary felt like he had just taken a sucker punch to the heart. His mind sputtered, then his jaw clicked in place, and he spoke with truth, “Honestly Ash, there’s practically no difference between us. The change has to come from you first. Please…..”

“The difference this time,” said Gardevoir, “Is that you have been properly diagnosed, and will have treatment made available, and ultimately, as Gary has stated, the rest will be up to you.”

“…..I have a lot to think about,” Ash said awkwardly, picking at his restraint.

Yeah. You both do. And that about did it for com communications. Gardevoir is with him at least prepping him up; so is Pikachu. You also heard that Dragonite tried talking with Ash too, along with the other Rangers, and Mary, but not much after that. As for you, you get the sense that people are either letting you have your space or avoiding you all together because reasons. Ritchie is still by you though, and you two haven’t spoken a single word to each other in said time frame.

Gary heard the door open, looked, and saw Misty standing in the doorway with Tracey; the upper part of her arm still wrapped in bandages.

Lord here we go.

“Have you two eating anything?”

“Um, no.”

“No.”

“Well, we’re going to Berry Blizten, you two want anything from there?” Her glances shifted between Gary and Ritchie.

“I’m not really hungry.”

“I’m good.”

“How about you Sparky? Umbreon?”

The pokemon shook their heads.

“’kay, we’ll be back,” and they left.

Hell has frozen over.
For the first time in a while, Gary and Ritchie looked at each other to share a bewildered glance, but before anything got too comfortable, Ritchie got up and walked over the window, looking outside and crossing his arms.

Gary wanted, needed to say something, but any attempt dried up in his throat, however Ritchie finally managed to speak directly to Gary, “I did see him. When you two were asleep. I peeked in, just to see.”

Gary suddenly felt like he was walking a tightrope.

“I also saw him when he fought that douche caboose Daniel,” Ritchie continued, “He was amazing, as always. I was, in the back.”

“Oh,” was all Gary said, he looked to Sparky who was looking dead on at Ritchie, studying his movements, but then he added, “That was nice of you.”

*That came out wrong, strike one –*

“Can’t compete with your generosity,” said Ritchie.

*Strike two –*

“I’m sorry,” Gary blurted – “But I had to say something!”

*Sa-wing and a miss.*

Gary pushed himself to sit up further, “It’s just, you know Ash, we know Ash! You’ve been with him longer than I have and that one little comment…” Gary trailed off as Ritchie had turned and glared at him through eyes on the verge of welling up –

*Ruh roh OnO;;;*

For a moment Gary thought Ritchie was going to tear into him like a rabid Ursaring (despite being in a hospital bed that saved him from Misty), but that harsh glare that very much matched the one Ash had once upon a time, faded. Ritchie turned away with his arms still crossed, head tilted down with his cap covering his eyes, “…I knew he was sorry. Anyone can be sorry. But, I haven’t been doing too well Gary, and that was the straw that broke the camerupt’s back. He’s got enough to deal with right now aside from me in a slump. Especially right now. *You think I don’t know what that feels like?”*

**BOY GEE HOWDY DOESN’T THIS SOUND FUCKING FAMILIAR.**

Gary saw Ritchie’s hand ball up into a fist, “*You think you were the only one that held him as he cried? As he tore himself to bits?”*

Gary felt ice surge into his stomach.

Ritchie continued, “*You think you’re the only one that matters?”*

“No! I was, I, I let my mouth get a head of my brain, sometimes” –

“I had my reasons,” Ritchie’s voice was down to a growl, “But we all just know better, don’t we? What’s good for each other, but never ourselves….*You’re not the only one who had to watch Ash as this sickness tore him apart from the inside out!…*I tired to help him, I tried really, really hard, so much to the point…that….**” Ritchie’s throat closed as the tears burned up his throat and squeezed out
his eyes. When Ritchie spoke again, his voice was thick, waver ing and wet, “No one should have to suffer from this, nobody, nobody...” Ritchie gave a sudden sharp inhale, “No one should have to lay awake at night over and over and over and wonder why they should even wake up at all the next day” –

Gary wished, ached to have been able to walk over to Ritchie and pull him into a hug (Sparky hugged his ankle at least) Ritchie continued to sob, “I don’t know what to do anymore Gary, I don’t know how to help him anymore, my best friend, my best friend is dying from the inside out and I can’t help him” –

“This is not a death sentence Ritchie,” said Gary just barely keeping his own self from breaking down, “I won’t let it be.”

Ritchie let out a fake laugh through his sobs, “You know I promised the same thing too right? So did Misty. How much do you think your promise stacks up huh? Because in the grand scheme of things I can promise you they won’t add up to very much.”

Gary felt like a knife had stabbed him through his chest.

Poor Umbreon and Sparky could only be near their Trainers, no nudging or purring would be enough.

“I’m sorry,” said Gary.

“Of course you are.”

…..You have a feeling Gary, that as much Ritchie mirrors Ash, he mirrors you too an awful lot in terms of relationship oops with Ash (at least platonic wise...hm)...Speaking of which you somehow gotta get back in good graces with him and grind your friendship level up more, if not to, just make sure he’s okay....

A maintenance Rotom knocked briefly then let itself into the room to take measurements off the machine hooked up to the nodes on Gary, its translator fitting a little loosely and swinging almost freely as it zipped about, “Hm~ Hm~ Vitals looking very nice here Mr. Oak. Very nice indeed!"

Look a little closer and you’ll see a bleeding heart doc. Ritchie has so expertly turned away as to not alert the Rotom to his distress, because that’s just what you do.

“Hey, do you know anything about how Ash is doing?”

Rotoms didn’t have too many features humans could identify emotions with, but it still wasn’t too hard to see it turn somber, “I’m afraid Mr. Ketchum is not doing too well both physically and mentally, but not to worry!” –

HA –

“I hear his mother made him a big pot of soup and is currently trying to get him to eat! I remember reading how a big meal would always make him happy!”

Fucking shoot me in the dick.

“You should eat something too Mr. Oak,” Rotom smiled (as best it could), “Who knows, it might just put a little more pep in your step.”

Rotom then wished Gary, Ritchie, and their pokemon well and left the room with its measurements.
A silence chilled between Gary and Ritchie so much that Umbreon gave an involuntary shudder, until Gary spoke up to make use of Ritchie’s promise to Ash, “Come to think of it, I am a little hungry.”

“I’ll go get you something then,” said Ritchie in a deadpan voice, “what do you want?”

“Anything is fine, I’m good with whatever, and thank-you.”

Despite Ritchie’s face being blank, Gary clearly read, ‘Eat shit.’

Ritchie wiped his face, making himself look just barely presentable to the outside world provided he kept himself mainly covered by his cap, “I’ll be back then.”

Again Gary’s mouth shot off before his head could filter, “Have, you ever heard Ash cry like that before?”

“Once,” said Ritchie quietly, without missing a step, “When he thought I was dead.”

YOU’VE APOLOGIZED, HE HASN’T! Ugh, GOD –

As soon as Ritchie and Sparky left the room, Gary dropped back on the bed, making Umbreon jump, then covered his face with a pillow.

Hi Gary! Inner voice here, for now until further notice – I am no longer your friend! In fact I will make it my mission to put you in absolute MISERY –

Gary shot up and threw off the pillow (making poor Umbreon jump again and chide him) he grabbed his found medicine bottle, and promptly took two pills dry.

*****

Ritchie sped walked through the hospital, thinking of what he was going to feed Gary, aside from a spoonful of bitter glares; Sparky almost running to keep up. He made a quick beeline to the break room where most of the Rangers had gathered, only to find it completely empty; Mary must have given the orders and runs for the day. Ritchie went over to the vending machine, the little one by the supply closet since that one was the least glitchy.

You almost admitted it to him Ritchie. You almost did. Ash doesn’t know how many times he’s really saved your life. He doesn’t know the reason ‘why’ for back then either. You’ve been playing this dance for a while now, but the cracks are finally showing. The edges you’ve traced are finally showing their teeth.

“I was fed up, I was exhausted,” –

Ritchie’s movements came to a near abrupt halt, that was Mary’s voice coming from behind the supply closet’s closed door –

“I mean, nothing was working, nothing was sinking into her brain that what she was doing, what she was thinking was wrong. And….all that time, she was just trying to talk to us, and nobody believed her, not even me or my parents…."

Ritchie could not, for anything, walk away, (even with Sparky’s beckoning) and when the candy
made a loud thunk as it landed, he could feel Mary pause through the door. Ritchie made footsteps leading away, and then using his stealth, snuck back by the vending machine, much to his pokemon’s disapproval. He heard Mary sigh, followed by a softer voice, one that wasn’t her’s; Ritchie could tell whoever it was, was trying to comfort her. From where Ritchie stood, if the supply door opened he could slip next to the vending machine and then behind it for cover before they ever knew he was there.

“We tried everything, and I mean everything,” Mary continued, “not that it did any good of course, and by the time we figured out what was really wrong with her, she was fed up with us. She had turned into a horrible person, she turned into exactly what everyone expected her to be. No remorse. No forgiveness. Just this, unbridled rage at anyone that moved….When I came back from the Ranger’s Summit and heard she had disappeared to join the Onelings…..”

The other voice became clearer, “You felt relieved that she was gone.”

Ritchie identified said voice as Max.

“I am so disgusted with myself,” Mary’s voice was wet, “I thought ‘well, maybe she’ll finally be happy’ – and they convinced her to…..to”

Whatever stars aligned to have Ritchie hear this piece of information, he thanked, and at the same cursed.

“That’s why you wanted a Chandelure?”

“Well, yeah, *sniff*. My Chani helped me cope…with all the Froslass in the region it just, made sense. I wanted someone, I wanted a pokemon I knew could be worse than the nightmares, because then they wouldn’t seem so bad. I could just ask Chani to light up the room when I couldn’t get the feeling of eyes starting at me from all corners, these, pale, cold blue eyes. Dead. Frozen. Right on me.”

“Jesus Mary, how long have you been holding this in?”

“What does it matter now,” Ritchie heard Mary blow her nose, “I gained my dearest friend at least, and Chandelure was great at herding ghost pokemon, primarily Froslass back home, because of course it would be. In fact, I was the go-to Ranger for such missions, to clear them out and back into safer territories. And then I wanted out. I was tired of seeing her face everywhere. So then I came to Kanto for a, bit of a fresh start, and I find these two Trainers, flat out of their minds doing the Ranger trials with no pokemon just because they could” –

Ritchie’s stomach flopped, Mary was talking about him and Ash –

“Their pokemon cheering for them on the sidelines! These, two, idiots!”

“But they’re your idiots,” Max said softly, “Hm~. What drew you to them?”

“….Their love. The connection they had. Still have. What I would never have….”

“Now don’t say that….”

Ritchie felt on pins and needles, Max’s voice was again too soft to hear, but Mary’s got louder –

“I shouldn’t have done that to, to Ash – I knew what I was doing, and everything in me was screaming to stop, but I couldn’t – I saw her, and I saw him – I saw the signs too, I saw it between them, that they had demons that haunted them like Lisa and I couldn’t bear to watch these two sweet
innocent boys fall victim to that!...I wanted to keep them safe. I wanted them to work through it, but..... But who was I to try and put this shit to rest when I helped bury her” –

Mary sounded like she was sobbing into cloth, probably clothing, most likely Max’s chest. Max was saying something, but it again was too quiet for Ritchie to hear, then Mary’s voice got loud,

“No, Zoroark didn’t give the killing blow, Chandelure did with its Fire Blast* attack that blew out her chest,” Mary composed herself, somewhat, with a dark edge to her voice, “But Lisa held on long enough to do the Destiny bond* attack, and when Zoroark deh-decapitated her ghost body, it was just that….You know how you truly kill a ghost pokemon right?”

“Yeah…” said Max, “you burn them.”

“You burn them alive.”

Mary’s voice got too quiet to hear, Ritchie dared to move closer to hear…

“I don’t know how you do it Max, I really don’t.”

“Well that makes two of us. I, finally got rid of all the toys” –

Ritchie didn’t need to see Mary to know she was full on cringing, “Yeah I heard about that from Gardevoir.”

More quiet voices, almost whispers, until –

“And we still have no luck on finding Avalugg….No body, no nothing,” – Max’s voice turning savage at the end there.

“They’re gathering intel on the Onelings in custody, so, there’s that,” said Mary.

“If they have Dannie” – Max’s com rang a notification.

“I won’t stop you,” said Mary, “I doubt anyone would” –

“Where’s Thomas?”

“With Rose, why?”

There was silence, but Ritchie could feel energy building up in the room, instincts shouted at him to squeeze behind the vending machine (Sparky squished itself under), and the moment he did, Mary and Max burst out of the supply closet, bolting out the room.

Thus Ritchie took that as his queue to leave, thinking to himself that there are far too many ghosts here that any lighter could ever handle.

*But first you have to feed Gary. Make sure he’s taken his medicine at least once too. Don’t leave him alone for too long. Don’t be by yourself too long.*

Ritchie’s com rang with a notification but he ignored it. Sparky sighed.

******
Knocked out by his medicine, Gary had fallen asleep just long enough to have a horrible nightmare.

He was back in the Dark Place with Ash, holding hands and running for their lives from the shadowy figure that pursued them yet again. A trading gasp, ‘Don’t let go of me’, followed by ‘I won’t.’

Ash was suddenly stopped violently, taking Gary along with him – even if Ash broke his promise by letting go, Gary surely didn’t – Ash’s free arm had a black chain manifested around it and his eyes read, ‘You have to let go of me,’ Gary promptly responded with ‘Never.’

The figure was rapidly approaching, there was no time for either of them to much of anything with Gary trying to pull Ash and Ash vehemently trying to push him away. Gary saw past Ash, to the figure, and everything slowed, just a bit, he could see it a little more clearly: he recognized the shape, he knew those shoulders, the waist – then the darkness was upon them both, and Gary was treated to the sound of Ash screaming and silenced by a sickening crunching noise –

“Gary, come on, get up now,” Gardevoir nudged Gary awake, “Sorry to interrupt your beauty sleep, but I need you to be awake for this.”

Gary slurred himself awake with a wave of anguish, anger, and resentment, “Why didn’t you eat it?”

“Oh,” Gardevoir blinked, “did you have a nightmare?”

“Yes, could, do you know if Ash is awake?”

“Yes he is very much awake,” said Gardevoir, “I just came from him, I’m sorry, you looked so peaceful” –

“It’s fine,” Gary snapped, “Nothing I can’t handle.”

“Well, sit up now, I’m going to start prepping you.”

Like a receding tide, Gary felt shame for the outburst, mild as it was.

Gardevoir began working on Gary’s code via Heal Pulses in silence, of which, Gary was very much sick of, and asked bluntly, “What are you thinking about?”

Gardevoir hummed, “I’ve been thinking about the Dawn Stone, and Lisa’s relationship to the Onelings, and, others. Every time I peer into the Link, into, just a cut of who she was, I get this feeling of running away, and of fear, painful stifling fear.” Gardevoir sighed, “From what I understand, Lisa was trying to escape the Onelings. Maybe they tracked her somehow with the Dawn Stone, and/or perhaps the Dawn Stone was their insurance policy on her. Perhaps they could resurrect her somehow with it.”

“That’s a lot of assumption,” said Gary.

“Yeah, well here’s more,” Gardevoir continued, “What if the stone was a catalyst into ‘changing’ her, to help her,” Gardevoir paused for a moment, “Nega-evolve.”

“That’s an awfully loaded thesis,” said Gary.

“And one completely baseless,” sighed Gardevoir, hanging its head a bit, “Hoooolllllllooo.”

“Do they have any information on what the Dawn Stone is really about?”

Gardevoir shrugged, “Zoroark is doing what it can, and the Onelings in custody, aside from the
Smeargle, seem to be a bit harder to pop open. Hm, last I heard the Smeargle had to be in a separate holding unit because the other Onelings were trying to attack it.”

“They just sound like the most pleasant group,” said Gary rolling his eyes. He picked up his com and began scrolling through text messages aimlessly, coming upon a most special one.

‘Do you want to go get something to eat?’ ‘<3’

Gary gazed at Ash’s icon. How long ago that feels.

“Gardevoir, is Ash eating?”

“Not much, his stomach is a bit upset.”

More silence, then Gary asked, “Hey….so, um, about the, ghostly presences here in the hospital….?”

“What of them?”

“Haaaaaaaaaaaaaaave, there been anymore, sightings, on the matter? Did Mismagius have anything further to add? Eventually?”

“I don’t think so, well, nothing worth mentioning at least. It’s been mild.”

“Mild how?” asked Gary.

“The, you know the usual, like whispers, floaters, ect. Nothing that would capture a human’s attention too much, although…”

“Although?”

“According to Mismagius, there was this one pokemon spirit that sat outside of Ash’s room for a little bit, like a sentry, like how Arcanine and Blastoise did, that was kinda cute.”

“When was that?”

“Oh that was when Ash was first brought in, and you know what I think I saw it myself once! I thought it was the hospital’s Sylveon, but nope! T’was a spirit.”

“….It was a Sylveon?”

“Yuppers, a real sweet one too. Mismagius said it just wanted to be by Ash’s side when things were bad.”

Gary felt touched, they would have to tell Ash that.

“Um Gardevoir, did Mismagius say, or see anything about a spirit Ber – um, Avalugg? Roaming around? By any chance?”

“Avalugg? Oh, you mean the pokemon that was with Ash? That would be pretty hard to miss I’d imagine, it didn’t say it did.”

“Hm….Maybe, its still out there then.”

“Avalugg do move rather slow, wherever they’re trying to get to.”
There was silence again, but much more bearable, until Gardevoir had another point of conversation, “I’ve been doing some musings about, how this all came to be. I wondered about the Link’s purpose, I mean, I can only assume Lisa had a type of Link in her too, if not one even more advanced than Ash’s. And the Link drains, it attacks, it’s, like an emotional cancer if I may be so bold to call it that. If Lisa placed that in Ash, then I wonder who placed it in Lisa? All that I’ve heard and learned about the Onelings is that their leader is a most controlling and fearsome creature. Perhaps they, used the Link to break apart what was left of Lisa, and this Link is doing the same to Ash, and evolving to fit the process.”

“A process that leads to what?”

Gardevoir stopped its actions, looking Gary right in the eye, “I have a feeling that the Link, and code cutting, are similar processes.”

Gary balked, “God,” he dropped his head in hands.

“I won’t let that happen,” said Gardevoir, shoving another Heal Pulse into Gary, “I swear it.”

“I’m sorry I dragged you into all of this” –

“Don’t be, where would you be right now without me? Hm?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know” –

“Easy, easy there, tututututututu~

“You’re over exerting yourself,” said Gary wiping his eyes –

“I am taking it in stride.”

“What about your powers?” Gary’s thoughts harking back to his Alakazam’s fate –

“I know the risk Gary, really I do, but I’m not going to pass on” –

“This isn’t your fault! None of it!”

“It was never a blame game to being with,” Gardevoir again stopped its actions and looked Gary in the eye, “I know Lisa is an easy target for everyone’s frustrations because of what she did, but this has become more than half-baked attempt at revenge. Ash’s soul is at stake. Your soul is at stake. Listen to me, I know the relationship between the two of you has been going through a rough patch, and this isn’t helping by any means, but you two must consider every ultimatum, and pursue the one that will best help heal you properly.”

“I’m not leaving him,” said Gary quietly, “That’s out of the question – what would make you even say that?”

“Let me finish,” said Gardevoir, stuffing another Heal Pulse into Gary, “You know of the red string of fate fable yes?”

“Of course.”

“Well, between you and Ash, and advances in bio-luminescence, I think you two have just moved that fable into a hypothesis.”

“…..Do elaborate.”
“There is, without a doubt, a connection between the two of you that no matter what I do with the
length of my powers, that I cannot suppress. Link* or not. Transfer Effects or not. The Stopper I put
on when you were having your attack fell off like a flimsy Band-Aid. This connection is something
more definitive as opposed to the Link* and Transfer Effect’s wild symptoms. Under these
unfortunate circumstances, it has only gotten stronger, be as it may, indeed, be but only a thread.”

“Go on.”

“To put it bluntly, there’s a thread of your souls connecting the two of you. How and when that
happened, I can only guess. And that throws my previous theories out the window because this is the
first case I have seen of auras actually doing something like that as opposed to something only
described in a poetic sense……How this went undetected by me for so long, well, it’s the amount of
the connection, which is a grand 0.000000038 lm, eh, lumens – and I only JUST barely caught it on
the code test, so I am going to metaphorically rake claws down my face,” which Gardevoir did,
dragging its eyes wide with a gut-growl, “and that’s that!”

Gary blinked, “You, cannot, possibly be upset at yourself for not catching that, Gardevoir, are you
serious, e-even with the tech we have today, that amount?! I’m shocked you found it at all!”

“Well, it was enough to bridge such pain, if,” Gardevoir made a face, “That is what, aided this whole
Link* debacle and the Effects between the two of you. Meh, I want to hang onto my theory that the
Link* got in by the Disable* attacks instead, but, well, it would also tie into the Transfer Effects just
so neatly,” Gardevoir gave a deep guttural sigh and composed itself. “It is such a beautiful
connection, that would, also explain why the Link* evolved the way it did. Your love, is very
powerful – or hm, could be average too – that makes me think perhaps this is in fact a lot more
common now that I know what to look for! Ah, anywho, getting off topic here” –

“Fact is, there’s a thread of our souls connecting us,” said Gary, “Aside from all the, bad, crap.”

“Yup,”

“Will you be doing a Soul Transfer?”

“If need be, Audi will be assisting if I do, I would trust no one else.”

More silence, but warmer as Gary took a moment to take everything in, “As to how this ties into Ash
and I healing…..”

“You both need more healing than just bed rest,” said Gardevoir.

“What has Ash been saying?”

“That’s he scared, of hurting you more. It wouldn’t be a bad thing Gary, look at how stressed” –

“I just haven’t been taking my medicine like how I should” –

“Gary” –

“You want to talk about my anxiety?! I don’t want to lose him, there it is in a nutshell.”

Gardevoir rolled its eyes and whispered something harshly in Kalosian.

“Whatever,” Gary spat back, riling up his nerves in the process, “If the Stopper you put on fell off,
how come I can’t feel Ash?”
“That is another ballgame all its own,” said Gardevoir as it threaded in another Pulse*, “The flow between the two of you is now reversed, so now, Ash is getting everything, and you’re not, which will work in our favor when you both go under. The plan I have now is to reel your Link* back into him, back to where it came, and I will use my own aura if need be as a lure to make sure it follows.”

“Won’t that cause strain on him?”

“Nothing he is not prepared to handle.”

“What about the strain on you?”

“Nothing I am not prepared to handle.”

“What if the Link* in me doesn’t work like it’s apparently working in Ash?”

“Then snip-snip,” said Gardevoir flatly, “It needs to come out, and I have a plan for that too, but honestly, with how your Link* is adjusting, it really is no where NEAR the severity of Ash’s, which is really lucky considering you just have the best mental fortitude.”

“Bite me.”

“I’m not having any trouble containing it at all, so once its reeled back into him, I will code cut it all out, and we’ll be done with it.”

There came a knocking at the door with Ritchie letting himself in, “Breakfast,” he tossed Gary a candy bar, which Gardevoir caught for him, “Do you need anything else?”

“No, thank you.”

“I’ll be back then,” and Ritchie left.

Gardevoir side-eyed Gary and the empty spot where Ritchie one was.

“No commentary needed,” Gary said bitterly.

“Hm, didn’t think as much,” Gardevoir set the candy aside, rubbed its hands together and clapped, “Alright, that will do it! Now, look at me, loooooook at meeееееее,” Gardevoir made a silly face that forced a half smile from Gary, “I need you to get some fresh air as this sets in, alright?”

“Sure,” Gary responded quietly.

Almost as if on queue Misty popped in with a quick knock, swinging the door wide open, “Hey, was Ritchie just here?”

“Indeed he was,” said Gary, and with what happened next, Gary could swear up and down Gardevoir and Misty had a private mental exchange,

“Well, I’m sure he’s where he needs to be, anywho, Gary, if you’re up for it, Tracey, Brock and me are going to the little flower shop down the street to fill Ash’s room up again, how about it? You want to come?”

Gary just helplessly laughed, “How could I say no?”

“We could also run by the com store too if you want, didn’t you order Ash’s new com a while ago?”

“Sure did, maybe it got lost or something, that poor Pelipper.”
“Alright then,” Misty had the most gentle of smiles on display and it truly touched Gary’s heart, “When you’re ready, we’ll be in the break room down the hall.”

“Sure thing.”

“Meanwhile I,” Gardevoir announced as it stood up stretching, “Am going to have another meeting with the staff and get the ball rolling, I’ll see you back here in, oooooooh, give me about two hours.”

“Gotcha.”

When Gary was finally alone with just Umbreon, he got out of bed, cleaned himself up in the restroom, put on clean clothes, put his com in his pocket, and met Misty, Tracey, and Brock in the break room with their pokemon.

Despite the conversation the trio kept lit around Gary, he was almost totally oblivious to the world around him, to the point of bumping into an old lady with her Espeon beside her as they exited the hospital, “Oh my, I’m sorry” – but the old lady just waved it off with a gummy smile and went inside to a waiting nurse,

“Mrs. Aberdale! Good to see you! You’re right on time for your appointment, right this way please.”

Umbreon did a small double take at the Espeon’s ‘swishing end’. The Espeon looked back at Umbreon with a coy wink, Umbreon blushed then quickly trotted up to Gary to keep pace with him as the group headed for the flower shop.

*****

“Thomas! Thomas!”

Mary with Mega-Lopunny and Chandelure at her side, and Max with Sneasel sharp and on the ready, were running down a darkened hallway of the police station with Officer Jenny and her Arcanine – the temperature was ridiculously cold, their breathes visible as they panted – they turned the corner and came across Alakazam with severe burns carrying an unconscious Thomas –

“THOMAS!”

Mary checked him in Alakazam’s hold, the poor pokemon looking like it was about to faint at any minuet, “He’s alive, Alakazam, can you not Teleport*?!” Alakazam shook its head, then dropped to one knee, still cradling its Trainer. “Disabled*?!?” Alakazam nodded – Max and Sneasel went running past – “MAX!”–

They ran past two dead pokemon, Onelings that were in captivity, the holding cells that contained them completely busted open. Max was thinking there should be more bodies around from the destruction he could see in the dim, flickering lights, when he came across the Transforming Smeargle, or what was left of it.

Its chest was burst wide open, and what was left of its exploded mangled body was frozen in place. Sneasel screamed and was knocked violently into the wall – Max whipped around to face fierce burning pale blue eyes and a cold vice grip wrapped around his throat raising him off his feet –
Ash sniffled, wiping his nose on his shirt, his thoughts with the conversation he had earlier with his mother via face-timing.

“Momma.”

“How, do you deal with worrying, about me?”

“I trust that you can take care of yourself.”

“…..I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“Because, I’ve been doing a very bad job of that as of late….I betrayed that trust….and because of me, Gary’s been suffering…I tried to protect him from it, from what’s going on inside of me, but that, I didn’t do that right either…I’m so tired mom, I’m so tired of messing up…I know I can be better than this, but….I just can’t rise up above everything that’s telling me I’m not….and I’m trying real hard to prove it wrong, but I just, *sniff* keep proving it right.”

“Well, it’s easy to prove a liar right Ash, because they can change the answer to whatever they want. That sadness within you Ash is a liar.”

A liar.

Ash looked to Pikachu, who was by him on the bed (a maintenance Rotom off to the side was taking measurements), “What do you think of me buddy?”

Pikachu typed out on Gardevoir’s com, ‘I love you. You need help.’

“Yup,” Ash popped his lips, “I’m with you there.” He picked at Gary’s necklace around his neck, then picked at his restraint again.

Pikachu looked at Ash with sad eyes, it leaned up against him, nuzzling his hand with the restraint.

“You’ve been with me forever….I’m sorry, little buddy, that you have to see this….I’m sorry this is what I’ve become…..”

Pikachu shook its head, typing out more into the com, ‘I have indeed been with you forever. I do know you. I know the real you. I know what the sadness does. I love you so much, and I will always be with you <3.’
Ash snatched up Pikachu, hugging it hard, Pikachu nuzzling its Trainer and patting his head as Ash’s tears soaked Pikachu’s coat. After a bit, Ash finally managed to pry himself away looking tearfully at his lifelong friend. Pikachu reached itself up, and gave a little Pika-kiss on Ash’s forehead making him smile. Ash set Pikachu down and gave it some neck skritches, Pikachu leaning into Ash’s hand as he petted it, “Eh heheh, what do you think little buddy? If I cry anymore, I’ll become waterlogged!” Ash laughed. There came a sudden knock on Ash’s door, he quickly wiped his face with a tissue that Pikachu snagged for him, “Come in!” his voice higher than normal, but it was the Rotom that buzzed quickly over to the door and was to approve whoever it was. It finally took a floating step back, and the door opened slightly, then just enough to reveal Ritchie standing in the doorway with Sparky at his feet.

"So, are you done being all banished and all then?"

Ash’s eyes went wide, “R-Ritchie!”

“Hey Ash” – Ritchie paused for just a moment, but as soon as Ash opened his arms wide with a look that screamed ‘I’M SO SORRY’ – Ritchie practically bolted over, the impact of both of them engulfing each other in a tight, tight hug making the hospital bed and machines sway, and they sobbed (more in Ash’s case) into each other’s shoulder. Ash pulled (hauling) Ritchie completely on the bed with him so they could be even closer together –

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, I never, ever wanted to hurt you Ritchie, please, please forgive me, please, I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry” –

Ritchie finally spoke, his voice wet and trembling, “I know, you didn’t mean it, I…..I’ve been with you for 8 years Ash…8 years, and now….this is the first time that, I, I, I don’t know if I’m going to be good enough to help you through this” –

Ash’s grip on Ritchie only increased, “Wh-what do you mean by that?”

Pikachu could only look on with the deepest concern, Sparky leaping up on the bed with it for added support.

Ritchie coughed, gaining slight ground on gathering himself up, “Let’s get real here….This comes and goes, but it ultimately stays. You have downspells, and I have downspells, and when they happen, its so hard to see what’s right and wrong, you can’t see or think clearly, even when you know what the right answer is…you opt out, because its just too dark to wonder how something good would ever have been an option in the first place…..” Ritchie pulled back enough to where they could finally look at each other’s tear stricken face, “You’re going to be your own worst enemy Ash,” Ritchie continued, he brushed away some of Ash’s bangs, “…And…I hate seeing you like this! I know the sadness can cloud what you think but please, when we try to help you, Ash, you’ve got to listen to us!”

“I, I am listening” –

“Are you?”

“Yes! Yes, I promise I’m listening…Ritchie…”

“We’re not kids anymore Ash, we’ve got to sort our stuff out….You’ve always been the strong one…you gave my strength back to me…but it’s clear now…I…I haven’t been giving your’s back at all” –

“No, no, no Ritchie, Ritchie, no, no please, I’m, I’m so sorry” – Ash pulled Ritchie in again, his
hands trembled, Ritchie was shaking so much, Ash feared his grip on him would shatter him into a million pieces –

“You’re my best friend Ash,” Ritchie sobbed, “I love you so much, I love you so much, I just want to help, I just want to help you…but I don’t know what to do anymore!”

“No, Ritchie, don’t say that, it, it’s not you that’s the problem” –

Pikachu was torn in running for help or staying by the Rangers’ side with Sparky, but maybe, this needed to be what happens, so, it stayed, Rotom however, was more than happy to do Pikachu’s bidding and to call for Gardevoir, leaving quickly.

“I….I’m the one that hurt you,” said Ash, “that’s, that’s my fault…..I accept that it’s my fault, because I shouldn’t have let it get the better of me, but it did, and you paid the price for it…..It should never come to that.…..”

Ritchie looked down and away from Ash, “I felt like…I had been stabbed…..What did I do that, made you so mad at me?”

Ash let his shoulders slump, “Nothing. I think, that’s the worst part, all my frustration that had just been building up and up and up and it just suddenly came out, and you were right there, and that’s awful, awful, awful of me! I can’t, I can’t believe I didn’t control it” –

“You lashed out at the nearest target” –

“Just like how she did! We’re, we’re the same.” Ash put his hand over his heart.

Ritchie took a long look at Ash, and the need to try for him, rose above every doubt.

“That’s, where you’re wrong Ash…..You both suffer this, but, given what we know about Lisa, she most likely wasn’t able to deal it and herself very well….but you Ash, at least are trying to, and you will make some mistakes” –

“And they’ve cost me so much already, I lost Misty, I’m losing myself in front of everyone, I’m practically torturing Gary, I hurt you – and Lisa, it, cost Lisa her life” –

“That won’t happen to you Ash. We won’t let it, won’t we Pikachu? Sparky?”

“Pipikapi!”

“Pika, chu~!”

“Ash,” Ritchie reached out, putting his hand on Ash’s shoulder, “I’m not going anywhere, and I think it’s been made clear that Misty, and Gary, and everyone else are not going anywhere either. You have such a big heart Ash, so please, please listen to us so we can help you, don’t listen to the sadness. It lies. It lies to you so much…Tells you you’re weak when nothing could be further from the truth….I, saw your battle in front of the hospital Ash, I’m always blown away by how strong you and your pokemon are! You have it in you Ash, you really do, and the depression tries to blot it all out, make you forget who you are….This is going to be your toughest fight Ash, and I know it begins every day with just getting out of bed, but you’re not alone, you’re never alone, never, never, never, never” – Ritchie went in for another hug, pulling Ash close.

Holding his best friend, Ash remembered what he himself had said to Lisa:
‘…you deserve the chance, no matter how small, no matter how hopeless it seems….It can get better, you can be better, I promise,’ –

“I’ll help it get better for you,” said Ritchie “somehow, I will. I don’t know what I’m going to do, but, just, somehow…I’m sorry Ash, I, I didn’t mean to come apart like this, when you needed me, I’m sorry” –

“No it’s okay, I’m sorry too,” said Ash, his voice full of wavers of its own again, “That’s, what this is all about right? Getting the sad stuff out, and I can’t expect you to hold it all in…That’s what you’ve been doing right? You know me, and I know you, and the holding in stuff, well, that hasn’t worked out very well for me, heh, Ritchie….” Ash moved Ritchie so they could look at each other again, “It does come and go, the sad stuff…but….” Ash looked to Pikachu, and then back to Ritchie, and grasped Gary’s necklace around his neck, “I have three really, really good reasons right here alone to get myself back together.” Ritchie’s face lit up, Ash scratched his nose, “We’ve done so much together, so it doesn’t surprise me at all that we’d fall apart together too.”

"Ha," Ritchie gave Ash a teary slanted smile, and their foreheads touched. Ritchie’s com buzzed another notification, but he ignored it, turned his com off, and opted to cuddle Ash instead, “Nope, no more distractions, I’m going to be here with you now.”

"...Thank-you Ritchie."

Nurse Laylah was scrolling through her emails on her com, walking down a clear hallway when she heard an odd buzzing noise. She looked up and saw a Rotom floating in the air on a tilted axis, completely unmoving, as if it was frozen in time and space.

“Rotom?”

Nurse Laylah then watched the Rotom burst into flames before her very eyes, its being dissipating in soft glows – she screamed – and before she could make her get away she was suddenly suspended in mid air by a psychic glow – her throat gripped shut by pressure alone – her com fell to the floor, shattering –

“Noisy, noisy! There are patients trying to die in peace here!”

Nurse Laylah was turned, and saw a lone Espeon with black, coal eyes and the widest of smiles.

“Let’s get you all peaceful now too~”

The pressure on Laylah’s neck went up and up and up and up to where her head would surely pop right off – if it wasn’t for a Shadow Ball* aimed at Espeon – which it dodged – breaking its concentration. Nurse Laylah was dropped and she scampered away as fast as she could through double doors.

“Hm,” the Espeon turned to its opponent, Gardevoir – both psychic types flared up their power at once, practically bending the reality around them as the pressure of their forces fought for dominance over the other, their aura’s burning brightly, visible by their powers going through extreme strain –

“Créature dégoûtante,” Gardevoir spat, “HOW MANY?!”

“Rude! And, uuum, just enough to you know, where I could be all stealthy, and I would have gotten
away with it too! But alas, I got greedy~ It was just too easy you know, they’re like, all in beds!”

Gardevoir roared its pokemon cry and put forth every ounce of strength it had to overpower Espeon, but made no headway –

“Hm~” Espeon dug its paws in as it held its ground, “Do I sense someone who is, oooooooh, tired~? You stretch yourself too thin m’dear!” Espeon took a step forward, Gardevoir pushed even harder, but still, it was losing. Espeon took another step, “But I can totes relate, you see I am a bit tired myself,” another step, “tired of keeping an eye on a lil’ Froslass,” another step, “tired of trusting a silly Zoroark for doing one simple task,” another step, “oh tired of having our dear family members leave and never come back, just, tired of, well, IDIOTS!!!!” It’s black eyes turned red!

Gardevoir was feeling itself begin to get pushed back – Espeon now walked towards it like normal, its smiling face twitching like an unstable channel –

“I’m quite at my limit you see! Why I’m just about to SNAP! I have but one simple mission to carry out, and look how effortlessly I am doing it! I can’t imagine why this was so hard! It’s really a breeze!”

Gardevoir tried calling for help, but its mind was so laser focused with its powers, if it dared to give an inch, Espeon would win for sure!

“Oh don’t bother, there’s no one that can even remotely come for aid now, not even the legendary pokemon! You see I planned this out veeeeeery carefully and brought my strongest subordinate to tie up any loose ends that should arise – and it’s been doing a very good job! I’m so proud! Being number 2 in the Oneling clan, I have standards I must uphold to you see! But you, you are the NUMBER ONE Human Health Transfer Pokemon in the world! AND THIS IS ALL THAT YOU’RE CAPABLE OF??? AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!” Espeon powers doubled and knocked Gardevoir flat against the wall – its powers then spear pointed to stab Gardevoir through the gut – but Gardevoir gathered it own powers back up in time and stopped it – aura against aura – but Espeon was pushing through!

Espeon looked Gardevoir right in the eye, “Not good enough. I want you to die knowing you didn’t have the strength to save them” – Espeon powers’ spearheaded through off an angle of Gardevoir’s powers – and Gardevoir’s head was snapped completely around, the break of its neck like the crack of a whip, and its body dropped to the ground like a rag doll as its powers and aura fizzled out.

Espeon trotted right up to Gardevoir's still twitchy body and poked it with its feet, “Nice!” It then trotted down the hall, “My Ditto must be having a ball itself! Oh my sweet little angel, hm~ Speaking of angels, Lisa~! Oh Lisa~! I know you’re here sweetie! Be a doll and come out now~ Auntie Espeon wants a word with you~! Auntie Espeon just wants to help you~! I heard you made a friend! He can come back home with us too! I’m here to help you both achieve a new level in happy family planning~!”

“I’ll tell you exactly how you can help me Ritchie.”

“Oh?”

Pikachu’s ears twitched at a faint noise down the hallway, Sparky perked up a little too.

“Just be you! Like, who was it that got me out of a raging river when my grappling hook misfired?”
“I did.”

“Who stayed up with me all night when I got mind screwed by that Hypno?”

“I did” –

“Pikapi!”

“Yeah, you did too little buddy,” Ash smiled.

“That stupid Hypno,” said Ritchie, “Casting Nightmare on you for no reason! But then Pikachu and Sparky zapped it to high heaven!”

“They sure did, and that, was the first time you sang me to sleep,” said Ash, “I won’t ever forget that.”

“Cradled you in my arms you big baby.”

“That helped too!” Ash laughed, his voice then dropped, “And…who was it that saved my life on Mount Silver?”

“I did….and who saved mine during the Ranger Trials?”

“Me – and the mi ii ii i li ons of times afterwards!”

“Hey! It’s no where near that much! And it’s not like I haven’t saved your tail loads of times too!”

“I lost count” –

“Well I did too!” Ritchie playfully stuck his tongue out blowing a raspberry, and the both of them laughed at each other until they wheezed.

Pikachu fell on its back with the greatest sigh of relief, Sparky patted its stomach.

Ritchie gave a deep breath, “Yeah….we’ve come this far pulling each other up, ‘watch each other’s backs, bring each other home’, I always will swear that to you.”

“Yeah, yes, you too, always.”

Ash and Ritchie did their Ranger salute, but in a much more subtle way, they clasped their hands together, papped their chests lightly, Ritchie giving a little howl, and Ash giving a little howl, (Pikachu and Sparky gave a little howls too!), with the two of them ending via another forehead touch.

And for that moment, everything was okay.

And then that moment ended.

From outside the room came soft voices, nothing sinister in sound, but with the words they spoke.

“I really have to hand it to Professor Oak, I mean having your boyfriend in such a state is utterly awful, I don’t know how he does it.”

“Or managed not to get contaminated, did you hear all those rumors going about how Mr. Ketchum is like, possessed?”
“Possessed?!”

“Yes!”

Ash listened intently; Ritchie, Pikachu, and Sparky snapped up – the voices continued –

“I get why they’re not telling him the whole story, I mean, I’d freak out if I knew I was harboring a monster! Professor Oak has his hands full!”

He lied to you, again.

Ash clutched his chest, grimacing –

“Ash” –

“It’s a real shame for Mr. Ketchum, man, such promise, just, gone, man, down the drains. I heard the chances of recovery are from zip to nil, this is the end of the road for him.”

You’re lying to yourself if you ever think this will work out between you and anyone you care about.

“Ash listen to me, look at me, listen to me” –

The voices continued, “Shoot, it was almost the end of the road for Professor Oak! I was in the room when they brought him in!” –

The breath in Ash’s lungs turned to ice –

“No! Ash, fight it!” –

“Pipipi!” Pikachu forced itself into Ash’s lap –

“They sliced open his arm to drain some of the Disabled* blood out while pumping new blood in! It was because of Mr. Ketchum–!”

You’re a monster.

– “because they share this freakish connection, called, urah, Human Health Transfer! The bad stuff inside of him got inside of Mr. Oak –”

You’ve linked with your friends, your mother, this will spread to them. You have cursed them all.
Gary will die because of you.

“That’s it!” Ritchie let go of Ash, shoved off the bed, stomped over to the door and swung it open – “HEY” – a sound like metal hitting glass rocked the room and Ritchie was sent through the air, landing hard on his back –

“RITCHIE!”

Ritchie, Pikachu, and Sparky were immediately enclosed in a psychic aura with Pikachu ripped out of Ash’s frantic grasp, the three of them held up at the mercy of a demon resembling an Espeon with red eyes as it walked in as casually as if it owned the place, slamming the door shut behind it with a flick of its forked tail – Ash tried to reach his friends, but the restraint he still had on stopped him –

“PI-PI-PIKA” –

“Ah-Ash!” –

The Espeon leapt up onto the bed easily, looked to Ash who was desperately trying to undo the restraint but his motor functions were too ill coordinated from his panic, the Espeon looked to his precious friends held at its mercy, just out of reach – it opened the curtains with its powers, and Ash’s heart all but shattered –

“NO” –

Ritchie reached out aimlessly to him – “ASH!!” – Ash reaching out for him in turn with the restraint once again stopping him – their fingers barely touching – before Espeon sent Ritchie, Pikachu, and Sparky flying with incredible force across the room and through the window completely shattering it, their bodies disappearing over the edge with a short mortifying scream before leaving nothing but the hollow wind blowing what was left of the curtains wild.

Ash’s hand reached uselessly towards the broken window….“P-Pikachu….Ritchie – n’GAH”– Ash was shoved down onto his back, his arms stretched spread eagle from the Espeon’s psychic powers as it walked over his body, its eyes glowing a candy red with a wide white smile underneath. Ash couldn’t even scream with how tightly his throat was clasped by the pokemon’s psychic force, he could only watch helplessly, his entire body held in place, as a stone as black as ebony was aimed right over his heart. Espeon stood on his stomach, the glare of its red eyes and wide smile cutting Ash wide open,

“Do you know how many people I killed on my way here to you?....Do you?” Espeon tilted its head, “And what did you do about it? Nothing. Nothing! NOTHING! If only you were at your best! If only you truly held the title the Pride of Kanto, would any of this have come to pass? Probably not! But they’re dead now, and you did nothing. Oh well, c’est la vie~! You’ll make a fine consolation prize! That’s all you’re good for now anyway! But I will show you mercy! Everyone takes a piece of you for themselves, but I’m actually here to give you something!” Espeon raised the stone,

“CONSIDER YOUR SINS ATONED WITH YOUR DEATH, BE BORN ANEW~!”

And plunged it directly into Ash’s heart.
“Oh Gary look, aren’t these carnations beautiful? G-Gary – what’s wrong?!”

“Gary are you sick?!”

"Bre! Bre-BRE!"

Gary was grasping his chest, eyes wide, almost wild, as a sub-zero cold spread from the core of his being through every nerve outlet his body had –

“Ash,” Gary dribbled out, “Ash – ASH – I have to get back to Ash! I have to get back to him! I HAVE TO GET BACK TO HIM NOW!” –

“Okay” – Misty shoved the filled flower basket away into a most bewildered clerk, “Okay we’re going right now!” – But Gary was already racing out the door and through a crowd quickly gathering in front of the store, all were looking and pointing toward Viridian Memorial.

“I saw it! Someone and their pokemon were thrown out of a window!”

“Look! There’s the broken window!”

“Oh my god are they okay?!”

“Yes! Moltres caught them! Saved their lives!”

“Where are they now?!”

“THERE LOOK! IT’S MOLTRES!”

Umbreon, Misty, and Tracey dashed after Gary as fast as they could, taking a glance at what had to be Moltres actively flying around the building and breathing fire directly at its structure –

“Is it attacking the hospital?!”

“Look! Look! What is that covering the siding?!”

Suddenly a roar cut through the air and the crowd was swooped down upon by Zekrom blocking a terrible Draco Meteor* attack for them with Protect*, its opponent –

“DIALGA?!”

But ‘Dialga’ suddenly changed form into Giratina and rushed Zekrom, crashing it into a building!

People were running and screaming every which way to get out of the line of fire of the warring legends –

Misty caught sight of a frazzled Brock trying to catch up to them, “COME ON!” Brock was suddenly pointing up and yelling something, but Misty or Tracey couldn’t hear over the panic of the people – Moltres had spotted them running through the crowd and made a beeline straight towards them – the next thing any of them knew was the legendary plucking them up amongst screams of the
public trying to get out of the fiery legend’s fury – it took Gary and Misty by its claws, Tracey up with its beak (making him give a high pitched squeal), and Brock made it just in time to jump onto Moltres’ back before it hauled itself into the sky, boosting itself by using Agility* to make a powerful thrust of its wings, the force knocking poor bystanders flat on their back and leaving Umbreon behind. The dark type landed on its feet from Moltres’ wind trail, looking helplessly for a moment as they flew away, then it bolted to the hospital itself, if there was anything it could do, it would do it -!

“What’s going on?!” Brock managed to screech –

“No time to explain,” the legend hissed, “Ash is in mortal danger, the very fabric of his soul is corrupting – you need to reach him before he is lost forever!”

“What?!”

Moltres stopped abruptly before a window on the 8th floor, everyone close enough now to see ice, ice snaking its way over the entire building – “You must reach him!” Moltres yelled again, “I will do everything I can to help!” – the legend tossed up Tracey (making him give yet another high pitched squeal) and heaved an intense Flamethrower* attack that blew away a sizable chunk of the windows and wall, everyone shielding themselves as best they could from the residual heat – Moltres caught Tracey effortlessly in its beak again before throwing everyone gracelessly into the building, and even though they were on the outer edge, they could feel the insane chilly temperature difference in the darkened hall with sirens blaring and flashing in almost complete darkness –

“What on earth?!” –

“GO!” yelled Moltres fanning its wings to push them into the fray as the ice threatened to close over the opening, “YOU MUST REACH HIM! DO NOT FEAR THE LIGHT OR THE DARKNESS!”

Gary bolted into the opaque abyss – “I’m coming Ash!”

“Gary wait” – Misty took one step before a pool of light opened up underneath her and dropped her body through it –

“Misty!”

Brock and Tracey were met with the same untimely traps, and Gary’s reckless charge was equally stopped by the same light making him fall and face plant into darkness.

“Audino come in! Audino! Come in now!”

Audino could hear plainly its borrowed com going off, but it was already doing its duty in protecting the patient it was to evacuate, Ash’s mother. It wasn’t about to back down, or cringe an inch as it glared into the pale, pale blue eyes of the Froslass, Lisa, who looked on modestly, not a hint of emotion in her voice, “Hmp, how funny that you’re the first ones I run into that I don’t have to kill…..I could have been you….I should have been you.”

Audino went into a fighting stance, Spare me your words, I won’t let you hurt Grandma Ketchum!

Lisa waved off Audino with its remaining arm, “Please, if I had wanted either of you dead, I would have done so moments ago. I’m actually pretty reasonable compared to, others.”

All the while, Mrs. Ketchum was sitting up in bed, hands gently resting on her lap, but her stare was
as cold as the air in Lisa’s lungs, “You. So you’re the one who tried to kill my son.”

“Oh?” Lisa squinted her eyes, “Ah, you must be his mother,” Lisa gave a wide sharp grin, “Excellent, I was hoping I felt you right.”

“I am indeed Ash’s mother.”

“Oh, well, it’s nice to meet you.”

“Unfortunately I cannot say the same,” said Mrs. Ketchum quietly.

“Yeah, well I did try to kill him and all” –

“Why are you here? What further purpose could you remain on this earth for?”

Lisa paused, blinked, and tilted her head to the side, giving a glance caught inbetween, ‘murder’ and ‘is it worth it’ – “Purpose you ask me? You actually asked me what kind of purpose I could have? Maybe it’s ripping your guts out through your mouth” –

YOU SHUT YOUR OWN! Audino shouted, stomping its little feet on the bed.

“Purpose,” Lisa sneered again, “Maybe your son’s purpose is to die – and I’ve got news for you lady – you cannot protect Ash anymore than my parents could have protected me.”

“True,” said Mrs. Ketchum simply, no waver, no retreat in her measured statement, “I’m so blessed to have him after the hell you put him through. I cannot protect my baby from everything. Sometimes, I wonder if there was more I could have taught him to prepare him for how cruel people could be, and there’s not a day that goes by that I don’t think of him or worry for him. And yet despite my reservations in how I raised him, he’s come this far. I must have done something right in having such a remarkable young man for a son. I am so very, very proud of him.”

Lisa laughed so hard she snorted, “I hate to break it to you lady, but he’s only mortal.”

“Oh of course, he’ll make mistakes, but I can take great solace in knowing he will learn and grow from them. I have to trust my son that he has enough strength to survive this world – and he has proven time, and time, and time again he has. He has a wonderful network of friends who will always be there for him long, long after I’m gone. My baby will be alright, and while I’m still breathing, I will do everything in my power to prevent his future from resembling anything like your own!”

Lisa rolled her eyes, “Listen here you stupid cunt, my parents were supposedly ‘saints’ too, and even they got tired of me, and you know what? You’re no better – and don’t even think for a second you are – you can’t fool me with those shitty words.”

“It’s a shame how broken their hearts must be in having a daughter who completely disregarded their teachings” –

“YOU DON’T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ME BITCH! You don’t know what I’ve been through!”

“Likewise you don’t know what my son has been through, and yet his heart is still intact, which begs the question of the decisions you chose to make. You have made it obscenely clear you don’t care about anyone but yourself” –

“NO ONE GAVE A SHIT ABOUT ME SO OF COURSE I CARE ABOUT MYSELF! You
think we’re all supposed to bend over backwards for others until we snap?! That’s just what I did! And now I’m taking care of myself, I’m not a punching bag or slave to this shitty world’s expectations!”

“And what standards were you held to? What broke you?”

“You wouldn’t understand, your kind just wouldn’t understand.”

“No, I think I do, you couldn’t express yourself to others, not in the way you wanted, and not in the way that it mattered…That’s what it came down to, wasn’t it? And then you became sick, and you had had enough, and you made a choice” –

“I had no choice –”

―“ and it’s unfortunate your choices were made out of so much hatred.”

Lisa gave an empty laugh, “Well, well, wooooow…I can see now where your son gets it all from, he tried to understand me, but you….You know what? I realize now, more than ever…” Lisa’s arm dropped limp by her side, “…….I never had a chance.”

Lisa’s presence then left the room as fast as it had entered; gone. Mrs. Ketchum’s ears were ringing, she clutched her chest and gave a gasping breath, Audino quickly going to her aide to help, “No, no I’ll be fine, right now, I need you to help my son Audi, help Gary, help them please!”

Gary woke with a start, quickly pushing himself up to an even darker version of the hospital’s interior, there were hardly any light sources, harking true to their nightmares, and it was very, very cold – *ASH?!* Nothing but the echo of his voice answered back at first, until he picked up hushed frightened whispers –

*Please…Please enough…! I can’t…I can’t take anymore…!*

*ASH! It’s me Gary! Ash! ASH! Tell me where you are!* Gary tried to run towards the whispers but their direction changed almost constantly, aligned with only fear –

Ash screamed, his voice sounding beside itself with terror, *Please, please don’t hurt my mother, please!*

*Ash I’m coming!* Gary bolted in the best direction he could guess, but the whispers suddenly turned faint until none could be heard – *Dammit* –

*Gary! This way!* Gary looked and saw a little girl in a hospital gown, someone he had never seen before. *Huh?!*

*This way Gary! This way!* she was pointing down a hallway. Gary rushed over to follow her as she turned the corner, but when he did, there was no one there.

*This way! This way! Keep going!* from further down the hallway, there was an older woman beckoning Gary to hurry on, in fact it was the same woman he had bumped into earlier! *Come on boy! Move it!*  

*Screw it,* Gary thought and followed the old lady, he was too desperate to find Ash to think anything against it and who these people, or manifestations could even be.
Tracey pushed himself up from landing on the ground belly first in the dark hallway, calling out “M-MISTY! BROCK!”

Brock rounded the corner, spotted Tracey, and helped him to his feet – Tracey managed to gasp out a single word, “Misty!?”

“I don’t know,” said Brock, “I was hoping you two would have landed near each other, c’mon” – “Where on earth are we?!”

“We’re still in the hospital, I think those were like, Teleportation thingies, UGH, I don’t know!”

Tracey pulled out from his belt pouch two pokeballs and tossed them, “Help us Scizor! Azumaril!”

Scizor popped out, flexing its claws and raring to go, likewise Azumaril flexed its little stubby arms.

“Oh my goodness I am so glad you got Scizor transferred over,” said Brock, plucking a pokeball from his own belt, “Let’s go Ninetails!

Ninetails popped out, looked around the dark desolate (and virtually destroyed) interior of the hospital, and gave Brock a ‘da fuq is this place’ look.

Gary was huffing, almost out of breath, *Are these people leading me in circles?!*

*Gary! You’re almost there! This way now!*

Gary looked up, and saw a Sylveon beckoning him forward.

*What….*

*Gary come on! There’s no time! You must hurry! Hurry now! Ash needs you!*

*Who, who are you?! All of you?!*

*Mismagius gathered us to help! Now hurry! Please!*

*Mismagius?!*

Gary felt his second wind come on, and throwing reasoning to the wind, he pursued the Sylveon that lead him to a frozen barrier which they both focused their efforts to try and kick/break it down – *You’ve got to reach him Gary and snap him out of this!* They broke through and continued on their way – *Trust in your heart to find him Gary, to find your Ash! I will give you all the strength I have! Break him free of this poison!* Gary felt something in his heart stir, something making him feel lighter than air, and knew exactly where Ash was – *Hang on, hang on for me sweetheart please!* Gary leapt over a turned over hospital bed, stumbled through a wheelchair, busted through another set of double doors, and stopped dead in his tracks upon entering a complete void with nothing but darkness.

*Sylveon?!*
No response, the Pokemon was gone.

_The Ash that comes back might not be the Ash that you know... What are you going to put back together? The ‘Ash’ you want?_

Gary looked all about with nothing but darkness all around, not even the double doors behind him were there anymore, *ASH?!*

*STAY BACK!*  

Gary turned, and there was Ash! But this time, it wasn’t only Ash’s eyes that were turned, his entire being was a pale, pale blue, as if he was already frozen – Ash was bent over with his arms wrapped around himself, and on top of that, Gary could see chains, chains reaching up from the black ground and clamped around Ash’s ankles, wrists, and his neck – he dashed over –

*ASH!*  

*I SAID STAY BACK!!!* Ash screamed in a tone Gary had never heard before, making his steps toward Ash immediately stop. He was shaking, Gary was shaking, both unsure of what they could do, yet both knowing full well in what they must do, *I, I don’t know how much longer I can control it! RUN! Just run! GET OUT OF HERE! I, can’t let anyone else die because of me!*  

*Die?!*

*Gary,* Ash was breathless, *This, thing, stabbed something into me! You’ve got to get away while you can, get as many people out of this place!* Ash gripped his chest harder, *I, I don’t know how much longer I can keep it in!*  

*Ash you’re the one in danger right now! I’m not leaving without you!*  

*JUST GET OUT OF HERE!*  

*I SAID I’M NOT LEAVING!*  

Ash dropped to his knees with the clinking sound of the chains, *Not again.....Don’t make me responsible for you too,* a thick sob escaped Ash, *It’s all my fault, because of me....They’re all gone, because of me!*  

*What? What are you talking about? Ash, that’s not true! None of this is your fault!*  

Ash looked up to Gary with a piercing icy glare sending a rightful chill down Gary’s spine – _and Gary saw it_, a black beating pulse right in the core of Ash’s chest – he heard thick ice cracking, rising, he couldn’t see it from the surrounding darkness, but it made its presence known all around them, circling them, closing around them –  

*What in your right mind thinks I’m going to believe a word you say?!* Ash snarled.  

*Stop listening to the Link*! To the sadness, to every bad thing that comes into your head! You’ve got the snap out of this! Stop listening to these terrible voices in your head! YOU’LL DIE IF YOU DON’T!*  

Ash snarl flipped to an empty smile, *I’ll die huh? I haven’t lived very long, and yet I’ve fought
nearly every kind of battle there is to fight, but what gets me?* Ash gave a single pap to his chest, the black pulse beating loudly, *The one right here.*

*No, I won’t let this take you away*–

Ash tried to stand up more, but cringed over in pain, *You, you don’t understand Gary. I’m done. I’m done being a failure. I’m done not living up to expectations. That’s all there is to it. I can’t do this anymore, and this, thing, inside me, is going to eat me whole* -

*NO ASH! It is FEEDING off your thoughts, off your depression! You’ve got to fight back! I’m here, I’m right here with you, and I’ll fight it with you!* 

*No, you need to leave right now. Please Gary, just give me this one victory, just let me be able to protect you at least, I can’t let this hurt anymore people, I can’t let this hurt the ones I love anymore* –

*ASH STOP IT! This isn’t you! God,* Gary desperately tried to keep himself together, *Listen to yourself! Right now, you’re the one that needs to be saved, you need to help us save you! And to do that, you need to let me in,* Gary took a step towards him, *Just let me in* - he raised his hands up and took a deep breath, *Breathe, breathe sweetheart, just like me – breathe, I’m right here… I’m right here….* Gary took another step towards Ash – Ash stumbled up and stepped back, Gary took several more hesitant steps – and Ash stumbled back, and the more steps Gary took towards Ash, the more Ash stepped back with the chains cruelly giving him just enough space to move away, but never towards.

*Just stop,* said Ash through grit teeth, *This isn’t helping, you’re not helping, you shouldn’t even be here!* 

*Ash* –

*GET OUT! GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE THE ICE GETS YOU TOO!* 

*I’m not leaving,* said Gary firmly, *The only way I’m leaving this place is if you’re with me.* 

Ash’s hands went to his head as he bent further with distress and agony, a pained cry escaping him – Gary made several more rushing steps toward him but stopped again upon hearing the invisible ice threaten its way ever closer, the chill in the air an empty bitter hollow cold. Both their breaths could easily be seen.

Reach out to him again Gary. He’s not going to let go.

*Ash, my Ashy, just, talk to me, talk to me please, I can’t help you like this, sweetheart, tell me everything that hurts, let me help you.*

Ash gave a few shuddering breaths, *You can’t help me. No one can, not with this, not with anything* –

*Stop, just stop right there,* said Gary fighting to keep his voice strong despite seeing Ash in so much pain, *You’re not beyond help, I swear to you, you’re not beyond help* –

He’s going to push back again, and push back hard. You will have to do something else to break the Link*. Probably something very, very painful.

Ash gave a cynical laugh with one hand on his face, *I thought I could bring Lisa back, I thought she wasn’t beyond help, but I was wrong there wasn’t I?* –
*Ash stop, you’re not like her! Don’t you dare even COMPARE yourself to her!*  

*Why not? We both have the same problem don’t we? We’re both all broken,* Ash tapped his head,  
*In here. It just, took me so long to understand* –  

*Because you were scared,* said Gary bordering on desperation, *You were scared, it was something you didn’t understand, and it’s okay* –  

*GOD, just, SHUT UP!* Ash yelled, *You don’t understand and you never will!*  

*HOW CAN I UNDERSTAND IF YOU WON’T TALK TO ME?* Gary yelled back. *You can’t shut yourself off like this Ash, and expect things to continue on, things can’t continue on this way! I love you Ash! I love you with everything I am! And it is killing me that you insist on hurting yourself this way!*  

*Yeah, pain, its all I know, love it. Now, that I know without a shadow of a doubt what I am, I don’t think I’ve ever really gave you love* –  

*That’s a lie and you know it Ash,“ said Gary, “This isn’t you!*  

*I know, I know, everyone wants me to be something, their something, whatever that may be, like, my purpose is, just to fulfill something else, just a ‘need’…a means to an end.*  

*Ash that is the despair talking! It’s twisting you! DON’T LISTEN!!*  

*No, this is the real me, and its awful.*  

Gary ran his hands through his hair in frustration, wracking his brain in how to reach Ash, and Ash continued,  

*So just leave. I’m not the person you thought I was. I lied to you, I lied to myself, seems only fair* –  

*Ash stop it – this is enough, ENOUGH! I’m not going to let you rip apart yourself like this!*  

Ash held out his hand, wrist up, *Want a piece for yourself?* The weight of the chain around Ash’s wrist made him drop his arm down, almost sending him to his knees – Gary tried to advance again, suddenly stepping through water which trembled with the sound of deep cracking all around – Ash looked up in fear to the darkness all around them – *You need to leave Gary – I can’t hold it back anymore!*  

*Then don’t! Baby I’m right here, just talk to me please, please* –  

*I have been, haven’t I?! But it just hurts everyone, and I’m tired of hurting everyone! Everyone needs to be safe from me – just leave, just get out of here, there’s nothing you can do here, please Gary, the ice is coming* –  

*I told you I am not going anywhere without you* –  

*WHY CAN’T YOU UNDERSTAND I’M TRYING TO PROTECT YOU?!*  

*How is this protecting me?!! And protect me from what? You? You’re not some monster Ash, and you’re not like Lisa! Everyone has problems, and, and, and I’m going to share with you one of mine, something I should have done a long time ago too!*  

Ash gave a pained confused look,*What do you think you’re going to accomplish?!! PLEASE, just,
But Gary was determined to continue keeping this train of thought going, praying to any deity that would listen it wouldn’t derail. Gary swallowed, the cold air reaching deep within him with each breath, *I have this, issue of loneliness…It, I think it started creeping in my early teens, when I was really, getting into the groove of where I fit into the world…The grandson of a great researcher, the expectations that came with it, the legacy that just my last name held….would, would I ever mean more than my name? Would people see me, just me….or would I be a part of some, endless facade…..Tell me does that sound familiar?*

Ash gave another empty laugh, *You think…?*

*In some way, even with my pokemon by my side, I was ready to embrace the loneliness, I made peace with it, and built up that stupid excuse that ‘oh adulthood is supposed to be painful and you’re supposed to put up with it crap’…but then, you came back into my life….And you still had the joy of childhood in your heart, it was there, I mean you had some maturity, but it was there! In fact I admired you so, so much for managing to keep it there despite what we now know you were going through! And for the first time, in a long time, I didn’t feel so lonely anymore!*

*But then it all came crashing back, didn’t it?* said Ash.

*When Gramps died.*

*Come to think of it,* Ash continued, *you were almost always touching me in some way or another, grabbing my hand, leaning on my shoulder, reaching in for a kiss, for a hug, to pull me closer in bed….so then, tell me,* Ash looked directly to Gary, *which part was love, and which part was the loneliness?*

Gary’s throat ran dry, be it from the coiling turbulence in his chest or the freezing air around them, and when he needed to speak the most, all he could produce was silence, till, "It, was just me, wanting to help you."

Ash looked and felt like he was going to throw up. The sheer amount of turmoil he had put Gary through, was still putting him through as he drowned in his thoughts, was unbearable. So Ash said bluntly, *All this time, since, it happened, you’ve been suffering. And I know now for a fact I didn’t help, no matter what I was telling myself by trying to protect you from, this,* Ash gestured to the black beating pulse.

*Ash…*I was always able to come to you for anything. Back then, I didn’t feel the need to address it, but then we started drifting….I didn’t know what I had done, but I knew you needed your space…Yeah…I….to, stay in your favor, I stayed out of your way….*

*Gary, if I made you suffer so much, why are you still with me?*

Gary’s hands were shaking, *Because I love you.*

*But, is that love, or did you just not want to be alone?*

For that, Gary was stunned silent.

Ash sighed with silent tears, *We’re in trouble huh?*
Trembling, and terrified of the answer he sought, Gary asked, *Do you love me?*

*I do,* said Ash simply, *I love you so much it hurts,* but a good partner, a good boyfriend wouldn’t do this to their loved one, even if I was scared of it, even if I didn’t understand what was happening to me….I made you suffer in the worst ways…..I’ve had this power over you, and I was blind to it, I can’t….Gary…it’s unforgivable what I’ve done….* Ash gave Gary a heartbreaking smile, *I’m not a good person.*

*Ash that’s not true*–

*We say we love each other, but we have a funny way of showing it. I mean…is this love? Is this really love that we feel? I’m starting to wonder if it was love at all, or just the need to be with someone.*

Gary wobbled after that sucker punch while Ash let himself be crushed to his knees again, looking at the ground.

*Ash….*

Ash’s voice was shallow and broken, *Gary….how did we think we could ever make this work?*

Drip….drip. Gary could faintly see something dripping off of Ash’s face, something black.

Ash continued, *I can’t do this, but you’ll only leave with me, is that right? Because you feel you need to be with me?*

Gary took a step towards Ash but stopped upon hearing the sloshing of water, he looked down and saw the water had risen up to his ankles and was sloshing lightly around Ash’s sitting form, the biting cold only growing, reaching down into their very core.

Drip…drip.

*Then,* Ash voice was shaken, but firm, *I’m setting you free Gary. You’re free. I’m not your boyfriend anymore. I can’t do this to you anymore. I can’t be with you anymore. You deserve and need someone better, someone who can be whole for you, and give you the love, protection, and devotion you deserve.* * Ash slowly bent himself upright, looking up, and if Gary had the lungs for it, he would have screamed. Ash’s eyes were completely black with thick black tears streaming down his face.

**You are too late.**

*The ice is coming Gary, I can’t hold it back any longer, get out while you still can. There’s nothing more for you here.*

**It has him forever now.**

Chapter End Notes
Spoiler alert: No it doesn't. And Spoiler Alert part 2: Gardevoir is rocking a broken neck, but not a broken spirit - this pokemon knows too many Soul Transfer tricks to just die so easily. I'd imagine in the end all Espeon did was really, REALLY piss it off. It's going to probably take me another haul to get the final part of 'ch 10' (11?) out, The Warmth of Frost: Part 3, and to that end, I am still going to deliver on my happy ending promise to you guys. I did not drag you all on this adventure for over a year to pop an ending like this, hell no. Next chapter, Gary is going to love the shit out of Ash, and Ash is going to get a damn grip on himself. Literally.
The Warmth of Frost: Part 3

Chapter by SilentAvera, Singing Woodpecker (SilentAvera)

Chapter Notes

The last part of Title Chapter, thank-you all for staying along for the ride thus far <3

I failed you.

Ritchie saw Ash’s terrified face, the red eyes of the Espeon, Ash again, then the ceiling – wind – curtains – pain – broken glass – sky – falling – falling – flames, claws, soaring, flying – powerful flaming wing strokes on either side of him – then a raging tempest crashed into his peripheral vision, knocking his body every which way, taking him, Moltres, and all through the side of the hospital with brick, glass, steel, and drywall flying all about. The next thing Ritchie comprehended was hitting marble flooring and rolling to a painful stop against an empty hospital bed with Pikachu and Sparky, the weight of Moltres landing almost right next to his head with talons inches away from his face. He looked up from on his back and saw the fiery legend turn over him, wings spread wide, roaring its challenge, the fire legend’s cry from the opposition mimicked right back to it in perfect tone. Ritchie blinked, still dazed, and saw red rivets streaming through Moltres’ beautiful yellow plumage.

Ritchie pushed himself up behind Moltres’ would-be protective stance, and saw another Moltres standing amongst the wreckage with red glowing eyes, it preparing a fire attack as the real Moltres prepared a flying one – Ritchie, Pikachu and Sparky had barely any time to scramble out of the way, the group diving out through the room door as the legends released Fire Blast* and Hurricane*, destroying everything in the vicinity, blowing out entire wall sections of several rooms and making a clean caved hole exposing a floor above and below.

Ritchie coughed, pushing aside the drywall panels that shattered like foam and covered him, Pikachu and Sparky, they had landed in an adjacent room across the hall, Ritchie’s body giving him a clear report he was very, very much injured after getting tossed around like a rag doll. His senses sounded like a blank television channel, but an odd crackling and crunching sound, like the sound of a footstep coming down on a frozen landscape, cut through. Ritchie blinked, trying to believe what he was seeing, ice had begun seeping through the very particles of the floors, ceiling, everything, freezing the pieces in place –

Pikachu was the fastest on its feet – “PIPIPIPIPI!” the group again scrambled out the way, this time of the approaching ice – the legends traded another attack, blowing Ritchie, Pikachu, and Sparky off their feet yet again –

“RITCHIE!” Moltres yelled for him to clearly hear, “DON’T WASTE TIME! ASH IS TURNING FAST! GO! GO FIND A WAY TO HIM! I WILL TAKE CARE OF THIS EVIL!”
Ritchie pushed himself up on shaking limbs, catching Moltres eye to eye for just a moment, his heart going a mile a minuet, his breathing just as fast; there was no time for another exchange of words save for the shortest glances of acknowledgement before the enemy Moltres charged the true one, stabbing its beak right into the legend’s chest –

“MOLTRES!”

The ensuing struggle, beating wings, snapping beaks, fire, wind, and everything in between, took the both of them out and over the side of the building –

“PIPIPIKA!!”

Ritchie stumbled towards the edge of the building with a foot suddenly sliding out from under him, he caught himself with his hands seeing puddles of red and splotches and smears around the destroyed room from the bloody fight. A fearsome cry erupted with fire surging up the side of the building, forcing the trio back with the intense heat, Ritchie shielding himself as best he could. The ice still snaked and edged it way through, but with the intense heat from the legends, its course was altered slightly, then Ritchie felt a burning pressure on his back –

“Oh~? Back so soon~?”

The hair on Ritchie’s neck stood up – he whipped around to see the Espeon with its cutting glare and smile standing over the wreckage – Pikachu and Sparky wasted no time, each firing Thunderbolts*, Espeon blocking them easily with Protect* – Sparky went for a Thunder Wave*, but the paralyzing attack was bounced back from the Espeon’s Magic Bounce* ability, Sparky took it with its Lighting Rod* ability, and Pikachu used Helping Hand*, letting Sparky blast a powerful Signal Beam* right into the Espeon’s disapproving face. It took the attack head on, but its paws didn’t budge an inch, its smile however, only grew more sinister and insane.

“My, what teamwork,” said the Espeon coldly, “Alas you waste your talents here!” –

“What HAVE YOU DONE TO ASH?!” Ritchie yelled.

The Espeon smiled wildly, “I helped him!”

Pikachu charged Espeon with Volt Tackle*, Espeon dodged it, dodged Sparky’s second Signal Beam* and grabbed Ritchie with Psychic* – bending his body in a painfully awkward manner making him cry out in agony, his bones creaking on the point of breaking, his head fell back, his eyes glancing over the ice as it crept over the ceiling aimlessly – and for a second, he thought he saw Ash’s reflection in the ice reaching out to him –

Ritchie!

“But you are beyond saving” –

A wave of fire surged through the room, burning the Espeon through and through, but not harming a hair on Ritchie’s head, Ritchie was released with Pikachu and Sparky running to his aide once the firestorm quelled.

The real Moltres appeared back through the rubble entry way in a blaze of fire, barely hauling itself
up, almost collapsing, its injuries only mounted more with slashes, gashes, and the ever steady rivets of red running through its feathers –

“YOU WRETCHED BRAT,” the Espeon hauled its charred remains up, its psychic powers popping and sparking, trying to ignite themselves again from its aura –

“I am your Death Knell,” Moltres blazed itself up and up for a powerful attack coiling from its belly, I, am the Deity of Spring, I depict the change of despair to hope! I am the light that cuts the horizon line – I AM MOLTRES!!!

“I’M GOING TO FUCKING KILL YOU!!” the Espeon’s psychic power finally flared up and bent the reality around it, Pikachu and Sparky let loose Thunder*, Moltres* used Fire Blast*, and Espeon took the hits again, if not to get a clean shot of Psybeam* off at Moltres, the legend moving in time just enough so the beam wouldn’t shoot it right through the heart, but the hit was still very damaging in tearing through Moltres’ side and knocking it back square into the rubble – Ritchie fearing for a second the beam was indeed a kill shot – the impact cut a large crack through what remained of the ceiling, the floor above threatening to go from the fire and wind damage.

Despite the mounting damage, Espeon was still standing, but now with a zig-zagging gash having cut through the middle of its face, its head barely looking to hold itself together with just the glue of blood. The psychic type snarled a sound not of this world – it prepared another attack, revving its power up for Psychic* – “You know the best way to put out a fire~? YOU SMOTHER IT” –

Moltres noted the fault in the structure right above Espeon and aimed its most powerful attack Burn Up* straight up as Espeon let loose its power – Pikachu and Sparky used Protect* to shield themselves and Ritchie and whatever they could of Moltres as down came the ceiling, flooring, walls, everything that the fire did not outright disintegrate, blasting a clean hole to the rooftop, leaving a large melted gaping cavern where the Espeon once was and glowing scorch marks all around that would brand anyone careless enough to touch them.

Pikachu and Sparky shared nervous and downright frightened glances at the destruction Protect* had spared them and Ritchie against.

The flames that decorated Moltres receded to an almost ember like glow, leaving it to look bare and exposed with just its regular yellow feathers (the gaping wounds only more pronounced without its red flames), Burn in hell, Moltres breathed, it turned to Ritchie, “WHAT ARE YOU STILL DOING HERE?! GO!!! Ungh, unh – go, help, him”, Moltres’ entire body was shaking–

“M-Moltres” –

“Stop Ash, and you’ll stop the ice, sh-shadow heart, it made him a shadow heart, s-soul is corrupting,” Moltres stumbled and stomped its injured body to the rubble edge, “Beware, the Transformer, beware Disable* attacks, I will bring you help, you must reach through the shadow heart” –

“You can barely walk!”

“This pain is nothing, NOTHING!!!!!” Moltres’ legs were trembling, but sound, the legend using what must have been an incredible amount of strength and fortitude to keep its body even.

Ice particles were still snaking their way through the building’s physical structure like an integrated shadow – but they strayed away from Moltres’ feet, “The ice will kill everything he is”, Moltres continued, “You must help him!”
Roars filled the outside air, Ritchie hearing the flares and sparks of enormous attacks shared and taken by Zekrom and whatever form its opponent had taken in the heavens, a fray that Moltres couldn’t possibly compete with –

“*Stop, you’ll only hurt yourself further, just Roost*” – he turned to Pikachu and Sparky, “You two try to find a way through the rubble!” the pokemon nodded and got to work. Ritchie pulled out his com from his zipper pocket, only to find the screen cracked and unresponsive – *Dammit,* he hissed internally, pressing his pokemon storage icon (The Barn) uselessly as if he was just touching a sticker.

“Don’t you think I would have healed myself already if I had the means?!” Moltres got up in Ritchie’s face, “Listen, their power is no good here, YOUR power is what matters! Your connection to Ash! Break through the shadow heart!!” Moltres then turned and spread its wings wide,

“Moltres” –

“I’ll be able to use Roost soon, plus I will have better defensive capabilities in being a pure flying type briefly – NOW GO!!!!” Moltres took off with a powerful stroke of its wings, back into the storm of things, turning its attention to the building, Ritchie already seeing some of its beautiful flames catching fire again.

“Right then, let’s go Sparky! Pikachu!”

“PIKAPI!”

“PIKACHU!”

Both Pikachu pointed Ritchie to the path they found, the Ranger leaping down onto an un-melted part of a stairway with the Pikachu along side him, all of them racing into the frozen darkness of the hospital with its interior sirens that still functioned blaring aimlessly.

****

*I’m not quite sure what I was thinking in believing I could have ever been with you. You made me feel, unreal.*

****

“It now appears we have reports that Moltres swooped down into the crowd and plucked a handful of people into the air with it! Zekrom is still combating the shape-shifting opponent, we can, only pray casualties will be kept to a minimum!"

Daisy had one hand firmly clasped to her mouth, the other held her com that rang for Gary with no answer. She immediately dialed him again, shifting glances from her com to the TV screen. All the laboratory pokemon were gathered around, worry etched in each of their faces; Gary’s Alakazam moved to be closer to Daisy, placing a clawed hand on her shoulder.

“And as my colleague stated before we are still trying to get a closer live feed of the area, as you can see from these pictures it clearly shows smoke coming from the medical center area of Viridian City with, oh my, there goes Zekrom again! Oh, okay, here we go, I’m getting word that our sister station has got a team on the ground? Yes? Yes! Alright, going live now, not live? They are? They’re on a com? Okay, going to a livestream of the downtown strip of Viridian City, our very own, uh, wait, Todd? Todd really – alright then! Todd Snap taking his chops to news reporting! Todd! Todd, this is Herbert and Gladys with PT News, what can you tell us about the developing situation?”
The shaky footage from Todd’s com did nothing to ease Daisy’s vibrating nerves, from the glimpses
of Todd they could see, it looked like he had just pulled himself out of rubble –

“I can, I can tell you all right now, the situation is very bad!”

“Todd, Todd have you sought medical attention?”

“It looks like you’re injured!”

“Trust me I’m leagues ahead of the poor souls getting wheeled out of Viridian Memorial covered in
sheets” –

“So you can confirm deaths?”

“Yes, yes, people have died here today. From what I saw, Zekrom and Moltres were attacked and
then all hell broke loose from there – there is an active massacre going on inside Viridian Memorial!”

The news anchor Herbert had his hand on his forehead, the other, Gladys, looked exceedingly
distraught in trying to gather herself on screen, “Can – can you tell us if there is relief on the
ground?”

“Yes, cops, ambulances, you name it, they’re all out there, this feels like a coordinated attack, but for
what, I can only guess!”

“Do you have any word if this is the work of the Onelings? Team End?”

“I have no idea, considering that’s where Ash Ketchum has been recovering, and after facing an
intrusion already, I can only speculate it’s in relation to him.”

****

If you were asked to have faith in me now, I wouldn’t hold it against you to think otherwise.

****

Audino wobbled, but kept its balance as the building gave a terrific shake, the normal type running
as fast as its stubby legs could carry it through the darkened and cold, cold, cold halls.

Ash, I have to find Ash! I feel him, I feel Ash everywhere, where, where, where, where?!

Audino skidded to a stop coming across ice, ice that completely covered everything in its path, the
hallway completely glistening.

Ice?! No…. Audino’s little hands went to its face as it sensed the aura of the ice that transcribed only
one name…..ASH?! Audino looked on in horror at the ice particles snaking their way through, This
can’t be! This, This can’t be happening! Not to him! NOT TO HIM!!! The ice particles were nearly
at its feet, they stopped, and Audino watched as slowly, every so slowly, the ice began to retreat. If,
*gulp*, if I follow the ice, I bet I’ll get to Ash! He might still be in his room! With that, Audino cast
Protect* on itself, bending the move to its will yet again in configuring it to mold around its body,
Audino stepped onto the ice, its footing sure, and took off to the source.

Audino blanched, turning paler than its faint complexion already showed, What does this mean, what
does this all mean?! The one solace it could take, was evacuating Ash’s mother, alas the borrowed
com got lost in the fray of the sea of people making their get away whilst Audino sent Ash’s mother
adrift in the literal human river. The normal typed wished fervently that Gardevoir or Mismagius
could be by its side, but neither Mismagius or Gardevoir returned Audino’s cries for help via a telepathic medium; Audino was a walking nerve ending.

The closer Audino got to Ash’s room, the colder it became with the ice becoming thicker. *It is leading me back to Ash’s room, I’m sure of it!* Ash, Ash, Ash – Audino rounded the corner to the hallway Ash’s room was on and came to another screeching halt, its hands going right to its face in horror.

It looked as if this section of hospital was removed from reality. There was a wall of pure ice and darkness all around, not walls or ceilings, or doors, or windows, everything of the nothing looked to be frozen within the ice block detached from reality.

Audino dared to put its (Protected*) hands on the ice wall, and felt a pulse. A slow pulse, but a pulse none-the-less. Gathering itself, it looked hard into the ice, there was definitely something at the center of it, in fact, there were two somethings at the center of it, frozen….Audino read the ice aura again and wanted to burst into tears, there was no doubt Ash was at the center of the ice block, but that other figure….Audino took a breath, and concentrated hard……..

There is a second pulse….? Yes….It’s faint, its very faint….on the verge of going out…?! There’s another aura! Its getting choked by the ice….Audino gasped, GARY!!!

*You have to concentrate even harder.*

“EEEEEEEEK!!” Audino nearly jumped out of its skin from the sudden presence manifested at its side, a Sylveon! *Ah, um, ah, ah – AAAH!!* D8!!!

Sylveon looked solid at first glance, but a closer inspection easily revealed it was in fact, very see-through.

You’re, you’re, you’re –

Dead, said the Sylveon, *Yes I am, and these two young men might be too soon if they’re not helped!*

What can I do? Do you know how I can help?!

Yes, Sylveon nodded, it turned to Ash and Gary with a somber look, *You’ve got to help them come back. Their bodies are here, but ‘they’ are elsewhere.*

The Dark Place, Audino blurted.

Sylveon nodded. It placed a single see-through paw on the ice, *So much pain. Ash is suffering so much. Gary is suffering so much. The Dark Place is a trap. They must fight from the inside and the outside, and that’s where you come in.*

Audino nodded, *Okay, okay.* It’s little hands against the ice shook no more. *I have to reach out to them, guide them back, I can do this is, I have to do this! For their sake!*

You know what your powers can do Audino, said Sylveon, *You also know what can happen, to you.*

That’s fine, all of it! I will bring them back! I’ll show them the way, just like how I did before with Ash! Audino bowed its head, closed its eyes, and concentrated; it’s pink aura beginning to glow around its body, and then, it began to reach. *Its deep, said Audino, They’re in deep…..Too deep…..Oh no, I, I can’t reach!*

*You must! Reach! Reach Audino! Sylveon placed its paw over Audino’s hand, You can do this!*
Believe in yourself!

Audino grit its teeth, *I still can’t reach! Ash! Gary! If you can hear me, say something! Anything! ASH! GARY!*

The building gave another terrible shudder, breaking Audino’s concentration, throwing its balance off momentarily – Audino’s little hands slapped back against the ice hard, making the tiniest of cracks appear, Audino gasped, *That’s it! I’ve got it! I can’t reach through the ice, I have to reach with it!* Audino solidified its stance more, its aura burning right up to a fever pitch, like a flame, like a star – *Ash, Gary, hang in there, please!*

Its aura slowly began to spread through the ice, a soothing pink over cold, cold pale blue.

****

*I thought maybe, just maybe, there was something there between us, within us, that, was worth trying for.*

****

Brock, Tracey and their pokemon braced themselves as the building gave another horribly violent shudder, Tracey cupped his hands around his mouth, “*Misty! Gary!*”

“*Ash?! Can anyone hear us?!”* 

The group quickly trekked their way through the darkened hospital, past the emergency lights flashing, Brock and Tracey taking note of how utterly trashed and thrashed everything looked, as if the place had been ransacked by a tornado. Tracey winced, “*What could have done this?!!*”

“I’m starting to think we might be bit over our heads on this one,” said Brock, “I don’t see anyone here! We should have at least run into a body or two” –

“*Oh don’t say that, hopefully this means that they were able to evacuate everyone*” –

“*Hopefully*” –

They turned down another darkened hallway with a flickering light on the end, it didn’t look any worse for wear, just darkened by the hospital’s damaged source of power. Tracey ran his hands through his hair, “*They could be anywhere! They could be hurt!*”

“Try to stay positive here,” said Brock, “*We’ve got to try and find Ash too!*”

“*Azu, maril!*”

The group looked to where Azumaril called their attention to, the water/ fairy type pointing down the hallway with its stubby arm, and there, limping into view, was –

“*An Espeon?!!*”

“*Yeah, and the poor thing looks hurt!*”

The Espeon itself stopped, looking up with its black, black eyes, and a blank stare.

Everyone went up to it.

“*Poor thing, getting caught up in all of this,*” said Tracey, “*Look at that terrible cut down its face!*”
“Easy, easy there, we’re here to help,” said Brock, going through his pockets and pulling out a small potion bottle, “Always be prepared I say!”

Espeon’s demonic smile suddenly cut through, “As do I-!”

Tracey and Brock’s bodies went rigid, voices cut, as Espeon’s psychic powers overpowered them instantly, Brock dropped the potion bottle – their pokemon completely caught off guard with Espeon taking their Trainers!

“Well, well, now! Here I was praying for His Will to be done, and then you all show up like an act of providence, two of Ash’s closest friends! How grand-!”

Ninetails and Azumaril hissed with Scizor threatening an attack, but Espeon kept its cool smile, “Ah-ah-ah now~! I may be injured but my powers work juuuuust enough~” Espeon stopped any chance of retaliation as it held up their Trainers before them with its psychic powers; Tracey and Brock completely at its mercy. Azumaril, Scizor, and Ninetails snarled viciously at the Espeon. “We don’t want to get all attack happy now do we~? You will do as I say, or” – Espeon used its power to twist Brock and Tracey’s limbs painfully, making them cry out – “they’ll be dead before they hit the ground. Not to mention your fellow comrades still in their pokeballs? I’ll CRUSH them~!”

“Azu-MARIL!!!”

“Oh~?” Espeon tilted its head, “would you rather I take them apart piece by piece till you comply~? How about I take one of your Trainer’s eyes for that little remark~?” Espeon bent Tracey forward against the screaming of their pokemon, and thus stopped, “Are we all on the same page now? My temper, is at its absolute LIMITS! I OWN you, blood, body, and soul – YOU WILL ALL DO AS I SAY! UNDERSTAND?! Thus, you all will accompany me back to Ash’s room, NOW!!!”

With rage fueling every ounce of their stilted movements, Azumaril, Scizor, and Ninetails had no choice but to follow Espeon’s lead as it held Brock and Tracey within its powers.

****

I thought I knew what I wanted. I thought I knew myself better than that. I thought I knew you.

****

The entryway and driveways to the hospital were clogged with fleeing patients, relatives, and staff. Police cars, fire trucks, and ambulances with lights flashing and sirens blaring were all fighting their way through the sea of people and pokemon as they ran for their lives, only for them to be met with a set of warring legends down the street. The attacker now taking the form of Lunala and aiming a torrent of Moonblast* attacks at a ferociously growling Zekrom that blocked again with Protect* and answered back with Crunch*, scoring a chomp on the Transformer’s wing.

Dragonite was at the hospital entryway, helping people get out and away with Gary’s Blastoise and Arcanine, and Ash’s Charizard, along with a host of police personnel and Rangers and their pokemon as the ice ever snaked its way closer to sealing the hospital up – “Hurry! HURRY!”

Dragonite yelled, trying to keep the ice back with Flamethrower* with Charizard – Mary’s Skarmory and Aggron beat back the ice with their own bodies, braving the flames, as the seemingly last of the fleeing residents made it out by the skin of their teeth – the ice sealed off the exit with a crunch like snow packing in every nook and crevice it could.

Aggron punched and punched and swatted the ice with its thick tail, but to absolutely no avail, not even a scratch or dent was made. Blastoise, Arcanine, and Charizard shared terrified glances of who
could still be trapped inside, they never saw Ash, or Audino, or Gardevoir, or Mismagius among the fleeing crowd, and unbeknownst to them, Gary, Misty, Brock, and Tracey thrown in by Moltres.

“This is unreal!”

“Not everyone is out! There are still people inside!”

“How do we get in?!"

Ash’s mother, in a wheelchair, was fighting the paramedics from loading her in an ambulance, “I’m not leaving without my son! Let go! Let go of me! I said I’m not leaving!” She rolled her wheelchair over their feet –

“Oi! Let her stay, I’ll watch over her!”

Mrs. Ketchum looked up saw Bibi the Blissey coming over; the paramedics moving on to assist others before their feet could be flattened any further.

“Thank-you, thank-you,” said Mrs. Ketchum rolling herself over.

“No problem,” said Bibi (with that ever outdated translator) taking position at the wheelchair handles, “where to mum?”

“I need to find my son, he must have made it out – he had to have made it out” –

A fiery cry from above snagged everyone’s attention as Moltres made its descent, everyone clearing out the way as it landed, the legend spreading its flaming wings wide and blocking the hospital entrance. Moltres caught sight off to the side of bodies covered in sheets, it made its voice booming, and for all to hear, “Humans here gathered! This is beyond your power and skill sets, you all must leave immediately!”

The continued roar and destruction of the battle between Zekrom and the Transformer (now taken to Palkia’s form) sent shockwaves through the crowd –

Moltres fanned its wings, “Go! The dismantling of this icy shell is already in progress! Fear not!”

“What are you going to do?!” Dragonite inquired.

“It’s what I have already done,” said Moltres, “I have managed to set the structure on fire internally, that should help everyone within defeat the ice –”

“YOU FOOLISH RECKLESS IDIOT!!”

The cry came from Cobalion as it leaped over the crowd right up to Moltres, following behind it was Officer Jenny revving her motorcycle engine to cut through the crowd with Mary riding behind her (Chandelure flying at her side), Rapidash down to a trot next to them, carrying Max (with painful looking dark marks on his neck) and Rose (the same on her face), and Zoroark with a translator around its neck tailing behind.

Cobalion got up all in Moltres’ face, “Do you realize what you have done!? You set this building on FIRE, YOUR FIRE! You do not yet have full control of your power, and you will NEVER have such control of FIRE set free from your grasp! There is no way to put the fire out! IT WILL BURN ALL IT TOUCHES! For once THINK ABOUT WHAT HARM YOUR ACTIONS WILL DO!”

Moltres scoffed, “I am trying to save lives here!”
“BY SETTING A HOSPITAL ON FIRE?!”

“IT’S COVERED IN SHADOW ICE!”

“BY THROWING ASH’S FRIENDS INTO THE MIDDLE OF THIS?! HOW ARE THEY TO ESCAPE!?! YOU THINK THE BUILDING CAN TAKE ANYMORE STRESS?! HEAVEN FORBID THEY RUN INTO THE ONELING!”

“I gathered them to help Ash!” Moltres clicked its beak, “And I ROASTED that Oneling into nothingness!”

“You don’t have any IDEA what that creature is! It looks like a pokemon but I can assure you that is no pokemon walking the halls” –

Zoroark, timid as its body language spoke, braved Moltres’ glare as it trotted up and stood next to Cobalion, “E-Espeon is second in command t-t-t-to the Onelings, they’re what the leader uses to-to p-p-p-punish, and” –

“Oh shut up,” Moltres snapped its beak in Zoroark’s face, “Speak clearly or” – Cobalion gave Moltres an Iron Head* right inbetween its eyes, dazing it momentarily –

“By the leagues that came before us, you are a disgrace. You have sentenced those poor souls trapped inside to death!”

Moltres shook its head back to clarity, eyes landing on the sheet covered bodies, its feathers ruffled up, “I have not! Their bond, will,” but Moltres stumbled over its words in receiving a glare from Mary, Max, and the rest of the Rangers that bled from broken and furious hearts – Bibi managed to roll up Mrs. Ketchum to the front edge of the crowd – Moltres fought back against the cutting feeling boring into its chest, “I fought the one named Ritchie! If Ash’s friends have HALF of his power, this will all be over soon!”

“You don’t understand,” Mary growled, “Lisa is in there too.”

“The, the ice witch?” Moltres tilted its head, “She is” –

“Very much alive,” said Zoroark –

“She is but a phantom now!”

“I can promise you she’s not,” said Officer Jenny, “My entire department has been destroyed, and my fellow officers would be dead if it weren’t for that Zoroark you have so mistreated.”

“I…didn’t do enough,” said Zoroark, looking back with regret in each of its features, “I tried to tell them what was coming, I told them! I told ALL of you! The stronger ones would be sent! And, they sent the worst one, Espeon! Espeon, second in command of the Onelings, the worst,” Zoroark clutched itself, “Espeon is the worst! And, it’s inside, it’s inside there now!” Zoroark, still clutching itself, stepped back, looking at the frozen and ominous building as if it was a creature all its own glaring down back at it; Zoroark gulped and raked its claws over its face, “It makes you, HATE, HATE yourself! It, makes you, HURT yourself, and then, it, it controls you….Espeon, was the one that suggested to, Lisa, that she….” Zoroark shook its head and curled in on itself, “Please, please don’t let Espeon take me back!”

“What’s done is done,” said Cobalion, taking control of the conversation, “We must get everyone as far away from here as possible, there’s no doubt this entire building is coming down.”
Everyone gasped –

“BUT THE PEOPLE STILL IN THERE” –

“Please tell me there is something that can be done!” said Dragonite, “We have to do something! We have to try something!”

“Chan, de *lure!*”

Max stepped forward, “We don’t leave anyone behind!”

Cobalion’s demeanor was grim, “We won’t be able to save everyone. With Espeon and Lisa inside, no doubt they will kill or take hostages if given the chance. We must not be so foolhardy to underestimate their intentions or powers, and there’s the fact of the unsound structure *that is on fire and filling with smoke* – Cobalion suddenly paused, it felt the Teleportation* ripples before a pokemon cut open a sleeve in the interwoven fabric of molecules and atoms and phased itself into existence, the psychic and fairy type dropping to the ground on its hands and knees–

“Gardevoir?!”

“WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?!?”

“Are you alright?!”

Cobalion helped Gardevoir stand, it was sporting a neck brace, and moved rather stiffly, “Apologies for my late arrival, that accursed Espeon got the jump on me and broke my neck,” the crowd gasped, “No worries, no worries, I reeled my soul back in with Mismagius help, and did some Heal Pulse* work, honestly not my best work, bit of a rush job because I was also stuffing my soul back in place and catching my aura on fire again. You know, Monday.”

“Do you need medical attention?” asked Cobalion.

“With all due respect, I am the medical attention,” said Gardevoir, “Number one Human Health Transfer Pokemon in the world, that’s me, Selena Gardevoir of Lumiose City” –

“Thank heaven you’re alright Gardevoir” –

“Where’s Mismagius?!”

“Mismagius is currently risking its life trying to get more people out,” said Gardevoir, “As I am about to do as well,” Gardevoir turned to Cobalion, “Leave the Froslass and Espeon to us, I will have that creature at your feet if it’s the last thing I do.”

“You were able to move through this ice,” said Cobalion almost in awe, “That has to have come at a hefty price” –

“One I am willing to pay” – Gardevoir looked almost ready to collapse.

“No, no,” said Cobalion, “You need to rest, you will better serve pokemon and human kind alike with your powers intact and not consumed by revenge” –

“I can help” – but Gardevoir’s legs wobbled, and it was brought down to its knees, Dragonite rushing over the fastest as Cobalion moved away, turning its attention back to the crowd,

“For this rescue attempt, I need only pokemon volunteers, no humans – I will select the groups” –
All of the Ranger and Officer Pokemon stood at the ready along with Blastoise, Charizard and Arcanine. Cobalion scanned the lot and felt the strongest heartbeats (or resolve in Chandelure’s case, deliberately ignoring Gardevoir), “Blastoise, Charizard, Arcanine, Zoroark” –

“Wait, me!?”

“Chandelure, Dragonite, Aggron, Skarmory, and” –

“BRE!! BREON!!!”

Cobalion blinked as Umbreon shoved itself to the front, huffing, gasping, fur completely disheveled, but there was no question about the strongest heartbeat here, “Umbreon. The rest of you do as your heart and Trainers deem necessary. Those I have called upon, prepare yourselves.” Cobalion turned toward the ice, it used an Iron Head* infused with the power of Sacred Sword*, and charged through, a cold, cold blast of smoky air immediately striking the group, the ice already freezing up over the gaping hole, Cobalion growled –

Another roar came from the Zekrom battle, which it looked to have under control at last, punching the Transformer (now a Lugia) into the concrete, over, and over, and over, busting a water pipe that gushed everywhere; and Moltres suddenly felt very small.

“That Ditto is crazy, absolutely crazy,” said Rose, “changing into all those legendary Pokemon all willy nilly? I mean, typically they get the better copy of the opponent in battle right? Yet its changing into them like a slide show!”

“True,” said Max, “But note how it had no real control over all that power, it just tried to flaunt such gifts around to compensate for utter incompetence,” Max looked to Moltres hard, the glare not going unnoticed; yet against its most bruised ego, Moltres glared right back at Max’s accusation.

“Moltres,” said Mary, pulling the legend’s attention against the flurry of activity, “You’re not too good at controlling impulses, are you? Got a lot of anger in you? Having trouble, expressing yourself?”

Moltres made a face, “You don’t know me.”

“Oh I think I do,” said Mary, her face full of sorrow.

Moltres retched back, “Stop looking at me like that! I am a legendary Pokemon, first and foremost, and I was only abiding by my duty!”

“Moltres,” said Mary again, Moltres forcing itself to see into her eyes that drowned in sadness, “Do you really understand what you’ve done?”

Moltres’ attention was snagged for second to Mrs. Ketchum who was grasping at a Ranger that looked to be explaining something to her and Bibi –

“They’ll never know it,” Mary continued, “but those boys were like family to me.”

“Like, family?” Moltres’ head tilted –

“And they, would come and tell me on their runs that, they were so, happy, to see you, a legend. A ‘great’ fire Pokemon that they had always looked up to. That Ash, had always looked up to. I just,” Mary sniffed, “I just wanted you to know that. What your legacy meant to them” – Mary’s hands went to her face as tears streamed down, Max pulled her in close.
“I’m, flattered” – suddenly Mrs. Ketchum’s presence was a lot closer as she had wheeled herself right up to Moltres – Family – “Oh! You are actual family – you’re Ash’s mo” –

SLAP –

Mrs. Ketchum put her whole body behind her hand and slapped Moltres across the face as hard as she possibly could, the legend caught completely off guard, the mother’s tears freely flowing, “How could you?! How could you?! My son! His friends! All of them?! All of them?!” her voice was barely a whisper through her hoarse emotions, she swallowed and gained her volume back twice over – “You’re no legend – you’re a murderer!”

Moltres gawked at the accusation, “No, no that’s not me at all! Look, just listen, one understands – I was, trying to help, that’s all. I thought….I’m the…..”

Of all the water attacks Moltres had taken before, the tears of Mary, the tears of Ash’s mother, cut deeper than any wound. Before Mrs. Ketchum could get up to try and physically strangle the legend, Bibi rushed over rolled Mrs. Ketchum away and over to Max and Mary.

Moltres took several steps back, still feeling the sting of the mother’s strike. It looked to the building itself, the encompassing ice showing odd shades of blue. There were some thick billowing patches of smoke now escaping out where the flames Moltres had set began to overtake the structure and everything of it, “I…..” Moltres’ look turned somber, “Did not think this through….” Moltres swallowed, “There must be hope, there is hope. I saw it in Ritchie’s face, and I saw the fire in Ash that burns, and, if not me, then he’ll, he’ll be the one to set things right! They can make it! Regardless of, of just everything! There’s nothing in this world that can tear apart that resolution!”

Mary’s hands clasped Mrs. Ketchum’s, who held the grip to her face, weeping, weeping, and weeping. Mary let go for a second to wipe her eyes, and looked to Moltres full of despair, “Well, I’m afraid you will come to find that we are all more mortal than you think.”

****

I’m starting to wonder how much we were leading each other on. How much of it was just an act.

****

“Just keep walking~ Just keep walking~” Espeon sang as it trotted happily with its hostages in tow, “Once we get to Ash’s room, we’re gonna have a nice cleansing chat, just clear the air, and then we can alllll go home together! As one~”

Brock managed to get grip on his voice out from Espeon’s powers, and blurted out, “What did you do to him?”

“Nothing his poor broken heart wasn’t already set on~”

“You liar” –

“Am not! Listen your buddy was in a bad, bad spot. He was so lost, lost and pathetic! He just needed some help to get on the right path, so I set him free! You all with your words and healing mumbo jumbo weren’t making too much headway now were you? Lucky for Ash, he had a Catalyst already inside him! But I guess you all call it, the Link*~ And the Link* did enough – but OH! The damage he did to himself?! Priceless! You should have seen his face when I threw Ritchie, Pikachu, and Sparky out the window! THE GUILT HE FELT WAS INTENSE!!”

“You’re evil!” Brock growled.
“Oh shoosh, they’re not dead, alas Moltres saw to their protection, no harm no fowl there~ Kehehehehehe~”

As Espeon spoke, Tracey did what he could in using his instincts as a Pokemon Watcher and watched the hell out of Espeon, noting its walking gait. He could tell the Espeon had taken a lot of damage somehow, and that it was trying not to limp as much. Scizor, in being as keen-eyed as its Trainer, took careful note as well…

“Oh what that boy did to himself! I don’t even think I really needed the Catalyst in hindsight!”

Brock managed to form another word, “Catalyst?!”

“Special devices made by our great leader that help us change, and grow. Catalysts are very important to us Onelings indeed! They help us achieve our unity~ Now I was very generous and gave Ash an edge in giving him another Catalyst so that he had TWO in him! And boy, oh boy, he just took it all in like a breeder in heat!”

“You’re disgusting!”

Espeon made a pouty face, “I tend to get that a lot from people who don’t know me or get my cause. I’m just soooooo misunderstood~ Hm~ Tell me, does the term Shadow Pokemon mean anything to you people? They were a pretty big deal in the Orre region once upon a time. These people thought they could turn pokemon into ruthless fighting machines by shutting off the door to their hearts, an exceptionally cruel procedure! Our Leader sought a better use of the technology. Instead of being used to fight, why not heal? What if someone is suffering so much from their inner turmoil they just can’t take what their emotions dish out anymore? Closing the door to the heart doesn’t seem like such a bad idea then! But, alas, results were…undesirable. So instead of closing the emotions off for good, our Leader developed tech off the Shadow methods to utilize them! To embrace them. It’s a much healthier route in the end for all. What cannot be destroyed, can be better channeled! So instead of closing off all the doors, just have one special door, where you can focus all the bad thoughts, and make something good out of it! If I’m going to HATE myself, then I can L O V E twice as hard!”

“You have a funny definition of love” –

“Ah ah~ Let me finish~ From the Shadow tech, came the Catalysts, that which latches onto your most consuming emotion and welds it to your soul, creating the one outlet for ultimate expression! You become one with it! You’re one TRUE emotion revealed! And, to release~ And even better yet! Those that allow themselves to be consumed by their one true emotion, have the chance, to evolve, into something, greater~”

“Nega-evolution!”

“Oh, is that what you call it?” Espeon quirked an eyebrow, “Pbbth, such silly names, you are silly!”

“You’re completely insane!” Brock snarled, “You’re not helping anyone by focusing their negative emotions on themselves!”

“Tsk tsk, you must always face yourself before you face your battles~! No wonder poor Ash was sooooooo fucked up! You so called friends sure weren’t any help! That’s why we Onelings gotta stick together, why we collect ourselves together, we get it. Why it’s just us against the world!”

Tracey managed to join the conversation, “By forcing, ungh, members to undergo your experiments?!”
“Experiments?! These are treatments! And we don’t force anyone, they want our healing! Even if they don’t realize it yet, and they thank us for it! They want our company! They want our teachings! And above all, they want our protection! Safety in numbers and all, and, once initiated, they’re like my own offspring! We live as one, humans and pokemon, all inside, all together –”

“We, we know the truth from Zoroark!”

Espeon stopped walking. “You. Don’t~. Know. Anything. It is the Will of His Own you see, nothing against your deities, but its time for a change.” Espeon turned and looked Brock and Tracey in the eye – Sizor thought this was the moment to strike, but no – Espeon had a firm ear turned right to its position – “We all need a little, change. Get outside of your skin, get into something new, something, more complete than you’ll ever be. Why, have you ever thought what it would be like to be free of that human shell? You can be so much more, you can be, b e t t e r. Hm,” Espeon popped its lips, “Personally I think you people are the ones that are ‘evil’ and ‘disgusting’. Humanity likes to think it’s the defining force in the world, well, WRONG. If it were up to me, all humans would be good for is fodder for pokemon! It is true that humans make pokemon stronger, so logic speaks that pokemon should be devouring humans as food, not each other! But that’s just my personal stance on things. Our leader is a bit more moderate and inclusive~ They sure opened up my eyes!” and Espeon let out a cold laugh with it coal, cold, dark eyes, sending a chill straight through Brock and Tracey and their pokemon. “I can be moderate too and show mercy, it’s not that hard~ But I hope you don’t mind if I can’t help myself and take a chunk out of one of you! Now let’s keep this train going~!”

Tracey and Brock managed to glance at each other to share in their despair.

Espeon gave a fake sigh, “I know change is hard to accept, but it’s easier when you’re not alone! All are welcome in our family, give us your breedjects of life and we will nourish them and heal them and help them be more of the existence which they had been so cruelly denied~!” A real shudder ran through Espeon, “And I can’t WAIT to see what Ash’s form will be~! You all might not even recognize him! He’s going to be beautiful, why, possibly even more beautiful than Lisa! And let me tell you, Lisa was one of our leader’s deepest favorites, aside from your’s truly that is~ She had so much potential, the most I had ever seen, aside from Ash now~” Espeon gave another fake sigh, “I wish I knew where I went wrong that that silly girl. I wonder what she’s thinking, I can feel her power surging through this place – she wants something! And she’ll stop at nothing to get it! This entire place is on, spiritual lockdown if you will now. Aaaaah~ I’m so proud! You know she really has developed her craft so well! Perhaps my age is showing a little, I was ever so slightly caught off guard by the, reaction that took place with dear Ash, something went amiss, but never to fear, our leader will fix that right up in no time! Our leader will fix you all in fact~ Mh, well, those that are left~” Espeon walked with more confidence, “It all starts the same way. You all have something, deep, deep inside that you think is ugly right? A deep dark, part of yourself that you’re terrified someone might find, unappealing~?” Espeon looked to Tracey and Tracey flinched, “I have a gift where I can, hone in on such traits~” –

“Leave him alone,” Brock hissed.

Espeon tsk-tsked, “But you can handle it right~? You’re not really, sick. Oh no, not me, not me! I can handle it! Really, I can! PLEASE!” Espeon let out a sharp cutting laugh that reverberated throughout the silenced halls, “Isn’t it easy for those that don’t take illness seriously to romanticize it? Oooooooh, what could I possibly do~? What could it be~? Are you like me? Do you understand me~? And those poor, poor babies who really truly are sick can’t tell the difference between themselves and a caricature depicted by those who twist it and bend it and just straight up believe what they want to. Are all bad people sick? Would that make it easier to understand them? Isn’t it just a personality disorder to BE bad~,” Espeon smirked loudly, “HMP~ Everyone is sick, and everyone is sick of this world. Well, we Onelings are going to do something about that. Oh~?”
Espeon stopped the group, its ears twitching this way and that, and then its smile cut even wider.

The smell of smoke had entered the air.

“How about this for a turn of events! The building is on fire!”

Everyone minus the Espeon had a wave of fear wash over them.

“This slightly complicates things a bit! Ah, but wait! There’s more!”

Down the hall, shuffling footsteps could be heard, making Scizor, Ninetails and Azumaril stand on edge minus Espeon who held an expectant smile…there was an odd flickering light coming down the hallway, or perhaps….

“Well, well, lil’ Lisa just couldn’t help herself now could she~?!"

Finally walking around the corner into view, was what looked to be an old woman with her body partially on fire, mainly her clothes and hair. There was no way she could be alive with how calmly she walked as her body burned, her pale complexion getting charred from what the flames could reach, her eyes glowing a pale, pale blue.

Espeon sighed in mock wistfulness against its hostages horrified looks, “I’ll never understand what pleasure she takes in making them walk, you can’t make them do anything! You can barely program them to do sentry work! I admit this one was a good host, but come on, really.”

As the woman walked closer towards them, Espeon popped it lips, “Alright then!” Espeon motioned to Ninetails, “Let’s go pretty face, Flamethrower~ The building is already on fire, so you’re really not going to do any damage that won’t be expected, but we really can’t waste too much time here now~ Put this thing down.”

Ninetails failed to move, too overcome watching the dead woman steadily walking towards them with her purple house shoes, her hair burning away, and the paper band around her wrist that held her name turning black from an ember.

Espeon cleared its throat, then twisted Brock’s arm all the way back, making him cry out in pain, the Espeon holding it in painful place –

“Brock!”

“I thought I gave you a command?” Espeon raised an eyebrow, “His shoulder is going to dislocate with this much pressure being applied….le sigh~” it then shook its head at Ninetails still frozen posture, Azumaril and Scizor both contemplated their own interference against Brocks grunts and whimpers of pain, “She’s already dead – and I would know because I was the one that killed her – do note that Froslass tend to make familiars with dead things, you will be doing that poor thing a service, you’ll be giving her a speedy Viking’s funeral! She’s already on fire, the work is half done for you! Now, FLAMETHROWER!” Espeon twisted Brock’s arm even further, “At this rate, it’ll break clean off if you don’t comply~”

Scizor glanced back at Tracey, and Tracey closed his eyes with a nod. The steel type rushed past, speed walking to the woman, and with a swift Bullet Punch~ to her burning head, her skull was crushed underneath, and she dropped flat to the floor, the sound of her body silencing Brock’s pain as Espeon let go of his arm.

Scizor gulped.
And then the old woman got right back up on a wobbly arms and legs, walking toward the group as if on ice.

“What?!”

“Sorry~ Valiant effort there Scizor, I applaud you for taking the initiative, bu--t, that’s not how you put down a Froslass’ familiar, nope. They must be burned away, burned till they’re nothing but cinders~ You know, like how you kill a ghost type for good – so! Come on now Ninetails, Scizor made it very, very easy for you, FLAMETHROWER*! NOW!”

The smell of smoke was getting stronger.

“Ninetails,” came Brock’s voice, teetering on the edge –

“You have to the count of three,” said Espeon, “And then someone is going to get hurt very, very badly…..one – two – three – !”

Tracey’s screams filled the halls.

****

That can’t be true could it? I know I felt something real with you, no matter how much it hurt.

****

Ritchie, Pikachu, and Sparky made their way as cautiously and as fast as they could through the hospital. When the light traps suddenly appeared on the floor, Ritchie thought back to the mirage traps he faced when riding his Charizard – “You’re not getting me this time!”

Pulling a page right out of an Infernape using Acrobatics*, Ritchie leaped up, grabbed a hanging light fixture, and swung over the trap with ease; Pikachu and Sparky cheering him through as they followed.

*Just hang on for me Ash, please, please, I’ll find a way to save you!*

The ice was growing ever steadily, freezing whatever didn’t move in place aside from the annoying persistence of the moving light traps – *PISS OFF!* Ritchied hissed, parkouring up and over another one by leaping onto a sliding cart, bed, wheelchair, then aimed for solid ground – *HA!* – where one opened up right under Ritchie’s landing, “CRAP” – and down he went with Pikachu and Sparky, falling straight through, getting teleported to a most unexpectedly placed flight of un-melted stairs just as another poor soul was trying to trek their way up them in the dark –

“AAAAHHH!”

“AAAAHHH!”

Their heads met with a bump and squeak and down, down, down they went with Ritchie coming to a stop on his butt, Pikachu and Sparky bouncing down right behind him, “O wow o ow ow, ow, ow….”

“Oooooof, Ritchie?!”

“M-Misty?!”

At the same time they held up their (barely functioning) coms for light (Starmie just used Flash* however, nearly blinding everyone) and they saw each other’s surprised faces.
“Oh my god, I’m so glad to see you!” Misty wrapped her arms around Ritchie, giving him a bone crushing hug –

“Ack, Misty, spine, breaking” –

Misty let go and let Ritchie catch his breath (both Pikachu catching theirs with Misty’s Starmie and Corsola), “Ritchie listen, there’s this crazy Espeon here” –

“I know, we just barely escaped it ourselves, but Moltres roasted it! Thank goodness you’re okay!”

Misty shook her head, “It’s taken Brock and Tracey hostage with command of their pokemon!” –

“What?”

“Pipi?!”

“Pika, chu!”

Corsola shook its head, “Cor, Cor, sola!”

“And I,” Misty gulped, “Have been hearing their screams – I only have Starmie and Corsola on me and they’re not enough to take them all on” –

“Where are they now?!”

The air suddenly turned an even deeper cold, to the point where everyone could feel it chilling their stomach.

“Hostages hm?”

A glowing presence appeared, Misty’s eyes went wide, and they all turned to face none other than the Froslass, Lisa.

Lisa clicked her mouth, “Well then, in that case, I guess y’all are mine now.”

Both Pikachu fired off Thunderbolt* attacks, Starmie and Corsola used Hydro Pump*, but Lisa cast Protect* with her remaining arm and held up Ritchie and Misty with its ghostly powers via a glance of her eyes, she side glanced the pokemon with a fierce conviction, “Do that again, I dare you.” So of course, Pikachu, Sparky, Starmie and Corsola had no choice but to back off, growling in anger.

Lisa’s eyes narrowed, “Hm, I’m kinda surprised only one of Ash’s friends was able to make it through to the Dark Place, I mean, if you all are so,” Lisa made a disgusted face, “super close and whatnot. Then againnnnnn, Gary is a walking cheat code to Ash’s game,” Lisa clicked her mouth against Ritchie and Misty struggling in the grip of her powers, “Ugh, I was not expecting this at all, hm….should’ve known better, anyhow, long story short, you two are going to help me get some revenge” –

“I would rather die” –

Lisa rolled her eyes and deadpanned, “Let’s just pretend we have similar goals here, like think, enemy of my enemy is my, hostage, kind of thing, deal.”

“Go fuck yourself” –

“Hey, you’d at least want to get revenge for Ash right? I thought I could do something in time, but, Ash is too far gone” –
“No” –

“And like, better you run into me than, uuuugh,” Lisa gave an annoyed/nerved shudder, “Espeon, UUUGTH. But we don’t have too much time for chit chat, I need to see what I’m working with here,” and Lisa took a Draining Kiss* from Misty –

“Ungh” –

“Misty!”

“COR-COR SOLA! D:>!!”

Lisa clicked her mouth, tasting the energy source, “Oh,” her face flattened, “You’re his ex, hm,” Lisa quirked an eyebrow as she got a more thorough reading, “keep telling yourself that honey,” she turned to Ritchie’s terrified face, “And now you” –

“DON’T TOUCH HIM!” Misty screamed, “Just use me, do what you want with me, I’m more than enough for whatever you need!”

Lisa blinked, “You know that only makes me want him more right?” and Lisa took the Draining Kiss* from Ritchie, pulling an anguished scream from him as well, “Lordie, wimp. I used the same force as….” Lisa paused, “Ah….” She looked to Misty, “You’re his ex,” then to Ritchie, “And you’re….” Lisa’s eyes went wide, wide, “ooooooooooooOOOOOOOOOH!” her smile growing just as large, showing all her teeth, “You’re like me!” her hand went to the side of her face with pure excitement, “You’re like me! You’re like me! You’re a BAD, BAD PERSON, like me!!”

Sparky looked ready to tear into Lisa, “PIPIPIPIKA!”

Ritchie, trembling and feeling completely gutted, forced comprehension, “If by bad you mean ‘awesome’ then yeah, I’m the baddest bitch around!”

Lisa barked a sharp laugh at that, “Oh my god, OH, MY, GOD, OOOOOUUUUUUUOOOUUUUGH!!! If ONLY I had taken YOU from the start! Aaaaaaaaaah, oh! This story would have turned out so different! Ooooonooh~?” Lisa tasted the energy a little more carefully, looking back and forth between Misty and Ritchie, and gasped – “He doesn’t know, does he? Ooooooh, how could you not have told him?! That’s important information!”

“JUST SHUT UP!!” Misty screamed.

“Wait,” Lisa tilted her head, “Why would you keep that from him? I’m confused, you all are supposed to be really good friends or something, at least,” Lisa’s face turned dark, “That’s what he believes….”

“Drop, dead” –

Lisa blinked, “I’m a ghost pokemon you moron. And for the record, I tried crossing over, my consciousness went all over the place to, shit that I was ‘tethered’ to, but I couldn’t ‘leave’. You can imagine my frustration SEEING EVERYTHING JUST, MOVE, ON! RRRRRRRGGGGGGGHHHH!!!” Lisa’s eyes burned fiercer, “You think I thought I had a chance in hell of surviving THAT? But, ugh,” Lisa raked her face with her lone hand, “I underestimated the insurance policy on me, and whoever’s bright idea it was to shove all those Onelings in ONE holding cell, I hope they get hung from their dick. Fucking morons. They all deserved to die.” Lisa’s eyes turned an even chillier shade of blue, “And I enjoyed watching the lights drain out of their eyes. Like I said, you two are going to help me get revenge, on one of the WORST in their ranks.”
Ritchie’s struggles became still, “Lisa, please,” came his voice, wobbling and wavering, “I’ll, I’ll do whatever you want” –

“Ritchie” –

“Pi-pika?!”

“If you help us save Ash!”

“Ash is a lost cause I’m afraid,” said Lisa deadpanning, “…..No one comes back from the Catalysts. Come along now,” Lisa moved to leave with her hostages in tow, calling forth a light trap to transport the lot of them to another floor entirely, she looked around, “Hm, not here either. Like your faith in Ash. Mh, maybe if you all were more open to him, none of you would be in this position. Ash would be happier. Less of a target. Less prone to making bad decisions. The Onelings prey on the weak minded. You both think too little of him, dare I say, even coddled him.”

“Are you seriously trying to lecture us?” Misty hissed, “This coming from a complete lunatic?!”

“Actually I was diagnosed as being a sociopath,” said Lisa, followed by a shudder, “There’s one memory I was hoping would never surface again, but I guess I have all of eternity to think over how I got, here.”

“Lisa please,” Ritchie begged again, “I’ll do anything, anything if you’ll just help us save Ash!”

“And I told you Ash is a lost cause!” Lisa barked to Ritchie, holding up two of her clawed fingers, “He’s got TWO catalysts inside of him! They put just ONE in me, what do you think two is going to do to him?! You see this ice? This shit spreading around?! THAT’S HIM! THAT’S ASH! WE ARE STANDING ON THE BRINK OF A METAPHYSICAL PLANE OF ASH’S DESPAIR – HE HAS BEEN FUSED WITH A CATALYST – there’s nothing for you to save! He’s gone! He’s gone FOREVER!”

“NO HE ISN’T,” Ritchie screamed back through his sobbing, “I refuse to believe that! I know he can come back! I know he can!”

Lisa raked her lone hand down the side of her face again, “And they called ME delusional, for fuck’s sake, if your dick is so wet for him just jerk off to the ice. You had your chance, and you blew it, not that it would have amounted to much anyway. In fact I bet you would have failed harder than how Gary utterly failed Ash, and then Ash failed you all! You’re a bunch of failures, a bunch of LOSERS! How could I think that somehow you all would be different from the set of people that fucked me over?”

“Leave him alone,” Misty growled.

“No you are terrible. Ringleader in all this shit – you were sooooo maaaaaaaad when Gary came along! And for what? Y’all were already broken up! But what do I know hm~? What do I know about how people feel in wanting to control situations? What do I know about people wanting to help a poor broken soul – ” – Lisa’s grip on Ritchie and Misty doubled, making them cry out – “WHAT DO I KNOW ABOUT HOW PEOPLE WANT TO CHANGE WHO YOU ARE???”
“PIPIKACHU!!!”

“COR, SOLA!!”

“SHUT UP!” Lisa knocked all the pokemon back with Icy Wind* –

“You’ll never understand,” Misty grunted out, “People like, you, will never understand! What you did…His own mother couldn’t even hold him as he practically lay dying! I will never forgive you for all the suffering you’ve caused! I will NEVER forgive you for what you’ve done to him! Even at his absolute worst, Ash never remotely stooped to the tactics you pulled! It’s not hard to see, that you prey on people, when they’re vulnerable – well, you’ve met your match – I’m not going to be intimidated by you” –

Lisa’s eyes narrowed again, “Oh no, I understand, perfectly,” she hissed right back, “To take control, to pin them – subdue them – to BEND them to your will – you have a desire for control too huh? Can’t let anyone one else help him – you’re not even together anymore! That undercut boyfriend you have now is just a rebound squeeze – the one you REALLY loved – you just can’t untangle your long, curled claws from” –

Misty fought through the pain of her body getting squeezed, “Don’t make assumptions about me” –

“HA! You and every other idiot around Ash might have him fooled, but you can’t fool me! This little heroic stunt of yours only PROVES IT!”

“Oh please, ugh, did your back hurt from that reach?”

“I AM TWO SECOND AWAY FROM SNAPPING YOUR’S!!”

“Like I said, I won’t be intimidated – eugh – you’re a bully! You’re manipulative! Is all you can do lash out? Don’t you have a shred of humanity left?!”

“AHAHAHAHAHAHAHA, OH MY HUMANITY IS AAAAAAAAALL HERE! That’s the best part – only a human can have such wonderful, fleeting, conniving expressions and delusions to make them think they’re ACTUALLY making a difference in someone’s life – when all they’re doing is TWISTING” – Lisa bent Misty’s body back making Misty gag out a cry of pain – “MANIPULATING” – she bent it back further –

“STOP IT STOP IT!!” Ritchie screamed –

“CORSOLAAAAAA!!!”

“PI-PIKA D;>”

“AND MUTILATING THEIR MENTALITY! What? Nothing to say? I thought we were having a good talk here? Oh no wait, are you in too much pain? Awwwww – good. I want you to remember this moment you pathetic waste of space – there will ALWAYS be someone who will have more control over you than you EVER will –” Lisa pulled Misty close – “this is your wake up call bitch” –

Misty, pushed up through the painful grip on her spine, and looked Lisa right in the eye, “You should have stayed dead when you killed yourself” –

Lisa’s right eye twitched – Misty and Ritchie were then slammed against the wall – the pokemon moving to retaliate just one second too late from Lisa’s moment of being caught off guard –
“YOU SHITS MOVE AND I SWEAR TO GOD RITCHIE WILL NEVER WALK AGAIN!” Lisa looked right to Misty, “Oh but you, you can join me in hell then – you’re going to be my little fuel source for this charade JUST AS YOU WISHED.” Lisa released Ritchie from her grasp and dropped him to the floor, “Get lost dickless, I’ve made my decision. I can still show mercy right?” Lisa shoved Ritchie away, “Take your rats, and go die in whatever way suits you best.”

Ritchie pushed himself up, his body couldn’t take much more, “Lisa, please, let Misty go” –

“No,” said Lisa simply, “she disrespected me, so I’m going to disrespect her right BACK” – Lisa slapped Misty hard across the face, leaving a red bleeding scratch –

“LISA PLEASE!” –

Starmie let loose a Water Gun* attack, but Lisa again used Protect* and blasted the lot of them with an overpowering Blizzard*, freezing parts of Starmie, Corsola, and Pikachu!

“RRRRRGH! WHAT IS WITH YOU PEOPLE?!?!?!? !!! ??? HUH?!?!?!? IT’S OKAY FOR YOU TO, TO SAY I ‘SHOULD HAVE STAYED DEAD WHEN I KILLED MYSELF’ – BUT IT’S NOT OKAY FOR ME TO HIT YOU BACK???” Lisa’s aura caught fire, “IT’S THE SAME! IT’S ALWAYS THE SAME! NO ONE EVER CARED ABOUT ME” – the floor, the walls, the ceiling began to shake –

“LISA” –

“NO ONE, NO ONE, NO ONE!!!” Lisa held up Misty by the throat with a crushing grip – “I’M DONE! I’M DONE I’M DONE OF BEING BULLDOZED OVER, I HAVE ABSOLUTELY NOTHING LEFT TO LOSE!!!! YOU’RE UNDER MY COMMAND NOW AND I’LL MAKE YOU ALL PAY!!!!”

Misty’s face was turning blue, Pikachu took its chance after freeing itself from the ice, and fired Thunderbolt* right for Lisa – yet with Lisa’s burning aura, she had all the time in the world to react. She grabbed Ritchie with her powers and pulled him in the way of the attack – Pikachu’s Thunderbolt* making a direct hit on Ritchie, electrocuting him through and through with his mangled screams.

The attack happened in just seconds, but watching Ritchie’s body fall was an eternity, and he collapsed in a heap on the floor. Pikachu was in shock, its little paws over its mouth. Sparky dashed over, desperately trying to wake Ritchie up. Lisa was breathing hard. There were silent tears coming down Misty’s face, moments before she herself passed out against the screaming of her pokemon.

Satisfied with the result, Lisa’s grip lessened with her captive the way she preferred. She then turned to Pikachu, “See? You see? And you were just trying to, ‘help’, weren’t you? And all you did was hurt. How does it feel? Want to try again? No? Then fuck off.”

With that, Lisa turned to leave with Misty in tow, and in using her burning powers, called forth another light trap and manifested herself, Misty, Corsola, and Starmie elsewhere.

Sparky was crying so hard it couldn’t breath, it flopped itself over Ritchie’s motionless body.

Sparky, Pikachu dared to move closer to its friend, Sparky….I….I’m so…..

Ritchie suddenly began to stir –

RITCHIE?!
Ritchie was moving, *Ritchie was breathing!* He managed to open his eyes, “*Spuh, Sparky*” –

**RITCHIE!!!**

Sparky hugged and pika-kissed its Trainer all over his face, Pikachu rushed over and gave the exhausted Ranger a hug on his head (with very much frizzled hair) and shouted its apologies as loud as it could.

“I’m, I’m ok you twos,” Ritchie’s words were slurred, “you think a lil’ Thunderbolt* is gonna take me out? I’m bust friends, with Ash, the lightning magnet! Ow, ow, ow, oh my god, ow, heh, heh,” Ritchie pushed to get himself up, but his body was just not having it anymore, and he collapsed again on the floor, “Ungh” –

Pikachu and Sparky suddenly perked up, their noses and ears twitching.

The smell of smoke filled the hallway, and seconds later, the very end of it was illuminated with flames.

**RITCHIE GET UP! GET UP!!**

Pikachu and Sparky were frantic in trying to get Ritchie up, yelling, screaming, pulling, anything to help him to move! And Ritchie, poor Ritchie could barely move his completely spent limbs; he could feel the suffocating heat rising exponentially.

Ritchie’s mind ran through what may very well be his final thoughts, “*RUN! RUN YOU TWO! Go! GO! You have to leave me here or you’ll burn too!*”

“*PIPIKACHUPIKA!*”

“*Sparky, I love you so much, I love everyone so much, I’m so happy to have had you all in my life*” –

*I’m happy to have met you too!*

The flames moved so fast, so suddenly that there wasn’t even any time to even blink, it engulfed the walls and ceiling all around, but didn’t touch Ritchie, Pikachu, or Sparky at all; and the unbearable heat was suddenly non-existent. The pokemon looked all about, seeing a shield of aura around them.

Ritchie saw Pikachu and Sparky look up in surprise as something teleported in behind him in the safety of the aura bubble.

“I’ve got you, I’ve got you Ritchie don’t you worry, it’s okay,” came a familiar voice, and Ritchie felt the most gentle of hands touch his side, “It’s alright now.” Pikachu and Sparky looked on with the widest, happiest, *happiest* sparkling expressions as Ritchie felt a most rejuvenating Heal Pulse* fill his body with relief.

****

*Is it selfish of me to try for you? Even if you should want to be set free? I just thought you wanted me too.*

****

Espeon’s group moved in almost total silence, save for Espeon’s mindless humming.

The guilt on Ninetails’ face dragged heavy with Tracey’s lifeless bodyweight in Espeon’s psychic
grasp. He was unconscious, there was a trickle of blood down the corner of his mouth, but his right hand was completely covered in red. It was broken in several places with a finger jetting out in the opposite direction that its joint bent.

Brock only wished Espeon’s powers would waver once so he could slip it a nasty right hook.

“Oh now come on everyone,” said Espeon, “let’s lighten the mood a little, what happens when you tell an egg a joke? Hm? Hm? It cracks up!” Espeon let loose gut-busting laughter.

Scizor weighed its options in killing the Espeon, but it could tell easily the Espeon still hadn’t let its guard down yet; its walking gait was too clean.

Espeon stopped, its laughter ceased, and its eyes narrowed. There was a shadow approaching at the end of the hallway against a flickering light before it went out.

Two pale blue eyes cut through the darkness.

Espeon’s black eyes sparkled and its smile went as wide as could be, “Could it be~! Could it BE~?!?”

Out from the darkness walked Misty’s body with glowing blue eyes; Corsola and Starmie on either side of her and looking aged 100 years. Her movements were jilted as she looked to have just stepped out of an ice box, her joints crunching as they moved.

“No – NO,” Brock screamed –

“Lisa my dear! Is that really you in there?”

“In the flesh, so to speak,” Misty!Lisa’s voice was their own layered on one another.

“Why, Lisa! That subject is still alive!” Espeon tilted its head, “Why on earth would you pull off such a possession? Why not just kill her?”

“I’m using her, obviously.”

“As a hostage? Oh! Look at me, see, see I’ve got two! Two! Isn’t that just fancy~?”

“For the love of god please shut the fuck up,” said Misty!Lisa

“Sigh~ You still have that potty mouth” –

“Because I know how much it pissed you off.”

Espeon pouted, “Must you hate your Auntie so much~? I was your confidant! Practically blood! You knooooow, I loooove you~”

Misty!Lisa held her hands out to the side, Ice Shards® forming in each, Corsola and Starmie got into attack position, “It is nice having two hands again, I must say.”

“What are you doing?”

“I’m going to kill you.”

For a moment Espeon looked to be genuinely hurt before its wide-ass smile took over, “Be reasonable Lisa, you think you stand a chance against me?”
“I’m banking on the fact these pokemon are not going to risk letting their Trainers die. They want to save Misty, they want to save Brock and Tracey. That right there gives me the edge over you. No matter how much control you think you have over them, pokemon that are bonded to their Trainers will fight to the death for them. It’s disgusting.”

“Well Ninetails receives failing marks in that department,” said Espeon, “Poor Tracey here suffered for its incompetence~”

Tracey began to stir from his suspended keep.

“Tracey!” Brock managed to grunt out.

“Listen Lisa,” Espeon’s voice went un-characteristically gentle, “I’m willing to overlook this little outburst of your’s if you’ll just come back home with us” –

“I’m not going back.”

“Lisa, Lisa, don’t be silly! You’re not of their world anymore” –

“I’m not of your world either.”

“M-Misty…”

The group looked to Tracey who was trying to come to. Espeon side glanced Lisa, “I’m afraid you’re the one that’s on a timer here. You speak of the bond of pokemon and their Trainers, but the bond between mates? Lovers? Ohohohohohoh~ All you did was put a cork on top of a volcano~ The moment she comes to! The moment he comes to!”

“She doesn’t really care about him at all, he’s a stepping stone to her and a doormat at best.”

Espeon tut-tutted, “You should know better than to strum the heartstrings” –

“Honestly it was too easy because Ash’s friends don’t know how to dip outside of their own pool” –

“And yet you brought his mate right to him! It’s almost as if you cared” –

“I do not care what happens to any of them,” said Misty!Lisa, “I’m literally using his ex as a meat shield. The only one I actually came here for was Ash and you had already nailed his coffin shut. I’m getting revenge for me, and I’m also gonna get revenge for Ash while I’m at it.”

“Do you think your actions noble?”

“No, justified.”

Espeon rolled its eyes.

“You say ‘let it go’ and I’m going to burn this mother down as it stands.”

Speaking of fire, the smell of smoke began to infiltrate this destination as well; all the pokemon’s nerves doubled.

“Speaking of timers,” said Espeon, “I hate to cut our reunion chat so short, but we should be making an exit soon, would you like to take this discussion outside?”

Misty!Lisa sent the Ice Shards* into the floor, freezing Espeon’s feet where it stood, “You’re not leaving this place alive,” Misty!Lisa growled.
Just when the pokemon thought they had a chance – Espeon plucked its feet easily out of the ice, making Misty!Lisa’s glare only intensify further. Scizor the only one knowing just how much in control the Espeon still was with its movements.

Espeon raised its posture upright, eyes now glowing red, and looked down on Lisa, “Very well child, I’ll play along with your little game,” it glanced over to Tracey and began prodding him awake with its powers, “Oh Tracey~ Get up now, come on, come on wake up~ Up you go~”

Slowly, slowly, Tracey came to, opening his eyes, opening them into a blurry mess. The darkness of the hallway, the light coming in, glowing blue eyes, a figure, a figure with red hair and dressed, dressed in her clothes, with glowing blue eyes? It couldn’t be Misty, Misty, Misty? Misty! MISTY!

“MISTY!!”

Lisa felt an incredible jolt in her core, “AUGH,” she clutched her chest, almost doubling over –

“I told you! I told you so~”! Espeon piped, “Even if she doesn’t love him, he sure loves her!”

“MISTY!! MISTY!!”

“SHUT UP!!” Misty!Lisa slashed the air and let loose another Ice Shard* in her grasp – its aim for Tracey – but Scizor managed to block it with Bullet Punch* –

“And there goes that temper again oh Lisa, Lisa, Lisa,” Espeon shook its head, “this was a most pathetic attempt at best, I’m so disappointed in you.” Espeon watched with most glee as Misty!Lisa writhed in trying to stay on two legs, doubling over again, hands going to the side of their head – Starmie and Corsola unsure of what to do!

“Tracey….!”

That was Misty’s voice alone! Starmie and Corsola called to their Trainer –

“FIGHT! FIGHT MISTY!” yelled Brock.

“MISTY!!”

“Tracey, Tracey!” Misty!Lisa hauled themselves up, Misty’s eyes were cleared of the glow!

“TRACEY!”

“Oh my~!” Espeon breathed, “I guess she really does love this human! Oh my poor Lisa, you were never able to understand love at all! Poor baby! Possession needs magnetic auras, and you my dear, repel everyone. I can only imagine the strain you’re under trying to staying inside!”

Misty!Lisa snarled and Lisa was back in control, eyes glowing fiercely, “ENOUGH” –

“Oh I quite agree,” Espeon’s red eyes gleamed with glee, “Its time to end this” –

“MIST-agh” –

Espeon closed Brock and Tracey’s windpipes completely shut – “I ORDER YOU ALL TO CAPTURE LISA! THEY GET NO MORE AIR UNTIL WE ARE ALL BACK HOME!”

Azumaril and Ninetails balked at the command and the fate of their Trainers, but Corsola and Starmie turned on Lisa as Scizor charged forward –

“GET AWAY FROM ME!!!” Misty!Lisa let loose a barrage of Will-o-Wisp* attacks, burning every
pokemon minus Scizor who used Protect*, Ninetails with its natural typing, and Espeon with its ability Magic Bounce* doing all the work. Espeon, however, was merciful enough to throw up Protect* for Brock and Tracey, who were quickly losing consciousness – “YOU’RE NOT GOING TO GET CONTROL OF ME AGAIN!!” Misty!Lisa was surrounded on all sides, “YOU TOUCH ME AND I’LL FREEZE HER HEART SOLID!!”

Espeon let out a cold laugh, still holding Brock and Tracey’s throats closed, it walked up next to Corsola, “Lisa, why I” – Espeon never finished its sentence, Corsola took its chance and let loose a Dark Pulse* right into Espeon’s wounded side – “AAAAAAAAAAAAUUUUUUUGGGGGHHH” –

Tracey and Brock were dropped to the ground, gasping for air, Zoroark burst from its illusion and dug a NightSlash* even deeper into Espeon’s side while receiving a face full of Dazzling Gleam*, both dark and psychic pokemon knocking each other apart –

“You Traidor!!” Espeon screamed –

Before Espeon could even wrap its psychic power around Tracey and Brock again, they felt a hand snag their arms and were Teleported* away! The figure moving too fast for even Espeon to get a good look at –

Misty!Lisa turned to make a get away admits the chaos, but came face to face with Mismagius and a Mean Look* attack – Mismagius grabbed Lisa literally by the fabric of her soul, and ripped Lisa right out of Misty! Letting Misty’s body stumble back against the wall – but she still had enough rage (and influence) in her to charge at Lisa and punch the ghost type right in the face, her icy ethereal flesh cracking in pieces just under her eye before Misty too was Teleported* mysteriously out to safety – with the hostages removed – everyone chose their target and lunged for Lisa and Espeon!

“I’M IN COMMAND HERE GODDAMMIT!!” Espeon roared, its red eyes blazing, the crack down its head glowing the same – it ensnared everyone, Lisa and Mismagius included, in the grasp of its awesome psychic powers – Scizor’s claw just inches from delivering a fatal blow right to the demon’s most vulnerable spot – and then behind it, Espeon felt the pressure waves of a pokemon Teleporting* in, but it had no time react with the bulk of its focus split on controlling the group out front, it heard in its mind,

Looks like you’re stretching yourself too thin, monsieur–

“How” –

Like greased lighting, Gardevoir’s hands appeared on either side of Espeon’s head, and the psychic/fairy type concentrated a Thunderbolt* right inbetween its palms, shooting straight through Espeon’s head, frying its brain. Everyone was instantly released from Espeon’s grasp, the psychic pokemon falling to a heap on the floor, twitching, black eyes rolling up in its cracked head, and drooling where it lay.

Gardevoir looked up stiffly, its neck still in a brace; Lisa was already gone, “Merde” –

Mismagius hissed at itself – “I’ll find her!” –

“We don’t have time,” said Gardevoir, “I need you to go help Audino” –

Scizor stepped forward, What can we do to help?

“Find more survivors if you can,” said Gardevoir, it placed a firm foot over Espeon’s still twitching body, “if you want to be by your Trainer’s side, I can Teleport* you out,” no pokemon motioned to
leave, “very well, beware the ice and fire, touching either one will damage you severely – I will alert you all mentally when the building is ready to go and get you out if you can’t get to the first floor, Zekrom is keeping the entryway clear of the ice – in the meantime, I am going to deliver this demon to Zekrom and then I am going to see if I can move the Ice Tomb that has Ash and Gary trapped” –

Scizor gasped, Ice Tomb?!

Gardevoir and Mismagius looked pained, but Gardevoir settled itself and spoke. “Just please pray, pray that Ash and Gary will be able to pull themselves through this, together!” –

The building gave a terrific shudder –

“Everyone! Go now!” Gardevoir grabbed Espeon’s limp body by its ear, “Do all that you can!” it Teleported out momentarily and everyone sped off into the treacherous depths of the building.

Outside in the hospital garden, the evacuees were being rolled out in whatever way possible to make-shift care stations lining the downtown area.

Gardevoir Teleported itself in front of Zekrom, holding the Espeon up by the ear, “Here is the demon, as said,” Gardevoir tossed its body at the legend’s feet and then Teleported itself right back into the hospital.

Curious police and Rangers wondered what the electric/dragon legend would do with the Oneling, and were promptly answered when Zekrom delivered a single electrified punch to dispose of it.

“Not surprised, it snuffed out the Ditto too.”

“That’s the judgment of the legends, and I wholeheartedly agree.”

“Hey, hey! Did you see Gardevoir just now?!”

“Yeah! That Gardevoir is goddamn miracle worker, I don’t care what anyone says about its unconventional methods or what have you. It was able to Teleport a lot more people out and even tried to channel Moltres’ fire! But, those flames are completely out of control, and there’s still more people inside, Ash Ketchum and Gary Oak are still inside – and those brave souls still trying to get the rest of the victims out!”

Ritchie, who was nearby the chatting Rangers and Officers, was sitting upright on a make-shift gurney, and was very quiet. Sparky was in his lap, Pikachu was next to him, but nothing else registered in his mind, save for the fact that, in the end, there was nothing he could do for Ash, or Gary. Mary threatened to tie him to a tree if he even thought about going back in, but Mrs. Ketchum’s pained heart was more than enough for an anchor. Next to him was Misty (in a wheelchair with blankets), Tracey (out cold again on another gurney and getting checked out by Bibi), Brock (kneeling next to Misty and applying an ointment to her skin), and Mrs. Ketchum in her wheelchair who was cleaning Tracey’s bloodied hand as gently as she could till Bibi was ready to wrap it.

Misty’s real Corsola was by her side, flinching whenever Misty flinched as Brock applied the ointment to bloodied cracks in her skin; her body gave an uncontrollable shiver, she was still freezing to the touch, but her attention was elsewhere, her eyes longing to be in the place of Mrs. Ketchum.

“Would this ointment be any good for Tracey’s hand?” Misty asked

“I have a second vile next to me,” Bibi replied without even looking up as it worked, “That one is for you. Have faith child, Tracey will pull through.”
“I’ll take care of him Misty, don’t you worry,” said Mrs. Ketchum, “You rest up now, you were possessed, you first need to get yourself better.”

Misty sighed through her nose, watching Bibi and Mrs. Ketchum work, her body jumped again, the ointment seeping into a particularly deep wound.

“Sorry,” Brock muttered, “There’s, a lot” –

“There is ice in her.”

Everyone looked up to see Moltres standing before them.

“The skin is the least of her problems, there’s ice in her, I, I can help.”

“Get away,” Mrs. Ketchum hissed, tossing a roll of gauze at it; Moltres dodged it easily with a turn of its head.

“I, needed that,” said Bibi flatly.

“She needs help,” Moltres insisted, “That ointment isn’t enough.”

“You going to set me on fire?” Misty spat.

“No, no, just,” Moltres turned around, “Get on my back, I can aide you with my body heat alone, it’ll help the ice within you melt, and then your own aura will take care of the rest….Your damage is severe, but not irreversible. Likewise with your mate,” Moltres looked to Tracey’s unconscious form, “I feel a heart thread between the two of you, stay close together, you’ll both heal and feel better.”

“I don’t ever plan on leaving his side,” said Misty.

Moltres set itself down right by Tracey (much to Mrs. Ketchum’s disgust to now be so close to it), and Brock helped Misty crawl right up onto its back, Misty being as deliberately rough as she could in making (beating) Moltres’ back comfy for herself. Moltres didn’t care.

Ritchie was side-glancing Moltres hard, feeling a mixture of thanks for saving Sparky and Pikachu, and then almost unbridled rage for putting Ash and Gary’s lives, and everyone else’s in even more jeopardy than was needed. With those two warring emotions within, Ritchie kept still, although Sparky could feel the maelstrom within its Trainer; it would rather have Ritchie still then him trying to kill Moltres with his bare hands.

“I can’t….tell you all how sorry I am,” said Moltres, it looked to the iced and burning hospital, “If there’s anything I can do to make it right….”

Ritchie kept still, and no one else seemed too keen on speaking either, until, Moltres felt Misty shift on its back. She took a moment before she spoke, she and Brock sharing a glance, “Well, at least, you know you did wrong…..In this case, that might be all you can do, aside from offering your apologies to everyone, and I mean everyone affected by the fire.”

“You made a terrible mistake,” said Brock, “And the dead can’t come back.”

Mrs. Ketchum whispered something harshly that no one else but Moltres caught. The legend lowered its head, and honestly looked like it wanted to cry.

Bibi finished securing a med device on Tracey’s chest, and then finally moved to go set his broken hand, Mrs. Ketchum only too glad to get away from the fire legend. Misty reached out and took
Tracey’s other hand; she had to stretch herself a bit, but it was well worth it to see Tracey’s face relax more in his sleep. She sniffled, imagining the suffering Espeon put him through…..As for Ash and Gary……

“I’m so sorry you all got hurt,” said Moltres, “Ash needed help and you all, were there for him, I thought…..” Moltres took a deep inhale and sighed.

“I will tell you this right now Moltres,” Misty wiped her eyes, “If Ash and Gary die, or any of our pokemon – I’m coming for your wings.”

“Misty…”

“…..Sounds fair,” said Moltres, “I don’t expect anyone to forgive me……I will learn my fate soon enough from the Eternal Legends. Regardless of what happens, you will get justice from my mistake.”

“Espeon is dead,” said Ritchie in a deadpan, surprising the group from his sudden vocalization, “That’s good. I look forward to your justice too.” Sparky just nestled Ritchie harder at his implied statement. Moltres accepted it at face value. “I mean that’s a step towards healing right? Seeing those you hate getting what they deserve.”

No one would argue that Ritchie and Ash look an awful lot alike, even Mrs. Ketchum was guilty of switching their names when they were all bundled up for a winter run, but now, Mrs. Ketchum saw the stark difference, and her heart made a painful movement.

Brock and Misty traded nervous glances watching one of Ritchie’s hands curl up into a fist, Sparky and Pikachu sat up, Sparky looking right into its Trainer’s hollow eyes – the warring emotions in Ritchie looked to have a victor – but before impulse would get the better of another victim, Mrs. Ketchum rolled up her wheelchair to Moltres.

Moltres half expected to get another slap to the face, especially since it was in a nesting position and easy to reach, but Mrs. Ketchum no longer looked angry, just utterly defeated and so very worn.

Moltres thought for a second the human had used its own equivalent of the move Burn Up*, and what it was looking at now with Mrs. Ketchum, was the tyless aftermath. She took a deep breath in, and a deep breath out, everyone watching her, even Ritchie and his clenched fist. Mrs. Ketchum looked up to Moltres, and said,

“If…” she sighed again, “If, my son, had the courage to forgive Lisa, then……I can forgive you,” Moltres’ eyes went as wide as dinner plates (as did everyone else’s), “I’ll take a page from his compassion and understanding, and humanity. As…..as upset I am at, all of this, everything, all of this with my baby,” Mrs Ketchum swallowed, composing herself to not break down as her throat wobbled, “The least I can do in his name, is to keep alive his benevolence.”

Moltres didn’t know what to say, except for a small, light, and very meaningful, “Thank you.”

Mrs. Ketchum quickly wiped her eyes and looked over at Ritchie. Ritchie’s face had softened greatly, showing more emotion (somber it was), he tilted his head away, letting his cap hide his eyes, a move Mrs. Ketchum knew so well from her son.

“I’m not giving up on my baby,” said Mrs. Ketchum, her hand gripped the wheelchair armrest, “He’s so strong, he’s so, so, so very strong.”

“He is,” said Misty, “And Gardevoir, and Mismagius too! I mean, they got that stupid Espeon, there’s no doubt they can take on Lisa!”
Brock nodded, keeping the positivity train going, “Right, last we heard, Ash and Gary were together at least, is that right?”

Bibi nodded, “That is what I understood from Gardevoir.”

“That’s enough to give me hope,” said Mrs. Ketchum clasping her hands together, “I’ve seen them back when they were still just toddlers, they have their, little ways of reaching each other. They were helping each other for the longest time and didn’t even know it. I know, I know deep in my heart that no matter what happens, they’ll face it together…..”

Ritchie shifted himself on the gurney, his legs making a swishing noise against the sheet, Sparky and Pikachu moving accordingly. He rubbed the back of his neck, Sparky relieved to see something warmer in his eyes, “Ash was always, adamant about protecting Gary,” he said, “He won’t let anything happen to him, he’ll protect him, no matter what, and….Gary will protect Ash, all the same.”

Misty couldn’t help but grimace as Ritchie hugged his knee.

_I don’t understand why this is happening._

_I don’t know why it has to be this way._

_We don’t deserve this. You don’t deserve this._

_You could at least have told me._

_Surely, I meant more to you than that, right?_

Gary felt empty, as if his chest was a barren shell, as if anything keeping him full and whole had disappeared from him in an instant. Before him, was what hunted them in their nightmares, but this, was no monster. It was a young man, lost, alone, and scared out of his mind, and at the end of his rope, wrapped in chains, and ice, and guilt.

It’s just Ash. Perhaps, there was some comfort Gary could find in that, aside from having his heart just torn in half. His hands trembled momentarily before falling limply to his side, *…..This…that is what you’ve decided on? To break up with me?*

The thick black tears continued to stream down Ash’s face as the water around them rose ever further up, *Yes,* his voice far away and withered.

And Gary’s was the same, *Okay……Okay. But Ash, Ash, I ask, just, hear me out, hear me out on, what I have to say, about some things.*

Ash was silent, but Gary continued.

*I will not deny that I’m lonely, you got that, one-hundred percent, and that, the, loneliness can motivate me to do things.*

The ice cracked around them in the darkness, the rising water giving slight tremors from beyond, but still, Gary continued with Ash’s silence for audience.

*Likewise my anxiety can push me to do things too….I didn’t want to get into another fight with you*
because, we just had so many, \textit{and so suddenly} – I was tired, just so \textit{tired}, I wanted you to come to me when you were ready, I didn’t want to push you into it, but sometimes….especially now, love needs to be stern, and firm, and, above all, \textit{honest},* Gary stood up straight, the water rising to his knees, and in Ash’s sitting form, up to his chest. Ash looked to Gary with his black eyes, *If we’re not together anymore, then I have nothing to lose to continue to help you in any way that I can, so, okay Ash,* Gary put his hands over his heart, and closed his eyes, *If this is what I have to do to reach you, \textit{then so be it}* –

*Gary what, \textit{stop} – what are you doing – \textit{what are you doing}* –

Gary reached within himself, taking deep shuddering breaths, cold coming from his lungs, the ice hidden in the darkness cracked all around them. He reached for his \textit{Link}, for the Catalyst, and with a single thought, cut it wide open to bleed freely within his body.

Ash, in utter horror, watched Gary’s form turn as blue as he was. Gary opened his eyes, sharing the same pale blue glow that Ash’s once did; his breathing becoming slightly more difficult.

*No….* Ash breathed, the water risen up to his shoulders, *Why…\textit{why did you}….*

Gary had let the \textit{Link} consume him as it did for Ash, but in return, at least, he felt completely connected to Ash.

It began to snow around them, the soft flakes landing and disappearing into the icy water.

*This hurts Ash, this is one of the most painful things I’ve ever felt in my life. You’ve hurt me by shutting me out, or pushing me away, but this tops them all by far,*

Ash had no response but a gaping, almost gasping wheeze.

This time Gary walked straight over to Ash, sloshing through the rising water. Ash did not recoil back, in fact, he couldn’t move at all. Gary stood before him with ease, and pulled Ash to stand up, \textit{forcing him to stand}, his limbs making creaking movements as if his body had almost been frozen in place. Gary took one of Ash’s hands in his under the water, but with the cold now between them, they couldn’t even feel each other’s grip. Gary grimaced slightly, but collected himself as best he could with what he had left, he had a firm grip on Ash, even if he couldn’t feel it, he wasn’t letting go.

*If you won’t speak first, then I’ll start,* said Gary, Ash just looked on in defeat, *…You remember….how things were when Gramps passed away?*

Ash’s look immediately changed to one of surprise.

Gary swallowed, *Do you remember, how,* he gave a sharp inhale, his eyes welling up fast, *How it…how it just happened, so fast. It just…it came out of nowhere….* Gary let his gaze fall as he tried blinking the tears back, but there were too many painful, \textit{painful} memories bubbling back up to the surface of that terrible moment.

There was a deep silence between them, aside from Gary’s sniffs and sobs to compose himself, until, *…..I remember….* said Ash quietly, *It was right before you were to give your big breakthrough speech….literally, not, barely even an hour beforehand.*

The water was rising up past their waists.

*Yeah,* said Gary keeping his gaze on their clasped hands in the water below, a few tears dropping off his cheeks, *I couldn’t believe it, he \textit{promised} me that he would be there, that he wouldn’t miss it
for the world, and he was walking and talking just like normal that morning, saying he had never felt better. I had just spoken to him that afternoon and he rushed me off the phone saying I needed to focus and to go get ready, that he would be able to meet up with me a little before I got up on stage. And just when I was wondering where he was, my com rang, Tracey was sobbing hysterically on the other end, and then he told me….* Gary swallowed as the tears flowed freely and silently down his face. *He was gone. He was gone, just like that.*

Gary tried to compose his crying, but couldn’t, so he talked through the heaving tears,*I couldn’t believe it, I dropped to the floor and couldn’t get back up. Not until you picked me up, like literally you’re so strong, you just hauled me up and held me, all of me, as I just, cried, and cried and cried and cried……” a large rolling sob escaped Gary, “You cried with me, you were there, on one of the worst days of my life….and you, you looked into my eyes, and I’ll never forget what you said, you told me, that no matter what happened that night, that you would be by my side, don’t you remember?* Gary wiped his eyes, *They asked me if I wanted to postpone the lecture or just cancel it altogether until, well….and you told me not to listen to what the despair was saying, you told me to listen to my heart, because honestly Ash, at that point I couldn’t even process anything else around me except for you…. And so, I listened, and I gathered myself up, stood up, and I got up on that stage…..and Gramps wasn’t there, but….* a sad smile bloomed across Gary’s face as he looked to Ash, *but you were. You were there with your mom, and Umbreon, all our pokemon really –Tracey, Daisy, and Ritchie, and, Misty, and even Brock! You all were there for me….and after I was done, everyone, got up and gave me a standing ovation! Whether they were clapping because I said some smart stuff or for Gramps or whatever, I felt I wasn’t alone*.

Gary placed his free hand over his heart again, the water having risen up to their chests, even higher for Ash’s slightly shorter form. Gary closed his eyes tightly as a few more tears squeezed out, *It still hurts, I miss him so much….and if you weren’t there Ash, if you all weren’t there for me, I don’t know what I would have done. You protected me then, you helped me, you were my rock, you got me through that time, you pulled me through….*

*The sadness….*

Gary nodded slowly, *Yes, the sadness….it comes and goes, like a wave, like flowing water. Sometimes the current is soft, sometimes its strong,* Gary squeezed Ash’s hand, rubbing his knuckles with his thumb, *I don’t know what the final straw was, that, twisted you inside so painfully to make you think you needed to keep these thoughts bottled up….I’m still dealing with Gramp’s passing, and not once did you shun me away when we were….like before….and then this wedge started coming between us, you grew more distant….You were always there for me, but then you stopped letting me be there for you….and I wasn’t sure what to do….*

Ash looked away in pain and shame with only a shuddering breath escaping him to skim the surface of the water which had risen up to just under his shoulder line.

Gary continued, *….When we first met again during the scout outings, I could tell you were a little different, a little quieter, just a bit, I mean, you were still quite energetic! But I thought, well, maybe just like any of us you had matured a bit. And then as we got together, I saw the you that I hadn’t seen since we were ten, that same, endless excitement, enthusiasm, passion, your ol’ active and bouncy self, just overflowing with life, but then, the quietness came more frequently, and, progressed, and I….I……just wanted to help you like how you helped me…..so I gave you your space, but the wedge only grew….I, was desperate to help you, but my decisions didn’t help either…..heh, because I lied to you, to, do what I thought would help – and I’m so ashamed I did that…* Gary couldn’t even look at Ash in that moment with guilt crushing his insides.
Ash’s mouth ran dry, it was scratchy and rusty but he forced it to work, his chest heavy from the water rising over it, *You only did that because I wouldn’t talk to you….I’m sorry I pushed you to act that way….I, knew you were dealing with a lot, you didn’t need another problem, I didn’t want to burden you more….and I thought I could handle it….* Ash gave Gary a hopeless smile, *That didn’t work did it?.....Right, let’s be honest here then, I don’t know how to love someone, I don’t know how to be in a relationship…..I never should have even thought I could be in one, the way I am –*

*Just because you’re sick Ash doesn’t mean you don’t deserve to be with anyone.*

*But, I can’t ask you to fauboubp –*in a single surging wave, the water had suddenly risen too high for Ash to raise his mouth over, Gary was free to float with the water, but the chains, *the chains were holding Ash down* – Ash’s knees went slack – but Gary immediately pulled Ash up, shaking him –

*DON’T YOU DARE! Ash if you let yourself drown right here, right now, I’ll NEVER forgive you!*

*Mmpbph* -

Gary pulled Ash hard but uselessly against the chains – *Didn’t our time together mean anything to you?! You’re just going to let his end you?! Destroy you?! That’s not the Ash I know! I know you’re still in there, who, even when he’s terrified, is fearless! The one who when everything else has failed, still kept going! Who never backed down from a challenge – even if you lost, even if you got hurt, beaten, broken – you tried! Try for me now! Right now Ash!*

Gary felt Ash give a sudden jerk on the chain –

Gary …!

*I’m not going to let this darkness tell you the time we spent together meant nothing! I should have confronted you about this a long time ago – so I want to hear it from you Ash! Not this lingering darkness, I want to hear it from you that you don’t want to be with me anymore, then I’ll accept it!*

Gary help…!

Ash pulled harder against the chains – the water was almost completely over him – Gary dove under and pulled with his best efforts, but the chains were holding fast –

*ASH!!*

Ash pulled harder against the chains, but it was no use – he shut his eyes as the water completely rose over him – Gary dunked himself under again, pulling at the chains as hard as he possible could, but Ash’s frantic movements moved Gary’s focus to his chest – *the stone!* The black stone was slightly poking out of Ash –

*It’s the stone! The stone merged with the Link!* Pull it out!
Ash grabbed what he could of the stone and pulled, pain wracking his face, Gary pulled on Ash’s grip and felt his chest tighten painfully – but he paid it no mind, he focused on Ash and used the weight of the water to kick against, adding to their force –

*Pull it out! Pull it out!*

Bit by bit the stone was coming out, Ash’s strength waned, but his focus did not – *bit by bit –

*GET OUT! GET OUT OF ME! GET OUT OF ME!*

The stone was almost out of Ash – Gary felt like his heart being squeezed to the point of popping right in his rib cage – he clasped his hands over Ash’s, and with one great big pull and kick using the water’s resistance – *the stone was out –!

*B-A-B-U-MP*

Ash gave a small gasp, a couple bubbles escaping his mouth before his body moved no more and floated limply, held only by the chains – a deep gaping hole appeared in his chest where the stone once pulsed with black oozing liquid gushing out and staining the water black around him – the stone floated away, dissolving into nothingness – *ASH-UOGH!*– Gary threw up back – the water, all of it, receded fast, dumping Ash and Gary hard on the ground, all of it sloshing away in heaving waves, taking their blue forms along with it. Gary grasped his stomach, his chest, throwing up gut-fulls of inky black till he was dry heaving. Gasping for air, he saw his reflection in one of the small pools left by the water, his glowing blue eyes were gone, he looked at his body, his arms, touched his face – he was back to normal – he then spotted Ash on his side, his body looking to be back to normal too aside from the black bleeding out from his chest.

Gary scrambled over and snatched up Ash’s motionless body, the chains rattling loosely, the both of them heavy and soaking on the dark ground – Gary shook Ash’s unconscious form – *ASH!! ASH!!! ASH! WAKE UP! WAKE UP!* Gary’s cold breath was easily seen from his screaming, but from Ash, there was none ghosting over his lips. He was still, there was not a single breath in his lungs, and the outer edges of Ash’s form, looked to be blurring -

Gary set Ash down and began trying CPR, doing the chest compressions, and giving air mouth-to-mouth, but quickly realized how futile that was as one, when he pressed down on Ash’s chest he practically squirted out the black liquid from the gaping hole, and two, this was The Dark Place; and then Gary realized what the blurred edges meant, as slowly, Ash’s form began to fade -

For a moment Gary didn’t know what to do, his hands were dripping – he grabbed Ash again as his form continued to get more and more see-through and shook him as the black liquid still spilled out from the hole in his chest, *ASH! PLEASE, PLEASE BABY WAKE UP! WAKE UP FOR ME!*
the chains around Ash’s wrists and ankles came loose and finally fell off with loud thunking clunks, the black liquid reaching out further all around them, reaching, and reaching, till they looked to be at the center of a great big inky blotch spot.

*ASH! ASH PLEASE!* But still Ash did not stir. The final chain around Ash’s neck was undone by a mere touch from Gary’s hand, and fell to the ground with the loudest clang; his legs began to fade away altogether, edging slowly up his body.

Gary’s movements to wake Ash up became weaker, his voice squeaked from being so strained, *ASH! Ash!..Ash!..Ash, come back, come back, come back…come back….*

Still Ash did not move. *Ash….Come back….Oh no….No…No god, please, please….Ash….please get up…..don’t leave me, don’t leave me please…please come back….Ash…..wake up…..wake up…..* Gary ran his hand through Ash’s hair, as that too was fading, and fell to thick, heaving sobs, his forehead coming to rest on Ash’s, Gary’s freely falling tears cascading over Ash’s face as he rocked back and forth cradling what remained of Ash’s dissapearing body. *Don’t make me do this, don’t make me go on without you…I can’t…not without you….Not without you….*

The pain in Gary’s chest was indescribable, consuming, freezing, burying – the squeezing he felt in his chest before was nothing compared to this – how could he even dare to think to continue on from him? How could he go on without his smile? His laughter? His stories? His pouts, his longings, his joy, his sighs, his touches, his love –

“Gary – whoa, whooooaaaaaa, wait just a Cottonee minuet, I-I, m-me, you, you and me, and us, and, Gary! You want me, you really, want me?”

“Yes…..*gulp* I want you Ash, I want you more than I haaaaaaaaaaave ever wanted anything in my entire life I, I, I, I…..llllllllllluh-o-ove, you.”

“………….”

“Silence does not befit you, you beautiful, wild, reckless, loving, gentle, hot as hell Ranger god stallion” –

“Are you insane?!”

“For loving you? Never, not in a million years…..well” –

“You’ve hit your heard harder than I thought! I need to take you to the hospital –”

“The only thing pounding right now is my heart Ash, no stop, stop it, don’t point down there. Listen, listen to me, stop it, Ash, Ash, Ketchum, I’m being totally serious when I say I’ve got, a major, major, m a j o r, crush, on, ye-ye-yyyyyou. No don’t point at your junk, I love this, grant it you are gifted in your heart and your butt. I, I mean it Ash, I really do mean it, I’ve, I’m….I’m over the moon for you, like, help I’ve fallen and I can’t get up, and I don’t want to. You’re, amazing, you’re wonderful, you’re, you’re just, oh…Ash? Ash, what’s wrong?”

“No, no Gary, Gary, its this, I’m not sad, let me just, sorry, Gary *sniff*…I’m happy!….I’m so happy, its leaking out of me….! Ha he ,heh, Gary…I, yerhuhm…..um….I…..I…..like you too…I mean, um, um – "

“I’ve got you, I’ve got you Ash, I’m right here…I always want to be right here…”

“I, want to be here with you too.”
Gary felt something warm suddenly wash over him, something calm and soothing and pink, and then, miraculously, Ash gave a shuddering breath on his neck. Gary immediately sat up, cradling Ash – his entire body completely solid again - and Ash breathed again. Gary’s heart almost burst with the overwhelming surge of emotion gushing out – “Sweetie, baby?” – Gary saw Ash’s chest rise and fall, rise and fall, “Ash?,,” rise and fall, “Ash? Ash?! I’m right here, I’m right here baby, I’m right here, that’s it, come back, come back to me” –

Ash slowly opened his eyes, no longer black, they were clear and their beautiful, beautiful brown… and blue. Ash’s left eye was brown, and his right was blue. Not glowing, not possessed, not influenced, just blue as if he had been born with it all along.

**Ash? Is…this Ash?**

“Ash?” Gary’s voice wavered.

Ash looked up at Gary, slowly blinking. His hand, slightly trembling, reached up to touch the side of Gary’s face, his thumb caressing his cheek. Ash saw him, clearly saw him. A breath escaped Gary, and he immediately put his hand over Ash’s, holding it in place –

*Ash, my Ashy –* Gary’s voice was desperate, searching –

Ash blinked again, *Gary….* his voice was barely a whisper, *You stayed…..* Ash coughed painfully, making Gary hold him closer, Ash’s hand slipped from Gary’s face, but Gary quickly snatched Ash’s hand up in his own.

*Of course I stayed, Ash, sweetheart – no, no Ash stay awake! Stay awake!* –

*Gary….You’re eyes, are clear,* Ash own eyes looked so very heavy, but Gary shook Ash and helped him sit upright, *You’re not blue anymore….Thank god….*

*Yes, yes baby my eyes are clear, I’m ok, I’m all ok, the Link is gone, from both of us! The stone, the Link, all of it, all of it is done and gone and gone forever! My eyes, my body are fine, and you, your body, your eyes, they’re back to normal, well, ah, um, um, a-almost* –

Ash was so wobbly, so woozy, so out of it, “Urugh….” Gary wasn’t sure if Ash actually heard him all of him or not –

“I’m here, I’m here Ash, I’m right here – are you in pain?* Gary obviously still noticing that gaping hole in Ash’s chest. Ash swallowed, he looked to be in pain, uttering nothing for the moment but a thick gulp. Gary couldn’t stand it, his voice on the edge of his breath, “Sweetheart, my love, my light, my stars, my everything, please, please, talk to me.”

**Be my Ash!**

Ash gave a deep wheezing inhale, then exhale, nuzzling into Gary’s chest, Gary ran his hand
through Ash’s hair again, *Ashy, please.*

Ash looked up to Gary, Gary looking down at Ash’s now heterochromic eyes, worry filling a growing cavity in his chest, and Ash finally spoke again, his voice still just above a whisper, 
*Gary….I’m, so, so, so sorry….I didn’t mean it…I was there with you and I wasn’t, I, I still, I always loved you, I’m so sorry that I, hurt you…Gary…?* Ash’s brown and blue eyes welled up, making him blink off thick tears, *I’m so sorry I didn’t take care of myself, I’m sorry I left you vulnerable, and I’m so sorry I said all those awful, awful things….Gary,* * Ash took another deep breath, *Um,* he sniffled, *You know how, wise men, say, fools go really fast right? And how um, um….Ooooh, I’m, not sure where I was going with that, it sounded prettier in, my miiiiind…*

It’s him. Of course it’s him.

A smile had blossomed over Gary, *I believe, it goes…Wise, me~n, sa~y….O~nly fo~ols, ru~sh, in, but I…..ca~n’t, he~lp…fa~lling in lo~ve, wi~th yo~u….*

Ash gave a wobblly smile, *Oh, Gary* – again they pulled each other into a deep hug so tight and fast, it was impossible to tell who went for it first, Gary only pulling back long enough to press a long sentimental kiss to Ash’s forehead, Ash looking up at him with a soft glance. A question bubbled up from his anxiety reserves, one that may be moot at this point, but Ash had to hear it, and forced the question out, *Gary, could, could, you ever, forgive me?*

*My sweet Ashy, my sweet darling, of course, of course I forgive you. Can, you also forgive me?*

*A million times yes, though I’m not sure what I’m forgiving, but I do, I do, I do, I do!* 

Gary pulled Ash close again and kissed him over his blue eye, then brown eye, letting their foreheads touch, nuzzling Ash gently. Gary’s words were close to Ash’s ear, but he spoke them to the gaping hole, to Ash’s heart, *I see you Ash, I see the real you, and I’m so, so, so very proud of you.* Gary heard what had to be a sob, followed by Ash’s wet response.

*Thank-you, that was really hard to pull through*—

*It is hard, but you did it, you fought it, we fought it together, and now, now we move on, right? Now we keep going!* 

*Yes, yes! The Link is gone! The stone, all of it! It’s gone!* 

*Yup, I threw it all up, fun times, bleh.*

Gary was suddenly squeezed way too hard by Ash, *Oh thank god for that!* 

*Babe let me breathe*—

They both pulled back a little, Ash looking around a bit before doing a double take at the gaping hole in his chest, *Oh, oh my…. * Ash gawked at the, literal, metaphoric hole in his being, *Oh, well, there’s an actual hole in me, that, oh boy, that sucks*—

Gary planted a kiss on Ash’s nose, *It’s okay, its okay sweetheart – I’m going to fill it with so much love and joy and just everything! And everyone else is going to fill it too!* Gary planted another kiss on Ash’s forehead —
Ack, Gary* – Ash looked at his body, and all around them, seeing the seeping black in a stagnant circling pool, *Uh…did all this black stuff come from me?*

*Yeah, it did.*

*Eep!*

*Eep indeed,* said Gary, *But it had to come out!*

*Oh my goodness, it’s everywhere! Ew, ew! It’s all over me, oh Gary it’s on your shirt* –

*It does not phase me one bit Ash,* said Gary.

The air was cold no longer, and was turning warmer still; they could no longer see their breath when they spoke. Gary took stock of their surroundings with Ash, and the darkness, had given away to light. They were surrounded by an entirely white landscape, as if all was but a blank sheet of paper, or utterly covered in snow.

*It’s all blank,* said Ash, *The Dark Place….Well, it ain’t dark no more.*

*No, it’s not dark anymore Love,* said Gary, he felt a twinge of conviction, *It’s what we make of it now.*

*Wish I had crayons……That would have been really cool if some crayons had just popped out of nowhere, but fine, stupid Dark Place,* Ash suddenly gave a sharp inhale and clutched his chest as a memory slapped his core with a great big black crack ripping the white landscape above –

Gary clutched Ash,*Ash!* –

*Ritchie! Pikachu! Sparky! They’re* –

*They’re OK!* came a familiar voice out of nowhere, Gary and Ash both gasped,

*A-Audi?!*

*Yes! Ash! Gary! You can hear me! FINALLY!!!*

*Yes!* said Gary, *We hear you! W-Where are you!*

*Trying you get you guys back into your bodies! But I need your help! The building, is going to collapse soon!*

*WHAT?!*

*Ash! The ice from the Link* isn’t receding fast enough! This is going to sound so bad, but Ash, to help, I need you to burn from a powerful emotion! Preferably a happy one but any powerful emotion will do!*\

A tremendous shudder broke through to the Dark (Light?) Place –

*HURRY ASH!* Audino yelled.

Blind-sided, but focused from Audino, Ash held his head in his hands and tried to concentrate,

*Happy, happy, happy, um Ritchie, Pikachu and Sparky, they’re really OK?*

*Yes! They’re fine! Moltres caught them!*
*And you’re safe Gary,* said Ash, *That makes me so happy! So really, really happy!*  

*It’s not enough! Get happier!* Audino practically screamed.

Ash made a face, *I don’t know how much happier I can feel, my boyfriend and best friends are safe, MY MOM! Is my mom* –

*Everyone is safe! Your mom, Misty, Brock, Tracey, everyone is OK!*  

Gary could see the despair mounting in Ash, distorting what he wanted to feel, what he knew that he should feel, and is feeling, but not enough of it? How terrible to make him feel worse for something he can’t control! Another shudder rocked the blank world –

*ASH! PLEASE HURRY!*  

*I’m trying!*  

It was then Gary knew the emotion that would turn Ash into a volcano on the spot and Audino must have read his mind,  

*Ash! It distresses me to tell you this, but, long story short, Lisa was brought back into existence by the Onelings!*  

Both Gary and Ash gasped – *Lisa?!*

*And, before your mom was evacuated, we had a run in with her! And you know what she did?! She called your mother a stupid cunt!*  

*SHE, WHAT?!!*

Instantly the white world all around broke into cracks like a mirror, shattering, breaking all around Ash and Gary, letting them fall among its remnants into a seemingly endless abyss – they reached for each other, grasped at each other –

*ASH!!!*–

*GARY!!!*

“HANG ONTO ME!!!”

They clasped hands, but it wasn’t enough, it was Ash that had the stronger grip, but it wasn’t enough, Gary’s hand was still getting pulled out of their grasp – Audino was screaming, but neither one of them heard it clearly, they were getting pulled away by forces they couldn’t comprehend – Ash barely held onto the tips of Gary’s fingers – they traded a glance of sheer terror –

*I’m sorry –*

As soon as Gary slipped out of Ash’s grasp, Ash’s eyes snapped open, he was back to reality, a cold breath heaving out of him, his breath a mist before him. He was on a hard surface, his body was laying on the hospital floor, every part of him in contact with the ground harbored a low droll of pain. The hospital lights were flickering, just enough to illuminate what needed to be seen. The walls looked to have suffered burns from a fire, but were somehow coated with a sheen of ice?
The air was very, very cold.

Ash pushed himself up quickly, breathing faster, creating almost a mist around his face, he spotted Audino off to the side, unconscious, hurt! “Audi?!” Then he heard a groan and saw Gary to his immediate side, shivering, seemingly unconscious as well, but grunting in trying to wake – Ash shook him, “Gary! Gary get up!” But Gary could not, he felt like ice, he felt like a literal block of ice – Ash checked what vitals he could with just his hands and his Ranger training – Gary was weak, but he’s alive, he’s alive, Ash scooped up Gary, rubbing his arms, holding him close, anything to get him warm – Ash looked to Audi still laying motionless –

“Impeccable timing, consider me shook,” cut a hollow voice from behind Ash making his blood run cold “…But don’t worry. Gary is just tired.”

Ash turned, and saw in the hallway the Froslass, Lisa.

“Woooooow, just wow, color me impressed,” said Lisa, “you both made it out alive, and, oh, ooooh~ With a new look to boot. I see we’ve got one more thing in common,” Lisa pointed to her right eye, “Take a look Romeo.” She raised her remaining arm, and the lights still working illuminated to their full potential; she then pointed to the reflective icy wall.

Ash gulped, holding the shivering Gary closer, and saw in his reflection that the iris of his right eye was clearly a lighter shade of color, in fact, it was downright blue.

“Don’t worry,” said Lisa, “It’s only a cosmetic change. Like a scar. I’m the one who got the short end of the stick here. Hm, as for that ice cube you’re holding” –

“I swear if you’ve touched him” – Ash growled viciously –

Lisa waved him off with her remaining arm, “I haven’t done a thing to him, but your ex did this to me,” Lisa pointed at the smashed part of her face under her eye, “Not to mention I also ran into an old colleague that is a HUGE FUCKFACE that tried to hurt me again, and then this bitch,” Lisa motioned to the knocked out Audino, “Decided to give a go at me too – I haven’t done anything, yet YOU on the other hand, that’s another story! I was trying to escape, like just fuck it all, but something just compelled me stay, and then I was like, oh yeah, I kinda have a bit of you in me after all those draining kisses – and there was the ice everywhere that was kinda a part of you, so then I was like, what the hell, lets just see what’s going on here! All I did was observe, and you two did not disappoint. Like I said, he’s just super tired, I mean it takes a lot out of them to deal with people like us; like its really, really tiring. He used every ounce of strength he had to bring you back from something that should have been impossible to come back from, so he really deserves a nap, in the meantime, we can chat.”

Ash could only blink in disbelief, “Chat?”

“Yeah. I moved through your ice and hid us within the hospital with the last bit of the power from it, it should be pretty hard for anyone else to get through, well, minus suicidal Pinkie-Pie right there,” Lisa pointed to Audino, then turned fully to Ash with a dark look, “And I need answers. I need answers right now” –

“To, what?”

Gary groaned, but he still couldn’t open his eyes.

“I need to know how you came back to life.”

“Came, back to life” –
“I need to know how you came back from all of that” –

“Came back” –

“If you keep repeating everything I say this conversation is going to go nowhere REAL FUCKING FAST,” Lisa screeched, “It shouldn’t have been possible, it should NOT have been possible for someone like you! I know you can feel it – that crater in your soul, that agony, that VOID – feel like there’s a wind blowing right through you? ‘Cause I have news for you, while Gary’s code is completely intact, there’s a great big gaping hole in your own” –

Ash remembered the gaping hole in him from the Dark Place and looked down, raising his shirt, but his chest looked normal with its scarring –

“You can’t see this hole you idiot,” Lisa hissed, “It’s not quite something physical per se, like your spanking new blue eye, but I don’t expect someone dumb like you to understand it either. Right now, with that great big hole, you are incredibly, incredibly vulnerable until it heals up. Gary will be just fine, but that hole in your code where the Link* and stone used to be, anything stuck in there, can influence you easily. Dare I even say, possess…..”

Ash gulped. There was clock ticking down Lisa’s rage with Gary square in the crosshairs, and Ash knew that time was quickly running out. His primary focus would be to make sure Gary and Audino would be protected until help arrives, somehow, somehow.

*This is just like how it was in the ice cave…only now Lisa has three lives at her mercy.*

As to how Ash was going to accomplish such a feat with no gear, no conscious pokemon for aide, and nothing to defend himself with but his words, he knew full well the only solution at hand. Ash swallowed, he pulled Gary up close and kissed him on his forehead –

“What are you doing,” Lisa groaned.

*Something you wouldn’t understand.*

Ash then set Gary down as gently as he possible could, and stood up, legs slightly wobbly, he stood up fully to Lisa in a protective measure against her.

He would have to talk to her. *He would have to reach her.*

“Thinking are you?” Lisa sneered, “I’m impressed, but don’t worry, I’ll give you time to form a thought, I’m sure it’s pretty difficult to do so – especially after having a Catalyst ripped out of you! Yeah, that stone they stuck in you? They stuck one in me too, they’re technically called Evolutionary Stones, or Evolutionary Catalysts, but oh, they can do a bit more than just evolve pokemon! I’m sure Gary might be able to tell you some wild stories!”

*ASH!* It was Gardevoir! And Ash hearing it scream in his head almost gave him a heart attack, *HANG ON! WE’RE ON OUR WAY!*

“Shocked?” said Lisa simply, reading him only by his facial expression, “Can your tiny brain even comprehend what kind of person Gary really is? Or the people you’re surrounded with?”

Ash quickly snapped back to the situation at hand, “Don’t talk about Gary like that” –

“I will say whatever I want! And I am going to say the truth! You’re an anomaly like me, you’ve got some weird parts in you that people don’t agree with, you’re something they need to fix, and with that gaping hole in you, they can put in whatever they want! It’s what they did to me – so how come
you were able to come back, but I wasn’t??”

“I, I don’t know” –

Lisa’s anger was rising, “You’re a damn fool, you’re an idiot – you’re just like me – those so called friends you have – I was too naive about it back then too, but here, right now, I’m telling you, these people that you think love and care about you, they’re only going to hurt you!”

“Says the person that tried to kill me, and my friends.”

“I will admit I’m no angel, so listen, I’m not here to fight, even though everyone is totally ready to lay hands on me, I just want to talk with you, and I know this all looks bad with this dummy all passed out – but they attacked me! What else is new? It’s easier to blame me now that I’ve actually done Bad Things.”

“You chose to do those things! You hurt my friends! You have hurt people, you have killed people!”

Lisa scoffed, “Yeah sure uh-huh. It’s all about everyone else, how everyone else feels, how you’re supposed to make sure everyone else feels good while they have to put up with you. Ash, you stupid twit, they’re the ones lying to you, like how they lied to me. I talked with them, I looked into their soul like how I did with you, and oh, MY, GOD, I hate to break it to you buddy, but they are no better than the people that betrayed me. I saw RIGHT through them. They’re keeping A LOT from you Ash because they don’t trust you, that’s where it all starts, and that’s where it all falls apart. We don’t get fair treatment Ash, that’s just how it is. You’re just as bad as I am. You’re a monster, just like me!”

“Being sick does not mean you’re a monster!!”

“Ash…is nothing like you,” came Gary’s voice, and Ash’s stomach dropped.

“Oh, oh, oh, do you want in on this conversation, popsicle?” Lisa sneered, peering over to see Gary’s still trembling form, his eyes barely open, but Ash stepped immediately into her line of sight –

“This is between you and me Lisa” –

Lisa tapped the side of her face inquisitively, “…….You know, from the other’s that I’ve tasted, I’ve only really felt Gary through their opinion…..” A small smiled blossomed on Lisa, “Gary, do you know how much you’re actually hated?”

“That’s not true,” said Ash –

“Oh honey, you’re in the dark about soooooo much” – Lisa’s eyes suddenly went wide, and a shudder rocked the building around them –

Ash remembered what Audino warned about the building, “Lisa, this place is about to go” –

“Oh believe me, I’m well aware,” she said, gaining her annoyed composure back –

“Take us somewhere else, somewhere safer, then I’ll talk to you all you want” –

“Ash,” came Gary’s weakening voice.

Lisa rolled her eyes, “I’m not going to let you guys just die like that, especially after coming back from that – and I still need answers! Besides, I’m a ghost pokemon, we’ll survive the collapse, as for everyone else trying to find us, weeeelllll, I’m not so sure about that.”
The building gave another terrible shudder.

Lisa scratched her face nonchalant like, “In fact, lets just wait it out, until” –

A sharp metallic moan cut through the air, the walls, the ceiling, the floor, everything shook, the tremors growing exponentially – Ash wasted no time to grab Audino and go for Gary – as fast Lisa was moving, she very well may have been standing still compared to Ash’s swiftness –

“ASH YOU STUPID DORK!”

Ash suddenly felt two arms wrap around him, Gary, and Audino – he looked over his shoulder and saw Gardevoir, feeling the tinges of a Teleportation* in progress, but at the same time, he felt Lisa’s icy grip grab him by his hair and pull much more strongly. He felt his body phase through Gardevoir’s grasp, phase through Gary and Audino – Gary’s attempt to grab Ash’s hand in vain as Ash’s hand passed right through his own – Ash ultimately was shadow shifted one way, and Gary, Audino, and Gardevoir (to its utter horror) were Teleported* in another as the hospital structure came tumbling, tumbling, crumbling down as story after story after story toppled like dominos; concrete, metal, dust, all rubble, all coming to an indefinite rest in heaps of jumbled, mangled twisted wreckage making the ground shake a mile out.

Gardevoir Teleported* out right to the group of Ritchie, Misty, Tracey (still unconscious), Brock, Mrs. Ketchum, Pikachu, Sparky, Bibi, and Moltres watching the building collapse – “Oh thank HEAVEN!” Mrs. Ketchum blurted, stumbling out of her wheelchair to Gardevoir, but Gardevoir slammed the ground with its fist and the group quickly noticed it was one precious passenger short – “No, no, NO, NO” –

“PIPIPIKA????”

“WHERE’S ASH?!”

“She, Lisa pulled him right out of my grasp” –

The group felt a rushing gust of wind as Ritchie and Sparky hopped onto Moltres back with Misty and took flight, the legend dashing over to the wreckage, Mrs. Ketchum got newfound strength in her legs and got up and ran over as fast as her aged steps could take her with Pikachu hot on her heels – Moltres doubled back for a second, and scooped them up in its claws, carrying them the rest of the way with the rest of the group racing behind, minus Gary virtually beside himself in Gardevoir’s arms, holding himself and screaming out his boyfriend’s name.

Ash had shielded himself from the falling rubble, but it all phased through him, that is until he got slammed into a piece of concrete and fell back, just barely missing jagged edges of glass and metal. Ash and Lisa coughed up a storm as the dust settled, Lisa using Icy Wind* to clear the air, and turn it just as cold again.

Ash took stock around him as his lungs coughed and gasped for air, they were within the wreckage of the hospital, in a cross hall section that miraculously was spared the worst of it. It was illuminated enough from the light outside through the pieces of rubble, although Ash could smell the burning, twitching electrical and gas workings of the destroyed hospital threatening another fire.

Lisa settled and looked straight at Ash with wide eyes, “…..I’m so glad that worked.”
Ash settled, and snarled, “Are you happy?”

“Ecstatic,” said Lisa dully, her eyes then burned blue and her aura filled the cross hall with a stronger icy, icy chill, Lisa attempted to compose herself, but it was poorly done, “Crap, m-my powers are starting to leak out of me, I think it’s my Froslass side, I’m injured, and thus all these natural defenses I have at my disposal are being triggered because of course they are when I’m actually trying NOT to hurt anyone that isn’t a Oneling – oh, and you’re welcome by the way – I killed almost ALL the Onelings that were going to invade this place, you all are SOOOOO WELCOME FOR THAT!”

Ash core shook, “Why should I thank you for killing?!”

Lisa facepalmed herself, her aura coming off in sparks, “You are hopeless – Espeon stabbed you in the HEART and you, you still feel bad? Oh don’t give me that look, they all deserved to die for what they do, I’m HAPPY they’re dead!”

“You’ve come so far,” Ash spat. Lisa narrowed her eyes at him, “Okay, fine, here you have me, here you have me all to yourself – if you want to talk, then I’ve got questions too! Why did you try to turn me into what you became? Why did you lodge that Link* into me?!”

Lisa shrugged scratching her nose with her remaining hand, “I dunno” –

“Ew no, hmmm…. .” Lisa tapped the side of her face with her remaining hand, “I guess it was, I finally could do ‘stuff’ to someone, stuff that was done to me. When I gained control over you, I, well, I wanted to feel that power, I wanted to know what it was like to, have that control. I wanted to feel what it was like to be in the driver’s seat of someone else’s life, and I went nuts with it! B-But the Link* has been removed, something that should have totally been impossible when the Onelings took a swipe at you, and wow, props to you because, well…in the end, plain and simple, I manipulated you.”

Ash shook, “I know” –

“No, I don’t think you realize how much though, so, weeeeeeelle, with me being an ice type I helped the Disappearing Mountains grow, which you guys did guesstimate at, just confirming, and so that in turn helped me trap a lot of pokemon, along with you, so it was pretty easy to guilt you into thinking everything was your fault, wah wah I should have left my scout on time, wah wah, I was the one that Disabled* your Charizard, so yeah I totally trapped you on purpose and essentially just let you gaslight yourself into a slow burn of self depreciation because I could sense your emotions, so I totally preyed on that” –

“You” –

“- it’s what so many people did to me before, just set me ablaze and let me burn, because I was the easiest to trap and manipulate at the time, so in turn, it really didn’t take much to push your guilt over the edge with how you were feeling, yeah, sooooooo, as I gained more of my humanity back, I realized what I was doing was what the leader of the Onelings did to me, programmed into me from my own torment, so I justified using you for my own means instead of theirs, which makes sense to me, but I can see by that ever growing horrified look on your face you don’t understand” –

“This…”

“- Sooooon, I guess that’s the main reason with a dash of ‘I stuck that Link* in you because blah blah blah I wanted to be human again so bad, and wanted to hurt you for no reason, literally no
reason except maybe some weird form of jealousy’ – like, if they took you back before I said it was okay to, I’d fully activate the Link*, which I did via Destiny Bond* which should have turned you into an ice zombie, forever, and maybe, I dunno, nommed on Gary or some other stupid friend. But…you’re still alive by some miracle, and the Link* has been totally removed with the Catalyst stone, aaaaaaaand,” Lisa squinted at Ash, “Oh, your biocode actually does have SOME improvements done to it via Gary, bravo, despite the hole, but, ‘tis a shame, it’ll be all for naught in the end, you’ll just revert back to default sad ol’ Ash.”

Ash was too blindsided by all of this information with a mixture of grief and rage battling for dominance in his chest and next movement to really say anything in the moment.

“So then my question still stands, how did the hell did you come back from that? How was all the damage I piled onto you, on TOP of your already worn heart, ON SUPER TOP of Espeon adding another Catalyst in you – how, HOW did you come back from that?”

The turbulence growing inside of Ash’s chest almost instantly dissolved away, and he answered, simply, as his chest was filled with the warmth of a stark loving reminder, “I think, part of the answer is, because, the change starts with me, and I chose to fight it.”

“But I chose to fight too, and I still ended up this way.”

“You’re telling half truths,” said Ash, “You wanted to fight it, sure, but you also wanted revenge, and those don’t mix too well together. You went to, essentially, what we’ve learned of now, some kind of cult” –


Any other person would have flinched and retreated, but Ash didn’t budge an inch from Lisa’s outburst.

“You don’t know what it was like!” Lisa snarled, “Once you’re deemed crazy, you think they listen to a word you say?!”

“I’m sorry they didn’t listen Lisa” –

“DON’T APOLOGIZE, IT’S TOO LATE FOR THAT!! I’M SICK OF PEOPLE PATTING THEMSELVES ON THE BACK FOR NOT DOING SHIT!!!”

"I'm trying Lisa" -

"TRY HARDER!!!"

“Listen Lisa, you're the one that made this harder on yourself – you tried to kill me and my friends! You’ve already killed a Sylveon! And by the looks of it now, many, many other poor pokemon!”

“POOR POKEMON??” Lisa screeched –

“A line has to be drawn somewhere, what you yourself are responsible for – what you can control – and you have told me – to my face – that you didn’t care what happened so long as you got what you wanted! What is anyone supposed to make of that?!?”

Lisa scoffed, “You think a normal happy person would ever commit such things?! Gee my life is so perfect, let me go blow away that kid over there” –
“You need to take some responsibility! We don’t choose to get sick but we can get through it” –

“YOU’RE NOT LISTENING!!!”

“I am! I am, right here, right now, what am I not understanding?!!”

“EVERYTHING! YOU STUPID IGNORANT BOY!”

“You don’t get it either! Can’t you understand, the lives you took advantage of, the pain you caused, those you were hell bent on hurting – and that poor Sylveon you killed, how is any of that remotely justifiable? And you know Lisa, all these people that hurt you, they won, they won because you turned into a terrible person just like them. You’re no different and you are certainly no better than they are.”

“You’re just like everyone else, you’ll never understand” –

“And I hope to god I never will.”

“Maybe you just need a little help in doing so,” Lisa sneered – but then her eyes grew wide and she retreated slightly –

Ash felt and saw ghostly tendrils wrap around his shoulders from behind, Mismagius had arrived to his aid!

“How did you get here?!” Lisa yelled.

“Hmmmm~ I’m a ghost pokemon too you know,” Mismagius leaned onto Ash, hugging him from behind, “Ash, I’m so sorry I’m late,” Mismagius nuzzled Ash (Ash happily nuzzled back), then looked right to Lisa, “I’m not going to let you take advantage of this sweet young man ever again.”

*ASH!* It was Gardevoir again voicing inside Ash’s head, making him (and his heart rate) jump again, *ASH! WHERE ARE YOU?!*

Ash tried replying in his head, *I’m in the wreckage with Mismagius and Lisa! I’m OK!*

Mismagius quickly tossed up a Lucky Chant*, “If you really want to talk like equals, it is only fair to put down your weapons.”

“Well, as you can see I’m a BIT unarmed,” Lisa spat.

Ash was wondering why Mismagius wasn’t phasing his ass outta there, he grimaced, it probably had something to do with Lisa’s chilly aura in the air? Her eyes were still burning blue, and then Ash noticed, the ice. There was a sheen layer of ice completely engulfing the cross hall, Mismagius must have made it in before it was sealed off, and this ice, was not of Ash, but of Lisa.

Lisa’s look was dark, and knowing, and distant, “History suuuuuure likes to repeat itself doesn’t it? We’re back in that cavern Ash, just you, me, and an intruder that thinks it can just stroll right in here and make a difference,” Lisa made a deep inhale and exhale, “Puh-lease.”

“Oh its about to get a lot more crowded in a minuet,” said Mismagius with a smile, “You might have physical forms trapped in here, but one of us has a very, very special connection that cannot be stopped by any barrier.”

Ash felt his heart pang, and wasn’t sure why.

Lisa glared, “Do enlighten me.”
“It may even have something to do with how Ash was able to, as you call it, ‘come back.’”

“…..You have my attention.”

Mismagius turned its glance back to Ash and gave him a wink, then looked to Lisa, “To put it simply, it’s love.”

“Oh don’t give me that CRAP” –

“No really, have you heard of the red string of fate?” –

“UUUUUUUUUGH” –

As Mismagius talked on with an increasingly frustrated Lisa, playing a delicate string-along game, Ash felt a crease in his mind open up, and open up right into the hole in his being – he felt them, he felt Gary, Ritchie, Pikachu, Misty, Brock – !

Gary: ASH! ASH! SWEETHEART CAN YOU HEAR ME?!

Ritchie: ASH!!!

Misty: ASH SAY SOMETHING PLEASE!

Brock: WE’RE HERE!

Pikachu: PIPIPIPI! Kidding I can talk too like this, BUT OH MY GOODNESS ASH! MY ASH! 8D!!!!

Ash hands touched his chest, he couldn’t help the overwhelming surge of emotion that crested and crashed down in his heart, tears squeezed out, *I’m here! I’m here I’m here! Gary, Ritchie! Misty, Brock, Pikachu! Y-You’re all okay!* 

Gary: ASH!!! My sweetie, baby –

Ritchie: ASH!!! 8D!!!

Misty: STAY STRONG!!!

And then came Gardevoir’s voice – *Quickly! Quickly now, focus like how I told you, and all of you get in Ash’s hole!*

Gary:………..

Ritchie:………..

Misty:………..

Brock:………..

Pikachu:………..But we’re in his head?

Gary: LORD –

Gardevoir: DE – DAH!! THE HOLE IN HIS BIO-CODE!!!

Brock: Ooooooh.
Ritchie: So what, do we just inch in slowly –

Misty: RITCHIE –

Ritchie: I’m just trying to figure this out like the rest of you –

Brock: It’s never a good idea to go in dry –

Misty: OH MY GOOOOOOOD – I’m SO glad Mrs. Ketchum can’t hear any of this –

Mrs. Ketchum: I’m feeling better now and can hear you all in fact, now do as Gardevoir says and get in my son’s hole!

Ritchie: I want to die 8’D

Misty: Ritchiestopit! –

Ash: Mom! Are you OK?!

Mrs. Ketchum: I’m fine sweetie :) I’m just glad you're okay! ;o;

Gardevoir: EVERYONE!! WE NEED TO PROTECT ASH WHILE MISMAGIUS HAS LISA DISTRACTED!!! >;O

Gary: Just ease yourself in –

Ritchie: Well of course you’d know how –

Gardevoir: I’M OPENING UP MORE! >;(?

Brock: Wait, so who else is here then?

Max: Yo~

Ritchie: OH HELL NO –

Gary: OH HELL NO –

Mary: How does this even work, hello? Hello?

Ash: Hi Mary! :D

Pikachu: Well I’m just going to send hugs here, sending all the hugs Ash! :D

Ash: I’m sending hugs too! To everyone!

Until Lisa’s booming voice broke through the inner conversation – “ENOUGH!!! YOU THINK YOU CAN JUST PLAY ME DOWN?! MY FEELINGS ARE NOT A FUCKING JOKE!!! IS THIS IS THE ONLY WAY I CAN MAKE ANYONE LISTEN TO A FUCKING WORD I SAY?! I SEE WHAT YOU’RE DOING NOW!!!”

Ash looked up and saw that Lisa’s eyes were now red – Mismagius attempt to use Protect* for Ash didn’t work, and he felt the Mental Link* from his friends and family get cut as if a knife had just sliced through a portion of his heart –

“YOU DON’T NEED THEM! YOU DON’T NEED THAT TO TIE YOU DOWN!!! They’re just going to hurt you in the end, once, once they see you for who you really are! They’ll use that and
Lisa’s rage bubbled down to searing simmer, “You just have it all don’t you? Amazing, they must really have an important stake in you huh? People have to protect their interests you know, I mean, you think legendary pokemon show themselves to just anyone? That’s says something. People expect things of you, huh? They expect a lot. The pressure can be unimaginable.”

Ash fumbled in his mind for a bit where the conversation with Mismagius took such a terrible turn, then again he really wasn’t surprised in the end, he just wished he could have spoken to his friends and family a little bit longer….

“Well I’m DONE with being ganged up on – don’t forget, I can take you all on with ONE ARM” – “That’s all you have left,” said Mismagius – “SHUT UP!” and Lisa blasted an Icy Wind* that Mismagius was successful in blocking with Protect* for Ash. Lisa’s eyes were still burning red, she paused for a moment, then spoke with a bitterness that oozed out of her voice, “A stupid string is it….I’ll admit I was blindsided by your ‘love’ too, and it looks like you still are, you still believe in that, lie.”

Ash swallowed, pulling himself mentally upright, “It’s not a lie. It’s real. It’s one of the most real things I have ever felt in my life.”

“Your relationship is fucking JOKE” – Ash’s hands clenched, “You don’t have any right to comment on it. Gary and I both have issues to overcome, but we’re going to overcome them – and I can see how you just let yourself be consumed, like how I almost let myself” – Lisa scoffed, “You and everyone else just don’t understand the hell I’ve been through” – “That’s not an excuse to hurt people!”

“But you understand where I’m coming from at least. Hmp. I was taken advantage of, all the time, so like you Ash, I’m done too. I’m a monster now, and a monster I’ll stay.”

“That’s up to you Lisa” – “No, its how people always viewed me.”

“NO, you’ve buried yourself down deeper, now it’ll be even more of a challenge to come back.”

“You make it sound like I actually have a chance and/ or want to come back.”

“Stop hiding behind your illness and face the consequences of your actions!”

“I could say the same to you Ash,” Lisa spat, “I have been HANGED for far, far less,” she snarled, “You think I’m afraid of what they’re going to do to me?! I have literally FElt IT ALL! You’ve felt my pain, and I’ve felt your’s! We’re the same, and I’m telling you, all of them are going to tear you apart because you’ll never EVER BE WHAT THEY WANT YOU TO BE! NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO! This fix you and Gary have is only temporary! Give it, oh, maybe a month, and you’ll be back at square one! Who would want someone so broken and stupid?!”

“UUUGH! You lash out when you’re confronted with the truth! You’re so destructive Lisa, getting
sick only made it worse, and it snowballed from there. You want people to pity and feel sorry for you because bad things have happened to you, but instead of trying to make yourself better, you only helped yourself to other people’s feelings! You’ve created this illusion for yourself that there’s no other place than the one you’re in right now."

“So what? I’m not even allowed to help myself?! Yeah, true on that because in the end I couldn’t help myself on my own, so I had no choice but to take! And everyone around me who said they could help me, couldn’t help me at all! They just made me worse!”

“And that made it okay to deliberately hurt me and everyone around me? For what?!”

“No one cared about me, so why should I care about anyone else?!”

“People did care about you Lisa! You burned Mary out like how I burned Misty out, but unlike you, I’m finally going to own up to it!”

“Pbbth, that red-headed cunt wasn’t worth your time” –

“DON’T YOU CALL HER THAT!”

“Still have an itch in your crotch for her? Pathetic” –

Ash’s hands were balled into even tighter fists, “This is your problem – you’re too bent on hurting people – even when you say you’re just trying to talk to someone, you can’t help but injure them!”

“BECAUSE YOU’RE STILL NOT LISTENING YOU STUPID JACKASS, AND FOR THE RECORD MY SISTER WAS A BITCH” –

“I AM LISTENING!! I’M JUST NOT TELLING YOU WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR! I WILL NEVER VALIDATE THESE HORRIBLE ACTIONS THAT YOU’VE DONE!! You hurt everyone around you” –

Lisa got right up in Ash’s face, “NO!! THEY ALL LIED TO ME SO I FINALLY FOUGHT BACK AND YOU’RE NO DIFFERENT!!!!” –

Mismagius tried to pull Ash back a bit from Lisa, but he was adamant on where he stood – “Lisa when I forgave you, I meant it!”

“And can you forgive me now?! Can you say without any conviction that you’d truly forgive me now?!”

“Listen to yourself! You’re actually turning this around on me?!”

“Yes! Because you’re a liar AND an idiot, just like the people around you! You think you can trust them any better?! They’ll screw up your soul so bad in filling it with what THEY WANT that the first thing you’ll do is jump off the roof of this building! Or maybe they’ll rip out your heart?! Then maybe you’ll truly know how I feel! Oh no wait, Gary already did that!”

“Will you listen to yourself?! You’re manipulative! You really are no better than the people that hurt you!”

“And I DOOOOOON’T CAAAAAAAARE ANYMORE! Yes I know, I am ‘the worst’ I tried to hurt you, well kill you for no other justification be some warped appeal that I could have such power over someone else. I wanted revenge for what was done to me, no matter the recipient. Scary huh?”
“Terrifying.”

Mismagius nodded with Ash.

“I know I’m going to be punished and harshly at that, but it’ll be out of revenge too won’t it? Or will you call it justice? Oh I wonder what, what, what, what will be their reasoning~ But I will say this, no matter what they will ultimately do to me, I won’t feel a thing, even if they want to burn me alive. I have too much of my humanity back……And then, the Leader will find a new toy…..Or….maybe he’s already got his sights set on something, or someone else.” Lisa looked directly into Ash’s eyes, “Wow, I don’t envy your position AT ALL!”

“Lisa will you just listen to what you’re saying?!” Ash’s hand touched his chest, “You want to talk to me, but you’re hurting me!”

“Oh am I really hurting your fee-fees~? BOO-FUCKING-HOO!!! Your pain is NOTHING compared to mine! Besides, aren’t you supposed to be some awesome Ranger? Trainer? Saved a whole lot of pokémon, met a bunch of legendaries, stopped loads of evil plots? And yet you’ve been brought to your knees by me! You’re weak! You’re really weak like I am! You’re no different, you’re no better!”

“So what if I’ve taken hits, I’m going to keep going! I won’t let the pain define me anymore because I’m not alone in facing it!!!”

“Oh and are your so called ‘friends’ and ‘family’ the ones who are going to shoulder that burden with you?!” Lisa hissed, “GET IT THROUGH YOU HEAD ASH!!! You’re sick like me, and when they FINALLY stab you in the back it’s going to be the worst day of your life! Gary will just fill your head with more lies! Tell you he loves you when behind your back he thinks you’re fucked up like everything else!”

“Gary would never do that, and you have no right to speak about someone you know nothing about!”

“I know plenty! More than you ever will in fact! This isn’t rocket science! Lonely twink can’t deal with his decisions or identity so he has to fuck someone better than him, only oops, guess he’s screwed up too! Probably even more so! I can virtually promise you he’ll ditch you and/ or cheat on you OOOORRRRR, you’ll cheat on HIM with that faggot Ritchie” –

SLAP -

Mismagius’ mouth dropped.

Lisa’s head was snapped to the side from the force of the strike, the red disappearing from her eyes, “AH” – her lone, shaking hand went up to touch the side of her crushed face that was hit, “GOD – YOU HIT ME IN THE SAME SPOT” – then her expression went to a wide-eyed picture-less shock. Ash was breathing through his teeth in a snarl, his own hand wavering in place as if he could strike her again.

Mismagius blinked, *He, struck a ghost type?*

“You, listen to me you disrespectful parasite, if you think you can use your illness as a pass for your actions you are sorely – sorely mistaken. The fact,” Ash swallowed, “that you have to hurt and manipulate people to feel better about yourself is proof enough of your disgusting so called *justified views.* You’re only continuing on the cycle that bent you – you’re choices broke yourself into who you are now, and the fact that you lash out so violently at anyone who challenges your views tells
me you are NOT willing to change, you let this, hatred consume you because you wanted revenge at
everyone that hurt you, no matter the cost, and when you joined the Onelings, your anger and hatred
made you malleable enough that they convinced you to hurt yourself in the worst possible way…..”

“They…” Lisa was shaking with her shock turning into rage, “THEY MANIPULATED ME!!! MY
HEART WAS NOTHING – THEY MANIPULATED AND ABUSED ME!!!!”

Ash again, didn’t so much as flinch from Lisa’s sudden outburst.

“What they did to me….!” Lisa dropped down from hovering over Ash, “What they did to me…..”
And she crumpled right down to the floor.

Ash and Mismagius traded a glance. Ash took a deep cleansing, clearing breath, and got down on his
knees next to Lisa’s small body curled up in on itself, “Alright then Lisa…Tell me, what did they do
to you?”

“What does it matter now, you’re not going to believe me anyway…”

“Yes I will. Tell me something. Talk to me. I’m stupid remember? I’ll believe anything.”

“*Sniff*….how does it feel? Coming down to my level? Lashing out, having hurt people you cared
about?”

“Honestly, it was the worst feeling in the world. I….I even thought about disappearing.”

Ash heard a small hiccup from Mismagius, but he didn’t dare turn to it, lest he find another pair of
hurt eyes because of him.

“I thought it would be so simple myself…” said Lisa, “…I thought, and I thought wrong….It
happened, and I, changed….I don’t even know how to describe it, but I knew I was wishing,
praying with everything I had that I could stop it, stop what I had started, what I did to myself, but, it
was done….It was done….Afterwards…..afterwards……*sniff*…….*sniff*…… They said time
could heal, that phrase is a dime a dozen, but time can’t happen fast enough because it hurts now,
and it always hurts now….Words started to feel like blunt force trauma, those were easy to shake off,
anyone can take a hit with their defenses up, its the ones that know how to hurt you that are the
worst.” Lisa thought of Espeon. “The ones that know how to strike clean through your defenses and
hit you in a place you never thought they could reach. You die, slowly, bleeding out from it. You
bleed out all the good things, then you bleed out your strength, then your will to live, and then you
die, a slow and painful death from the inside out.”

“Lisa…..”

“The Leader….wanted more control over me because of my powers as a Froslass…..said I was, so
special…..my potential to be, and – and, so, my humanity had to be compromised for the greater
good, but I saw though that by what everyone else had done to me, their compromises to me….yeah
right….You want to know why I’m so good at foiling psychic pokemon? The Leader of the
Onelings is a psychic type, and I wanted to get away from him. I learned what I had to. Wanted me
to be his, ‘thing’, saw my potential and abused it. So, with what sanity I had left, I jumped ship,
simple as that….What I’ve done is NOTHING compared to him, and yet….” Lisa looked to Ash
with hollow eyes, “You were so easy to read Ash….such an easy target, I couldn’t ignore Zoroark’s
plea, so I took you for myself…I thought all sorts of things as I held you captive…Things that are
ultimately impossible….or so I thought….I did horrible things….and yet…you’re still here…I….I
talked with your friends, tasted them….to see….and they were just like my family….That couldn’t
be right, that just couldn’t be right…..How come I was left to fall apart…..” Lisa suddenly lashed
herself up into Ash’s face, “HOW COME YOU PULLED THROUGH WHILE I WAS LEFT TO ROT?! I NEED TO KNOW WHY, WHY, WHY, WHY, WHYYYYY!!!”

Ash looked to the side in sadness, “I…didn’t really keep myself together…..”

“But you’re the one that pulled through, even with THEM,” Lisa hissed, “Just keep shoving it down my throat, I can’t wait to vomit everything back up all over you!” Lisa wiped her eyes, “Like I said, it’s easy to paint me in a bad light because I’ve done bad things, but the others….ooooooh….” the look on Lisa’s face sent a chill down Ash’s spine, “but the others won’t be so easy. Trust me, in the end, they just won’t want to deal with you anymore because you’re a burden” –

“Listen Lisa, even at my worst, I never wanted to hurt anybody. And yeah, I’ve made mistakes too, my actions, what I thought was doing was right, hurt who I loved regardless, so, I shut myself off to try and protect them and it, it backfired, horribly….but I never, deliberately meant to hurt anyone.”

“Oh fucking cry me a river, are we going to play which case is more holier than thou? Just because you ‘didn’t’ want to hurt anybody – you still did! And you’re always going to hurt people!”

“I’ll try to do my best not to, and if I do, I’ll own up to it.”

“Yeah, keep telling yourself that! Stupid martyr, gonna go down without a fight? Hmp. They have all the power. If you don’t fight back you’re a doormat, and if you do fight back, you’re a monster – there’s no beating or being better than them because they’re in power over you!”

“Then strip them of their power over you!”

“You can’t,” Lisa snarled, “Once you become their target they will bleed and gut you to paint their murals of ‘righteous arraignment’” –

Ash couldn’t help but wonder what on earth happened to Lisa in the course of her life –

“They’re going to crack you like an egg Ash, and twist and squeeze out everything you love about yourself. These people around you were just like mine, they’re all fake! Every last one of them! You have to justify your right to live to them! That’s why all this talk about valuing life? IT’S ALL BULLSHIT!!!” Lisa fully rose up again, “They make it their business! Whatever they think is wrong with you, they make it their business to correct you, until you’re broken, until you BREAK!” – the walls cracked with veins of more ice radiating out – “Then they take the pieces left of you, and put them back together they way THEY want! And you look at yourself in the mirror, *hic* and its like looking at a monster…..They look at you behind glass, they put you in a box to make themselves feel safe. They teach everyone you’re the danger, and it’s a million to one – and I’m the dangerous one? When they taught everyone else that I was the monster it became perfectly fine for them to hit and spit and laugh at me – AND ALL THE WHILE I COULDN’T LIFT A FUCKING FINGER TO DEFEND MYSELF – LEST I SHOW MY TRUE COLORS! THE ONE WHO WAS THE REAL MONSTER HERE!!!” Lisa made a horribly anguished sound, her one remaining arm grasping at the ghostly flesh of her chest, “They take you, break you, and turn you into the very thing you were trying to escape! Just, just to further along their ignorance – because of heaven forbid they were wrong!” She began to rip part of her own flesh off –

“LISA STOP!”

“….And….they were right….Look at me…..Look at me…..” Still holding a piece of her own tattered body, Lisa looked to Ash as the black tears flowed freely down her face, her voice low, and unwavering, “……They’re going to come for you Ash…and when they finally break you….you’ll turn into something horrible, perhaps even worse than I am. They’ll strike at what you hold so dear,
at what you love the most, and they’ll destroy it without so much as batting an eye, no, they’ll do so with a *smile*….*It is intoxicating to control people*… AND IM DONE BEING TOLD WHO I AM AND WHAT TO DO! I - ” Lisa’s aura suddenly flared up like a wild bonfire – Mismagius yanked Ash back out of range – Lisa screamed as her body overflowed with pain, anguish, despair –

“Lisa!” –

“IT BURNS, IT BURNS, IT BURNS SO MUCH!!!!”

“Mismagius?!”

“There’s, there’s nothing we can do,” it said, its voice wavering, “It’s her code, the strain, her powers, it’s getting to be too much for her!”

Lisa’s scream reached a deafening pitch – before the fire of her soul snuffed out almost instantly, her body still floating in mid-air, smoldering, Lisa looking like a rag doll held up by an invisible hand. Her aura popped and fizzled like electrical sparks around her, Ash took a step forward –

“Ash what are you doing?!”

Ash merely looked back to Mismagius with a glare that read loud and clear, ‘*Don’t interfere.*’

Lisa grunted and managed to pull herself up a bit, and saw Ash coming to her – she retreated – “Don’t come near me!”

But still Ash walked.

“What are you doing?! Stop, stay back!”

But Ash kept going.

“I SAID STAY BACK!” Lisa threatened an attack, but still Ash walked.

“Stop, STOP, Ash, I have the Cursed Body* ability! You can’t have forgotten that! STOP!...STOP RIGHT NOW – STOP!”

Ash stood a little over a foot away from Lisa and looked her dead in the eye, “There is still something in you that cares Lisa…..even after all of this……the things that happened to you, the things that you have done…..There is still something in you that cares.”

*I think that’s you….!* Lisa thought, her eyes were sullen, “*Is that so? And you? Why do you care? Why do you care so much? Why don’t you let your heart grow cold and dark? You’ve suffered! You’ve suffered a lot! And you’re just going to suffer more!*”

“You’re right, but, I won’t be alone, and, I think that’s the other part of the answer to your question Lisa. I came back, because I wasn’t alone, but you…?”

Lisa blinked, two tears dripped off her face, followed by a hollow shuddering breath, “*I was alone… Even when surrounded by people…I was alone…..*”

Lisa looked over to her reflection in the ice, a Froslass. She exhaled, changing into her human form, illusion, one last time. She flinched slightly, upon feeling Ash take her remaining hand in his,

“Ash……You…….”

“Let it go Lisa. You have to let those terrible, terrible thoughts go, or you won’t get any closure.”
Lisa gave Ash a small sullen smile, “It’s sad….you…..truly are a good person….Ash….don’t….don’t let them kill you from the inside out….Don’t let them smother that fire…..And if, someone should turn on you…..understand why…….” Lisa let her head drop down, “How, how come no one ever loved me, the way they loved you?….I might still have been human……..Ha……I’m looking for excuses, again….I, always looked for excuses….didn’t I, Mary? I ended up poisoning myself, in more ways than one. I wanted revenge, not justice, no matter what, and no matter who it was……..Ash, do you still feel sorry for me?”

“Yeah, I do.”

“….I wanted to change……in some way, I did succeed……” Lisa looked around her, at the ice, she could feel presences getting closer to where they were, she could feel the angry, angry legends on the outside, the search lights searching through rubble, people, pokemon, machines, there was no where to run or hide save for the ice cavern she had made, and will rapidly melt once she…. She looked to Ash with Mismagius beside him…. “Ash, when you meet the leader of the Onelings, and you will meet him…..Talking will do nothing. You will have to kill him.”

Ash swallowed.

“Promise me, you will stop the Oneling leader.”

To stop him at least, Ash responded with conviction, “I promise Lisa.”

Lisa let out a sigh that was seemingly held all her life, “Thank you….Ash….can I ask, another favor of you?”

“Sure.”

“I know, everyone is going to remember me as a monster, but, could you, remember me as a person first? A person….who changed into a monster.”

Ash made a deeply pained face, followed by one, two tears down his cheek.

“Oh I’m not worth that,” said Lisa, “Don’t you do that for me, I’m not worth mourning over.” She let go of Ash’s hand, and her form as a human melted away, leaving the lasting presence of Froslass. Lisa sighed at her ghost pokemon form, “…..I don’t think I can cross over, and even if somehow I was able to, I don’t think I’d be happy there either. When they burn me, I’d rather just, disappear.”

Ash then suddenly leaped forward and grabbed the Froslass into a hug.

Lisa’s eyes went wide as dinner plates, then filled with tears as she closed them, “Ash…silly boy……what you feel for me isn’t real….I tried to manipulate you, remember? Through your guilt, you think you care about me, but you don’t, it’s a trick. It’s just another trick. I tricked you again. Just let go, let go of me….Ash, let go….Ash, I’m dangerous, please….please……Please…..Why…….Why do you care so much about someone like me? I’m a manipulator. I’m a murderer…….*sniff* You’re funny Ash, you’d hug a flame, just so there wouldn’t be a chance of it getting cold…..you’ll get burned….you stupid boy……”

Voices could be heard now, they were getting closer. Lisa pulled away from Ash, and Ash let go, tears still streaming down his face. Lisa held out her remaining hand, “Give me your hand Ash, one more time, I have something to give you.”

Ash held out his hand, Lisa placed her’s directly over, “If there was one advantage to being a ghost pokemon, it’s the shenanigans we can do,” and Ash felt something small and round plop onto it. Lisa let her hand drop to the side, and Ash saw a lone pokeball in his palm. “I know,” said Lisa, “they’re
going to destroy me regardless, when I answer to what I’ve done, but I think, you deserve the honor
at least, to put me in my place.”

Ash wiped his eyes, sniffling, “Okay…”

Lisa eyed the pokeball in Ash’s hand, he tapped it with his thumb, and it grew in size, ready for
capture. Lisa gave a deep inhale, and exhale, “……Goodbye Ash, I hope you can get the help you
need.”

Ash nodded, a couple more tears dropping off, “Goodbye Lisa, I hope you get your help too.”

To this, Lisa gave Ash her last genuine smile, “Hm.” With eyes closed, and shoulders slumped, Lisa
tapped her head against the pokeball, and let the device take her being within, Ash immediately
hearing the click that signified a capture. He held the pokeball close to his heart, and Mismagius
wrapped him in a nuzzling hug from behind.

The ice all around them fluttered up and away in sparking flurries, dissolving into nothingness. Ash
suddenly felt his body completely ready to give out, Mismagius had him, yet still he fell back nearly
as dead weight. Exhaustion came over him from stress he didn’t realize he had been fighting, much
less carrying.

“I’ve got you, I’ve got you Ash,” said Mismagius –

Gardevoir Teleported* into the space, years of relief showing on its face as it spotted Ash and
Mismagius. Ash fought to stay conscious, and managed to say, “Gardevoir, you waited….”

Gardevoir nodded, “I did.”

“….Thank-you. I had to…try…. Ash passed out, and out from his hands dropped Lisa’s pokeball,
but Mismagius swiftly caught it with its powers.

Gardevoir sighed, “You really are something special Ash…”

The ghost type looked to Gardevoir, “Who do we give her to? The authorities? The legends? Her
sister?”

“I’m not sure how the rules will play out in this, technically Ash caught her,” said Gardevoir, “But
we’ll discuss that later, right now, let’s just get him back to his friends and family.”

“Right.”

Gardevoir gently took Ash from Mismagius, and together, Teleported* and shadow shifted out of the
rubble, Mismagius holding tight the pokeball, and Gardevoir holding Ash close.

**Surely, even then in that moment, I meant something to you, right?**

Chapter End Notes

This portion of what was then ONLY chapter 10 was written as far back as June
2016….yeah….y e a h . . . . . . It almost feels unreal as to have it like actually posted
now....Sooooo many changes and additions and....yeah.

Anywho, its time to wrap up this story, can't wait to bring it to you guys, and once again, thanks for following this tale. It's pretty personal to me, hits rather close to home. And although I like my stories to entertain, if they actually 'help' anybody, well, I'm glad I could, in some small way by words on a computer screen <3
Chapter Notes

Boy howdy has it been a while. I don't want to say too much other than life is sucking, very, very, VERY much right now, and so I've decided to go ahead and post what finished part of the ending I got. The ending extended itself 'quite a bit' and I've been dodgy to labeling this a '?' kind of story because I myself like to see how much farther I have to go, and, well the honest thing to do is to switch the story over to '?' because, I don't know what the future holds.

The remaining chapter titles and their summary are as follows:
Iceberg- you only see 10% of your problems which is A Problem
Meltdown- (most likely in two parts) ANGST ANGST ANGST ANGST ANGST ANGST ANGST
One More Light- Recovery, realizing your place in a very big and scary world and adapting
Snow Angels- Happy Ending <3 things come full circle, our boys are good

With THAT said, I do have every intention of finishing this story. Whether circumstance beyond my control allow me to post it, is another thing entirely. Kind of like the summary of the story, which in a funny way, haunts me.

So here I present what I do have currently done, I've been sitting on this for a while and with things just getting progressively worse and worse and worse each day, I may as well post it now - I was going to post all the remaining chapters at once because I'm tired of this story making a liar out of me with how long it is/ how many chapters there are remaining, but, I realize now, perhaps too late, how moot such a notion was.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You’ve got him?”
“I got him, don’t worry, go on ahead if you need to.”

Ash remembered what came next in patches as he went in and out of consciousness. His first recollection was with his eyelids too heavy to be opened: he was being carried in strong, thin arms over what had to be uneven ground with the way they struggled to keep their footing, yet they walked fast and with purpose. He could hear their feet shifting on, rubble? Tinks and crumblings of concrete. Popping, sparks, sounds typically of a psychic pokemon ‘s aura having trouble manifesting as flow for their powers. Thoughts of Gary’s Alakazam drifted through Ash’s sub-consciousness. The air was cold and heavy, his breathing was somewhat difficult. Voices, soft at first, then someone turned the volume all the way up for yelling and hollering. Ash could clearly hear all the commotion, but he couldn’t understand a single word that was being said, and he was out again.

Next there were more loud sounds, lights, red and blue that he could make out behind his closed eyes, a whoop of a siren, pokemon chattering – big pokemon – someone coughing. He felt a shift in gravity on his body, he wasn’t being carried anymore, he was laying on something soft and flat and
getting wheeled about; there was something soft curled up by his neck. Ash managed to open his eyes but of course everything was blurry. He could see the sky, but couldn’t tell if it was day or night or even comprehend the passage of time, everything was happening by the moment, everything was being measured in the breaths he took with each breath saved by the oxygen mask over his nose and mouth.

Another blink, and the colors placed themselves more distinctly, there was definitely a yellow fluffy butt in his peripheral vision, and people on either side of him. Faces, blurry portraits he felt he knew, and one he had no clue of. The unknown person looked to be an older woman, but she stepped away, she looked to be injured, too much red was mixed in with her colors. Suddenly more voices, urgent, beckoning, too many, then, like a warm wave of relief, he heard Gary, *his Gary*, albeit a little too far away for his liking,

“Gardevoir said it was this one.”

*Gary, you’re okay right?*

“Alright, here we are.”

*Hey.*

“Okay, we’re going to lift him up now, Brock, you got it” –

*I know you.*

“I got it, on your mark” –

*I know you too.*

“Okay, okay – one, two, three” –

*That’s Max, Mary, and Brock –*

Up he went, Pikachu’s ears flicked up into view behind their body, Ash watched the sky getting pushed out for the interior of an ambulance as he was rolled in on the gurney. Someone dressed in white walked by from out the ambulance interior making Pikachu finally stand up on their hind legs. Ash could see the electric type had a bandage wrapped all around their middle, *Who hurt you* – and then Ash swiftly remembered his little buddy getting violently thrown out a window –

“Who’s going in with him?”

“We are.”

*Momma...Momma!*

Ash’s lips moved, but no sound came out and no one noticed his minuscule stirrings of life. He fought, *fought* to stay awake, he needed, *needed* to see all who was there with him, however his eyes utterly refused to listen, and began to close on what sliver of vision he had, the colors all blurring together once again.

Before his eyes fully closed, something pinkish jumped up on Ash’s gurney. Pikachu seemed not to notice, but Ash desperately focused his eyes to see if it was Audino, lovely little Audino, but the colors, swirling and moving, kept the unknown pokemon’s presence a mystery.

Till their pale blue eyes took form, along with their long ears and ribbon-like feelers.
Ash knew who he was looking at, his mind sputtering to understand. Pikachu did not seem to notice the Sylveon at all as they sat on the edge of the gurney – perhaps this was the hospital’s staff Sylveon? And Pikachu was just used to their presence? Or Ash’s mind, so utterly exhausted, was conjuring up remnants of his beaten and bruised heart?

Ash felt the gurney rock with the ambulance as people stepped up inside it, and the pink presence suddenly disappeared in a blink of colors –

“C’mon Gary, I’ve got you, oof, I’m gonna put you right next to him – ouf, hey, Ritchie, oh, where’d Gardevoir go” –

Wait – Ritchie…!

And that was enough, Ash was out yet again. The next time he woke, there was a much larger presence to his right than little Pikachu on his left, laying next to him about as close as they could get without being on top of one another. With the oxygen mask gone, and his chest feeling lighter in health, Ash took several deep breaths, immediately picking up Gary’s familiar scent, his body letting out a shuddering sigh of relief in return. Ash felt Gary’s arms and legs clutched around him in a protective embrace, completely enveloping him, and he let himself melt into every open crevice that was Gary. Gary still felt cold, but he was no where near the ice cube temperatures as before, much to Ash’s added easement. Another deep releasing sigh reached Gary’s neck with Ash feeling the corresponding shiver race down Gary’s body. He felt Gary’s hand stroke his hair – he’ll never get enough of that, Ash loved that, loved that, loved that, and mindlessly nuzzled into it, his core feeling so, so very warm.

“Is he waking up?”

I want to momma, I really want to, but I’m so tired.

“Let him rest, don’t worry.”

There’s Gardevoir.

Ash felt Gary give him the softest chaste kiss upon his cheek, sending an electric spark surging through him in what felt like an attempt to jump start his motor functions – because Arceus almighty did Ash want to touch back, and hug, and kiss, all the kisses, and nuzzle and just, be with Gary. He felt every movement, every tremor, every breath, every heartbeat from his lover from his legs to his chest followed by the incredibly rejuvenating waves of a Heal Pulse* enter his body, soothing every inch of him down to the very cells that made him; Ash feeling every tick and tock of being alive.

They were safe. He was safe. It was done.

He flexed his hands, they were empty.

She was gone.

*So, they took her already….*

Can you blame them?

*No….I can’t….but……I wonder if they, did they even….*
Not everyone is like you.

*Technically I caught her, they at least have to notify me of what they’re going to do with her.*

Don’t you ever get exhausted in caring for people?

“N-no.”

“Ash?”

When are you going to stop lying to yourself? Was this not enough? Was he still not enough?

What will it take for you to understand?

*If I stop caring, then what is there that’s left of me? I have to keep pushing forward. I have to fight for his sake, for their sake. I can do this, I can do this...!* 

Do you think your actions noble? Do you think yourself redeemed by always trying to be a ‘hero?’ Do you not know how much deeper you just dig yourself?

*I will make it right. I know what I’m fighting for. I’m not scared anymore.*

I wonder, what it will take for you to understand.

“I yunder, stand.”

“I think I heard him that time –”

“He’s moving!”

“Ashy? Sweetheart?”

You haven’t learned a thing. You haven’t changed at all. You give, and give, and give, and give, and give. Maybe when there’s nothing left, it’ll hit you.
*I’m loved, and I love them, I love him.*

“Ash, wake up, it’s okay, you’re safe now. We’re here sweetheart—”

Ash’s eyes opened again into a blur of colors, he reached out—

**It never fails. It’ll take away what matters most. It always does.**

The blurriness focused into his hand upon Gary’s cheek, Gary holding it in place, greeting Ash with the warmest of smiles, his eyes shining with a mixture of utmost happiness and relief.

Gary swallowed the knot in his throat, then croaked, “Hey Ashy.”

Under a tired, but oh so happy feeling, the corners of Ash’s lips turned up, “Gary…”

A wave of ease went around the ambulance; Ash feeling several soft paps on his back.

“Welcome back,” came Gardevoir’s voice, Ash turned (as much as his body would allow) and saw the psychic and fairy type looking a bit worse for wear.

*…..You’re wearing a neck brace?* Ash’s voice wasn’t fairing too much better, “Gary, Gud’evoir, wh-where’s, e’very” –

“Rest now, think later,” said Gardevoir, “No worries now, absolutely nooooo worries now, everyone is okay, iiiiiii~n some form,” their voice got lower, “or another.”

Pikachu nuzzled up on Ash’s chest, “Pikapi!”

“Oh,” Ash’s heart jumped a beat, his body fighting to sit up, “my little buddy” –

“Yeah, we’re all good here,” smiled Ritchie – and as soon as Ash honed in his voice, the mere sight of Ritchie (also not flying through a window) overrode everything else – Ash’s body hauled itself up (to the surprise of everyone), reaching out to him with arms wide –

“Ritchie!”

“Ash” –

Gardevoir used their powers to lift Ritchie and Sparky to get them on the gurney (as best they could given the space of the ambulance and said gurney), and the ambulance chose that exact moment to go over an uneven bit of highway, bouncing Gardevoir, and accidentally making them slam poor Ritchie and Sparky into the roof –

“OhygodRitchieSparkyI’msorry!!” –

“It’s fine, I’m fine, its all good,” said Ritchie rubbing his head (Sparky wearing a firm :< ), “I suffered defenestration and electrocution, a little street bump aiii~n’t nothin’.”

In a minor moment, Pikachu looked away in rubbing its head in shame, “Pika…”
“We Rangers are tough, right Ash – *dn’ake*” –

Ash snagged Ritchie and Sparky right into the clump that was him and Gary, “I w-want that awful image I have of you three going out the window out of my head, hugs now, hugs now” –

“I still need to breathe Ash I don’t want to add suffocation” –

"Pika piiiiiiiiii!

“Easy Ash,” said his mother gently, “Everyone is fine.”

Ash perked up again, “*Moommaaaa,*” he made little grabby hands at his mother from the pile of his boyfriend and best (human) friend (letting Ritchie catch a breath),

“I’m fine sweetheart,” she reached out taking his hands in her own to give them a good squeeze, “You all just cuddle up now.” Both were hesitant to let go, but did once the ambulance gave another kick from the shift of the highway.

“*Everyone* is okay?” Ash inquired further as Gary and Ritchie tried to get comfortable around him; Pikachu and Sparky took up their own cuddles at the edge of the gurney.

“Yes,” said Gardevoir, “Audino and all the other pokemon are being treated at the pokemon center in Viridian City, and then they’re going to be transferred to the pokemon center in Pewter City, where we are going, tomorrow; so they will join up with us then if they’re able. Misty and Brock are riding in the ambulance carrying Tracey, they are a couple cars behind us I think, I dunno, they may have passed us,” Gardevoir suddenly bent down to Ash and whispered, “Our EMT driver is supposedly a very cautious one, the other, not so much! *AHEM*!”

“Carrying Tracey?” Ash’s internal Friend-in-Dangerometer flashed, “Wait a minuet, what happened to him?”

“Espeon happened,” said Gary, “The one that attacked you got the jump on Brock and Tracey, and, it,” Gary suddenly faltered, “hurt him”, his voice failing him at the end sounding the alarm in Ash –

“But he’s going to be fine,” said Ms. Ketchum, trying to soothe Gary as much as her son, “Ritchie and I were there with Bibi when they were patching him up and they had him stable in no time.”

“Yeah,” said Ritchie, “You know how Bibi got all that excellent practice with just the two of us alone.” Sparky nodded in resignation, “Tracey will pull through, he’s soft, but no pushover!”

“T-True…” Ash looked to Gary as he wiped his eyes, “thank goodness he’ll be okay…”

All in all, you all look like you’ve been through hell itself, there’s not a single person or pokemon in this ambulance that doesn’t look like duck tape is holding together their state of consciousness. Can’t imagine it wouldn’t be too different for anyone else in this circle. Hi I’m Ash’s inner monologue, I haven’t had too much to say –

Ash clearly saw Gary fighting back a break down, and pressed, “Although, isn’t there anyway we can call them just to see how they’re doing?” he asked, “And Mary, Mary, Max, Rose, Thomas, the legends” – Gardevoir put their hand to Ash’s mouth, stopping him effectively.

“Like I said before, everyone is okay,” said Gardevoir, “and I like said before, just before, rest now, think later.” Gardevoir leaned back a bit against the siding, “Besides, we’ll be at the hospital soon enough, we can talk with them then, if they’re not passed out that is, I mean, we all took, *quite a bit of punishment,*” but Gardevoir caught Ash eyeing their com regardless on the shelving, “That needs
to be charged, and it’s a miracle it survived the ordeal.”

“My com is broken,” Ritchie sighed.

“Mine has been trying to come back to life,” said Gary, his voice broke through the thickness of his throat and a stuffy nose.

Mrs. Ketchum pulled her own out of her pocket making Ash light up, but her disapproving glare at her com dashed those hopes quickly, “Mine says,” Mrs. Ketchum squinted at her com heading, “‘Searching’, and its had that heading for the past hour, I’m sorry sweetie.”

*Think of this as the higher forces saying ‘NOT NOW’ about as loud and clear as they can. Aura incentives be damned.*

“No, no, it’s okay, we’ll, we’ll talk to them when we can at the hospital.”

Gardevoir tapped the side of their head setting off a small aura spark that popped loudly, making everyone jump, “Bleh, that’s still a thing, I would open a Mental Link*, buuuuut I’ve-eh, I was not immune to the Punishment Express, and I need to save what I’ve got to focus on you at the moment, my apologies.”

“You were dead – there’s no need to apologize,” said Gary, Ash gasped –

“Dead?!”

Gardevoir waved off the concern, “Don’t make it sound so dramatic, I mean sure, the Espeon broke my neck, but I was able to pull myself together with Mismagius’ help” –

“That is dramatic Gardevoir!” Ash sputtered, “You could have been dead for good!”

“My words exactly,” said Gary, “Mismagius really came through” –

“Yes, yes they did, but I can do Soul Transfer* remember?” said Gardevoir, “I was more mad at myself, but I am very grateful for all they did. Mismagius is in the ambulance with Tracey, so, no worries there.”

*That Espeon….*

Gary took a deep breath to gather himself further. Ash defaulted to nuzzling his boyfriend to comfort him and himself the same, Gary turning fully into Ash’s affection, relishing in the touches and caresses from each other.

*Oh, the heart thread, the heartstring….I feel…..*

Gary felt his hand get taken, he thought it was Ash, but a glance over revealed it was Ritchie who had taken Gary’s hand into his own – Gary’s throat instantly became twice as swollen with more tears swelling up into thick beads threatening to fall; his heart suddenly so full and overflowing. Gary seized the opportunity to squeeze Ritchie’s hand back, *hard*, he wiped the corner of his eyes.

Ash looked to Gardevoir, “Gardevoir, I just want to say I’m eternally thankful for all you have done. Thank-you, for, everything. Everything. It’s almost too much to think about, thank you –!”

“I must concur,” said Mrs. Ketchum, “From the bottom of my heart, thank you!”

“Yes, thank-you Gardevoir!” Ritchie piped, Pikachu and Sparky adding in with chirps.
“Thank-you, my friend,” said Gary, his throat clamping up again.

Gardevoir soaked it all in and smiled it all back, placing a hand on their chest, “You’re all so welcome, I’m very happy to help….” They blinked, suddenly looking far away, their hands settling on their lap “…I’ve always felt it deep inside, that, this is what I’m meant to do…..What made me even want to become a researcher in the first place, especially with tabs in the medical field. Our feelings, our hopes and dreams, there is a power there, something virtually palpable in its measure to shift and shape reality.”

You could just call it ‘determination’ ;)

“I wanted to discover all faucets of how our emotions impact the world around us. Psychic pokemon have the capabilities to be the most…emotionally in-tune to all living beings…Auras, Transfer Effects, Human Health Transfer, they have their basis in science, but their emotional resonance and legacy, have strong translations with a person’s state of mind to the point where their practice can be impeded or controlled just by how someone feels….Such efforts have lasting impacts on a healthy mentality.” Gardevoir’s face turned a shade cold, “So it fills me with such anger thinking about that Espeon….That Espeon….knew what it was doing, it knew, exactly what it was doing….”

:(

“….I don’t understand how a creature could be so cruel,” said Mrs. Ketchum, “I don’t understand how someone can inflict such pain and be happy for it…”

Gary tired to wipe away another wave of tears with a deep breath on his heavy chest, “Evil thing,”

Gary looked to Ash, cupping his face, “It almost, it almost” –

Shhhh Gary, it’s okay. It's okay. You never gave up on Ash.

Ash placed his hand over Gary’s, turning to kiss his palm.

“But its dead now,” Ritchie added quickly, “Gardevoir and Mismagius rescued the lot of us out from the hospital and out of the grasps of Lisa and Espeon.”

Lisa – !

Gardevoir looked to shine again, rolling their shoulders and lifting their head up high, “I was able to get the jump on Espeon with Mismagius’ help and delivered that filth to Zekrom, who promptly dispatched it, as they did with the other Oneling causing havoc, a Ditto that could split itself apart! Terrifying, truly terrifying, it was like that, oh, T-1000 thing from that one movie, but its parts could function independently into a whole other form!”

“That’s crazy!” Ash blurted.

“I think a better example would be that monster from the The Thing, from John Larpenter’s version, to be exact,” said Ritchie, a visible shudder ran down Gary’s spine –

“Yes, more like that,” Gardevoir agreed, “It was super crazy! That, thing, gave the legends a run for their money! That was very scary!”

Ritchie mumbled, “Pbbth, Moltres’ motives for ‘helping’ was very scary” –

Before Ash could think to further inquire about the legends and their state, Gardevoir continued on, giving a little sigh, their shoulders slumping, “Now, as for Lisa, Ash, we had to give her pokeball over to the police”– Ash sucked in a breath – “They had a Seize Order, honestly that should come as
no surprise given the threat she posed.”

“Did, did, they kill her?”

“They should have,” Ritchie growled –

“Pika..”

“They have not,” said Gardevoir, “thouuu~ugh as much as the legends wanted to, ehrm.”

Gardevoir cleared its throat, “at face value, Lisa is in a pokeball, and that right there was probably what gave her some, borrowed time, because she now, technically, is under guardianship” –

Mrs. Ketchum intervened, gathering her son’s full attention, “But that’s a whole other can of worms you don’t need popping open right now honey, right now, you are here, with us, safe and sound, toss any and all other thoughts out of your mind, please sweetheart, today has, today has been so much already.”

“Yes it has been,” Gary added. Gardevoir rubbed the back of their head, looking very apologetic for setting the seeds of an unpleasant conversation (but one that will eventually come to fruition).

The weight of exhaustion Ash heard in his mother’s voice sent a painful pulse in his heart. Seeing how tired and spent she really was, along with the pleading look in her eyes for her son to just finally get some rest, made Ash sink back into Gary’s hold, Gary rubbing circles on Ash’s wrist. If he looked up, he’d see Gary pleading the same, and if Ash looked forward, just past his mother, he would see his own distorted reflection on the surface of the metal siding, and the clear difference in hue with his eyes.

Oh, right.

Ash watched the reflection of his hand go to the side of his face, touching around his right eye lightly.

“Pikapi.”

“Ash” –

Ash shifted a little, “I know mom, I know its, blue now.”

“Just a cosmetic change, nothing more,” said Gardevoir quickly.

*I know. Just another scar…..ow my chest…..*

Ash felt a Heal Pulse* go through him, sending a more pleasant feeling through his body –

"Whoof,” Gardevoir sighed, “We want to keep your state of being up, I think this goes without saying Ash, but out of all of us, you got the luxury all expenses paid trip from the Punishment Express” –

*Oh yeah, there’s a hole, an actual hole in my, code, soul *– “There’s a hole in me, right?” asked Ash, “In my, soul?”

“Nothing we won’t be able to handle,” said Gardevoir quickly, covering their bases lest they accidentally upset Mrs. Ketchum again with information that is not yet (fully) ready to be discussed –

Gary pressed a kiss to the side of Ash’s face, nuzzling further into him, Ritchie doing the same, and Ash just absorbed it all inbetween them. Gary’s voice was quiet, but Ash heard it clearly over the
highway ambiance, “You’re all still here Love,” Gary’s hand touched Ash’s heart, “Right here. Don’t you worry about anything right now, we’ll fix it, all together, I promise.”

Ash made a grimace Gary couldn’t see.

*I know… I’m… glad….. Hey…. Can we still feel each other’s emotions? I’m….. um…..*

“Right, right, don’t you worry,” said Gardevoir, “here now, you all just cuddle up again,” Gardevoir pulled up a white sheet and tucked Ash, Gary and Ritchie in (pushing them further together if that was even possible), “There now,” they all looked like one big giant young man burrito, “Get some good rest and relaxation, you all really, really need it” –

UNDERSTATEMENT.

“So do you,” Gary managed to interject eyeing that neck brace, “Please Gardevoir, promise me you’ll at least go on leave after all this to recuperate.”

“Tsk, tsk, tsk, says the person, who as I recall in our dorm room, pulled four back to back all-nighters to polish his thesis statement, alone” – the sudden glare from momma Ketchum sped up Gardevoir’s retort, “But, yes, yes of course, I will, I shall,” the mewl smile still slipped through, “For now, I’m running on that dutiful pride-streak stamina that does like to get us researchers into trouble! Besides, I still have a good amount of Heal Pulse* in me from Bibi giving me a quick boost, buuuuut yes, absolutely, once I have you all placed properly at Pewter General, I am going to go down like a Smack Down* to a Fearow, bank on it – oh! That reminds me, I need to make some calls to my assistants before I pass out!”

Mrs. Ketchum sighed deeply.

*I’m sorry mom.*

For the rest of the trip, Gardevoir worked on further cleaning out the hole in Ash’s being/ code (Ash had fallen back asleep under Gary’s caresses through his hair). If Gardevoir insisted on pushing themselves well past their limits, the least anyone could do was understand the lengths they were going to, so, Ritchie asked how they were applying their Heal Pulses* for a code with such a wound. Gardevoir described it as if they were treating a physical wound from any dirt or debris, but this particular wound was in Ash’s “soul” per say. They were treating the edges of the hole to be more precise, strengthening them, since any lingering stinging mentality still had the capacity to do quite a bit of harm to Ash if they were left to meld into him via the hole – as the Link* was trying to do, but with a complete code/ aura; this way, despite everyone around him, Ash is now more defenseless than ever.

As Gardevoir further explained, walking a very tightrope conversation with Mrs. Ketchum’s studied looks, having the gaping hole was bad enough, for during this time, Ash was at a high risk to be exceptionally vulnerable and highly impressionable, it would all lean on how strong his mentality was, and with even that somewhat up in the air, difficult conversations are almost certain to prove a challenge – basically, Gardevoir put it bluntly, it would be like walking on ice, alas, and Ash would absolutely need to navigate the places that were thin vs where some strain could be taken.

Gary meanwhile certainly felt some pressure in his chest from strain he didn’t need right now.

The absolute last thing they needed was Ash to get an infection of the mind that seeped in through the hole, (on top of what he is already dealing with via depression) Gardevoir also warned that Ash’s body could unintentionally make itself ill in trying to heal the code with its own means because it senses injury, but wouldn’t be able to locate a definite source, and overcompensate. Ultimately,
going back to how strong Ash’s mentality was/ could be, it would be a case of mind over matter. If Ash could be in a better frame of mind, the chances of him becoming sick would lessen, likewise if he was not, he would more than likely get very sick, hence why it would be so important for everyone to drop in as much good vibes as they could, as that would make a very real difference in how Ash’s code would heal.

Gardevoir yet again cleared their throat, “A person’s state of mind can strengthen their aura, likewise in a wounded state, weaken it, but, regardless, the hole will close up in its own time. It will heal, in time.”

All things now were matters of time.

Ash awoke as the ambulance made a hard curve following the exit ramp of the highway onto a lower level road, making him feel like he was falling, his body almost spazzing in trying to react, but Gary wrapped himself around Ash tighter, Ritchie rubbed his back, “We’ve got you, it’s just the curve of the road Love.”

“We’re going to be approaching Pewter City within the next 10 minuets or so,” said the driving EMT, “Then it’s another 10 or so to Pewter General.”

Yay. Please don’t kill us we’ve been through enough.

As they approached the drive-in of the hospital, the ambulance had to carefully navigate itself through a sea of people, be it reporters, officers, bystanders or otherwise, (“How did you all get here alreadyyyyyyyyy?”) followed-up with an occasional whoop whoop of its siren telling people to get the hell out the way.

“Good lord, you’d think there was a rock concert going on out here or something,” the EMT commented.

Gary gave another kiss to Ash’s cheek, his fingers rubbing small circles into the small of Ash’s back, his other hand once again running through Ash’s hair.

*Please just never stop doing that….I think I am going to grow my hair out just a little bit more.*

Finally they were through the people and passed the gate for the back entry drop-off, the ambulance occasionally going over large speed bumps that made Ash feel as if he was riding over waves. Ash nuzzled into Gary and Ritchie more, he didn’t want to think too much about water unless he had to drink it. Gary responded with a more lingering kiss pressed to his forehead, and Ritchie, a cuddle.

*I don’t need some Link* or thread to feel your emotions Ash,* Gary thought, *No matter what, we’re connected, and I can tell you’re still hurting sweetie.* Gary squeezed Ash’s hand, *I’m right here, I’m always going to be right here, stay strong Love.*

Ash squeezed Gary’s hand back, he felt Gary, but could not feel the same internally, *…..Why do I feel I’m missing something……*
connection between the two of you that is stronger than anything~! So this counts! I think, I mean, yeah you can read Ash’s expressions, but, you can’t, feel the internal stuff? Maybe the heartstring just needs to reboot after that Dark Place stuff which was Quite The Strain On Your Being. I mean Gardevoir is shorting out from all the power they used, so it’s no surprise you and Ash would take such a hit.

ANYWHO, so lets have some super omniscient narrator retrospection here and there because mental illness is not picky in patients and there’s so much more to not say! Eyy.

I have something to say.

:o

Hi.

**OH! You’re Ash’s, thing! Well hi! :D**

Hello.

Anything you want to add? Here, I’m going to give you a star to better differentiate yourself from me.

*Ash likes hugs.

Good, and you can keep that star on, and if you have nothing further to say LETS BEGIN GARY with ‘here’. *Ahem*, you all arrived at Pewter General and are setting up residence in rooms on the fifth floor. Y’all caught a glimpse of Tracey, unconscious, hooked up to a portable med device, a breathing tube in his mouth – but that’s good he’s getting the help he needs! Espeon royally fucked up Tracey’s hand and some of his organs, like it was as if Espeon took a knife and stabbed and cut him at random, all internally, Tracey had a lot of internal bleeding – do they know how close he was to dying? No you don’t think they do, aside from what you pried out of Bibi, so Tracey (you know, like of the final remaining members of your wishful thinking family), like the rest of you, was knocking on heaven’s door – so lets not forget Bibi’s kickass medical know-how too! They brought Tracey back from crossing the river Styx! He’ll be fine! He’ll be fine! He’ll be fine! He’ll be fine! He’ll be fine! He’ll be fine! He’ll be fine! He’ll be fine! He’ll be fine! He’ll be fine! He’ll be fine! He’ll be fine! He’ll be fine!

*He’ll be fine.

And yeah Espeon ripped his insides up but who can’t walk that off now-a-days? Internal bleeding pssssshhhhhhhhh! You also spoke with Misty and Brock. Brock is doing okay aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaand Misty looks like a freaking mummy, though she tried to make light of it against the faces of despair by calling herself ‘Misty the Mummy’! You guys learned she was FUCKING POSSESSED and it is a FUCKING MIRACLE she escaped that ordeal as ‘intact’ as she is! Sometimes body parts can fall off! Body parts can fall off after a possession that intense! Yikes! Yikes! But that didn’t stop Ash from asking to hug her, and she said yes, and you saw the pain on her face as she rested her chin on his shoulder, but dammit she gave Ash the best bear hug she could – never mind those cracks in her skin!! And when they pulled away the pain on her face was gone like magic!

*:*D

:D

8D
ANYWHO. You all did survive this ordeal together, soooooooooooooo, like, perhaps the shock still hasn’t fully settled in yet so things just feel weird but there’s really nothing to worry about for once because you guys are all here! You’re all in pieces held together by floss but you’re here! You guys got in touch with Mary from Mrs. Ketchum’s com that finally picked up some bars and she informed y’all on how the others are doing and she sounded just like a freaking robot, so you’re just good, it’s all good now, allll goooooooood noooooow. Sure, her undead sister is confined in a pokeball and responsible for god knows what else AND YOU REALLY WANT LISA TO FUCKING BURN IN HELL but you can’t let stuff like that get you down! Look on the positive side! ‘Kay? M’kay. Okay then peace, inner voice out.

Hahaha no, I’m not done with you yet pleb, its time to show how deep this cacophony of emotional melodramatic entropy runs –

Yeah, yeah that’s right, what now, what now what now, what now homes, you can’t get rid of me, you can’t get rid of me, you can’t get rid of me, let’s play a game in seeing how ‘really’ intertwined ‘we’ all are. Gary pauses and looks at Ritchie’s face, unable to read his expression from surprise, or disgust – ?

“There’s no bed in this room” –

“You all are on it,” said Gardevoir rolling their gurney in (Pikachu and Sparky huddled on the edge), elsewhere the hospital staff were running around like ants, “mind you this hospital is being filled to capacity, some patients at lesser risk are being transported to Pallet Town’s only clinic – and some are going as far away as Celadon and Cerulean City. I’m sorry, but it’s easier to keep the three of you together,” Gardevoir then added with a quirked eyebrow, “That’s not a problem, is it?”

“No, no, it’s fine,” Ritchie caught Gary’s gaze, and smiled, “We’re good.” Gary felt something so heavy suddenly leave him that he was lightheaded for a moment. “We can snuggle it out.”

“Snuggles are good,” Gardevoir nodded, moving about the room and pulling over a med monitor, programming its data filters.

That’s not going to stop you from worrying Garyyy, NO REST, NONE, NONE, NONE, NONE, NONE, NONE, NONE –

*Shut up, shut up, shut up, * Gary hissed internally –

“Uuugh,” Gardevoir groaned, “of course this plug is missing, boys, I’ll be right back,” and Gardevoir swiftly left the room.

You said something awful, AWFUL, to Ritchie. Ash doesn’t know about it yet. Never build an empire with sand castles. ANY AND ALL CONNECTIONS AROUND YOU DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE –

*SHUT UP, LEAVE ME ALONE, PLEASE, PLEASE* –

Gary felt a kiss pressed to his forehead, only, it wasn’t from Ash – and when Ritchie pulled back, Gary was all but sputtering.
Ritchie was wearing a grin (although a shit-eating one at that) as wide as his face could hold, “That’ll keep your inner thoughts at bay.”

“Aiy Ritchie, you’ve got to give him a heads up,” said Ash, “Gary’s not too keen on affection like that from anyone but me.”

“Rude.”

Gary shook his head, “No, no, nah, nah, its fine, m’cool, I for 1,” he sounded as if he had just stepped out a nose-diving airplane, “A kiss was, more than I was expecting, I guess, things happening, too much,” Gary plopped down.

Pikachu and Sparky traded glances. *I wonder what Umbreon would do,* Pikachu thought.

“I learn forgiveness from the best!” said Ritchie continuing his grin, giving Ash a pat on the back so hard, his entire body moved –

“Oof, hey,” Ash squinted back and forth at Gary (still face down) and Ritchie with the both of them having ‘GUILT’ stamped over their façade, “*stare*……….Is there something I am missing here?”

All that came out of Gary was a gargle of sounds like an eldritch abomination.

Ritchie tried to play it off, “Before all this mess, Gary and I just had a little riff-tat, nothing too major” –

More incoherent sounds escaped Gary to Ritchie’s contrary, making Ash quirk an eyebrow up.

“Okay, so it was kinda major,” said Ritchie trying to wave it off again, “But, hey, it’s put in perspective, so much more has happened and its” –

“That doesn’t make the wound hurt any less,” said Ash; Ritchie almost bit his tongue. Ash’s voice was quiet, “I think we all know how much impact words have, directly, or, otherwise.”

*And thus, the straw that broke the Camerupt’s back – that was already broken in several places and was rolling, not walking, rolling down a hill because the legs were also broken, was placed. Bye Gary it was nice knowing the last shred of your dignity –*

“Oh how the tables have tabled,” said Ritchie in a dry moment. A squeaking sound like a Zubat snagged their attention over to Gary who had turned over with his hands over his face (but it was VERY clear he was doing the silent, heavy, sobbing), his entire body was shaking –

“Woah, Gary!” – Ash pulled him in close – Ritchie reached out and placed his hand on Gary’s knee –

“Hey, hey, it’s okay, really!”
“Gary, shh, shh, shh, its okay, its okay, woah there, its okay, its okay” –

He’s unraveling – his defenses are all gone – have been gone – if Ash is technically defenseless now, then Gary is demonstrating the consequences –

Gary swallowed, gaining some volume to his crying. He squeezed out the confession as if his stomach was rolling up like a tube of toothpaste, “I was maa-aaad Ritchie hadn’t come to see you and I lashed out for him to, to disappear” – Gary’s voice cracking into pieces at the end.

Ash looked to Ritchie who opted to look elsewhere for a moment, “Okay, so yeah that happened, and it hurt, but – but we’re cool now, Gary, Gary, we’re cool now okay? Let’s just push past it. I’m gonna push past it, you didn’t mean it” –

“I hurt you so bad” –

He’s unraveling messy and fast – he’s exposed – he gave you everything, everything to bring you back, he has nothing left for this – he’s got nothing left in him –

“And we’re gonna move on,” said Ritchie clasping his hands together, “We’re all ready to move on from this right? Yes? Yes? Just forget about it – things have SUCKED and I just want everyone to get through this, okay? We’ve been, dna,” oh there goes Ritchie, gasping for breath as the emotion swells, “under so much, and we almost died, and I *sniff* could care less now about some stupid words – the point is we’re all alive and we’re all together – lets keep it that way – !”

And down goes Ritchie. Oh boy. This Camerupt could use a neck brace itself. They’re both empty. Been empty, what happened took everything, just, everything out of them so that this just, dropped ‘em. Geeze.....Lookit here, lookit here, lookit here. To your left, your boyfriend, a mess, to your right, your best (human) friend, a mess, both utterly wrecked and sobbing, to each their own, a tragedy. Bluh.

“Pi..pika?” Pikachu and Sparky had ears low and sad.

Well get to it Mr. Fixer-Upper!

*O-kay then,* * Ash thought. He felt a movement in his heart. It started out like a leaking bowl filling up a cavern, adding weight to his chest bit by bit, and it grew, and grew, and grew, and grew until Ash felt the full sum of the pain that was wracking Gary’s mentality, their connection via heartstring catching on again between them and spilling all of the pain back into Ash who took it like a lake. Oddly enough, it was comforting in how familiar it felt. This, Ash could gather, he knew how to help Gary, and he wasn’t without information as to how to approach Ritchie either. He’s held them both in his arms as they wept before, plenty of times, LOTS OF TIMES, so holding them at the same time, that was a no brainer! And dealing with this pain, was as normal as breathing.

Before Ash reached out, his chest tightened considerably. He knew the hammer of his state of mind/rest was coming, and going to come hard, but right now, he was able to be there for Gary and Ritchie, something he knew even in his most deplorable states he was capable of. Ash knew full well how his friends joke about his seemingly heroic tendencies (especially concerning Superman), but if
there was one super power he truly had, it was to aid those in need, especially the ones he loved.

*When you’re not screwing up the relationship, mind you. Tick, tock –*

**Shut up.**

:o

Ash gathered Ritchie to him, single-handedly hauled Gary over, and bridged the two sobbing young men, helping them weave their hands together into vise-like grips; an arm for each hurting heart.

Ash’s voice was soft and sweet and as sincere as it could be despite the bowling ball in the center of his chest, “Hey, you guys remember that walk we took in the woods together? Well, I mean it was really an escort for Gary, but I had my cam out and I was filming us?....You, remember what happened at the end right?”

Almost instantly the crying came to a pause, a sniffle, a tear drop falling off.

*We saw Ho-oh flying overhead, the Rainbow legend that grants happiness; they looked right at us, and flew on.*

“I know how, some, happy times get pushed to the back….So, I, you guys know I record, a lot of the happy times to look back on and, that time, I couldn’t. It happened so fast, Ho-oh was there and it was gone and I remember wishing so hard that I had that moment saved, because all we would ever have of it – all, I, would ever have of that moment was the memory…..We didn’t even take a picture of ourselves afterwards, we were so wrapped up in that we actually saw Ho-oh and…..”

*I can’t really pinpoint when I started, being more, afraid? Yeah afraid of the memories.*

Ash closed his eyes, “And yet….I can still picture everything so clearly. The sky, the trees, the clouds, the sounds, everything…..us…..things, pieces like that, I had to remember that you don’t have to be afraid of losing them.” Ash’s grip tightened on Gary and Ritchie’s hands, “You don’t have to be afraid of losing each other.”

*I was afraid I was going to forget how to be happy. All I would remember was an imitation.*

“And, ultimately, I know that’s…..really easier said than done, given, present, and past, things happening….But….If what we said didn’t matter, how come we’re still together?” Ash ran his thumb across Gary’s hand. “There’s so many twists and turns, and ledges and pitfalls and sinkholes and about every roadblock imaginable, why not just stop, and never move forward again?” Ash felt Ritchie’s hand tighten. “We know the answer, but it still gets to us! We still stop and crash, and burn, and burn hard – but that doesn’t change the fact that those moments are worth fighting for, we’re, worth fighting for, heh, even if we fight each other….we’re always, going to be a part of each
other….I’m, probably preaching to the choir here, but…..It’s so easy to remember the bad things, its so easy for the bad things to take over everything – that’s why I would record so much – because I wouldn’t so much forget, as, as like, get…consumed……”

“It sucks,” came Ritchie’s voice, “I hate it…”

Ash felt Gary nuzzle into him. Ash continued, running a hand through Gary’s hair, “Even if there’s no record of it, even if no else can see it, or hear it, or feel it, we know what we saw was real, what we felt was real…..We know what it does. What it hurts…”

*What it destroys.*

“And that’s why, we, t-try to learn.” Ash took a deep breath, “That’s why we learn…..that’s why we forgive…..Because, whether we were out in the woods, looking in the mirror, or looking to each other, after we saw Ho-oh, we promised to do better by ourselves, and yeah, we still have a lot to learn, obviously…..we have to try harder, no matter, how much it hurts…” Ash single-handedly wiped a curl of hair from Gary’s wet face. “I was never in a lower place in my life than in the Dark Place, and I see that its going to be, quite the climb back up,” Ash squeezed Gary and Ritchie, “But I have two very strong anchors right here.”

“Pika-pika!”

“And of course you too buddy.”

“Pika :3”

Ash took another breath to keep himself even, in doing so, he felt lighter, if only for a moment, “Our good moments, the happy moments, the really, feel-good make everything better moments” –

Have to earn their place too.

“……manifest in ways that, sometimes, we need a little help to see. A little reminder, in the form of a hug, a ‘good morning’ or ‘goodnight’, a pat on the back, a kind word, or even a kiss, that says yeah, you’re loved.”

*So, no matter how many times I am thrown to the ground, I will get back up…..It was always the little things you did Gary that let me know no matter what you loved me. Besides, how can I ever forget how to be happy, when I’m surrounded by reasons to be happy…..?*

Ash pulled them both into a brief, tight, arm hug, “I love you both so much…”

*We’ll make new moments, good and bad.*
Gary’s voice was down to a strained whisper, “I love you all too, I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry…”

*No matter what, we’ll forever be a part of each other.*

“It’s okay,” Ritchie sobbed right back before he gave a sharp inhale, his voice very grated, “Hey, Gary, look,” Gary did, and Ritchie, because his throat was just too clogged, used sign language to tell Gary, that he loved him too.

*The good. The Bad. We’ll learn. And we’ll forgive.*

Gary knew that sign because Ash would flash it to him if he was too sleepy to speak, or was chewing on something and couldn’t talk –

**But we don’t forget why.**

Ash got pancaked between Gary and Ritchie who quite literally hugged/ snuggled it out, but he didn’t care, not one bit, for all the closure in the world, minor stifled breathing could be tolerated.

Fuck this Camerupt in particular – if only you could take your own advice –

Pikachu and Sparky brought over a couple boxes of tissues for them; they sat back, and let the crying trio have their moment.

**We don’t ever forget why.**

When Gardevoir returned with the equipment they needed, they were tailed by Mrs. Ketchum (back in a wheelchair), and found all three young men passed out and curled up so tightly around one another that they looked to be just a jumble of limbs barely hidden underneath a couple sheets slipped into the nooks and crannies of their bodies. Pikachu and Sparky were on the edge of the bed, they looked up with sleep in their eyes, each giving a thumbs up.

“Aaaaaaaa~” Gardevoir clasped their hands together, “So much love~ See? I’m glad they worked it out so quickly, I knew they would! Ash might just pull through this yet with minimal distress, it looks like he has two” –

“Pika, pika!”

“I’m sorry three, no, four points of loving alignment~”
Mrs. Ketchum placed her hand over her heart with a smile, exhaling a deep, deep sigh of relief that FINALLY they were all getting the rest they needed. “Yes, indeed.”

“Mmmmmh, actually make that five, no six, including me now, actuallyyyyyyyy eight? Eleven? No, no, much, much more than that! Aaaa~ Hoo-hoo~!”

***

When Ash woke, he was alone.

A shudder rocked down his spine, but he was kept grounded in feeling Ritchie and Gary wrapped around him. They were warm, so warm, almost too warm. Ash was glad they only had a couple sheets around them, any more and he’d be burning up for sure. Gardevoir was out cold on the couch turned futon, their snores adding to the sleep ambience Ash wanted to be a part of again. He could feel his limbs were heavy, there was an edge to the grogginess his body had from the sleep it reluctantly emerged from. The feeling reminded Ash of the tell-tale sign of a cold forming from the tickle in the back of one’s neck.

*I’m fixing to go downhill,* Ash thought, *Fine, I just want to get back to sleep then.* He closed his eyes, expecting to fall back asleep, but something started tugging at him from the back of his mind. Ash tried to push it down, but it was persistent. Opening his eyes again, the thought came into focus.

*…..Why do I still feel I’m missing something…?*

More annoying than that, Ash felt a buzzing hum start to stir in the core of his forehead, an oncoming headache fixing to make his night very shitty. Ash growled internally. He couldn’t fathom why his body decided it needed to be awake at this ungodly hour just before his wellbeing nosedived. He suddenly felt like he was in a place outside of observable time, as if he had woken up in some sort of liminal space.

*What time is it anyway…* Ash looked around, hoping to see a stray com, he spotted Gardevoir’s on a table next to them, but that was too far away.

In the corner of his eyes, he saw something red, and nearly jumped when he thought it was two glowing eyes, but no, all the way in the corner of the room, there was a digital clock with red glowing numbers. Ash let his eyes focus a little more, and saw the time show exactly 4:13am.

*Whyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy.*

Ash let out a frustrated sigh through his nose, his limbs were only getting more sluggish, and the buzzing in his head grew ever so stronger.

*Fine, I’ll just tire myself out then.*

Ash sat up carefully to not disturb Gary or Ritchie (quite a feat with Gary wrapped around him), his eyes adjusting further to the darkness of the room. There was moonlight coming in from the window. The room was cool, but not too cool. If only he could get his hands on some sort of electronic device, he could watch something or play some silly game over on PlaceBooks.

Perhaps it’s not something you’re missing, but something you’re oblivious to going ba-bump, ba-bump, ba-bump in your chest.
Ash eyed Gardevoir’s com, *It would be really cool if those Transfer Effects had given me psychic powerssssssssssszzzzzzzzzzuh.* Ash made hapless grabby hands at the com, on the table near Gardevoir, where it stayed. *Phooey.* Gary wrapped himself tighter around Ash, preventing further movement. *Aiye, Garyyyyyyy.*

Typically you don’t notice until it’s too late.

Shut up.

:/

Pikachu and Sparky’s ears suddenly perked up, the pokemon sitting up from their sleep with their eyes barely open, Pikachu cocking its head at Ash –

“Oh! Pikachu! Sparky!” Ash whispered, “I’m sorry guys, I didn’t mean to wake you!”

Sparky blew a raspberry while Pikachu chided Ash to go back to sleep.

“I will little buddy, but, could you do me a favor and bring me Gardevoir’s com? I’m just gonna poke around a bit, and then I’ll go back to sleep.”

“Piiiiikaaaaaaaaa.” Pikachu jumped (fell) off the hospital bed, retrieved Gardevoir’s com, and brought it over to Ash. They nuzzled their Trainer before hauling themselves back to the edge of the bed where Sparky cuddled ‘em back to sleep almost instantly. Ash pursed his lips watching the pokemon snuggle, *Ooooooh, Umbreon’s gonna be so jealoussssssss.* “Hmp~.” Ash swiped Gardevoir’s screen (the lock picture a selfie of Gardevoir) springing the com to life; he quickly brought down the bright settings down about as low as he could stand it (the background picture of Gardevoir in a cap and gown showing off their doctorate).

Gary stirred a bit, Ash put the com right on his chest to drown out the remaining light, waiting till Gary settled back on him, dribbling out meaningless sounds. Ritchie sighed on his other side, and once Ash was satisfied everyone around him had fallen back into a deep sleep, he pursued some mindless distractions against the ever nagging thoughts in the back of his head.

*…….What could it be that I’m overlooking??*

Probably against his better judgment, Ash Toogled the news coming out of Viridian City, reading off the headlines in his mind, *'Hours of Fear, A Hospital and City under Siege’….‘Occult Brings Viridian City to its Knees’…..’Body Count at Viridian Memorial Rises’….‘Stunning Capture by Ash Ketchum, Demons that Terrorized Viridian Memorial in Custody or Dead’….‘League Promises Swift United Front Against Occult Labeled Terrorists’…..‘Millions Pray for Victims of Viridian Memorial’….‘Ash Ketchum Among Injured From Viridian Memorial Massacre’…..’Viridian City Awaiting Justice From Occult Members In Custody’….’Kanto Master Expected to Call for Legendary Council in Time of Crisis’…..*

Against anyone’s better judgment, Ash tapped on an article and scrolled right to the comments:

NE14rarecandy: None of this would have happened if Kanto had a Real Master

GrassMomma: Lance has suffered a severe injury that takes YEARS to recover from, no one can prevent heinous acts such as this. Show some respect!!!
NE14rarecandy: I wasn’t talking about Lance. Besides he’s retired. The League drags him in and out from his recovery time to stand in as Master instead of appointing a new Master. Disgusting. Lives were lost that could have been saved.

GrassMomma: How?? Master or not Lance, or anyone, could have NEVER seen this coming!!! Choosing Masters takes time!! There are no good candidates right now!!! You are blaming a system you know nothing about!!!!!!

NE14rarecandy: I’M NOT TALKING ABOUT LANCE GOD GO SUCK HIS DICK

FairyLight: I sure hope everyone made it out okay!

UmbreonRez: lol

EnoughSkitty: I know everyone is focused on the hospitals, but the Viridian Emergency Control and Dispatch Center was hit too!

UmbreonRez: they’re useless anyway that won’t be missed

EnoughSkitty: Troll [reported]

RedRobert: This is a terrible tragedy. I cannot believe Moltres, a legend that has brought such guiding light before, made such terrible choices to the point of almost costing the lives of Gym Leaders Misty Tides and Brock Slides, ALONG WITH OUR GUIDING SON ASH KETCHUM. FOR SHAME. FOR SHAME!!!! THANK ARCEUS THEY’RE ALL SAFE!!! RIP to the lives lost…

Porygon2Squared: Right!!! Moltr3s wingz shuld b RIPPED TF OFF!!

BubblebeamWitch: LEAGUE NEEDS TO ISSUE A WARRANT TO THE LEGENDARY COUNCIL FOR MOLTRES IT TRIED TO KILL INNOCENT INJURED PEOPLE AND GYM LEADERS AND A CANDIDATE THAT DID NOTHING TO IT SOMETHING IS VERY WRONG WITH IT

NE14rarecandy: KANTO NEEDS A MASTER NOW. RIGHT. NOW. NOT LANCE. NOT ANOTHER REGION’S MASTER. KANTO NEEDS ITS OWN FUCKING POKEMON MASTER NOW.

GrassMomma: Running off to another thread hmmm?? Still don’t know how the League system works hmmm??

NE14rarecandy: GO FUCK A CACTURNE CUNT

wateriswet: Look at all the birthdays that suddenly won’t come to pass

KantoKid: that’s mean :( 
ItsAlwaysSunnyInCinnabar: I hope everyone responsible for this is killed then tortured then killed again AND TORTURED AGAIN and then burned at the stake

TrainerTool: How do You burn a fire type because Moltres is responsible for like half of this it set the goddam hospital on fire like u can’t get anymore responsible than that.

ItsAlwaysSunnyInCinnabar: WHAT? No way, fucking way, are you sure???

TrainerTool: Yeah man its real sad :( My dad is one of the first responders and saw the whole thing even saw Cobalion tear into Moltres for doing what it did

ItsAlwaysSunnyInCinnabar: OH MY GOD. OH MY GOD. I WANT TO THROW UP. I LOVED MOLTRES EVER SINCE I WAS A KID AND OH MY GOD. OH MY GOD.

TrainerTool: Yeah its fucked up :( I’m so sorry. Plenty of other legends though ;3

ItsAlwaysSunnyInCinnabar: OH MY GOD I HAVE TO GO IM SORRY

TrainerTool: No worries man you take care

ItsCelebiBitch: Who wants to bet the legendary council will do jack shit?

ThunderMe: Oh oh I do! I do!

KantoKid: I wish Ash was our Master :( I bet they would listen to him

ThunderMe: That makes two of us.

“Do you, or can you even comprehend how severely missed you’ve been?!”

[This comment has been deleted]

RedRobert: HOW DARE YOU. I DON’T CARE IF YOU’RE A TROLL OR NOT, ASH HAD HIS FIRST LEAGUE MATCH IN OVER THREE YEARS TO A FUCKING STAGE-NAGER BECAUSE HE HAD A POINT TO PROVE TO ALL OF YOU SELFISH PEOPLE– ASH IS STILL OF/ IS KANTO’S BEST

TrainerTool: Man ain’t nobody in their right minds to be trash talking Kanto’s Son like that did you even see the match they forfeited because they underestimated him

[This comment has been deleted]
TrainerTool: Obvious troll is obvious

RedRobert: OH MY GOD PLEASE SEEK HELP

[This comment has been deleted]

RedRobert: YEAH YOU NEED HELP, LIKE A PUNCH TO THE FACE. Ash and Ritchie’s relationship is no one’s business but their own, and if you had EVEN THE SLIGHTEST bit of friendship in your life, you’d know that this Moltres has two sticks up their ass and Ritchie was obviously challenging Moltres to put them in their place, or in case you were misinformed, Ritchie is in the top five percent of Kanto’s register, they know the rules VERY WELL I ASSURE YOU and his Charizard almost SMOKED Moltres clean BY THEMSELVES

ButterfreeBaby: I miss Ash very much :_

SilverWind: He had a match though, maybe he’s coming back soon! Don’t lose hope!

Porygon2Squared: H3’S IN THE HOSPITAL YOU PORGS

SilverWind: D:> 

DeltaHard: I’d like to see some leadership come through to be honest. We can’t keep putting Lance out like this. We can’t control Red or Blue. Kanto has had a vacuum for a while now, and it kinda started *cough cough* three or so years ago.

“That is your responsibility as a Top Percentile League Trainer in pushing our region forward.”

And then to no one’s surprise Ash wasn’t feeling too well.

*Right, hole in my code, and I suffer from depression, sooooo, this is probably not doing me any favors. Get a grip. Get a grip….With the Link* out, I’m supposed to be better at dealing with this……*

Buuuuut, given you have introduced a million OTHER voices to stir unpleasant thoughts in your head, this may be somewhat harder to do. If you thought you were missing something before, you certainly are missing the belief that you can even begin to deal with this on your own NOW –

*QUIET.

Ash swallowed, his hand absentmindedly touching around his neck, feeling an odd vacancy, *Wait, I am missing something!* Ash’s hand searched around his neck further to discover Gary’s necklace was gone – *Oh no….no…no!* He’s had that since he was 10….No, where could it…* Ash looked around the room, looked on the table near them, it had to be here, it had to be somewhere that was not the rubble of Viridian Memorial – he definitely hadn’t seen it since the time he was last aware of its presence around his neck – and now, now it’s – gone.

Gone.
What a waste. Perhaps the Espeon took it as a trophy, but there is no asking about it now because the Espeon is very dead. The necklace is gone forever. A consequence. But, Gary doesn’t seem to miss it too much as he hasn’t even inquired about it. Maybe he hasn’t had time to miss it. Maybe he’ll mention it later, maybe not. Perhaps you can get away with that one. Or not. Maybe he’ll mention it in passing, a jab. A reminder of another mistake and another failure. Maybe not. Maybe he’ll let it go. You’ve gotten away with excuses for your behavior in the past. But now, you’re not going to make excuses are you? It’s time to face this isn’t it? It’s time to get a grip on yourself….You’ve got to remember how to do it yourself when the bad times come, you’ve got to remember to not hurt anyone, you’ve got to remember that you don’t want to hurt anyone, you’ve got to remember you will have to fight every single day of your life for ‘normalcy’, you’ve got to GET A GRIP –

Ash laid back, staring at the ceiling, letting himself zone out with whirring thoughts from too many unnecessary places echoing in on themselves. He was feeling the glue of his embattled remains come undone despite having Ritchie on one side, Gary on the other, and Pikachu at his feet.

As they peacefully slept around him, Ash let the weight of his own heart crush him.

***

When Gary woke, he was tired.

His bearings gathered he was laying upright, his hands lightly shifting to pull Ash close, but there was no Ash to be felt, no Ritchie either, but he did feel a small soft hand on his chest.

*Maybe they got up before me, god I feel heavy….* As soon as his eyes adjusted to the brightness of the room, he tilted his head so he could see just enough. All around them was a garden of flowers, all the flowers, just like before in Ash’s room at Viridian Memorial; the sight brought a small smile to Gary’s face. He was still in the same room, but the three of them were now in separate beds (Ash and Ritchie still asleep). Ash’s bed was in the middle with Gary on his right, and Ritchie on his left. A jingling sound overhead tempted his eyes up to see a Chimecho hovering over Ash (they were looking through chart papers). *Okay, but, why the separation…?* The small hand moved about on his chest again, Gary looked and finally saw it was attached to a med pokemon checking his vitals, a Clefable, suddenly looking stunned,

“Oh my,” they adjusted their translator, “Oh my, you’re awake! You’re awake! Oh – I’m sorry if I woke you love!”

The Chimecho chimed happily.

“No, no, you’re fine, you’re fine,” Gary croaked and stretched, he felt, better, to say the least, “I’m just glad to be awake.”

“Don’t we all have such a wish?” the Clefable smiled warmly, “I knew today would be special! Come come, tell me how you feel, any pain?”

“No, just, gogginess….hey, why are we all separated?”

“Separated?”

Gary tried to motion to Ash and Ritchie but his arm just flopped, “We’re in separate beds?”
“Oh! Some spaces had opened up, but more importantly it made treatment easier, especially on Ash, poor dear, he’s been fighting a nasty fever” –

To that, Gary shot up to get a better look at Ash (his body going ‘woah now lets not get too cocky here’). He saw, much to his woe, Ash unconscious and panting silently in his sleep, small beads of sweat having formed on his forehead. Chimecho lowered themselves and wiped the beads away with their tail-turned-reusable-towelette.

“Oh but he’s pushing through, don’t you worry Mr. Oak” – Chimecho chimed again positively with Clefable's words -

Gary fell back on the bed, exasperated, *No, no, he got sick, he wasn’t supposed to get sick! He was supposed to have been protected!* “Has he been that way all night?”

“All night?” Clefable blinked, “Oh! Oh my, right, of course, you’ve just woken up! Why my dear,” Clefable clasped their small hands, “my dear you’ve been out for a little over eleven days!”

**WHAT 8DDDDDD –

“Eleven…days…?”**

Chimecho chimed again but – “Oh but we’ve been taking good care of you all now don’t you worry! Why before Gardevoir passed out they called for their assistants, those they had personally trained from Kalos to come over and my goodness! They have been true blue lifesavers! Take lovely Chimecho here, they have been hooked up to Ash ever since they arrived and have produced nothing but the finest healthcare!”

Chimecho sighed, and chimed, again.

Gary wobbled, he rubbed his arms, numb from the sudden passage of time, “I’ve been out for eleven…days…”

“My love you needed the rest after all you’ve been through! The lot of you are lucky to be alive! Why Gardevoir themselves couldn’t possibly keep going, lest they risked losing their powers from overexertion – and can you really bear such a thought?!?”

“No, no, I cannot,” Gary immediately thinking to his dear Alakazam, “Hey, where is Gardevoir?”

“Oh I reckon they’re over with Ash’s mum, they’re still recovering too that one, but they’re doing very well!”

Gary’s hand touched his chest with a deep sigh of relief, “Thank goodness….thank goodness….”

Gary looked over to Ash, still panting in his sleep, “So then, Clefable, has, has Ash been sick this whole time?”

Chimecho chimed but – Clefable shook their head, “He woke up innnnn, I think it was just three days later since you all arrived at Pewter General, you can imagine our shock, he should have been out much longer – about as long as you! Now Ritchie was quite a fighter, he was out for about one and a half – but Ash, well, he just, just upset himself, seeing you there asleep, so his body made itself sick, again. You see, at first what knocked him out those three days, on top of all the other stress his body had been through – bless me you all have been through so much! Well, it was Ash’s body overcompensating in trying to heal itself, doin’ more harm than good because flesh cannot heal that awful gaping hole in his aura, everything else, sure, but – but don’t worry, don’t you worry that fever is firmly under control! Ash mentality was in a weakened state so his body tried to pick up the slack, tried to ter burn out what it thought was an invading germ, but in such an instance as this, a germ of
the mind? Such efforts are moot ‘m afraid.”

Gary blinked in trying to keep up with Clefable’s quick speak, Chimecho chimed woefully for him. All of this Gary could infer anyway from the conversation with Gardevoir back in the ambulance, but that didn’t make it any easier to swallow that Ash took the ‘getting really sick’ route.

*He was supposed to have been protected, what happened, what happened….*

“Ash was okay for a little bit after he woke from that, did things to keep busy, such very, very good things I must say!....But.....” Clefable sighed, allowing Gary’s mind to catch up to it, “....Poor thing.....He just couldn’t get over his grief.....He loves you so much, seeing you there, just, well, it crushed the poor dear.”

*The feeling was mutual…*

Walls are all down y’all, things are going to hurt more. Things that don’t usually bring you to a stopping point are going to slam you against a brick wall –

“Watching the news certainly didn’t help either” –

*Goddammit you were supposed to stay away from that* –

“He snuggled right up to ya, pettin’ ya, even gave you little pecks on the cheek here and there – and he would talk to you! Talk, and talk, and talk, telling your sleeping self all sorts of stories!” –

*Because of course you’d be in a coma-like state when Ash would start telling you stories again 8D*

Gary’s chest squeezed tightly, *Ash….* his heart yearning and ringing something fierce –

“And Ritchie, oh Ritchie, he tried to help, distract and all, oh! I remember he dared Ash to recite that entire Pyroar King movie and he did! Line for line!” Clefable turned a shade somber, “he tried everything to wake you he did, ignoring all we told him to just let you be,” Clefable sighed, “and when he continued to get no response, it just snowballed from there.”

*Oh Ash….Sweetheart….* Gary rubbed his arms again, he felt, none of that, heard none of that, nothing, no dreams, no dreams at all, no Dark or Light place, it was all just the abyss of sleep.

*Maybe your dreams were eaten and analyzed? Fuck I don’t know –*

To say it was going to be agonizing waiting for Ash to come around yet again, was an understatement.

Clefable shook their head with a sigh, “Him and Ritchie were asking so many questions, oh and the staff, oh ho! Got quite the earful! Eventually one Audino” –

*Audi?! No, another one, another one, my Audi, where* –

“Ooooh, that Audino finally snapped! And barked at them to leave ‘em be! They hissed for them to save all other questions till Gardevoir came back around, but at the time, who knew when that would be! So they had no choice but to wait – which they didn’t of course, but bless them they tried!”

Gary felt around his pants, and saw his com had been placed on the table next to his bed, but without a charger, it was very much dead; he groaned.

“Oh love here, you can borrow mine for now!” piped the Clefable taking their com from their purse and handing it over to Gary.
“Thank-you, thank-you so much!”

“Don’t mention it! How about I go fetch you some breakfast, would you like that?”

Gary’s stomach growled before he could give a proper response, “I would, very much so, thank-you so much again.”

“Oh think nothing of it love, be back in a jiffy!”, and Clefable trotted out the room.

Chimecho lowered themselves down to Ash again, wiping his forehead,

“Chimecho?”

“Yes?”

“Oh, so you, can talk” – *And without a Translator too* –

Chimecho smiled, “Yes I can, but Clefable doesn’t know that, sooooooo shhhhhhh~”

*Oh my god* “They mean well I’m sure….”

“I’m sure they do.”

Suddenly you relate so hard to this lil’ guy –

Mismagius phased themselves in through the swing of the door –

“Mismagius!”

*Ching-ching-ching-aling~*

You lil shit >:3c

“Oh Gary, it is so good to see you awake!” the ghost pokemon floated over with ease sporting an ear to ear grin, “Did Clefable talk your ear off?”

“I didn’t care, they were super sweet.”

“Oh, let me see their com for a second,” Mismagius took the com, sending out a text, “There, I paged your sister and pokemon, they should be bounding up here soon!”

Wait did you say sister –

“Is everyone okay?” it was a blanket statement, but pressing none-the-less.

**OH SHIT SON** –

“Oh yes, yes, all of your pokemon have recovered wonderfully, the only one still over at the Pewter Center is little Audi, but don’t worry, they’re conscious on and off and responding very well to treatment.”

*That’s a relief…* “I’m so proud of my little Audi, so, so, so, so** proud.”

“As we all are. They performed another miracle in helping get you and Ash out of that…mess….”

Mismagius looked over to Ash, still panting, still asleep. Mismagius turned back to Gary with reserve in their features, “….It is, quite remarkable, and horrifying, what you two went through, and survived.”
“Please, tell me all you know.”

“Well….to put it bluntly, you both survived a brutal, brutal form of code cutting. The Link* was ripped right out of you both…along with, that, stone out of Ash...Ash told us what happened, and were able to gather some details from Audino when we could. We were all in, awe, and to be honest, shock….Honestly…..there’s no other way to come around it – in any other occurrence – you both should be dead but here you are very much alive and we’re all so very, very happy for that. Audino risked their life to reach the two of you through the corporeal ether.”

“The corporeal ether? Oh! The Dark Place!”

“Yes, again they used their own soul to make way into Ash’s being, moving through the ice that uh, the stone, catalyst? Had created. The stone that was plunged into Ash’s heart, it was, trying to metamorphasize, evolve, his entire being – why the ice that was branching, was, Ash’s soul, branching, out…” Mismagius took a breath, Gary spinning internally on what he had just heard, Chimecho chimed sadly, “Audino is one of a kind, and with the right training, Gardevoir is certain they will surpass them one day, easily.”

Gary took a moment to absorb this, his hands having come to his face, clasped just before his mouth. Mismagius cleared their throat, taking the trait from Gardevoir, “There is still the connection between you two, the heartstring, grant it that connection has been rather rattled,” Mismagius paused, “there’s no question of the love you two share, how e v e r ….for that love to have been utilized as a cutting agent, an emotion sharpened as a tool…hm….that can be double edged sword” –

Gary swallowed, “Is there a hole in me now?”

Mismagius shook their head, “We found it had latched onto you more at the surface, Ash was the one with merging problems, and when the stone was ripped out that reset everything, even the bits of you that were tangled in each other, it was just a very, very messy extraction. What was ripped out of you Gary, your code is already almost done in healing, another thing we’re all very grateful for….Ash will, understandably need, a lot more time…”

Worry rose in Gary like a rising wave, “My poor Ashy…”

“He’s going to be fine though,” smiled Mismagius tiredly, “He’s got you after all, Pikachu and Ritchie, his mother, Misty, Brock, Tracey” –

Tracey!

“Mismagius, h-how is Tracey?!?”

“Oh! He’s awake! He’s doing very well!”

“Thank god,” Gary collapsed on his bed, his hands going through his hair, “Oh thank Arecus and each one of their angels…!”

Mismagius was downcast, “No kidding, that Espeon, oooh terrible, terrible thing it was, I’m glad it’s gone. Oh!” the Clefable’s com was ringing, “Oh…it’s your sister” –

“FUCK” –

Mismagius (and Chimecho) looked as if they had just been slapped in the face (Ash stirred mildly)– Oh…you said that…out loud, and every mother within a 10 mile radius heard you, you dirty boy!
“Um, gimme…please…”

Mismagius did, and smartly excused themselves from the room to give Gary a moment, Chimecho turned away, as if they were trying to suddenly be invisible, Gary answered the com –

“H” –

“GARY OAK YOU HANG UP THIS COM AND I WILL CHOKE YOU THROUGH THE GODDAMN SCREEN SO HELP ME GOD” –

Been there, done that.

“Hi” –

“DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME????”

– “Daisy.”

Gary could hear panting, as if Daisy was running, “Listen Gary, listen, I know, I’m not really your sister, I know we’re playing some sort of surrogate family bullshit, but when you make someone care about you the least you can do IS LET THEM KNOW YOU’RE OKAY.”

“I’m sorry” –

“Do you know how worried I’ve been?” she is definitely crying now, “Do you know what was going through my mind as I drove over here, and I drove, STRAIGHT, HERE, I didn’t stop, I did not stop till I was at this fucking hospital’s doorstep.”

And now you’re welling up Gary, wipe those eyes,

“I’m okay.”

“I don’t know how Tracey puts up with you, I really don’t, and now he’s hurt and I couldn’t get in touch with anyone” –

Gary listened to Daisy completely break down over the phone, and felt like complete shit. Daisy eventually hung up the com, finishing up by saying she was almost there, Gary replying that he would be very happy to see her, wiping his eyes to no avail.

By now Ritchie had finally woken up (Chimecho kinda slapped him a bit in the face with their soft tail). For him to have slept through all of that meant he at least was (FINALLY) catching some much needed deep zzzz’s. Ritchie sat up groggily, rubbing the sleep from his eyes and shooing Chimecho away –

“Hey there,” Gary croaked with his face still a mess, Ritchie snapped to him wide eyed –

“GARY!!” – he quickly forsook his bed to run over and jump into Gary’s, clutching him in one of the strongest hugs Gary had ever felt –

“You’re okay, you’re okay, you’re okay, you’re okay, you’re okay” –

This is the, second time, you both are hugging each other covered in snot and tears…..PLUS 10,000 FRIENDSHIP POOOOINTS >8’D!!!!!!

“I’m okay, I’m okay,” Gary answered hugging Ritchie back, sniffing, wiping his eyes some more, “Dnga, I’m kinda more concerned about you guys,” Gary rubbed Ritchie’s back –
Why didn’t you protect Ash –

“We’re okay,” Ritchie’s voice was muffled against Gary’s shirt, “It just got to be, a lot, stuff started sinking in,” Ritchie pulled back, face a mess, “A lot of stuff – I should get him up, he needs this, he needs you so bad” –

“No, no, let him rest, let him rest for now, he’ll wake up soon right?” –

“That’s what we thought about you” –

That almost triggered Gary’s anxiety into chaos levels, but he kept Clefable’s words in mind, many as they were, “I mean, Chimecho has been taking good care of Ash, haven’t they?”

Ritchie paused, giving Chimecho a look, the pure psychic type responding with a thumbs-up via tail form, “Yeah, yes, yes they have,” Ritchie smiled, “They’ve been doing an amazing job.” Ritchie looked longingly at Ash, and sighed, “I got caught up in it, heh…”

Great.

“For now we can talk,” said Gary pulling Ritchie’s attention back to him, “Tell me, what happened? Define the stuff, all the stuff, what did he do? How did he get sick?”

Ritchie scratched the back of his head, “Well……When Ash woke up, I was so happy, everyone was really, and kind of surprised because I’m sure you’ve been told that he should have been out for much longer. He was shocked, like you, I’m sure, at how long he’d been out, and then you were there still asleep, and we were okay at first because we were like, knowing, and hoping you’d wake up soon, anduh Ash went, well wheelchaired over to Misty and Tracey’s room and talked with them, after talking with his mom and me, Gardevoir was still out, he talked to Brock. Max, Thomas, Rose, everyone, like, well almost everyone, he couldn’t catch Mary at the time, but she’s okay, but like everyone he could get in contact with, he talked to, to like make sure they were okay” –

This coming from the person who was LITERALLY GROUND ZERO OF NIGHTMARE FUCK YOU ICE LAND –

“Everyone was more concerned about Ash though, and after he was like okay with everyone being okay, we talked with the International Police who were really super concerned with the Onelings like, yeah thanks for noticing finally,” Ritchie’s voice oozed with malice but he straightened up quick, “So that was something,” he sighed, “And inbetween all that, Ash would try to reach you. And….he couldn’t. He could reach all these other people, everyone but you, and that just…” Ritchie looked into Gary’s eyes, “Dude it burned him, burned him to his core, burned him clean out…”

Is this the kind of guilt Ash feels? You know you’re not at fault Gary but damn if your heart isn’t completely cut open and bleeding.

Ritchie wiped his eyes, “It sucks man, it really does being so helpless to help someone you love so much….So like, from that point, Ash, was on a mission to help, to do, anything and everything in his power to do something, he couldn’t sit there, he just, could not sit still, not when so much is happening – and like, if we didn’t let him do anything, he’d feel a million times worse, because the news coming out of Viridian City, it’s bad, it’s really bad Gary” –

“You guys were supposed to stay away from that” –

“It’s everywhere! And I mean everywhere! I had no idea how bad it was – dude, the Ditto that could put itself into pieces and be all Thingy had a third part that Cobalion took out – and that third part hit the Viridian Emergency Control and Dispatch Center” –
“Wait, isn’t that a counterpart to the police station?”

“Yup…..we think they attacked them because it was some sort of kick-back to locking up some of their besties, that Lisa slaughtered anyway, and that’s a whole other can of worms, but let me just say the body count is much higher than anyone thought it would be and its just awful, awful, this is a horrible tragedy and the coverage is worldwide, like, before this happened, the biggest news out of Kanto was our seasons being all weird with the changes, and the seasons festival being late. I mean….How can you sit back during all of that when there is something screaming inside you to help?”

So…..Ash tried to take a break from the world. You tried to take Ash away from the world. And the world came crashing back with a vengeance.

“Ash is a helper, it’s in his blood, it is in his nature, dude, check it.” Ritchie produced his (new) com and showed Gary a post Ash had made and posted to all his social media accounts:

Oh, Ash made a statement –

And it read as such, ‘Everyone, thank-you so much for your concerns and well wishes! Please keep all those affected by this terrible tragedy in your thoughts and prayers, and please, please respect everyone’s privacy as we try to cope and adjust to a new reality.’

And that was followed by,

‘This is a very difficult time for Viridian City, if there is anything you can do to help, anything at all, here is a list of numbers for departments and charities that can really use our support!!!’

#ViridianStrong

;’(

That was followed by something Ritchie had pinned on his own account which was basically all the departments (especially Viridian’s medical hub) and charities thanking Ash for his generous donations, and before he could ask Ritchie, Ritchie spoke, “Gary, he donated practically every last cent he had, his rep at the Kanto Financial Center nearly had a damn heart attack and was like scrambling to get in touch with him and talked him out of,” Ritchie made air quotations, “’bankrupting himself’, but whatever, he has a job, and I don’t mean to sugar daddy you, but he has you too, soooo, I don’t know, but the rep made Ash remember his other financial obligations, like the schools his other pokemon are attending and whatnot” –

As you know, good on Ash for wanting his pokemon to have an education, but you sure as hell don’t mind now getting the chance to be a sugar daddy to your Ashy <3

“But the only way Ash would compromise in keeping some of his own money waaaaaaaaaaaaassssssssssssss thiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii

BOY –

Ritchie put a finger on Gary’s mouth before he could even BEGIN –

“Now before you get mad, Ash is not competing, there is no way in the lights of this earth anyone would allow him to do so – Mrs. Ketchum went full mom mode on him don’t worry – we know Ash is in a very, very delicate state of mind, hole in his code, him getting sick, you being still knocked
out, this was to keep Ash preoccupied as much as it was about helping people,” Ritchie removed his finger, but Gary still kept a very stern look, Ritchie held a half smile, “He had to do something, he just had to, and I mean, look at the response man, and 20,000 of those pecks was in the first 10 minutes, that’s crazy!” Ritchie looked warmly at the post, “It’s like, he never left, you know? Like, Gondor called for aide and Rohan answered, big time, big time because dude look, look who responded” –

@Blue: Sign us up, we’re coming home!
@Red: ….He means me too.

HOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOLD THE FUCK UP –

“Dude, what” –

“I know right?! Red, or David, and Blue, or, uh, Jonathan” –

“I forget which are the code names” –

“I know right, at least my name isn’t a primary color” –

“But like, um, um, um, wow” –

KANTO’S LOST MASTERS 8D, well, okay they’re unofficial Masters, not really Masters at all in the League’s eyes – BUT STILL –

“I know right?” Ritchie was practically squeaking, “Anywho, um, pbbth, so, so like, Red and Blue are totally coming in from Alola, and, aaaaand~!”

Gary continued reading,

@HilbertBlack: Unova coming in hot! >:D Me and the missus are joining!
@HildaWhite: Can’t wait to see you Ash! <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3

“Oh my god” –

THOSE ARE FUCKING REAL
MASTERSAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

“YES!! Hilbert and Hilda from Unova are coming! The Married Master couple of UnovaaaaaaaaaAAAA~!!! And like, even ETHAN wanted to come! ETHAN! But, hrrrmmmmugh, he said he’s assisting in Sinnoh, but he totally sends his regards – like, dude,” Ritchie was practically biting his com, “aaaaaaa~!”

Goddam it’s cute seeing Ritchie so star-struck :3 But fuck it man, so are you! For phoofs sake, Red and Blue are coming home BECAUSE OF ASH. HOLY SHIT. No for real, HOLY SHIT –
“Lance is also helping Ash put together the Tourney along with Brock and a couple other gym leaders, it’s going on pretty smoothly I gotta say, it’s going to be so great, this is so good Gary, it’s all so good.”

However, an eyebrow quirked up from Gary who was suddenly set with a very real reality, “But, okay, so, this is good, it’s awesome, but, I’m to believe none of this put any pressure on him?”

Ritchie’s happiness turned sour and he looked away, touching his face nervously, “Weeeeeeelllll….” he sighed, “We should have seen this coming, honestly, I mean, we all know it’s wrong, but, he…….Ash feels responsible” –

Gary’s heart hurt, “How, how can he possibly feel responsible?!”

“It’s Ash,” was Ritchie’s only response, and that was all Gary needed to understand, “We’re all adults here Gary, I know his mother wanted to shield him, everyone wanted to shield him! We wanted to protect him! But, he can make his own decisions, I mean within reason, and you know for him to have done nothing, that would have only made him feel worse” –

“He’s not exactly conscious at the moment, is he?”

“No, he isn’t, but as Mrs. Ketchum put it, ‘to confine my son would be trying to contain a ray of light, it’s not going to work, it’s not in his nature.’ So what we can do Gary is what Gardevoir said, to channel in some good energy, some positive vibes to give Ash’s heart the strength to fight and to work on what he needs to work on to get himself better because there is so much negative right now, it’s suffocating!”

*And you see Ash gasping for air –*

“I want to hold him,” said Gary, “I need to hold him.”

“Oh, um,” Ritchie looked to Chimecho who nodded. They used their psychic powers to move the med machines away (no one was currently hooked up to them) and the beds together, lowering the bed rails, “Thank you Chimecho!”

*Chiing-aling-ling-chingaling~!*

Gary moved himself to Ash’s side, Ritchie staying back in not wanting to crowd them; Ash was still dealing with a nasty fever after all.

*My sweetheart….* Gary gave Ash a lingering kiss on his cheek, feeling how hot and flushed his skin was, yet, Gary saw an almost immediate reaction of Ash’s face relaxing slightly. “I’m here Love, I’m here.”

“Me too,” said Ritchie, “Oof” – Gary had snagged him into a cuddle hold.

“Yes you are.”

For now at least, Gary and Ritchie had each other to lean on as they waited for Ash to come around, yet again. Thankfully Clefable (?) returned not long after that with a bulging tray of food –
“Oh Ritchie, Ritchie! Blessed be you’re up! Hang on, I’ll go get you your own plates” –

“Oh no Clefable” –

“Yeah we can share this, this is a lot” –

“Fish-posh, your bodies need plenty of nutrition, I’ll be right back!” so off it went against a sighing Gary and Ritchie. Through the swing of the door, Umbreon, Pikachu, Sparky, Blastoise, Arcanine, Charizard, Zippo –

“Alakazam!? Nidoking?!”

And a, Geninja? All entered the room! Squeezing in really against the garden of flowers –

“Well now, look at you all!” Gary was riding cloud nine seeing all of them well, Umbreon, Pikachu and Sparky jumping up on their bed – that Greninja looking very impressive –

“Gary,” said Ritchie as Sparky snuggled up to him, “That’s Ash’s famous Greninja! They came over with Gardevoir’s assistants, they were keeping up with the news and stuff, they just had to come and see Ash!”

The water and dark type nodded, “Gre-ninja!”

“It’s so nice to meet you” –

Suddenly the room door flung open putting everyone and the pokemon on point (Ash’s Greninja with a Water Shuriken* in hand), but as quick as their guard went up, it went down –

“Gary” –

The pokemon all parted themselves to make way for a panting young woman dressed in a loose shirt and pants leaning on the side of the doorframe –

“Daisy….”

She pushed herself up from her knees. Gary, regrettably, had to uncurl himself from Ash. Gary and Daisy made eye contact, he flung open his arms and Daisy dove right into them, the both of them clinging to each other like they hadn’t seen one another in years, and may very well haven’t.

Ritchie sat back, very much reminded of his mini reunion with Ash before all hell broke loose, and thankful hell did not break loose again (at least situation-wise, Daisy still let Gary have it verbally, Ritchie liked to think we was more gentle with Ash…perhaps that didn’t do too many favors…). Pikachu hopped over to Ash’s bed, snuggling up by their trainer, Charizard lumbering over to be by his side as well.

“Hey, so, um, *sniff*, h-how is the Master-To-Be?” asked Daisy, taking a tissue and wiping (in a futile manner) her face.

“She’ll be okay,” said Ritchie, “When Ash was awake we were talking about different kinds of treatments with Gardevoir. Gary,” Ritchie gave him a smile, “We’re going to all have to be diligent about taking our meds, okay?”

“Oh lord,” commented Daisy thickly.

“Contrary to popular belief,” said Gary taking the jab, “I do like taking medicine that helps me
manage my condition.”

“HM” –

“Um,” Ritchie scratched his head, “Ash may also get some body aches too, so when he wakes, they’re also gonna put him on a little pain medication to help counter-act that, anduh, as for the other medication, the other treatments, Gardevoir is gonna give verbal advice, but mainly their assistants will be working on Ash from here on out. Gardevoir really, really pushed themselves…” Ritchie took a deep breath, “they gave us a big warning about, taking care of ourselves, and you know, of course they gave Ash a good talking to, Gardevoir and Mrs. Ketchum both, for Ash to try, key word being try, to try to keep the news down to a minimum, because he is so vulnerable right now. Like, they said anything, and I mean everything is amplified in him because of the hole in his code, like, one thing might not be such a big deal to us, but it could be the end of the world for him” –

*HEY DJ PUT ON ‘NOW THAT’S WHAT I CALL ANXIETY THAT I DEAL WITH 24/7 VOLUME 2859’!!!!!!*

–“and they were warning Ash that he could literally *burn* his code, the open edges, if his emotions take another nosedive, so yeah, they weren’t happy with him burning himself out, so to speak” –

*To think you took the torture of waiting for him and Ash got dunked by waiting for you?*

The pit of Gary’s stomach turned, *I have to do something…..* *

“So yeah, we need to work on that with him,” said Ritchie, “He really, needs to work on that.”

“Oh okay,” Daisy interjected, “So like, he needs to do that for himself though, or he’ll never get it.”

Gary didn’t have the strength to bristle, and he didn’t want to, even if Daisy was taking over for Misty in the criticizing department, hell, he would need all the help he could get to make sure everything from here on out would be going in a positive direction –

“You guys, well you Ritchie, you’ve done a better job of taking care of yourself” –

*PARDON~?

– “but you mister,” Dairy poked Gary’s chest with a pointed finger, “You are guilty of this too, this not listening and getting all wound up, you shouldn’t feel the need to sacrifice yourself just to pick up a pencil for the other, does that make any sense? Communicating and compromising is the bread and butter of a relationship yeah, but if those pillars are already shaky, then what kind of foundation is that, you know?” Daisy wiped her face again, making better progress against the tears, “You want this to work Gary, you’re going to have put in a world of work, are you ready for that?”

“I am.” Gary glanced over to Ash, “He’s worth it.”

“And Ash needs to do the same.”

Clefable returned again with another tray loaded with food, and once they saw Daisy now in the room, it made a polite fuss in going back out to get some more food, and before anyone could stop them, they were gone, *again*, against their sighs. With the swing of the door, came another entrant, a Rotom, their com in hand (floating next to it really), listening to a news report as they came in to chat with Chimecho (in pokemon speak but that didn’t stop Chimecho from ringa-ling-ding-dinging).

But like a Venomoth to a flame, you couldn’t help but listen to the report. And…like Ritchie said…..it’s bad….really bad. You all are adults here and know the limits of your media consumption
but Gary we’re about to explore ‘I know this hurts me but I’m going to listen to it anyway.’ Let’s look up some stuff shall we? Let’s be total hypocrites here and just immerse ourselves in what we ALL KNOW is going to hurt us and that’s just how it is because now you have to see for yourself how bad, because how can it be that bad, maybe they’re just exaggerating, you know what you went through. Let’s see if all the details coming through from the news outlets are correct. Ah. Ah. Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh. Seems they are.

To know you were actually there in heat of it all, makes it feel surreal somehow…..Really you all probably should have stayed away from the social sites (as there was still the unanimous agreement to keep the TV in this room OFF) but hey, I’m convinced you all are secretly masochists! It turns out Daisy had gone out shopping for a new com and charger for you. You must remember to completely jailbreak it from all the tracking apps she must have placed on it, pbbth. But for real...these stories....you guys are beyond lucky to be alive, someone up there must really, really like you, or just enjoys your enduring torture as consumable entertainment. But who am I to speak on the matter.

*I wanna speak.

>:C

*:X

These pictures of the remains of Viridian Memorial don’t even look real. You want to believe they are fake, but you were RIGHT THERE when the building fell and Ash was still inside and you were screaming and screaming and screaming for him……..Look at the bodies covered in sheets, and with the collapse of the hospital, some bodies might never be found, oh but Chandelure here, Mary’s boss ass Chandelure – okay so when the straight up hero pokemon were racing against time pulling people out of the hospital before it collapsed, Chandelure was pulling out bodies so families could have their closure and be able to bury their loved ones. Obviously not everyone was recovered, but damn if Chani didn’t try. Perhaps more ghost pokemon should have had the same foresight? Grant it getting alive people out first makes more sense. Ritchie told you that Mary had to go collect Max herself from shifting through the rubble (he wouldn’t listen to Dewgong or Sneasel) and you honestly don’t know how much gas either of them has left, especially Mary….Ritchie said they were still doing okay, oh and Thomas was discharged from the hospital! That’s some good news too.

Apparently the evil Espeon and Ditto were like a wildfire to a forest with how many lives they were able to claim in such a short amount of time. You’re reading off the names in your mind, names of people who were murdered, for no other reason than just being at the wrong place at the wrong time – and in a place of healing! In a place of help! In a place where people go to get better, to get help, to make a difference, to be of assistance – and Espeon mowed these people down! And why? For what? Why would it do that? Why would it kill so many innocent people? People who were just trying to get better, and it killed them for no reason. It’s sickening, detestable, disgusting, and it boggles the mind. Not to mention the fucking familiars Lisa just, up and made, seriously? Seriously. Those poor people were already murdered in cold blood, don’t desecrate them any further! God, just....no wonder Ash burned himself out and made himself sick….This is awful, this is so awful....You hope to god Ash won’t be crushed by another guilt trip because this is all kinds of recipes for disaster, and this is making you so scared, so, so, so scared that “Ash”, your “Ash”, is going to disappear because of the hole in his soul, that the depression is going to surge tenfold into the code wound and kill Ash from the inside out and okay enough, enough, enough, enough –

*Please wake up Ash, please, please love, please wake up soon. Please, please, I need you, so much....*
himself, idiot, look at anything else, put on a Disney movie or something, one without death would be ideal. Oh wait that’s the whole fucking catalog. Hmp. Well, LET’S READ THIS ARTICLE 8D!!! Oh, oh, ooooooooooooooooooh – OKAY SO you know how Suicune was all cool in the pool? Well it turns out it was super cool, because it MUST have left a blessing in the fucking water because, because, get this, injuries from burns were NON-EXISTENT! Someone also even SPORE they saw a child, a child patient, walk right through the flames completely unscathed! Yeah, you want that story to go world-wide, but what does? The pictures of the flames, bluh, okay sure.....

Umbreon put their paw on Gary’s com, giving him the “SHUT IT OFF” look about as forcefully as they could. Gary turned off his com, laying back on the bed, composing himself quickly in case Ritchie, or Daisy took a look at him (that didn’t stop Alakazam or Blastoise from catching Gary and making a mental note). Ritchie and Sparky were playing a game on Clefable’s com, one of the farming ones from Placebooks. Chimecho was still dutifully tending to a still unconscious Ash.

Gary looked around the room, taking in the sight of all the flowers again, of which Greninja had taken a couple for themselves and Pikachu while Clefable watered the rest, humming happily; they were fashioning some flower bracelets. Charizard and Nidoking had parked themselves by Ash, Charizard grumbling because their claws kept cutting the petals when they tried to make a bracelet for themselves.

*It is nice to have a room filled to the brim and bursting with friends and flowers, oh!*

“Hey Ritchie, did y’all make any flower crowns?”

Ritchie shook his head, “We wanted to, but never got around to it.” Ritchie looked up at Gary, adding in a monotone voice, “Ash was too busy being busy and worrying himself, I should have known it was bad when he said he wasn’t hungry.”

“Oh my god.”

“I know right.”

Daisy was eating a bowl of noodles in a chair off to the side, her com playing the movie Titanic and it was right at the part where Rosey was unclenching Jack’s frozen dead hand from her own, “He better be starving when he wakes up.”

*Ching-aling-alingling~!* As if on queue, Ash suddenly sat up.

“Gre-NINJA!”

“Pi-pi-pika!”

“Ash” –

“Ash, Ash!” –

Clefable accidentally dropped the watering can, hobbled itself over to Ash as Charizard and Pikachu steadied him under Chimecho’s care, “Watch your claws, easy, easy, up he goes now” said Clefable – Ash groaned, holding his head in his hands – “Still have the headache do you?”

“Yes,” Ash croaked.

“Ashy” –
Ash snapped up upon hearing Gary’s voice, their eyes locked, “Gary” – Gary beamed at Ash – “You’re awake!”

“Yes Love, I’m okay, I’m okay” –

“Dearie, be mindful of your wounds – !”

*CHINGALINGGGGGGG*

Ash practically tore himself out of every attempt of confinement to crawl over to Gary, “I couldn’t feel you, I couldn’t feel you at all!”

“Dearie, please!” –

Never-the-less, Gary insides seared as he gathered Ash in his arms, Ash in turn yanking him close, “What do you mean you couldn’t feel me?”

Ritchie interjected, “Again, Gardevoir said that could be a side effect from the hole, you two still had, have, the heartstring” –

“No one knew for sure,” Ash hissed, Ritchie rolled his eyes, “But I feel it, I feel you now, Gary!” – the both of them were clutching each other as tightly as they could, almost to the point of pain, but Gary still magically wove his hand under Ash’s chin, tilted his face up, and let their lips instinctively lock together –

Blastoise turned to Arcanine, whispering in pokemon speak, See? Two humans deeply in love need to press their lips together, it must release a type of beneficial hormone, and/or signify to the other a physical desire, say for instance to drop an egg for fertilization, otherwise why would they do it so profoundly?

Indeed, Arcanine agreed, I think Gary has a greater potential to become gravid over Ash however. So many eggs must have been planted by now! How are either of them not with young yet?! I’d love to help care for their pups!

Umbreon, meanwhile, still thought the both of them were fucking morons as Ash and Gary’s kiss deepened right in front of everyone –

“Oh, there, we don’t exist anymore,” said Daisy against (mainly Gary’s) overtly wet kissing noises, “Come Ritchie, let’s go bunk with Misty and Tracey for a bit before we get pregnant by friendly fire.”

Even if Ritchie growled internally (for MAAAAAAAAAAAAANY reasons), the look on his face gave him away, “Good idea, I’ll catch you later Ash.”

Once Ritchie’s warmth retracted away, Ash broke the kiss (much to Gary’s dismay), “Ah, Ritchie” –

“No, no~” Ritchie softened greatly, “I know how much you need this, just, listen to Chimecho and Clefable would you?”

Ash blinked, finally fully acknowledging the fairy type who had their stubby arms crossed and the psychic type who had a knowing look on their tiny smug face.

“Oh, oh I’m so sorry” –
Clefable sighed, “That’s all right now, let me just get in a Heal Pulse* in ye (*CHINGALINGBITCH*), get that headache out” –

“My headache is almost gone now,” Ash smiled.

Ritchie took a glance at all the food off to the side, “Hey, are you feeling hungry?”

Ash’s stomach spoke before be could, “Yeah, to be honest I’m starving!”

The look of relief from Ritchie went all around the room. “Good to hear,” Ritchie touched his forehead to Ash’s, “I’m glad you’re awake Ash,” he nuzzled and hugged Ash, making him giggle, Ritchie leaving with fondness oozing out of his features with Daisy and Sparky almost pulling him out the room.

“Don’t screw each other too hard,” said Daisy flatly; Gary stuck his tongue out at her as the door shut on her sticking out her tongue in rebuttal.

Blastoise, Arcanine, Zippo, Alakazam, and Nidoking were the next to excuse themselves with well wishes and thanking all the stars above the couple was okay. Alakazam and Nidoking gave Gary hugs and pats of reassurances for a Trainer they had been apart from longer than their liking.

Alakazam cleared their throat, “Gary, it’s good to see you smile.”

Aaaaaaand that would have completely disemboweled Gary had he not had the happiness buffer of Ash in his arms. Ow.

Greninja, Charizard, Umbreon and Pikachu were the last to excuse themselves, Pikachu helping Ash get situated with a plate stuffed with food, “Pipipi, Pikachu!”

“Thanks buddy, sorry I keep making trouble….”

Pikachu gave Ash a cute pika-hug, *I know you’ll pull through.*

“Gre, Greninja,” Greninja handed Ash the two finished flower bracelets.

“Oh, thankyou! Thankyou so much! Look Gary, here, let me put it on” –

*Hmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmkindawishthesewereringshmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm~ Couldbesymbolicofringshmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm* 

Pikachu bounced off with the rest of the pokemon while Charizard gave Ash a nudge before departing themselves, leaving Ash to tear into the plate of food. Clefable looked very, very satisfied in watching Ash refuel, whilst Chimecho seemed to be in an internal happy place –

“This is soooo good! What is this little, pouch thing” –

Aaaaaaaand we’re just gonna, kindly tune out Clefable giving Ash an entire history lesson on all the eats, hmm~ They are so cute though. Like the exact opposite of your sweet Audi, sweet, shy, little Audi….Sigh. You did receive some communication from the pokemon center earlier in breaks from the news consumption, but you really, really want to speak with Audi….It is a little worrying that you can’t just yet, they are resting, resting, restingiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii4Who knew waiting and resting could be so fucking exhausting.

“So this is called a, pasty?”

“Yup!”
“Down into my belly it goes~ Nom, nom, nom –”

Gary moved himself to curl around Ash from behind like a limber Persian, rubbing Ash’s back, feeling him move as he gobbled up his plate.

*If you recall Gary, this is about as much as you’ve seen Ash eat in a while, well, since this whole fiasco thing. Good, good, this is great, he needs to get some food-food into him. It may not be the meal you had wanted to cook for him oh so long ago again, but, at least he’s moved up from soup, he’s eating it alllllll – Ash went rigid – oh – Ash’s face suddenly turned green – oh no –*

Clefable realized the problem it let get away (Chimecho was still in its happy place), “Oh no Love I think you might have eaten too fast!”

**UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUGH GET THE BUCKET D8 –**

Ash frantically pointed to his throat –

*“HE’S CHOKING” –*

Chimecho emerged from their happy place, slapped Ash flat on his back with their tail making Ash cough up the pasty bit, and the psychic type returned to their internal beaches and waves.

Clefable and Gary made all kinds of fuss at Ash but Ash was just happy to catch his breath, clutching his chest as he leaned on Gary with Gary swearing every oath he knew that he would never, EVER, (let Ash out of his sight) let Ash live it down if choking on food was what took him out.

And then Ash’s stomach decided it was time for a mutiny, making Ash feel very, very nauseated, but his body was determined to keep all the food he had eaten inside, much to everyone’s relief. Clefable cranked up the hospital bed so Gary and Ash could sit up more comfortably, Gary holding Ash and his grumbling tummy.

“Traitor,” Ash muttered to his gut.

“How~” Gary nestled his lips in Ash’s hair.

“At least you’re keeping it all down,” said Clefable, cleaning up all the leftover food, “It’s about time you got something nice and hearty in ye, don’t you agree?” Clefable was looking to Chimecho but Chimecho was faaaaar awaaaaaay.

“I’d adopt you if I could.

Once Clefable was done, they grabbed Chimecho by the tail, leaving the pokemon to float on their powers, still lost in their happy place “Alrighty now Loves, we’re going to go get some instruction from Gardevoir and then we’ll be right back, toodles~!” Clefable left like a child with a balloon, that balloon being a Chimecho that couldn’t wait to go back to Kalos –

Thus Ash and Gary were finally left alone together, again.

*Nice, convenient room clearing, it’s almost as if this WAS part of Gardevoir’s instruction, ‘once both humans are awake leave them alone so they can copulate’ – HELL YEAH >8D*

Not that they could do too much aside from soft and tender caresses (Ash still feeling a bit nauseous), but for now, it was more than enough to feel each other’s reassurances and sweet nothings. Ash turned a little so they could fully embrace and feel each other, the both of them moving in time with
each breath and nuzzle. Ash nudged up for another kiss, Gary touched Ash’s face, their lips meeting softly before deepening greatly with an inhale, grasping at each other, tongues reaching, suckling with moans driving their pace up and up. Ash the one to break the kiss again suddenly, pausing to look into Gary’s eyes, each the same color, Gary looking into Ash’s, one brown, one blue.

*It flows like water.*

Gary curled a lock of hair behind Ash’s ear. Ash closed his eyes briefly to nuzzle into Gary’s hand, giving a kiss to his palm before Ash dove into Gary’s embrace, Gary hugging Ash as much as he could, trying to shield him from the emotions that tormented him.

*I let it get to me Gary. I was so scared, I’m so sorry, I let the fear get to me when I couldn’t feel you, and all these thoughts just burst into my head and wouldn’t go away and all I could think about was getting you to pull through, even though, I knew I should have just, left you alone, I couldn’t….I upset everyone around me when I went under, and that’s no one’s fault but mine…*  
*Told you it flows like water.*

*Shh, shh, shh, it’s alright now. We’re still works in progress remember? There’s still a lot we have to figure out.*

*I’m going to be better, I swear it.*

The room was silent, not a word was formed from their mouths, they were speaking, knew they were speaking, but in their desperate need to communicate with one another, they were almost (blissfully) oblivious that the manner was so much more intimate (especially since they weren’t facing each other). Their heartstring was utilizing and revamping their Transfer Effect, a seemingly new power enveloping them with how clear they could hear one another’s thoughts, a give and take even in measure, till, Gary received a dousing dose of the fear Ash felt for him and a host of other turbulent emotions threatening to rip through –

*These bad thoughts just don’t stop, they don’t, and I’m working through them, trying to see stuff, and, I know everyone means well, Ritchie and I talked for a long time – but….I…..*  

Ash nuzzled harder into Gary, his right hand touching lightly around his blue eye.

*It’s so obvious now Gary, it’s so out there, and I’m trying to gauge everyone’s reaction to it, and I know, I know everyone means well, they’re not trying to hurt me, but I just, I want to make it so clear that I’m still me! I’m still in here! People change, and I am changing, I am, going through changes and I’m not what so many people think or want me to be and I’m trying not to let it get to me, but I’ve never, felt this before, I’ve never felt…..this kind of shame –*  

“Shame?” Gary vocalized.

“Sh-Shame, for…”

Gary’s hand swiftly moved to cupping Ash’s cheek, lifting his face up so their eyes could meet, his thumb gliding over Ash’s lips. Ash swallowed the rest of his words laced in pain, but Gary still felt their ill intent fester in Ash. Gently, Gary pulled Ash in. Ash closed his eyes as Gary gave a lingering kiss just over the blue one. When they pulled apart, they were once again locked in each other’s gaze.

“Never feel shame for the challenges you’ve gone through. I know you know we’re not defined by
the bystanders, but the choices we ourselves make.”

*Remember Gary, things are very much amplified in Ash right now. In you right now. These feelings, they’re overbearing and overreaching.*

“Gary, when you look at me, do, do you see someone different?”

“I do, but not in the way you think,” said Gary running his fingers through Ash’s hair, “I’ve known you for over twenty years Ash, and your courage, your compassion, never fails to amaze me. I see someone whose heart is endless, *endless.*”

Ash looked away momentarily, not in underlying opposition, but to consider Gary’s words. Gary feeling he *was* making a difference, however small, in how Ash was interpreting himself.

“I will support whatever decision you make Ash, if you want to get contact lenses, that’s your choice, and no one else’s. You’ve got a tooth implant coming soon don’t you” –

“A tooth is a little easier to hide.”

“There’s nothing to hide. What’s wrong is a lack of respect and a lack for privacy now-a-days,” Gary tut-tutted.

“It seems like I’m coming apart bit by bit in front of everyone, despite everything….You risked your life for me, you gave, everything for me, and I…."

Gary could feel Ash’s disappointment in himself, “It’s going to be okay Love, you’ll see, we’ve got each other, we’ve got each other, and you know everyone here is on your side, no matter what, and all together, we’re going to help you get stronger at the seams.”

“Do you think I’m overreacting? It’s just, like its one thing after another, *after another…*”

Gary shook his head, “Ash, we just went through *hell,* fiery, freezing, life-threatening, tumultuous physical and emotional *hell, again.* Now that we’re able to truly relax….again, our minds and bodies are going to start the unwinding process….again – and that can set loose a whole torrent of wonky health problems physically and mentally. It’s just, something we’ve got to ride out and process, just as we’ve been doing before, we’re going to keep doing so now, and to any other challenges that come our way. Just rinse and repeat Love, we can make it, we can work through it together.”

*You feel it, you feel it. Dammit. He feels so unsure of himself, he feels at a loss, he feels there’s something missing inside of him, he feels incomplete...But you’re here....!* Did you not show him how committed you are when you LITERALLY HELPED DRAG HIM OUT OF ICE HELL????

Ash rubbed his neck, Gary catching a sign of guilt before Ash’s eyes focused on something else, “Well, then…I might come apart a little more, I’m sorry, I know you’re healing too, this isn’t a one way street, you can lean on me too Gary, you can tell me anything!”

“I know Love, even if we both totally unravel, we’ll stitch each other back up.” Gary touched Ash right over his heart, convincing himself as much as Ash, “We’ve already got one string holding us together.”

*There, there, what is that pained face for? What’s wrong Ash? I feel you pulling away –*

“What’s wrong?”

Ash looked like he was in physical pain, “Gary…there’s, something I have to tell you, and I don’t
know if you’ve noticed or not, but I,” Ash shut his eyes, “I lost your necklace” –

*That’s it?* Gary tilted his head, “My necklace? So?”

“You’ve had that for years! Wasn’t that something your parents gave you?!”

“It was, but…”

No, no that does hurt, don’t play it down –

“You didn’t lose it Ash, that’s not on you, if I were to blame anyone, I’d blame Espeon and the rest of the Oneling scum that attacked us. Don’t you feel guilty about it for another second, besides, if it came down to some object and you, honestly, what would I pick?”

There, his eyes go searching again when the truth is right in front of him. Look at me Ash. See me. See. Me.

“No, that makes sense,” said Ash, his voice a little heavy.

“I can always get another necklace Ash, but that,” Gary scratched his face nonchalantly, “reminds me, I’ve um, I lost something of ours too” –

“Nothing that can’t be replaced,” Ash said quickly, “Don’t worry about it” –

“It was our pokeball,” that got Ash’s attention, “Kept it safe all these years in that little black box and now it’s just, poof. I was gonna…I don’t even remember what I was going to use it for, I think I was going to put like a little love note in it, but then the Espeon and Lisa attacked and now it’s gone.”

“Gary you can’t blame yourself for that” –

“So I don’t want to hear you fret over a necklace, okay? You don’t fret over the necklace, and I won’t fret over our pokeball” –

“Right it was out of our hands.”

“Completely out of our control.”

“Nothing I could have prevented” –

“Nothing could have been done different” –

Silence. Gary and Ash looked at each other, both feeling the underlying current they tried to hide from the other, their heartstring betraying them.

It still hurts. It still hurt losing those items that meant so much. Sure they’re just things, but, they were your things. They were keepsakes that held past and promise. Now all you have left is the present and future, and for some reason, that feels a little scary…

Ash’s gaze dipped down, he leaned into Gary, the both of them settling back down on the bed in each other’s embrace, Gary feeling Ash’s breath on his chest, the bad thoughts still gnawing on the edges with the material loss.

“Bluh, I think I could use a vacation from my own head at this point,” said Ash.

“The sentiment is mutual Love,” Gary sighed,
“I’ve got to be more consistent with my medicine. Which reminds me, I should probably get clearance on my refill.”

“They’re gonna put me on medicine too,” said Ash, “But Gardevoir said we might not find the medicine that works for me right off the bat, it might take some time.”

“We have all the time in the world Love,” Gary tightened his grip around Ash.

“Hmp~” Ash moved up to kiss Gary’s nose, “I’m so glad you’re awake,” Ash nuzzled Gary more, “I’m so glad, I’m so glad….” The gnawing edges stopped for a moment.

“And I’m happy to be back with you,” said Gary, “I never want to leave your side again, ever, *kiss*, ever, *kiss*, ever, *kiss.* I love you, *kiss* every part of you, *kiss*, just as you are Ash *kiss*.”

Ash added breathlessly, “I love you too, so much, so much, so much” –

“You never *kiss* have to fear that Ash *kiss*,” Gary whispered, “I will always *kiss* love you, *kiss* just as you are, *kiss*.”

“Gary” –

And Gary would say it till it would finally sink in. They hugged and kissed so hard that they might bruise; the both of them completely entangled in the other. Gary meant it then, and he means it now that he would love Ash no matter what changes befell him. He just wished Ash could love himself as much as he did.

And Ash, wished he could be a better boyfriend. There was so much he wanted to tell Gary, so much he wanted to do, but all he felt he was doing was vocalizing the bare minimum – even now with the heartstring, the Transfer Effects coming through, they also foretold of the underlying current of misery and woe raging against their mental banks.

That wouldn’t do, not now, not when they’re back together, again, and Ash decided that he and Gary should take this moment for themselves. Ash suddenly rolled on top of Gary, his hands pinning Gary’s arms just above him, the both of them suddenly gathering what they were about to get themselves into against the ever continued threat of conflicting thoughts and emotions –

Would you like this?

HELL YES –

Gary gave his approval with a throaty growl and a sizzling look that read ‘TAKE ME’, the both of them long ignoring the glaringly present fatigue in their limbs, Gary ground up and Ash began grinding down onto Gary, both still clothed, both not caring, but –

“I’ll try, *gulp*, to make this fast,” Ash gasped –

“No, don’t, mh, don’t make it fast” –
“Someone could walk in” –

“Then they can walk right out” –

This is what you want right?

YES – YES – I –

Ash ground himself hard into Gary, erasing almost any chance of thought, “Mhungh, Gary” – kissing him as if this was the last time they would ever touch, they last time they would ever be together, rendering Gary both speechless and breathless with how completely Ash was losing himself and it was driving Gary’s insides wild –

*God Ash, you feel so good, you feel so good! *But – *This is intense, even for you! But so good, SO GOOD – mh – MH!!* – But – a feeling in the undertow was persistent despite the nigh immeasurable waves Ash and Gary’s hips were riding, the feeling sowing up like a great big pointed rock sharpening it’s tooth in the undertow –

You’ve never felt Ash love you this desperately before, this ferociously before – ! But okay you just came out of an 11 day coma thing – and he’s missed you! He missed you so much and he loves you SO MUCH – but this feels, fast – this is fast! Very fast!

As much as Gary wanted Ash to completely unravel in his hands, ultimately something felt off, and the longer it bubbled in Gary’s gut, the darker the feeling became –

*Ash, Love – wait – wait a minuet, wait a minuet – ! Hey! You had a problem before when we did it in a hospital! Ash you felt bad afterwards! Ash is this what YOU want??? This isn’t, Ash WAIT* –

This is what you want right –

WAIT –

Against their bodies’ hot and heavy desires (and a raging boner) Gary broke the kiss, pulling his arms from Ash’s grasp and grabbing Ash’s face, looking intensely into his half lidded eyes, giving Ash time to come down from the high of their surging make-out….. “Gary?” Ash’s eyes questioning, he was barely holding himself up, his eyes shut themselves for a moment as a wasted tingle ran up his spine –

What do you want?
Gary’s features softened as fast as he deflated himself, *God you’re gorgeous…….* Gary watched Ash gulp and gasp as he caught his breath, *Do you have any idea what you do to me Ash….?* Gary’s voice was a gentle as could be despite being out of breath, “On second thought, *huff* lets take it *gulp* easy sweetheart, okay? It’s alright, we’re alright, come on, *swallow* I mean, even I can see how bad a shape we’re in, my body, it feels, oooh I’m starting to feel something” –

**What do you really want?**

Ash’s arms wobbled, “Ungh, yeah, uh, I kinda feel it too, between your legs, but…..”

Gary swallowed internally, *God don’t ever front yourself like that, don’t force yourself for this, not for this, ever, please Love* –

Ash swallowed and opened his eyes, “Yeah…heh….whoops…..I um, um, got, um, carried away, I’m sorry” – Ash tried to pull away, but it was Gary’s turn to snatch him up –

“No, no, don’t be, I wanted it too, *god I wanted it*, but let’s,” Gary pulled Ash down to lay with him, “Let’s stick with this for now, just for now, just until we’re healed, okay?”

…..*You think he ever faked it with you?*

Ash kissed Gary’s nose, “Okay.” Their heart rates began to settle back down from their rapid high, Ash threw his leg over Gary’s side to have their crotches at least touching –

*God you’ll be the death of me!* “Besides, didn’t I promise you all night long when we were back home?”

…..*Dude…..*

Ash sighed pleasantly against Gary, “You sure did.”

“And you bet I’m going to live up to it. Every single mimic pokemon in the forest will know my name and chant it far and wide~”

**Seriously, do you think Ash ever faked it for you…?**

Ash snorted, but Gary could feel his smile, however, he abruptly couldn’t feel too much from the Transfer Effects as they proved to ultimately be as fickle as ever. Perhaps at the moment, for the best.

*Okay, okay. That’s fine, you don’t need that mind-o mumbo jumbo for this. You feel Ash. You know Ash. For fucks sake you’ve known him for over twenty fucking YEARS. This has to be okay for now! You only live once, and who knows with how unpredictable things can be (CASE IN FUCKING POINT THIS GODDAMN STORY) how many more moments you’ll have with those you love. Take your time. Take your time. Treasure this. Treasure them. You don’t know how precious these memories are going to be. They could be downright lifesaving. Sex ain’t everything, and you two have so much more to prove to each other.*

…..*But for reals though, are you actually good in bed?*

Ash falls asleep peacefully, Gary does later.
Word spread around that you had rejoined the natural world fast enough and you were swarmed, in a loving manner at least, by Gardevoir, Ash’s friends and most notably his mother (minus Tracey who is still very much bedridden and taking A Nap) via com communication and it was like honey to your soul to be honest BUT YOU REALLY WANT TO TALK TO TRACEY AND AUDINO AND YOU KINDA HAD A CHANCE EARLIER BUT ASH SEEMED TO KINDA MAYBE SORTA OVERRIDE YOUR ABILITY TO MAKE RATIONAL THOUGHTS but you did send him a series of texts with your new com number sooooooooom KIT). Surprisingly to some, you actually don’t social media too much but this WHOLE DEBACLE has somewhat humbled you to make a couple posts on your most noteworthy accounts that ‘yeah this happened and it sucked but still kickin’’ to some effect. ANYWHO, as much as Ash wanted to clear his calendar and spend every waking moment with you and y’all just smother each other in sloppy make-outs and grabby-touchy hands, Ash is kiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiindaa Big Deal and Putting Together a Tourney with some of the World’s Most Renowned Masters. Masters. That’s right, Masters. Masters the people who are like, for lack of a better term, GODS, in the Trainer world. Which is the real world. So, let’s bank ‘em at Demi-Gods and rethink your life choices because yeah sure World Renowned Scientist is Great, but God-tier? COME ON –

“You know what super power I’d like to have?” said Ritchie as he laid spread eagle on the side of the bed, watching Chimecho hovering over Ash –

“Hm?”

“I want to be able to fly.”

“Too soon,” Ash groaned, nuzzling into Gary; they both laid together with Gary going through his emails as Daisy told him about a couple things that needed the get sorted out at the lab. She was sitting on Gary’s side going through her own assortment of files via her com.

“Hindsight as they say is 20/20~” Ritchie chimed, lifting a leg up.

Gary sighed through his nose.

God, in so many ways….

Ritchie bent himself up, “What super power would you want Ash?

“Hmmmmmm….you know flying does sound pretty cool I gotta say,” Ash gave a wide grin, “I really would be Superman then!”

“Superman doesn’t just have flying,” said Daisy without looking up from her com, “He’s got like laser vision, strength, conditional immortality” –

“Mental stability.”

Ritchie pursed his lips and Gary pooled his attention to Ash.

Ash rubbed the back of his head, “Well, I guess scratch that one off…”

“For the record, Superman isn’t perfect up here,” said Daisy pointing to her temple, “But if you’re looking for someone with an almost spotless record, then you want Wonder Woman.”
“YEAH!” Ash and Ritchie piped.

“And she also has that lasso of truth,” Daisy added, “A useful tool.”

Gary shot Daisy a dirty look.

_Wouldn’t it be something if y’all’s heartstring turned out to be something similar?_

“Wonder Woman can fly right?” asked Ash.

“After the reboot, yeah, they gave her flight powers.”

“Nice~”

_That’s something to ponder over Gary, you felt something incredible last night with Ash, for better or worse, was it the truth?_

Ash turned to Gary, “What super power would you want?”

“Telekinesis.”

“Too soon,” Ritchie toyed.

“You wouldn’t be the one I’d be throwing out,” said Gary, Daisy stuck her tongue out at him.

Ash groaned, turning his head from the painful memory.

Chimecho was looking over some charts as they hovered over Ash, but they were paying close attention to the conversation at hand in feeling a tremor in Ash’s Health Transfer Channel (also they were counting their blessing Clefable was now assisting Tracey for the time being).

Gary then caught onto Ash’s mood turning, diligently remembering how Ash’s emotions needed extra care. He nudged Ash gently, “What’s on your mind babe?”

_This isn’t about last night is it…?_

Ash shook out his hands and gave a ‘blech’, “Just working through past unpleasant thoughts.”

The heartstring says otherwise.

:X

Gary massaged Ash’s hand, trying to rub some reassurance into him. Ash’s hand ran through his hair, “Pffhuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu…. ” His eyes stung, but no tears dropped, cluing Ritchie and Daisy to chill with the subtext.

“Hey, how’s the Tourney coming?” asked Daisy.

_Nice miss-direction –_

Ash perked up slightly, “Oh! I’m supposed to be getting a call today from Hilda and Hilbert, or texts, or something.” Ash reached over Gary to nab Clefable’s com, “Look, lookit,” Ash pulled up Hilda and Hilbert’s accounts on Pecker and they had the Tourney pinned on their walls.

“Nice,” smiled Daisy, “Hey, you think they’ll do a battle showcase with their legends?”

Ash held the com with both his hands, tapping it to his lips, “Maybe” –
HE’S SO CUTE X3 Eyyy, you should check on your order you made an eternity ago for Ash’s new com dude – something is totes amiss there –

“I mean they’re doing so much already, and Lance, and Brock, and just, everyone, it’s so good, this is such a good thing, and it’s going to help so many people!”

You shooooould focussssss on yooourseeeeelf a biiiiittt plllleeaaasseeeeee.

“Gary ow-ow you’re squeezing me” –

Gary’s massage on Ash’s knuckles had turned into a grip, “Oh, sorry” –

“Something on your mind Gary?” Daisy asked with a quirked brow.

HHIIIIIIIIIISSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS – GOD YOU’RE BEING ANNOYING RIGHT NOW –

Chimecho waved their tail to catch everyone’s attention, “I’d like to remind the room that we have two patients here who’s current emotional stability requires direct attention and not diversion. Speak your intents clearly.”

PBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBTH~!

Daisy pursed her lips, but for a moment Ash and Ritchie looked stunned since this was the first time they heard Chimecho speak, but Gary was already on point, “Maybe I could invent a real lasso of truth, like as they say, ‘take a hair of the Houndour that bit you.’

And then you’d just have all the answers wouldn’t you, you wouldn’t be dogged by Misty OR Daisy and you could full on ask your lover straight up if HE EVER FAKED IT WITH YOU 8O –

ASH ISN’T LIKE THAT DX!!!!

ARE YOU EVEN GOOD IN BED GARY?? ARE YOU?? ARE YOU??????

“This whole time you could speak?” asked Ritchie.

Chimecho pursed their lips, “Meh.”

At that moment, Mismagius phased through the door –

“Mismagius! :D”

But Mismagius was honed in onto Ash, the look on their face stonewalled, “Ash, we have visitors, legendary visitors.”

Ritchie bristled, Gary knew the tell-tale signs of Ash plummeting like a rock, “Oh boy,” Ash sighed –

“What? What’s going on?” Gary pressed.

8’3333333333 –

Ash looked to Gary, “It’s about, Moltres. They were supposed to come visit soon, and I guess soon is now.”

I DIDN’T KNOW YOU WERE EXPECTING A VISIT?????? RITCHIE?? THAT MIGHT HAVE
“They must be able to talk about it now,” Ash looked right to Gary and Ritchie, “And talking is important.”

GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAUUUUUUUUGH WHERE IS THIS COMING FROM?????? DX!!!! STOP IT!! STOP IT REOCCURING THEMES!!! YOU ARE BAD THEMES!!!!

The door swung open again with (“Gardevoir! :D”) taking stock of the look on everyone’s face, “Oh good you know about our special guests” –

Mismagius sighed, “It was starting to get a little too comfortable around here, alas.”

Ash was already moving to get off the bed, Gary attempting (poorly) to keep Ash near him with minor touches that turned into full on grabbing, “Gardevoir, I have to go talk with Moltres” –

Gardevoir paused, till, “Yes, I, think you do.”

WHY –

“Gardevoir why?” said Gary, pleading.

“Because the other special guest with Moltres, is, Ho-oh.”

Everyone stopped as if they had suddenly been paused, Ash’s mouth dropped, “….Ho-oh…?”

Gardevoir nodded, “Yes, the Rainbow Legend, the Reviving Lord, the Eternal Legend of Reincarnation, the Golden Heart of Johto, the one who REALLY wears the pants in that region. The Ho-oh.”

Mismagius nodded to Ash, “It’s time.”

NO IT’S NOT ASH NEEDS TO REST THIS IS TOO MUCH TOO MUCH GODDAMIT –

QUIET!!!

YOU QUIET –

***

ASH’S INNER MONOLOUGE MIGHT ROLL OVER BUT I WON’T, I’M PULLING DOUBLE DUTY HERE, I WILL NOT BE QUIET, BUT I WILL BE PRODUCTIVE SO LET’S FUCKING RECAP – sssssssssssssssoooooo, getting to the rooftop was easy enough! Well for Ash, because, what was, not easy at all, was that Ho-oh only wanted Ash’s presence and no one else, not even pokemon. You all are chilling by the freight elevator, crowded as can be. Pikachu is standing next to you and Umbreon, sporting an even bigger pout than you which is rather impressive. Ash’s mother has her hands clutched together as she sits in her wheelchair, goddamn this shit is going to put her in an early grave – can you believe she’s only in her 40’s? WHAT THE HELL MAN??? Why is she so run down? :_;

Ash wanted to walk himself, but at least Gardevoir said no to that – get this, Gardevoir was
supposed to be in a wheelchair themselves, but hey, you all have shit streaks at taking care of yourselves so PBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBTH – but at least Ash was made to get in a wheelchair. Grant it was very cute watching Ash and his mom roll down the hallway together, however there’s no cute here now, only worry, and worry, and worry, and more worry. Chimecho is still hooked up to Ash via a Health Transfer Channel, so if anything, ANYTHING took a nosedive with the situation, Ash would be out of there in two shakes of a Mareep’s tail. Brock and Ritchie were willing to fight off BOTH legendary pokemon if need be – which, the thought is nice, its’ very nice, in theory, although Ritchie took on Moltres before and Brock has Misty’s pokemon with him – she WISHES she could be there, be closer, but she just can’t leave Tracey – ANYWHO that would most likely end with Ho-oh burning everyone alive and that just won’t solve anything. And then it would revive all of you into like weeds or something and burn you all alive again. Just for funsies. And use the ashes of your corpses to fertilize some plants with fruit and then a pokemon will eat you and then you’ll either be a part of an egg or poop. Most likely poop. Okay lets bring it back to reality now – sure, sure, Ho-oh has been known for being a bit of a hardass, but its not like, MEAN, just, dry. And, unapologetic. That’s Tuesday for you.

It won’t come to that, it won’t, and you have a feeling that Ho-oh is going to be doing all the talking anyway and if Moltres gets out of line, Ho-oh could execute it right then and there. That, probably won’t scar Ash, too much….fuck.

Gary you are going to have to pull double, triple duty, Ash needs you now more than ever. He’s out there all alone….

Ash’s breath was uneven; the wind on the rooftop strong. As soon as he was in the Eternal Legend’s line of sight, Ash could feel their gaze as if it were a physical force. The air in his lungs vacuumed out, replaced by a pressure that pounded in echoes to his beating heart within the seemingly vast cavity of his chest. Ash gulped, he rolled his wheelchair up to the Rainbow legend with Moltres standing beside them; the lesser fire/ flying pokemon was looking down, and fairly shrunken against the impressive and shining plumage of Ho-oh and their infinitely stronger stance.

Ash gripped the wheelchair arms, gripped his heartstring, he felt Gary grip back, settling him slightly –

….This is supposed to be a private conversation, but Gary, you can feel Ash, you can practically hear the blood pounding in his ears –

Ho-oh’s booming and breaking voice concentrated its sound waves right into Ash’s eardrums, overtaking any soothing sentiment –

“Hello Ash Ketchum.”

“Hello,” Ash squeaked, he cleared his voice to make him sound more solid, “Hello.”

“I’m glad to see you alive.”

“I’m happy to be alive.”

“I doubt that.”

D8<

Ash’s awe broke with a WTF look.
“I mean that you’re, happy, in general.”

Ash still held a WTF look.

“To be blunt, you haven’t been happy in a long time,” said Ho-oh, “You’re not happy, nor are you satisfied. There is much to improve upon in your life.”

Is this a thing where fire/flying legends just shit on your well-being because their personality sucks?

Before Ash could get a word in, Ho-oh continued, “But we’re not here to talk about that. Time is a precious resource. I have summoned you to inform you personally that your inclusion with Moltres’ raising is no longer needed” –

YAAAAAAAAAAAY 8D

Ash jumped to his feet, “What? Why?” –

Ho-oh stepped closer to Ash, any all apprehension Ash felt about their encounter gone as he stood toe to toe with the legendary pokemon, “Moltres’ recent behavior is nothing short of abhorrent. This debacle with the hospital is not their first offense. For all intents and purposes what they need now is closer to an exorcism rather than the guidance of a Trainer. We cannot wait till you have fully healed” –

Moltres raised their head, “I said I would wai” –

Ho-oh whipped themselves to Moltres in a fraction of a second, roaring their ear-splitting cry – snapping their beak shut millimeters from Moltres’ face, clipping the edges of their feathers off, “SILENCE! IF IT WERE NOT FOR SUICUNE’S BLESSING OF THE WATER, MANY WOULD HAVE DIED FROM YOUR FLAMES!”

Yup, yup, so Suicune did bless the pool water! :o

Ash’s ears ringed, he fell back into the wheelchair, his head numb from Ho-oh’s outburst (Gary’s as well).

“You will not speak again until you have my permission.”

Moltres nodded in agreement. The Eternal legend righted themselves, ruffling their feathers as Moltres sank into a yellow and fiery ball of shame.

“Ho-oh,” Ash gathered his voice, “H-how are the other legends doing? How is Zekrom? And Cobalion? And Suicune?”

“They are all fine and well.”

“Thank goodness.”

Ash couldn’t see Moltres’ face, but he was certain they were on the verge of crying.

Ho-oh nodded, “Then this conclu” –

“Ho-oh, I have to disagree with your decision,” said Ash.

Ho-oh blinked, “Oh?”
Moltres peeked up from their shame ball.

“I am aware, that, there are, things, I need to address, with myself, but that never, *ever intruded upon my ability to raise or protect pokemon!* And right now, right now Moltres does need guidance, *they need a whole lot of guidance!* But I disagree with your treatment of them, and I disagree with being pulled from raising them!”

8D…..<8D

“You, disagree.”

“I do!”

Ho-oh eyes narrowed, their booming voice suddenly down to a piercing whisper, “**And what would you do?**”

“I would talk to them! Not just, yell at them, shut them out or shut them down! Moltres needs help! Not disregard!”

*HO-OH IS GOING TO KILL HIM OH MY GOD GARDEVOIR, MISMAGIUS, CHIMECHO, CLEFABLE SOMEONE GET HIM OUT OF THERE!!!!! GET HIM OUT OF THERE!!!!*

Ho-oh lowered their head down to Ash, heat escaping their breath, flame on their tongue, “**You are telling me how to raise a ward of mine?**”

Ash was unwavering, “I’m telling you how I would raise a legend.”

**In a wheelchair. A hole in your code. Restless whispers plaguing your head** –

“My name is Ash Ketchum, *and I’m so much more.*”

Ho-oh stood back up fully, looking down on Ash with their striking gaze, “**You are.**”

“I will raise Moltres. Kanto is *my home*, and I will *never* let down the deities that defend it. Zekrom said you all were desperate for help, and I will never leave a call for help unanswered.”

“**Zekrom speaks in ideals. If Reshiram were in their place, their truth would have scorched you.**”

Ash was still unwavering in his eye contact, “No matter what, I will go where I am needed. I will do my best to make a difference, I will give my all, that’s *my truth and my ideals.*”

*Ash are you serious right now….You can’t, not right now, please, please, please – !*

Ho-oh’s eyes narrowed, **“Your presence is astute practically by accident….And all who claim to have glimpsed my presence, say they were to be blessed of eternal happiness…”** In that moment Ash choked internally, and surprisingly, Ho-oh’s glance softened, they sighed, “**but we both know, that isn’t true.**”

Looking at Ho-oh seemed to be harder now, but Ash fell back on his legendary determination to push him through this.
“Anyone is free to challenge us at their discretion and peril, and you, Ash Ketchum, have been graced with the most luck-fulfilled encounters and confrontations. Perhaps you will be lucky once again….Or, if your words are any measure, perhaps it is not luck at all. I commend you for standing up for your beliefs, childish, naïve, and foolhardy as they are.”

“If helping those in need is foolhardy to you, then I wonder who really is the fool here.”

Ho-oh’s eyes flashed, Moltres looked scared, and Ash was two parts regret, and one ‘I could have phrased that better’ –

ASH –

Ho-oh suddenly boomed out laughter scaring both Moltres and Ash, the Eternal legend taking their time to gather themselves, wiping a tickled tear from their eyes with the tip of their wing, “Well! Alright then! As you wish, Master Ash. I will respect your decision. But you will respect mine. Moltres will complete their penance, and then you may do whatever you see fit.” Ho-oh smiled.

“May the lights of this world blossom with your colors.” Ho-oh turned to Moltres, “Be at Mount Silver by sundown.”

Moltres nodded heartily.

The Rainbow legend spread their wings wide, gracing Ash with a rainbow of the most beautiful colors he had ever seen, and in one powerful wing stroke, Ho-oh flew off into the sky, into a ray of light itself.

Ash’s lungs unclenched from a breath he was clueless in holding, clutching his chest as he gasped for air. As he gathered his breath, Moltres eclipsed him with their shadow standing before him, awe and thankfulness swirling in their eyes, pupils dilated and shinning. “Ash….thank you. Thank you….Everyone, everyone is done with me…..I….I don’t know what to say…..If you knew….if you knew….”

Ash reached out, touching Moltres’ face (still trying to catch his breath), “Then maybe, *huff* its time for a new perspective.”

“It is time, for many new things,” said Moltres, the fire legend motioned they wanted to be near Ash, and Ash nodded with permission. They sat themselves down next to the stalwart Trainer, placing their head in his lap. He could hear the flames that brought life to the legend, but he was in no danger of getting burned. He began petting Moltres as if they were the tamest creature on earth. “I want to be yours….Your heart….” Moltres closed their eyes. “….I will wait for you. I know you must heal. I will wait for you, I will wait for you forever. I will wait for you, forever.”

“Hm.” Ash continued to pet Moltres, “…..That Ho-oh, I can never quite grasp their personality.”

“No one can,” said Moltres dryly, “But I am thankful they spared my life….The council….I have much work to do if I am to uphold my legacy. I am Moltres. I am also a failure.”

“That makes two of us,” said Ash.

“You are not a failure Ash. What drew me to you….was how resilient you are even though you are stained” - Ash gave a very stern / face and Moltres turned the script - "F-Fire can be so fickle, so brief and fleeting, but you? You burn, and burn, and burn, and burn…I can’t believe you stood up to Ho-oh!”

Ash rubbed his head, “When I get heated, I get heated! Heh, it can get me in a lot of trouble, we’re
both hot heads!”

“Yes we are.”

Ash looked right into Moltres’ eyes, “Listen, I’m going to work on myself, and now you’re going to work on yourself too, never mind if the other legends don’t see it in you now, you first have to see it in yourself, that’s what really matters….We’ll work on that together, okay?”

Moltres was so deeply moved by his kindness, “That is who you are Ash. You burn with passion. You burn with bravery. You burn with kindness.”

“I seem to do a lot of burning huh?”

“You are fire Ash. You are kin to electricity, but deep down inside, you are fire.”

“I guess that’s why my mom named me as such!” Ash laughed.

“She is a wise woman.” Moltres moved to stand up now. They reached behind themselves and plucked a feather, “Ash Ketchum, I present to you my pledge.”

Ash looked at the feather with pure reverence, yellow, eternal flames on the edges, gorgeous. He took the feather from Moltres, the pledge almost hovering in his hand, coated in the power and life force of the Flame Pokemon.

Moltres leaned into Ash, touching their foreheads together, Ash accepting the moment, “I will wait for you forever. I will make you proud. I will give you my affinity, Spring shall be your eternal ally.” Moltres stood fully again, moving to leave. “I must now continue my penance. May you find peace, Ash.”

“I hope you find peace too Moltres.”

“I’m sorry, so sorry, for everything.”

“I forgive you.”

Moltres suddenly couldn’t speak, they nodded to Ash, flying away in haste. Ash thought he saw tears flicker off their face, and in seeing a couple dark spots on the pavement, he wouldn’t be wrong in suspecting.

Ash watched Moltres fly away, his chest warm inside *……I hope you can get the help you need…* * Ash gripped the feather. *I will do my best Moltres, that’s a promise.*

The heartstring went untouched.

***

It’s evening. Ash sleeps. Gary doesn’t.

You can’t be mad at Ash Gary, you can’t. You know how he is. You know he’s a Helper and that when someone is in need, it’s practically torture for him to stand by. He just can’t do it. So, the rest of you have to put some sense into him to make him rest, and he did, he did, for the rest of that day, it was all rest. He listened to you all. After talking with Hilbert and Hilda via texting. After talking
with this dude named Alain that you learned is Kalos’ Master. *INHALE* After talking some more to the Tourney coordinators. After trying to talk with Mary, but instead he was able to talk to UGH MAX. After talking with his pokemon. After talking with his friends and momma. After talking with another International Police Rep. After talking to some of the hospital stuff. After talking with some RANDOM ASS Trainers on le social media. After talking with practically EVERY. PERSON. ON. EARTH.

Gary watched Ash sleep.

So how can you fault him for that? EASILY!!!! HE’S!!! NOT!!! TAKING!!! CARE!!!! OF!!! HIMSELF!!!!!!! AND YOU SURE AS FUCK AREN’T GOING TO OVERLOOK IT THIS TIME. YOU’RE NOT. YOU’RE NOT.

Gary rubbed his face in anguish.

*Sigh*…That’s just who he is. He’s a helper, he’s a fighter, he’s an adventurer, and when he gets himself back on his feet, he’ll be out in danger once more, risking his life and this whole process will begin AGAIN…..And you know one day, Ash will join the Master ranks. It’s just a matter of time at this point. Hmp, Lord, let’s tally the current Masters shall we? We got Ethan from Johto, Steven from Hoenn, the husband and wife team of Hilbert and Hilda from Unova, Alain from Kalos…Alain…..ene…and…..hrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrgh….this bastard stewing shit-pile Paul from Sinnoh-oh-no. Bleh. And of course, Kanto’s Lost Masters, the unofficial Masters, Red and Blue and the Trade-in Master, Lance. *SIGH*. But like okay, Ethan, Steven, Lance, Hilbert and Hilda are cool in your books though, they seem nice and tolerable enough and they never fucked with Ash or tried REALLY, REALLY HARD to hurt Ash’s life, indirectly or otherwise – PBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBTH. Yeah, you don’t like this ‘Paul’ at all. NOT at all. Or Alain. Too broody it seems. Pbbth. These people might present interesting roadblocks for Ash when he goes for his candidacy…..uuuuuuuuugghhhhh.

Gary booped Ash’s nose, watching him unconsciously wrinkle it.

How does this work again, hm….Each region has its Champions, go them, and yes, Ash is one of Kanto’s champs, but even that was a little while ago. He still has his ranking maintained in the top 1% in Kanto, or as its known, ‘the territory of the Champs’….real cut and paste there. As for Ash’s world ranking, he’s in the top 5%, and as such, the top 5% is considered the target range to be ready for Master Qualifications, buuuuuut, people have done it before in the just the top 10%, hell even top 15%, as if that’s not an achievement already. Anywho, that’s just typically how some project in figuring out who’s got a good shot at their candidacy. Numbers are not everything, no matter how much that fact is an oxymoron with your research hissing at you ‘REMEMBERRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR’.

Gary settled himself down next to Ash.

Two regions (in your immediate part of the world) currently don’t have a Master over them, well, an official full-time Master at least, Alola and Kanto – the Alola region has yet to have a Master surface up within the last, what, 30, 40 years? The Kanto or Johto Master typically covers for the Alola region….But well, Alola DOES at least have the ‘unofficial’ Masters Blue and Red…..Like okay, they’re Masters in your books, and they SHOULD COME HOME FOREVER to take over for Kanto but that’s a bit of a sore spot for your region because god those two will do what they will, soooooooooo….and like…..everyone is of course looking to Ash to break the, supposed “dry spell” for Kanto. Ugh, and yeah, Kanto does have an on again, off again Master in Lance, but…..Lance suffered a pretty big injury about decade ago and was forced to give up active duty, that’s still such a bummer to think about :( He isn’t getting any younger, none of you are. But if need be, Lance will
step up if Kanto really needs him, Red and Blue DO pitch in, from, afar.....and Ash........

Gary looked over at Moltres’ glowing feather, now set in a glass case that fit it just right. Gary sighed through his nose.

Ash would not hesitate to protect everything he loves.

*And neither would I,* Gary thought. He closed his eyes, nuzzling up to Ash, with Ash nuzzling him back in his sleep; a smile spread across Gary’s lips.

Ash is here, Ash is safe, nothing can hurt him, nothing can hurt him, he’s here with you and he’s safe. He’s safe. He’s safe. He’s safe.

“I’ll protect you Ash, I swear it, I swear it, I swear it....”

But are you good in bed?

SHUT UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUP.

Chapter End Notes

So there you have it. All I can say is at this point, start saving and backing up all the stories you read, and, I hope things turn out alright for us all. If you want the finer points as to how the remaining chapters turn out/ what fully happens, you’re more than welcome to page me on my tumblr and I will gladly tell you all you want to know, or you can inquire here down below or PM, and I will do the same. I just hope one day things will be okay again.

I won't stop writing, even if I'm just writing for myself. I should consider myself blessed I live in a large city (Houston) with many different providers so I might be able to switch if I can, but, still, it shouldn't be that way.

I'm grateful for each and every one of you who stayed this far <3 and I'm so sorry things turned out this way. I wish, I wish, I wish I could have finished in time, and it breaks my heart so much that this is where I may be forced to leave it.

Still, I'm not going to stop writing, and so long as I have access, I will post as I finish up <3
FINALLY. I see the end in sight for this story. The world is currently on fire, and after pulling myself out of some good ol' depression lapses, I will do my best to finish it before everything goes up in smoke. Like Ash and Gary’s relationship.

But never fear, said it once, and I'll say it again, this story WILL have a happy ending, unlike so much of what's happening in our world right now. It gets bad before it gets better, sending a hug to all of you *HUG*. Like these boys haven't been through enough WELL sometimes life is like that 8'D

Meltdown parts one and two were very, very hard to write because they hit so close to home >3<;; I'm still tinkering with part two, but I JUST finalized part one, so, here we be.

After this we got ch 16 Meltdown Part 2, ch 17 Aurora: One More Light, and FINALLY ch 18 Snow Angels, THE END, FOR REALS THIS TIME, THIS IS IT, THIS IS EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEET~
*Oof, Ash, come on, it’s okay, we’re alright* –

*I’m so sick of these mind games Gary, I want this to be something good!* –

*Well I can’t argue with that….Hmmm…* As Gary pondered, Ash nuzzled him, softening Gary greatly, nudging him to rest his chin on Ash’s head and embrace him dearly.

They could feel their connection burning brightly, they could feel all good things between them, they felt like glimmering, shimmering hope, and above all else, they felt loved.

*Ah, Gary, look!* 

*Mm? Oh…* 

Up above, there looked to be a collection of twinkles, like starlight captured from the night sky and pasted upon their white canvas with only the shimmering glints to give them away against the pale landscape.

Curiously, Ash raised his hand up, waving it back and forth, and curiously enough, the twinkles spread in time with his movements, as if his hand was a paintbrush tool from Photoworks, painting them on in strokes.

*Wooooooooooooooowwwwww* – Ash stared at his hand in absolute wonder –

*This is a dream Ash.*

*Yeah but lately my dreams have been trying to kill us, hmmmm*, Ash booped Gary’s nose and a sparkle appeared right on the tip!

*Ah! My nose!* 

Ash in turn brightened up like a star himself, *You twinkle! My twinkle, twinkle Gary!* 

*Ash* –

*Boop, boop, boop, boop~!* 

By the time Ash was done, Gary had freckles of twilight – Ash’s hands went right to his face in a squee pose – *Oh my gosh Gary you look adorable!* (*GASP*) Am I twinkling?!*

*No.*

*Awww, boo.* Ash added one more boop to Gary’s cheek, leaving a twilight beauty mark. *This is awesome! But I wanna sparkle tooooooooooooooo* –

Gary tried booping Ash’s to leave his own sparkle, but it didn’t work. *Boo indeed.*

*This is our dream, if I want to sparkle then I’m going to sparkle dangit!* Ash whipped around to face the open essence of the dreamscape, *Make me sparkle! I am the sparkly, sparkle prince! I command you dream to appease me with glitter!.............OKAY FINE BE THAT WAY X(*

*I think I sparkle enough for the both of us Love, let’s keep this positive okay?*

Ash still gave a pout, *Sure.*

*Maybe I can create something….hmmmmmmm, this is a mental construct, and we have more than
earned our power over it, probably,— oh!* Gary turned to Ash, *Give me your hand.*

*Okay.*

Gary clasped his hands around Ash’s, closing his eyes and thinking as hard as he could….When he opened them, they both could feel their fingers clutching a round mass, and upon releasing their grasp, they saw their pokeball sitting in Ash’s palm.

Ash’s eyes sparkled like a nebula, *Oh, Gary~!* Ash glomped Gary again, only this time taking them both down, and began kissing Gary as if he’d never be able to kiss him again with Gary only too happy to oblige, fresh off the high from the symbol of their relationship returning, if only in a dream – Ash’s fervor fueling their passion to a burning roaring blaze that set their emotions on fire the rest of the evening.

Okay Gary you SEXY, SEXY BEAST, rise and shine! Rise and shine! It’s time to put your best features forward because you are going to be aaalll about Ash’s recovery from here on out 24/7, 365 days a year to show you are a superior asset to Ash – I mean you’ve already made an excellent case in rescuing Ash from the Dark Place! You know, risking your sense of self being depleted into a void of nothingness – you are a worthwhile mate! You are a worthwhile partner! You can do this! Rah! Rah! Rah! Rah!

RAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa h hh hh h h h h . . . . . ho~? Ho~ OH! OH~! OH

OHHHHHHHHHHHNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNN
Ash and Gary awoke from their dream of existential make-outs to find they both had exceptionally pressing matters hardened in their pants. Completely throwing out any decorum for physical restraint, they slipped into the bathroom as discreetly as they could together (honestly it didn’t matter, Clefable’s cheeks were burning red because they both had been moaning VERY LOUDLY in their sleep) and as soon as they thought they had the slightest semblance of privacy in the enclosed bathroom space, their lips drew like magnets, their pants and underwear were cast off, and Gary sunk down on the floor on top of their discarded clothes with Ash seating himself on Gary’s lap, wrapping his legs around his waist, hanging his arms around Gary’s neck as Gary clutched their dicks together. A breath escaped out of Ash’s mouth against Gary’s cheek – there was no drawing this out, their raging desire demanded satisfaction NOW, and in a couple of strokes from Gary’s hand and grinding from Ash’s hips, they were coming over each other’s stomachs and chest. Ash clutched Gary as if he was the final tether of his sanity, and Gary, once again, seized the opportunity to pull another orgasm from Ash before he could float all the way down off his high by slipping one sinful slender digit up between Ash’s ass cheeks, pressing against his ring of muscles – Ash’s eyes flew open and his face burned with anticipation and surprise and NEED –

“Guh-Gary!”

Gary seized Ash like a carnivore, biting down on Ash’s neck, feeling Ash’s moaning gasp vibrating through his lips – Gary had Ash moaning his name and pushing into his hand in a matter of minuets, and again, Ash’s hips were quivering with a second orgasm rocking his frame, but before he would become a lump of limbs, Ash grasped Gary’s dick in his hand and returned the favor tenfold by kissing Gary into another galaxy before his vision turned white and Ash’s hand was covered in Gary’s cum.

So um, yeah, forget that mess if you’re good in bed or not Gary, look at that face, look at Ash’s face, he is completely, totally, utterly, DECIMATED by you~! He’s DROOLING! YOU ARE A GOD OF HAND JOBS >8D~!!!! A GOD I TELL YOU~!
Gary took Ash’s lips one more time, leaving a very satisfied twist of the tongue and lip pop as he pulled away from a very dazed Ash, head titled, with the most lovey dovey of smiles gracing his features.

“I love you so much Gary,” he slurred.

“I love you too Ash,” Gary breathed.

It took them both a moment to come down off their high before they realized what a mess they had made of themselves (and feeling the full wear and tear that their bodies were still enduring), but they were in the bathroom at least and showered to freshen themselves up before they’d collapse in a heap of gummy limbs; grant it, they couldn’t keep their hands off one another wasting precious minuets under the shower head.

It was as they were getting dressed (Clefable dutifully handing them fresh pairs of clothes via a slit crack in the door), trying to outpace their growing fatigue that Ash began shaving more precious seconds off by staring at Gary with not so much a loving look than a concerned one.

“Babe?” Gary asked, “What’s wrong?”

Ash scratched at his face with a weak index finger, tilting his head, “Gary?”

“Hm~?”

“Your, face…?”

Gary’s hands immediately went to the sides of his face, “What about my face, what’s on it” – he stumbled over to the bathroom mirror, Ash moving to his side and pointing so he could see –

“Look, no look closer, here, you see it? Freckles!” said Ash, “It looks like you have, freckles!”

Gary touched his face lightly, “What the…when….how did…”

Ash, wide-eyed, placed a single finger on Gary’s nose, “Boop…”

Alas the surprise sudden appearance of Gary’s freckles would have to take a back seat as the couple just barely made it back to their bed before passing back out on one another.

There came a knock at the door, Clefable opened it to see Ritchie with a slight blush over his features. “So uuuuuuuuuum…are the love birds done…? Mary’s here, and…”

“I’m so sorry Ritchie, but they’ve passed back out…maybe some other time…?”

“Oh, understandable…I think she’ll be back later.”

But she wouldn’t be back later. Misty also came around to inquire if Gary had some time to talk to Tracey, but like Ritchie, was informed the couple was out.

“Alrighty,” Misty sighed, “Make sure Gary checks his texts will you?”

“I’ll remind him once he’s up, no worries Love!” Clefable piped.

When Ash and Gary came around later in the morning, Clefable decided to skirt over the news of Mary’s missed appearance, and Chimecho held their tongue as well since the groggy couple was paying dearly from the earlier demands on their bodies.
Gary checked his texts as best he could with his vision struggling to right itself, and once he saw Tracey’s messages, he immediately called him, but Misty answered, “He’s asleep Gary, sorry.”

“But he’s doing okay?”

“Yes, he’s pushing though, body is giving a little kickback but it’s nothing serious, he’ll be fine. How are you and Ash doing?”

“We’re hanging in there.”

“Alright, you guys just keep at it, we’re all here together, safe and sound, I’ll text you when Tracey comes around again, but, the doctor gave him another round of that pain medicine that essentially dumps you in Slumber Land, so, I dunno when that will be.”

“No problem, I’ll see him soon.”

“Take care Gary,”

“You too.”

Yaaaaaay for developing bonds Gay I’m so proud ;w; Though she had ‘that’ tone, eeet cooouuuunttssssssss.

That morning, Ash and Gary didn’t leave their room, much less the bed, in fact, there wasn’t much moving at all since the both of them had developed rather nasty headaches leaving their caregivers pondering why they would awake in such a state since they, well….

“How, how do you get a stress headache from sleeping?” Gary groaned.

“Mmmmmuuurrruuuuuuuugh,” said Ash.

Gary rubbed his face aimlessly, “There’s nothing to be stressed about” – and the moment that ‘wish’ left Gary’s lips, he could literally feel the universe turn its collective head at him and smirk.

Chimecho cleared their throat, “‘Oh how the man looks to the sky to ponder dreams and whims, when the sky looks back in reply and sighs of his own limitations and grins.’”

OH SHUT UP.

Ash: Bluh.

As the day wore on there came triumph over the headaches, and, sadly, Gary’s surprise freckles had completely faded away, disappearing as mysteriously as they had appeared before they could even be discussed (no one had even snapped a picture), but the phenomenon was duly noted to be discussed later with Gardevoir.

Ash groaned.

Gary: Love, you feeling any better?

Ash: zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz

Ash’s body demanded more sleep as the fever plaguing him came back (to the surprise of no one), but the pain wasn’t as bad as before. He woke up on and off, on and off, communicating here and there, nothing too much, nothing too strenuous as he had pushed himself a bit yesterday (to the surprise of no one); Gary knocked with a knowing tick that made the corner of his mouth twitch as
he looked at Moltres’ feather gleaming beautifully in its case…Thankfully as the day wore on, the fever lessened, and Ash was well and awake enough to walk around in their room a bit with Gary.

“You don’t have to force yourself to walk Ash” –

“If I stay stuck in bed for another second I’m going to scream,” said Ash, “I need to move around, even if it’s just these tiny steps.” And tiny steps they were.

Chimecho hovered near them, “I wouldn’t really call this walking anyway, ‘tiptoeing while holding onto another person’ would be more accurate.” The couple glared at Chimecho; the psychic pokemon casually floated away.

“Huuuuuuugh……(*tiptoe~ tiptoe~*)……Gary, you think your freckles came from our dream?”

“I can’t ration any other explanation for it, but, yeah, I really truly think they did.”

“That’s so crazy!”

“I know, we gotta remember to talk to Gardevoir about it, it may not feel like it, but that’s some pretty serious stuff, not in a bad way, but like a, wow, that actually happened kind of way.”

“As long as it’s good, I’m all for it,” said Ash, “You look beautiful with anything, but with starlight,” Ash giggled, “Freckles? Just, wow…”

_Oh my heart 8’3_

“Thanks,” Gary blushed, he kissed Ash’s cheek, speaking against his skin, “You can rile my blood up with just glance~”

Ash made a silly face making Gary snort loudly through his nose, “Oh yeah that’s what I’m talkin’ about~”

Ash giggled in turn as they nuzzled one another.

The day progressed. Ash told everyone he was okay, and they believed him. Gary told everyone he was okay, and they almost believed him.

“Have you taken your meds?”

“YES. I HAVE DAISY.”

“Pbbth.”

“PBBBBBBBBBTH~!”

“On that note,” said Chimecho, “How are you feeling with your first dose Ash?”

Ash held out his arm and saw his hands slightly shivering, “Shakey? Is shakey a thing? And, tingly?”

“Shakey is a thing, let’s see how you progress.”

“Okay.”

_Huuuuuuuuuuu. You remember the ‘joyful’ expedition in finding your prescription Gary =n= But, it’s just something you gotta get through AND IT SUCKS ASS, but, you got through it, Ash’ll get_
through it, and you both can send each other cute little reminders via your coms <3 As Ash’s mate, you have this responsibility =w=b In fact, set a reminder right now :3 You took your meds today, you are a good mate, so shoo on them uwu. Perks of a stable commitment are snuggles, all the Ash snuggles, all of them, none get more Ash snuggles than you 83 –

“Gary you climb any further on me and I’m not going to be able to breathe” –

“Accept my love.”

Ash smirked, “Alright then” – Ash swiftly nabbed Gary around his waist and rolled on top of him, pinning him down by sitting on his hips – Clefable (as they were pruning some flowers) turned away right on their heels without missing a beat, but Chimecho was up for a show –

“Ah,” Gary’s eyebrows furrowed, “Are we no longer concerned abou –

“Kuch-kuch-kuch-kuch-coo~!” The tickle attack was brief, but it was enough to get Gary winded and wiping away some laugh-tear beads from the corner of his eyes. Ash kissed Gary’s nose, “I hear laughter is good medicine, so I’m prescribing at least one good laugh a day Gary.”

“Is that so Dr. Ketchum?” Gary held a half-smirk, rubbing Ash on his thighs, “Will I have you to look forward to ensure my dosage is correct~?”

Ash smiled more broadly, “I think you can look forward to a lot more than that~”

MMMMH THIS CORN BE GOOD X3

Gary pulled Ash in for deeper kiss, brief as it was, considering there is still company in the room, but it was enough to make Ash completely relax his body on top of Gary’s; the weight comforting.

Again, again Gary~ That didn’t feel fake, Ash really does like making out with you Gary. OR DOES HE –

hhhhhhhhHIIIIIIIIIIISSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS.

They didn’t go any further than that, despite the return of a mighty need rushing south. Ash rolled off to the side, and they shared more nuzzles, sweet nothings and caresses, their heartstring shining a bit brighter from their interaction….h o w e v e r . . . . . .

A knock on their room door made Ash and Gary sit themselves up (Gary crossing his legs). Clefable opened the door to a tall policeman in a tan trench coat on the other side, Ash and Gary immediately recognizing the man as Looker from the International Police.

Go away :D

Looker tipped his head to Clefable as they ushered him in with bubbling kindness, he stood before the couple with a tight posture, “Good to see you Ash, and Gary! Gary, I’m so glad you’re awake” –

You’re like the last person on earth to find out Investigator Bob.

“I don’t mean to intrude so suddenly, but Ash, I have a couple more questions I need to follow up on.”

“By all means,” Ash motioned for Looker to take a seat, “What’s up?”

A reminder Gary that you were out for 11 days and don’t think for a second you’ve been caught up
Gary sat back and watched Ash as he spoke with Looker. The questions were simple and not invasive by any means, yet, right in front of Gary, he watched the light slowly mute in Ash’s eyes as the conversation carried on. Looker was getting details about the Espeon, although how many details can one get when Ash’s time with Espeon was so brief?

And, Gary….This is your first time hearing about what Espeon did to Ash, you know it threw Ritchie, Sparky, and Pikachu out the window, and that it stabbed Ash in the heart with the Catalyst, but to hear how it, smiled, how it, gloated, how it, enjoyed the sheer terror it wrought upon them all….As brief as it was, that’s one encounter that burns itself into the back of your brain. And you’re very, VERY glad that it’s very, VERY dead.

While Looker flipped through his notes, Gary brought Ash’s hand to his lips and kissed it, leaving Ash to all but collapse onto Gary; Gary wrapped an arm around his boyfriend. Looker was cross referencing testimony from the rest of Ash’s friends, he was trying to deduce if there were somehow multiple Espeons involved, or if it was just the one, or perhaps even another Ditto, “We’re just crossing our ‘t’s’ and dotting our ‘i’s’ here,” said Looker, “We want to make absolutely sure there was only one Espeon on the scene, and so far, everything adds up to one.”

“Well that’s a relief given that the one is dead,” said Gary flatly, *Now please, just, go* –

“As for the Ditto that was dispatched by Zekrom, it is troubling that it could split itself up into independent functioning pieces, unfortunately we’re unable to weigh its corpse to deduce if it was whole at the time of death as Zekrom fried it to a crisp” –

BECAUSE, THAT’S ALL YOU NEED RIGHT NOW IN THE BACK OF YOUR MIND. THANKS LOOKER, THANKS A FUCKING LOT –

“I’d like to interview Zekrom, but that’s maybe wishful thinking on my part.”

“If there were any remaining pieces, I’m sure Cobalion would have sniffed them out,” said Ash, “I have faith after what happened that Cobalion wouldn’t leave any stone unturned, neither would Zekrom, or any other legend that pitched in.”

Looker’s hand went to his chin, “This is true, and there have been reported sightings on Cobalion in the area, as well as Suicune, and Raikou. That is a safe assumption to make. Oh! I heard you spoke with Ho-oh the other day” –

“Yeah, I did, all we talked about was what to do with Moltres, Ho-oh has them fulfilling a penance for their actions.”

“A penance seems rather light if you ask me,” said Looker.

HEAR HEAR~!

“But who am I to judge?”

YOU’RE A COP –
Looker stood up, readying to leave, “Well, seems my next move is to try and get a council with some of our legendary colleagues, I’ll be speaking with Lance and the Kanto League next,” Looker smiled, “You’ve been a great help Ash, greater than I think you’ll ever know.”

“Heh, I try.”

Looker nodded, wished the couple well, and took his leave with Clefable wishing him all the best.

Aside from REALLY WANTING TO KNOW MORE details on how Ash has been a big help, Gary was more mesmerized on Ash’s subtle transformation. To describe, it was as if a great action movie was playing, but it was muted. It was like looking at a beautifully intricate painting, but its colors were grey scale. Ash was still there, but his movements were more careful, and he was more quiet. There wasn’t a single trace of light in his eyes, but he smiled. He was willing and able to get up and move about, but tired quickly. When it was time to eat, he tried to eat more, but just couldn’t.

Gary recalled how in the Dark Place Ash’s eyes were completely black, empty, and now, as Ash goes about, his eyes lifeless, soulless, they may as well have been shadowed over by darkness.

Again Ash told everyone he was okay, whether they believed him or not this time, Gary paid no attention. Gary felt that inside, Ash was fighting a battle he couldn’t quite vocalize, but Gary trusted Ash to stay true to his word despite the slowly boiling turmoil within.

It was feelings, painful feelings Ash just had to work through, feelings of loss, inadequacy, questions of self-worth, all the things Gary knew the answer to. He could tell Ash till he was blue in the face how much he means to him, but he may as well throw those compliments into the hole in Ash’s code. So Gary again left his trust with Ash that he’ll work through it.

*It is okay to leave things be for now, we’re getting ourselves together, thinking things through….It’s okay, it’s all going to be okay, it’s okay, it’s okay….*

Gary tried not to pay the quick spurts of pain across Ash’s face any mind, and let Ash process on his own time. If Ash needed Gary, he was right there. He would always be right there.

8)

Regardless, it was torture.

“Ash….you okay?”

“No,” Ash answered truthfully, gripping his wrist.

Suddenly you understand how Ash feels the need to help, because Gary, you would do anything right now to put all those awful emotions hurting him to rest. You’re not overlooking this, in fact you see it very much, and you see him favoring that wrist and his blue eye in nervous touches and rubs to the face…..

“What’s going through your mind Love?”

“……Mary, and her family.”

*INHALE*………. Breathe. Center.
Namaste……Namasteeeeee……... Can you think for yourself? Once upon a time, you used to have more investment in the story of Ash Ketchum, I QUITE remember that at the Silver League~!
“….It’s just sad,” Ash continued, “…Mary, and her parents are going to go through a very, very ugly process….” Ash weakly picked up the borrowed com (who knows whom’s at this point), letting the weight of it move his wrist, “There’s a lot of angry, and scared, and hurt people right now.”

Gary gripped Ash’s hand holding the com – “Ash that’s not your responsibility” –

ISN’T IT?!

Ash’s hand shook, whatever answer he had for Gary was stuck in his throat, one that he probably handed out many times before in the time Gary was asleep, “….I just can’t sit and do nothing….”

“Ash, sweetheart,” exasperated, Gary wrapped his arms around Ash, “You have done so much, and I know I’m preaching to the choir here, but you started a Tourney to help fund Viridian’s recovery with not one, not two, not three – but four legendary Trainers coming in to assist! Looker is right, you’ve been a huge help already, please, please – PLEASE! Don’t take on anymore responsibility. You’ve got to rest – you have to rest!” –

For Gary’s sake as much as your’s! For your mother too! HELL EVERYONE IS PROBABLY SHELL-SHOCKED FROM THIS DX –

“I seriously doubt the Rangers are going to leave Mary and her family out to dry, and let me just take a wild guess here, but I’m sure Max has been by her side no?”

“He has.”

“Well alright then,” said Gary, “See? They’re going to have all the support in the world, don’t you worry.” And yet, Gary saw Ash make an ever so subtle disapproving face, “What is it?”

*If some of that support made it to Lisa, we probably wouldn’t be here right now, * Ash sighed through his nose, “It just, really sucks they have to go through this twice, losing their daughter, her sister, like that…” Ash turned away a little, his eyes downcast, “…..I spoke with her, like spoke-spoke, in the rubble of the hospital….I talked with her, I talked Lisa down…”

:o

“You, wait, you, talked her down?”

Ash looked full to Gary, “I did. And I know most, well, honestly everyone, everyone thought I was crazy for even trying, but I had to! Even for her! She screamed, she cried, she was in so much pain….All that anger, all that rage, just, burned her completely inside and out, it, changed who she was, but I saw….I saw her, I saw Lisa. Just, Lisa…I wish….I wish someone else, anyone else – would have done the same, before it was too late, before she hurt so many, before she hurt herself….All it took was someone to reach out, just one, all it takes, is, just one voice…If I don’t say something…somebody else may never get the chance to themselves.”

Goddamn your boyfriend is fucking Master material. Вишиshi
picture right next to it….The fact that you even spared her a moment, after what she did – “

Yeah let’s take a quick gander at that again shall we? Kidnapped Ash, tortured him, tried to kill him, tried to get him to kill his friends by turning him into a Familiar, continued to torture Ash via the Link* whatever thingie, Catalyst – and uh, oh yeah~ Severely injured the Rangers after attempting to kill them too, possessed Misty, injuring her very much too, injured Ritchie, ADDED to the HOSTAGE SITUATION, KILLED SO MANY POKEMON, KILLED THE SYLVEON, REALLY NOW, REALLY PEOPLE, ARE WE REALLY GOING TO GIVE THIS MONSTER A PASS –

Gary swallowed, “You’re just too much, you know that don’t you?”

“In, a good way?”

“The best way,” Gary ended that statement with a kiss to the tip of Ash’s nose, “I can’t even fathom the strength it must have took for you to do that, to even, look her in the eye” –

BECAUSE YOU WOULD HAVE KILLED HER DEADER THAN DEAD –

Ash touched his blue eye subconsciously –

Gary continued, “Honestly I don’t remember much immediately after we got out of the Dark Place, I think my memory took an emergency dump from all the stress we were under, and you, actually took the time to talk to her…” Gary rubbed Ash’s hand, “No one can say you didn’t try, Ash, you have done everything possible in your power, you have gone above and beyond what would ever be called upon you to do! But Ash….please, I know you care about people, I know you’d, give some stranger on the street the clothes off your back, but right now, there are plenty, plenty of helpers here. Voices will be heard, needs will be met, people and pokemon are getting help, so Ash, I’m, begging you, to please, please, please! Rest and look after yourself! I know you gotta do this Tourney thing, I know, I know, and that’s fine – but, I don’t know if you think taking care of yourself is selfishness – it is not – Ash…just, don’t forget about you…."

If you won’t protect yourself, then I will.

Their heartstring screamed Gary’s devotion to the point where Ash’s eyes got a little misty-eyed. In a flux of adoration, Ash kissed Gary, the two deepening the kiss softly as one, hands resting, and bracing upon the other, pulling back gently, both gazing into each other’s eyes, Gary’s thumb rubbing just to the side of Ash’s blue eye.

“You’re my rock Ash, yes you have when you could” –

“But I” –

You’re overlooking.
“I told you before, I don’t know what I would have done without you after Gramps passed, you saved me, you literally saved me…”

Their foreheads touched….. “….And you saved me. Gary, back there. You and Audi, I’m so lucky to have had two people reach into, into hell for me, and haul me back…” Ash squeezed Gary’s hand, and Gary squeezed back, Ash’s eyes going downcast, “…Lisa felt like she didn’t have anyone –”

HUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU WITH LISA AGAIN DX –

– “not even her own family…..” Ash looked away briefly, “It’s, not for me to say, because I don’t know, I don’t know what happened between Lisa and Mary, and it’s not my place at all to pass any hint of judgment…..I just, wish things had worked out better between them…..”

This is draining Ash, it’s draining him! God, what is this, fear? Fear. Fear….you feel in him…..Missing…..missing….missing something?

* Or, someone?

Gary kissed Ash’s forehead, “Ash, you know no matter what, you have my support, you have my love, you have every single bit of me, and I’m going to prove that to you every single day.” *Till the day I die…*

A desperate smile broke over Ash’s face, a soft hopeful light returning to his eyes, “Gary” –

Gary pulled him in for another long and cherished kiss.

“And you have me,” Ash added breathlessly against Gary’s lips, going in for another deep rooted kiss before pulling back just enough to speak again, “You have me every single moment of every single minuet” – again they were passionately making out, completely disregarding any hesitation for decency.

I CAN’T TELL IF THIS FAST OR NOT BUT WHO CARES 8D~! WHO CARES SUDDENLY WE’RE OVER THAT BECAUSE ASH FINDS YOU HOT AS FUCK AND THAT’S ALL THAT MATTERS –

OR – ASH FINDS YOU HOT AS FUCK AND THAT’S ALL THAT MATTERS 8DDDDDDD –

Ritchie walked in, saw the couple kissing, rolled his eyes and walked back out, Ash just barely catching his presence, breaking the kiss, much to Gary’s dismay – “Ritchie!”

“No, no, you guys just keep on doing what you do,” Ritchie called beyond the doorway, “There’s just this Pelipper that was looking for your room.”

“A Pelipper?”

A very, very worn looking Pelipper arrived at their room with Ash’s new com Gary had ordered oh so many moons ago.

Ash looked to Gary, his eyes shining, “Gary! Aww~! You didn’t have to!” –

Gary nudged Ash lovingly, “I wanted to Love, go on, open it~”

Ash read the card, his heart full to bursting –
‘To my dearly beloved, you have my heart in your hands, and now you have the world in your pocket~’ Yeah Gary pimped this com TF OUT X3

Ash opened the package, his smile as radiant as the sun, “AAAA – Gary! Gary! Oh my god I love it! I love it! I love it!” their heartstring was practically bursting with light, tickling Gary right in his heart, Clefable and Chimecho basking in their radiance, “Thank-you, thank-you so much!”

Gary wanted to ask the Pelipper ‘what the fuck took so long~?’ but the poor thing looked outright exhausted and had a note with a proper explanation, more or less,

Ah. Well they had to put the com together, okay understandable. Then, they tried to deliver to the cabin several times and of course y’all ain’t there. Then to Viridian Memorial and got turned away by the police when they were doing a sweep, WELL, OKAY? And no one could send a fucking email – oh…oh they did….ah. guess your brain overlooked that…oops >n>;;;; Y’ALL STILL COULD HAVE CALLED BUT WHATEVER – ANYWHO, they tried to deliver to Viridian Memorial again but low and behold the hospital is now rubble! AND NOOOW, they finally caught up with y’all at Pewter General, and that’s the story of how Ash got his new com *confetti*.

Ash thanked the Pelipper profusely because that’s just how he rolls and gave them a very generous tip, to which Gary added onto *because pass on the good vibes please*, which put a little more pep into Pelipper’s step as they left.

“Sorry for the address runaround,” said Gary. The Pelipper waved it off, motioning they were just glad to finally get the package delivered, and took flight from their window.

Ash continued to tinker with his com, “Let’s see, my number should still be the same, yeah, I just gotta program it innnnnnnnnnnnnn, okay, okay, eeeeeeeeh – Gary try calling me” –

Gary reached for his com, unplugged it from a charging station, and dialed Ash’s number, Ash’s new com lighting up with the default ringtone with Ash answering it, “Hello my Gary~.”

In that moment, hearing Ash’s voice through his com, Gary’s chest squeezed itself something mighty, making a couple of tears well up in his eyes in remembering all his past failed com attempts in trying to contact Ash, and now –

“What’s wrong?” asked Ash.

“It’s, just really good to hear your voice. I-I mean I know I can hear you, you’re literally right here, but, here, over the com, I don’t know, I dunno its silly –”

“No it’s not, “Ash hung up his com, he honed in on the pain quickly, “I promise you, I’ll always answer your call.”

That didn’t help 8D

A deep wave of relief and grief hit Gary all at once and he wiped his eyes as he hung up his com, “…I was just so desperate to reach you, I had forgotten my stupid com when I went to the store – and I’m never, ever going to forget it again! I saw your text ‘wanna go get something to eat?’ then ‘heart emoji’ and then I got word you were gone, and” – Gary took a deep inhale and exhale, trying to get his spiraling emotions under control, the hole in his code amplifying his echo of loss….. “I felt so helpless….all I wanted was to hear your voice again…I would have done anything…”

...And then Lisa tormented you and Ash.

Ash smiled, “You’ve done everything,” he took Gary’s hands into his own, “I’m here now Gary,”
Ash touched his forehead to Gary’s, “I’m not going anywhere.” They took each other in their arms, Gary getting rolled by the wave that rose and crested in him, knowing now that whenever he would dial Ash’s com, he’d answer.

Or at the very least text.

After a snuggle and yet another brief make-out session, they settled back with Ash leaning against Gary as he continued to explore the com’s features, looking through its specs and applications – *Aaaaaaaaaaa~! Eeeeee~! X3 This is amazing, this is so amazing, I can’t believe everything he put on this!* –

Maybe Gary you can pimp out Pelipper’s Grab and Go on your Pecker account or something, that poor thing went the distance and then some to make sure your gift arrived in the end.

*Of course, they deserve all the praise after this, I’ll do it too – oh man, it has all the photography apps, all of them aaaaaaaaaaaAAAAAAAAAAAA~!*

Gary turned to Ash poking around on his com.

*I can’t believe how much MEMORY this thing has, I could probably take a picture a day for the rest of my life and not even break a quarter* –

Gary blinked.

Ash continued to tinker with his gift, *I can’t wait to try this out, oh man, this camera has ALL the pixels, and I can edit vids and* –

Gary was looking at Ash wide eyed. He could hear him plain as day, but Ash wasn’t moving his mouth.

Oh god, this again, the mind, the voice hearing thing again 8) But this from, WHAT EXACTLY -

*I need to make the first picture special, it’s gotta be something really, super good* – Ash looked to Gary, and in any other instance, Gary’s heart would have been in a tizzy, but Gary was still trying to grasp that he could fully hear Ash’s thoughts through their connection – *I want to kiss him more, more, all over his body*–

“Ash,” Gary startled, “Ash, do you, do you know what you’re doing?”

“Hm?”

“Ash, um, I can hear your thoughts, again” –

“Okay?”

Clefable and Chimecho from their maintenance work of plant pruning and chart noting snapped in 100% –

“Okay just, say something, anything with your mind.”

Ash tilted his head, “Anything?”

“Anything, just do it.”

“Um, okay.” *I want to kiss Gary very much.*
Gary blushed and repeated, “You want to kiss me very much.”

“No surprises there~” Clefable commented as they set their watering pail down.

Ash’s eyebrows perked up, “Wow, good guess,” he gave a mewl smile, “or not, you know like all of my aura and stuff,” Ash then smiled so sweetly, “did my eyes give me away?”

**HE WILL BE THE DEATH OF YOU –**

Gary crossed his legs, “I, don’t think so, do it again.”

“Okay.” *I think pokemon are the best.*

“Say something that’s not so obvious, something you think I would never, ever, guess in a million years.”

“But you’re really smart” –

“This is very true, but you are always one to take me by surprise, think of something.”

Ash pondered a moment with his hands making little fists just before his mouth like a how a Meowth would do,

*Why are you so gatdamn cute –*

“It’s natural I guess,” Ash mumbled, he perked up, “Oh! Okay, alright I got one. *ahem*”

*Sometimes I lay awake at night and think what it would be like to be baseball, and I’m like getting thrown around back and forth, but then a batter comes up and I get popped fly into the sky and I keep going into like outer space and I’m shooting past stars and stuff and I end up going into an Ultra Wormhole and I pop out the other end and I’m like sitting in this bed holding this device called a 3DS and I’m watching ‘my hands’ move the controls about and making my life do stuff and apparently the command to have sexy times is ‘down down up up right left right left A B’ and I think that what if my life isn’t in my hands at all, but at the whims of someone else who sees me as meandering entertainment.*

Gary stared at Ash, his hands clasped before his lips.

“Okay….so…….So…….Sooooooootthhhhhhhhhhhooooooo” –

“What did you hear?” asked Ash.

Gary deflated, ‘That your stories are as crazy as ever, you’re a baseball and you fly into space and come out the other end as a metaphorical manifestation in where you feel you don’t have control over your life anymore.”

Ash squinted his eyes which was followed by an almost dizzying realization, ”Wait...."

*I think the live action Beauty and the Beast is obscenely overrated* –

“It is not!” Ash snapped, but saw clear as day that Gary hadn’t moved his mouth at all. Chimecho looked back and forth between them, a wide grin spreading over their features –

“Oh my!” Clefable gasped, “My Loves, I think, perhaps – your Transfer Effects just evolved!”

Ash and Gary looked at each other for a moment, seeing each other, and seeing right through.
*You can hear me!* 
*I can hear you!* 
*ASH* - 
*GARY* - 
*Oh my god* – 
*Oh my gosh* – 
8O!!!
* :o……I like my star :3

***

*Fascinating, truly fascinating!* chirped Gardevoir (internally via Mental Link* to everyone since the psychic type was back to taking a rest in bed after pushing themselves because no one knows how to rest around here), *You can finally hear each other’s thoughts clearly~! Ohohohohohoho~! Such a strong connection between humans has rarely been documented!* 

“Rare is a generous statement,” said Clefable, “I’ve never come across such research!”

_Probably because everyone who learned Telepathy used it to talk around you~!_

Ash scratched his hair nervously, “I’m sure if you look more Clefable, you’ll find some of that research….out there…..”

Ritchie meanwhile looked more concerned than anything, nervous at best, sitting on the edge of the bed with arms crossed and form shivering. Daisy was pondering the notion more than anything with an inquisitive hand under her chin while leaning on a chair, but the couples’ new found power of shared (as opposed to one-sided) telepathy utterly captivated Clefable, Chimecho, and Gardevoir – “Ash,” said Ritchie, “this doesn’t freak you out, _just, a little bit?_”

“Well….Why would it now?” Ash picked at the blanket, “I mean, considering what we’ve been through, no, this doesn’t freak me out at all. Gary and I, I mean we’ve already been able to feel so much with our emotions, we already could hear each other’s thoughts in a way! And Gary could hear me before, soooooo….Honestly, this just feels like a natural progression of how we can communicate, I mean, like, the really good couples can ‘read each other’s mind’ in a way, shoot you and I in a way can too! Especially when we’re out on our runs, we just _feel_ it, you know?!”

“Hm,” Ritchie warmed a tiny fraction, “Well, when you put it like that, that does make, a little sense.”

“Yeah,” Ash smiled, “Only thing is I can actually hear Gary’s thoughts now too! I think it’s just one more thing we can explore as a couple. Besides, if I have something to worry about, then I just have to come out and say it no? Why put it off?”

Ritchie’s nervous look came back –
Oh boy...

Gary you remember when you were freaking out about invading Ash’s privacy with all the mental stuff? Hm? Hm? What happened to those concerns? Because I think even the author forgot. Well yeah you told Ash, but still...

“What do you think Gary?” Daisy asked pointedly.

“I think for us a couple that our communication habits will only get more acute” –

LOL. Acute has two definitions and you all thought of the one everyone else is thinking of, AREN’T YOU –

If Daisy’s eyes could roll into the back of her head and stay there, they would.

Gary looked off in thought ignoring his sister’s sass, “I had moments prior where I could’ve sworn I could hear Ash’s thoughts, but it was so random and sudden that I didn’t think too much of it except shenanigans I didn’t understand yet.”

Remembering his plea for you when you first saw him after he was brought to Viridian Memorial, or the time he craved water after the attack by the Smeargle, just to recap~

"And then I could hear Ash’s thoughts as the Link* business went about, but it was just a one way radio that had its ways”-

“But now,” Ash continued, “we both, have access when we’re in tune, its like, something just, turned on, I dunno, we’re still trying to get it in the swing of things, like, just before you guys came in, we suddenly couldn’t hear each other at all with mind stuff, but then we could again?”

Gary took over under Daisy and Ritchie’s heavily studied scrutiny, “I’m guessing the translation of our connection is working some kinks out, like a switchboard testing its connection. The thing to note here is what’s being translated through Transfer Effects or our Heartstring, or even something else entirely! Subconsciously we’re doing something, we just have to figure out how we’re picking up each other’s wavelengths to the point of understanding direct language internally.”

Ash looked confuzzled.

* Hard to understand X( but science is still cool *3*

“But even more impressive than Ash and I being able to hear each other, was our interaction in our dreams” –

“Okay yeah that, thaaaaaat is something else – you for real had freckles?” asked Daisy.

“Yes,” Ash chimed in, “But they were starlight at first! Then we woke up and uh, did stuff – and then we noticed them! Gary really, really had freckles! And I’m so so so super super super bummed we didn’t get a picture! UGH” –

*I think,* Gardevoir began, *This Telepathy could correlate with the power of the ‘Dream Space’ you and Gary share.*


*Formally known as the Dark Place. The Dream Space will be the name for your ‘personal phantasmal plain’ you and Gary are somehow able to manifest your consciousness into – because I
am now certain beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Link* kafuffle you suffered Ash triggered access to the Dream World phenomenon.*

Ash perked up, “The Dream World!??” he whipped to Gary, “You were right!”

Gary snapped his fingers, “I knew it! That would explain why our bodies were so heavily affected – how the reality was so, jarring,” he looked up, “how you were able to directly affect my body….”

Gary went into a pondering pose looking right at Ash’s blue eye, “And, perhaps….”

Ash blinked, his hand reaching to touch around his blue eye, “Hey, you think, that was what turned my eye blue?”

“But your eye stayed blue,” said Daisy, “Gary’s freckles went away” –

“The Link*,” said Ritchie, “All that crap Lisa put in you” –

*Exactly what I was going to say,* said Gardevoir, *Ash, your physical change is a remnant of the Transformation the Link* was trying to distill in you.*

“Oh, okay, just, throwing that idea out there.”

*Your eye is not going to change back Ash.*

Gary crossed his arms, “Grant it, the Dream World is something we still have no idea how it works, just, how it can be accessed – but even that knowledge is limited! And, now, it seems Ash and I can utilize it….”

Ash fidgeted, holding his wrist, “If we can utilize it…maybe, I could try to change my eye color back?”

*That might be a possibility,* said Gardevoir.

*:o*

*But I wouldn’t get your hopes up Love.*

*I told you.*

“That is really something though,” said Daisy crossing her arms, “You two gaining access to your own little portion of the Dream World….that is something that very, very, very few humans have ever had the ability to do without the assistance of the Entralink – and well, there was that one case of a guy who smoked a blunt off the smoke from Musharna, but he went insane and died” –

*HE WHAT NOW?*

“What?!” Ash sputtered –

“All of this came about under extreme circumstances in the first place,” said Gary as he put an arm around Ash, “Mainly in…dealing with all the suffering that Ash was put through* –

“Mh.”

*True, and the other experiences were influenced under times of duress as well, save for the poor blunt fellow,* said Gardevoir, *but, they too also had auras that were exceptionally conditioned with pokemon influence, be it from blessings, health treatments, or, (*cough*) otherwise – and,
unfortunately for Ash, it was more nefarious from Lisa’s will and that horrid stone from Espeon* –

“Not to mention all the blessings you’ve gotten from the Legends Ash,” said Ritchie, “I guess the tipping point was what Lisa did to you, and that opened up the Dream World access?”

“Maybe,” said Ash scratching his head, “So….what does this all come to then?” Ash tilted his head up in a notion to Gardevoir, “Okay, so my blue eye is a remnant of the Link*, but Gary’s freckles, for sure, were of the Dream Space because we don’t have the Link* in us anymore……yet…..could the stone that Espeon stabbed into me….could that have come modified from the Dream World?”

*Oooooh,* said Gardevoir, everyone feeling the chill that ran down their spine, *Now that is a thought…*

“But not a pleasant one,” said Gary.

*That would put more merit to it triggering a more powerful Dream Space. But, from what Brock recalled to us of what Espeon told him and Tracey, the Link*, err, Catalyst, was developed off Shadow Pokemon Tech from the Orre region that their oh-not-so-great leader came up with….Shadow Pokemon Tech closed off the door to their ‘heart’ per say. Now, your ‘heart’ and ‘soul’ are essentially the same concept, and of that, your emotions and personality together make up the colors of your aura, or bioluminescence, the shine of your soul. Your biocode is the bridge encompassing your soul and body chemistry which influences each other in a very delicate give and take balance. When you feel good, your body feels better, when your sick, you feel bad – and that’s where Human Health Transfer comes into play. Follow?*

“My head hurts,” Ash grumbled.

*Yes, it is, it really truly is. Now I explained all of that to explain this. Having that Catalyst ripped out of the two of you reset your functions, a crude code cut, minus the hole in your code, so, that, in theory should have made the access to the Dream World much more mute, but it didn’t. We can argue it’s only gotten stronger to the point of physical manipulation evident from Gary’s freckles – plus now you two share a Telepathy ability! It is my belief that the intense bond you two share with each other with the Heartstring, allowed Transfer Effects* of a psychic pokemon, most likely from me, eeeeeee~, to plant the development of your Telepathy, and thus helping to set the stage of the shared Dream Space you two can access instead of having your own separate spaces.”

“A shudder ran up Ash and Gary’s spine.

“That’s awful, simply awful!” said Ritchie.

*No, no, you are also a great user of Health Transfer,* said Gardevoir, *You’ve got the data in you as well, and, in theory, it was just updated via Ash’s code because of your bond.*

Poor Ash looked so lost, Gary turned to Ash,

“Okay Ash it’s like this, the Dream World is like a program that can only be accessed with help from an adapter, say the Entralink, or a compatible program, and our codes now have the software in them
that can read the Dream World! Isn’t that neat?!”

Poor, poor Ashy still looked lost, “Science is too amazing,” he said weakly.

*Maybe we should pump the breaks here,* said Gardevoir, *There is so much to analyze!*

“Main thing I’m taking away from this,” said Ash, “Is that our connection is getting stronger, but as it gets stronger, cooooould that give us further control over how we can interact with the Dream Space?”

*Instead of your nightmares completely overtaking it? 8’)*

*That seems a likely conclusion! But what gives you power over it, is not so much your bond, as your own personal development. Your bond is helping you two with the shared space, but you both, as individuals, your own power in governing aspects of the Dream World will come from your own code’s interpretation of it, so the hole in your codes isn’t doing you two any favors, buuuut once those holes are closed, OH~!* Gardevoir’s outburst made everyone jump, *The possibilities are marvelous!*

“I think it’s safe to say for the time being though that Ash’s connection to the Dream World is stronger,” said Gary, “You were able to make a physical change on me temporarily, even with the hole in your code.”

*So exciting~*

“If I may, interject here, for a moment,” said Daisy, “…Gardevoir, you ate a substantial amount of Ash’s nightmares, no?”

*Yes, I did* –

“Ok, you and Gary were terrorized by some of said nightmares, yes?”

“Um, we were yeah.”

“Okay so,” Daisy crossed her legs, “The point that I’m getting at is, as your access to the Dream Space becomes more defined, then, so will your nightmares. In the most advanced cases, specs of the Dream World can become real. Say like, you know how Pokemon are able to manifest certain Dream Specs from the Dream World yes? WEEEEELLL, you two are just scratching the surface of what your mental projections can conjure forth, especially you Ash with how powerful your own is looking to be. If it was important to strengthen your psyche before, now it is imperative you both do so, or those terrors….might actually follow you out into the real world. Like,” Daisy rubbed her temples, “I know you guys are happy, but, this can’t have come at a worse time!”

Everyone in the room looked like they had the wind knocked right out of them, and the stunned silence of Gardevoir said it all. Ash and Gary had taken each other’s hand, exchanging fearful looks, remembering how they were hunted in their sleep by a very not-so-friendly manifestation of Ash himself –

**GREAT SO YOU BOTH CAN NOW BE HAUNTED BY ACTUAL PHYSICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF YOUR MENTAL ILLNESS THAT IS SO NOT NICE, THAT IS SO NOT NICE – GARY I’M SO SORRY DUDE, I TAKE IT ALL BACK, I’M HERE FOR YOU IN THIS PREMPTIVE REAL WORLD SILENT HILL NIGHTMARE SHIT – WAIT COULD I BECOME REAL???? 8O!!!!**

* :o or me?
Gary got a grip on himself (and Ash) with a deep inhale, “We can handle it…we’ll face it….with, honestly, everything that has happened, it’s nothing we can’t handle. I protected Ash before, and I’ll do it again,” he said with conviction –

“At what cost?” said Daisy, taking whatever conviction Gary had and stuffing it, “……Your codes must heal, we all know what can happen if left otherwise. I don’t mean to rain on your chivalrous parade Gary, but you two must come to terms with yourselves above all else. I know you’re dealing with a lot, and I don’t mean to add more to your burdens, but this is too important to sugar coat.”

“Oh,” Ash rubbed his arms, chills spreading all through him, “Okay, okay so we, just stay on the course of getting ourselves together, we can do that, we can totally do that, we’re doing that” –

And on that note, I would like to thank the higher forces at be for never failing to tank my boy’s emotions when it really matters –

“We’ll be here to help,” said Ritchie, “The most important thing to remember is you’re not alone – no more isolating yourself when there’s a problem.”

Ash bent a little, and Daisy made a snort that made Gary respond with a glare.

*Truth,* said Gardevoir in a much deflated tone, *And, as they say, faith without works is dead, and you all have been fighting the gamut for each other tooth and nail, I mean sure, wayward thoughts can throw all sorts of monkey wrenches in a seemingly enclosed emotional space* –

**83**

Gary and Ritchie turned away from one another, Ash bent further.

**HHHHHHHHNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNGUHHHHHHHHHHHH**

*It goes without saying how much you all love each other….*

Вишишшшшш?

*Maybe this time, love can be enough.*

“Love is what has gotten us this far,” said Ash, “What could take us further?”

“Logic,” said Daisy flatly, and Gary felt something prickly move in his heart, “Love can give you the strength, but without logic, you will lack the tools to use it productively.”

*Love was able to help you rescue Ash. Yeah you ran in there guns blazing without a spare thought to the aftermath of it all BUT WHAT ELSE WERE YOU SUPPOSED TO DO???????? THERE WAS NO TIME TO THINK–*

Gardevoir clapped, *Which brings us to the next round of business that is a one-stop-shop jump on the code treatment! I mean with this, yet ANOTHER trial to overcome* –

**Joy. . . .**

*Mismagius and I have been mulling this theory over and coming up with a treatment to best help you cover the most ground in sifting through your emotional slog along with tempering your mental chatter, hoho~! You both are going to build, in your Dream Space – a MIND HOME 8D!!!!.*

“………………”
Ash tilted his head, “…A Mind Home?”

*Okay the name is stupid, but the concept is not! A Mind Home 8D!!!!!!!!!*

“Let’s call it a Dream Home,” said Gary beaming, already catching onto Gardevoir’s plan –

*Alright fine, and that does sound better – a DREAM HOME 8D. A collective expanse where you two can create a safe space in the deepest reaches of your soul – aaaaand~! This should also help in repairing your codes in giving you both a place of absolute mental tranquility!* 

**Absolute. Mental. Tranquility. ‘Mkay.**

Ash still wasn’t catching on, “Um…sooooooooo?” –

*Allow me to explain~ Since you two share a Dream Space, we’ll begin with the two of you developing your own Dream Spaces by yourselves that will essentially define what makes you, you!*

“We can’t build a home together?” asked Ash.

*That can come later, right now, you need to work on yourselves and get those codes healing. But what you two will build together, in setting ground work for your relationship, is a Dream Garden that will link your homes together! It is important to note that you two mustn’t let yourselves fall into that trap of melding your identity as a joint account in moving forward. Ash is Ash, Gary is Gary, and you meet each other as you do. In your homes, there should be rooms that only you can access as you each are first and foremost the master of your own Dream Home~*

Ash tilted his head again, “Huh, well, okay then….I mean, the whole world knows we’re not gonna agree on everything,” Ash then side eyed Gary, “Case in point you don’t care too much for the live action Beauty and the Beast.”

Ritchie made a mock/ meaningful gasp, Gary rolled his eyes as hard as he could.

“What would be lurking in the basement?” asked Daisy dryly.

**Wearing emotions on our sleeves much dear sister~? >:) ?**

“Reptilicus,” said Ash without batting an eye; Ritchie giggled.

……ene

“I don’t care what anyone says, that movie was scary” –

“Alrighty then, there’s a plan to fight this,” said Ritchie, “There’s hope, threat of Dream Terrors or no!”

Ash looked to Gary, “What do you think?”

Gary smiled warmly, “Let’s do it, we can do it” –

“Gary, have you taken your meds today~?” asked Daisy.

“Ah…”

“Well, you might want to start there first,” and Daisy left the room in a sudden fit of silence.
“…Rude,” Ash commented, rubbing little calming circles into Gary’s tensing hand. 

“Eh, she’s always been like that,” said Gary, still, his hand shook.

*Well…shall we look at floor plans?! 8D*

……… ;_; 

Ritchie followed Daisy out, his swift pace catching to her more sullen one, “Daisy, you couldn’t show just a little support for your step brother?”

“Listen,” said Daisy as she whipped around, her voice even, “I know you two have made up from your little tit-for-tat so you’re being soft on the matter, but you know, deep down inside, this is a problem, plus, you don’t know Gary like I do” –

“Don’t give me that – he’s trying! Do you even understand what he’s put himself through for Ash?”

“Yeah, he’s putting himself into a hole,” said Daisy, Ritchie gawked, “If anyone, anyone needs to mull over their thoughts, its Gary. He has issues Ritchie, really serious ones if he lets this get out of hand, which he will” –

“You don’t know that,” Ritchie spat – “Nobody is perfect, the point is to work on ourselves to get better!”

“Uh-huh, yeah, and it looks like its just going along swimmingly, doesn’t it? How long do you think it’ll be till Gary takes over Ash’s Dream Home?”

“They haven’t even started yet! God, give them a chance!”

“Uh-huh, sure, listen, whatever grievances you got settled, get ready for round 2. That’s just how Gary is.”

“He’s trying to be better. Everyone is! That’s what we’re hanging onto, that’s what everyone is hanging onto! Why can’t they have their happy ending?! Enough! It all just needs to be enough!”

“Wow, woah, wow, okay,” Daisy laughed half-heartedly, “And you’re still, still~, STILL, sorting out your own huh? No wonder, noooo wonder~”

“No wonder what?”

“That you’re clinging to Ash like a Shellder to a Slowpoke’s tail, three’s a crowd you know” –

“You know nothing about us” –

“Oh I know plenty sweetheart,” said Daisy, “Mt. Silver~”

“You don’t know anything” –

“Oh~ I bet you anything Gary’s gonna get reeeexxaaaally curious about some of Ash’s ‘closed doors’ – I wonder if Ash really is keeping his mouth shut, or just put it behind him –’”

“Daisy” –

“How much you wanna bet the cherry blossom door will be covered in roses~?”

“THAT’S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!”
“Oh it is now, because Gary’s involved, and I’m going to be the one to clean up his mess once again. He can be vicious Ritchie. Vicious. Did you ever wonder what put Gary on meds in the first place?”

“It’s not my business,” said Ritchie, “And that is so low of you to even bring the topic up” –

“It needs to be brought up!” Daisy snapped, “You want to talk about enough? Enough forgiving, enough putting it aside” –

“Then why have you stuck around huh? You obviously care for him, or maybe you’re just using him as an emotional crutch because you can’t stand being alone” –

The somber look that flashed in Daisy’s eyes shook Ritchie, “I do care for him, we’re an awful lot alike, and I don’t like seeing him get hurt, but he does it to himself, just as I do it to myself, just as Ash, and you, and the rest of our sad little circle have hurt ourselves in one way or another. I want this to workout for them just as much as you do, but I already know what happens next,” Daisy’s look turned dark, “And so do you.”

Ritchie couldn’t find the words to say anything back as Daisy flipped her hair and walked off, “Learn to let go Ritchie,” she called back, “we’ll all be better off for it, especially you. It’s time some real amends are made here.”

***

“Audi! Hey Audi, my sweet Audi, how are you feeling?! Are you alright? Are you okay?” Gary wiped his happy tears away, he was face-timing with Audi who was still at the pokemon center, he could see they still had some medical electrodes stuck to their chest–

Audi adjusted their translator as they nodded enthusiastically, “Yes, yes, I’m doing better, getting stronger everyday!”

“Good, good, I’m so glad to hear it, I’m so, so, so sorry I didn’t get in contact with you sooner!”

“Oh, no, no, it’s okay, it’s fine, honestly, I’ve been more worried about you! When they said you weren’t waking up I was so scared, but then I was so happy when they told me you finally came around! Personally I’ve really been in and out of it! Just sorting through some things you know, putting myself back together!”

“Do you have damage to your code?”

“A little, but, it’s nothing I can’t overcome! You have damage too right? We’ll both overcome it, I just have to remember to be strong like you!”

“Audi, you’re the one that’s strong, you’re so strong, never forget that, you’re amazing, and, honestly, there aren’t enough adjectives in the world that can properly describe what an incredible pokemon you are” – Gary suddenly looked off to the side, “Hang on, hang on a minuet, Ash is here too” –

Audino saw the com cam get shuffled about as it was handed over to Ash –

“Hey Audi!”
“Hello Ash! I’m glad to see you doing better” – Ash kissed the screen, making Audino blush redder than a Tomato berry –

“You know, soon you’re going to be challenging Ritchie’s record in saving my life!”

Ritchie’s voice came off screen, “Not sure that’s a record I want challenged.”

“I’m a medical pokemon, it’s what I must do!” smiled Audi.

Misty slid into view right next to Ash, and to not be left out, Gary squished in on Ash’s opposite side, “Oof” –

“Audi,” said Misty, “As an official of the Kanto League, I’m here to formally announce that you’ve been nominated for the Order of the Rainbow Wing for exceptional, exceptional bravery in the service of medical pursuits under hazardous condition.”

Audino looked like they froze, then, “R-R-Rainbow, Wing?”

“Yes,” said Gary –

“So well deserved,” said Ash –

“I can’t be the only one nominated! What about Gardevoir, and Mismagius, the Ranger Pokemon” –

“They’ve all been nominated too,” said Misty, “They can give out the same award multiple times you know, as many for all who qualify! And Audi, you qualify.”

“D-Don’t you have to have a l-l-legendary p-p-p-p-p-p” –

“Yes, you need a legendary pokemon to nominate you too, it was Cobalion, and a league official, of whom you had me and Brock and” –

“And me!” piped Ash, “My credentials as a Champion are still good!”

“Hey, when is Brock coming back?” came Ritchie voice off-screen again –

“Uuuuum,” Misty looked through her com notes, “Afternoon I think” –

Meanwhile Audino was frozen again, then they dropped their head and started to outright bawl –

“Oh Audi,” said Gary, “Sweetie you deserve this and more.”

“I don’t know what to say,” Audino sobbed, “Thank-you, thank-you so much,” they cried through thick gushing tears, suddenly one of the machines started to go off attached to Audino, making them jump, making everyone jump –

“Audi?!”

Just as quickly Nurse Joy came into view behind Audino and worked the machine over, making it stop its alarm, “Okay,” said Nurse Joy, “Audi, sweetheart, might be exhausting yourself a bit here.”

“Are you alright?”

Audino quickly wiped their face (a futile attempt at best), “Yes, yes, I still have to be a little careful with, my heart, but I will be okay Gary, I will.”
“Okay, I’m going to come see you in person either tomorrow or the day right after, okay?”

“O-Okay, you don’t have to” –

“I want to, the only reason it’s not today is because we’re devising a plan to sneak Ash out so he can come see you too” –

Ash came back into view with a pair of sunglasses on, “Yeah Audi, secret agent agency man!”

“Whaaaat who is that?” Misty mocked.

Audino bit their lip, but gave an honest giggle, “Okay, well, I guess I’ll see you guys then!”

“Bye Audi!”

“Bye-bye sweetie” –

The com was swept all around Ash and Gary’s room with everyone giving Audi waves and many heartfelt well wishes, Ritchie blowing a kiss, and with a final goodbye, the call was ended.

Just off to Audino’s side out of the line of sight, stood Gary’s Alakazam, “…Audi.”

Audi sniffed back more thick, thick tears, “…Not yet…I don’t want to tell him just yet…I don’t know how to tell him….and now he’s coming…..”

“I can break the news to them,” said Nurse Joy, “I’ve delivered worse.”

“You’re alive Audi,” said Alakazam, the old psychic pokemon taking Audino’s tiny hand into their larger one, “He is not going to think any different, no one is, I promise, that’s not who Gary is, you know that.”

Audino just bent further as the tears freely flowed from their face.

Okay, one down, one to go –

Misty stretched as she got up from Ash and Gary’s bed, she had been finally freed of the rest of her bandages just hours before, “Alright Gary,” she gave an elaborate bow to help him up, “Shall we make our way to Tracey’s room?”

“Yes, yes – WOUGH” – Misty scooped up Gary like he was nothing but a doll, Gary holding himself like a startled pooch.

Ash flexed his hands, “Guh, this medicine is making me feel all…rubbery.”

“Rubbery?” Clefable asked, “Well that’s a step up from prickley.”

“I guess.”

Misty turned Gary to Ash, “You going to be okay?” he squeaked.

“Yeah, don’t worry,” Ash smiled, “You two go on to Tracey’s room.”

“I’ll look after Ash,” said Ritchie.

Misty tossed Gary lightly to adjust him in her grasp, “Let’s go, this is a little overdue.”
“Be gentle with him,” said Ash, “You have precious cargo there.”

Misty rolled her eyes with a smile, “More like fragile.” Clefable held the door open for them as they left.

“Soooo,” Gary cleared his throat, “You’re going to carry me the whole way there? You’ve just barely been healed –”

“Yup, I’m giving my body a little exercise and you’re my practice weight~”

“I’m touched.”

Okay in this time-frame Gary we can stop and take a gander at why, oh why, you are suddenly scared of seeing Tracey? Yeah, Tracey, T R A C E Y –

Misty walked exactly 10 steps, right to the room next door, “Here we are!”

8O….

Gary did a couple double-takes, “Wha-Wait, he’s right here?! He’s been right there this whole time?!”

Aha, maybe he can critique by your noises how good you are in bed because you know he’s your ‘lab mate’ –

“Always has been,” said Misty, she knocked on the door with her foot –

“I could have knocked” –

“No need.”

A Rotom promptly answered the door, “Oh! Mr. Oak, and Ms. Tides, please come in!”

“Special delivery babe!” Misty announced.

“Gary?” came Tracey’s voice. The pokemon swung the door wide open, revealing Tracey sitting up in bed with his com in hand, Gary letting out a deep, deep sigh of relief,

“Tracey” – the moment the science bros’ eyes met, Gary couldn’t get by Tracey fast enough and Tracey looked like hell. The next thing out of Gary’s mouth was, “I thought you were getting better” –

“Yeah, I uh, got banged up a bit more than they thought, but I’m still here!”

“Tracey!” –

“Oh my god quit squirming, here, here,” said Misty, depositing Gary next to Tracey, “get in there with him, you’re not gonna hurt him, he looks worse than how he actually feels, he’s really much better.”

“Yup” –

Gently as Gary could, he snuggled right up to Tracey, hugging him and wanting to hug him for the longest time (Misty tucking them in), Tracey fully returning the gesture, making Gary starkly remember that even as he hugged his hardest, it was still no match for the Ursaring hug that was Tracey, and Gary let himself get smothered, his eyes welling up instantly.
Tracey’s ultra hugs are rare, but when they’re given, they emit nothing but the deepest affection for the recipient. Come to think of it, one might not survive getting hugged back to back by Ash and Tracey, but what a way to go out – CRUNCH~!

“How long has it been since I gave you one of these?” asked Tracey.

The fact that you can’t honestly remember Gary really hurts all parties involved.

“I, um…”

It’s like this fam, the thought of Ritchie hating Gary had made him feel sick to his stomach, but the thought of Tracey hating him made him want to curl up in the deepest, darkest hole and die….’cause like, there is, a lot Tracey could take issue with Gary, A LOT, and he would be well, well in his right to do so, and act on it, aaaaand Misty’s aura alone vibrated this to Gary (could also add onto her hater-aide for Gary too), but ohohohohoho fam, Gary already KNOWS –

It wasn’t long before hot, stinging tears flowed out of Gary onto Tracey’s shirt, “I’m so glad you’re okay, I’m so glad you’re okay, I should have come to see you ages ago I’m so sorry” –

Gary felt Tracey’s throat swallow, this voice turning just as thick and wet, “You were in a coma-like state, don’t beat yourself up about it,” he croaked, “I got worried because a lot of our specialized personnel were out, Audi, Gardevoir, it was down to poor Mismagius and the staff members and they were running around like a Blaziken with their head cut off till Clefable and Chimecho arrived! It was all kinda scary till we figured out what your body was doing…then we just had to, wait.”

Tracey and Ash have pushing what bothers them down in common, but, unlike Ash in the past, Tracey was more open to discussing what bothered him, he talks to you, he talks to Misty, he talks! You gotta admit now that you had pushed him away a little…..maybe a little more than a little….and that stupid cabin in the woods plan didn’t help, yet despite everything….everything….there’s never been any question that, you know, you’re friends…To be honest, this hole in your code is pushing you to grasp at all your relationships right now, and you’re taking the initiative and nipping ALL THIS EMOTIONAL TURMOIL IN THE BUTT BECAUSE YOU DON’T HAVE A LOT OF FAMILY MEMBERS LEFT GARY MOTHERFUCKIN OAK –

“Your hand! How is your hand?!”

“They’re still working on it, so jury’s still out on it, and they don’t want me to try to move it just yet anyway, so, sorry if it feels a little weir” –

“You don’t have to apologize for anything! I’m the one that should be sorry!”

“Gary, oof” –

Gary nudged further, “Have, have you been right next door” –

“I asked to be by you when I learned you went under, in, in case anything did happen, I’d be right there beside you.”

Hey. Hey. Hey Gary. Tracey was the one that found Gramps dead, remember? Do you remember that Gary? He was Tracey’s grandfather too. And Ash’s. And every other person that came to know the warmth that he was.

Gary’s Heart: *CRACK*

It was you that turned cold. Maybe they should have stuck you in the ground instead.
With a trembling voice, Gary just asked straight out, “…Do you hate me?”

Misty and Tracey looked equally stunned at the question, “What? No, absolutely not” –

“Because you have every right to” –

“Oh my goodness Gary, where is this coming from?! How could I ever hate you?!”

“Because I’m a terrible person!” and Gary just cried, leaving Tracey almost totally bewildered and Misty a little taken back at the intense display of affection of Gary to her boyfriend. They both know Gary can be a bit of a showboat, but this is raw, it’s real, and it’s gushing –

“Gary, you’re not a bad person,” said Tracey, rubbing small circles in his back. Misty looked to him with a quickly growing worried look. Not wanting to talk directly around Gary, Misty typed on her com, *It’s gotta be the hole in his code*, and showed the text to Tracey, who nodded in reply.

Tracey rested his head on top of Gary’s, and with his free hand, typed out a text to Misty, *I need some time with him*. She nodded and quietly left the room, the Rotom following her out, they didn’t need to take a hint that these two needed a serious heart-to-heart.

Gary’s swirling thoughts were sitting on a razor’s edge. It all came rushing up to the surface again.

That day. That horrible, horrible day.

How long has it been since he died?

Gary clutched Tracey tighter.

Ever since then, all your success Gary, in the back of your mind, comes at the price of remembering where you were when Tracey called you, completely hysterical, and….Can you believe that it has been only a year? It’s only been a year, and, so much has happened that it feels like an eternity outside of time and space. What did you do Gary? Did you ever really process that he was gone forever? And you berated Ash for holding things in? You cried, you cried, and you cried, and you told yourself so long as you had them that you’d be okay.

But you’re not okay. And you haven’t been for a long, long time.

“I used you,” Gary croaked out.

“Hm,” Tracey clicked his tongue, “I don’t recall it as such.”

“I did…you’re too nice to me. You forgive so much. And you deserve so much better than a sorry excuse for a lab partner like me. You do so much, so much, you do so much Tracey – it’s like I’m just a lump of breathing coal –”

“Oh Gary stop that. You know that’s not true, this is the hole in you talking. You are exhausted mentally and physically – so much so that your body crashed and you were out for eleven days. You were in a state of recovery, essentially your body put itself in safe mode, and your code was trying to reboot after having some ransomware jack you around a bit. Your body forcibly reset, cutting what was lost loose, and now a little of you is missing and that’s why you feel so hurt. But, you’ll never lose me Gary. Even if we drift a bit, I know we’ll come back together, one because I kinda work for you, and two,” Tracey made sure they held eye contact, “You’re my best friend, you know I will always love you.”

That only made Gary’s heart squeeze itself even tighter, forcing Gary to breathe out, “…..You found him.” Gary felt Tracey freeze. “You found him….And I left you all alone. I left you all alone because
I couldn’t even see him, without, without thinking…..Having my lecture was no excuse, and you were still there! *How, how did you pull yourself there to see me?*

“Easy,” Tracey’s voice was slightly higher, tears streaming down his face, dripping onto Gary, “I was always there for Gramps, so of course I’d be there for you.”

“I saw you once after the lecture, and then I just, disappeared.”

“You were with Ash, Ash was taking care of you. Misty was taking care of me. They were texting each other back and forth, and we *were* together Gary, crying lumps of sorrow, but we did spend time together, *we were together*” –

“I don’t remember any of it. I barely remember the funeral. I don’t even remember if I spoke, or if you spoke, or Daisy, how sad it that?”

“It’s grief Gary, you’re allowed to be sad, Gramps was your only parent, he was your entire family for so long before Daisy swooped in.”

“I tend to do very silly things to people I love,” Gary pushed himself up to make eye contact with Tracey again. “I never….ever…..really thanked you, for everything you’ve done….Really, you, and Daisy kept the lab going, I mean, you see it coming, and I, did not think I was going to fall apart like that, *my god, you were the one that found him*…. And you, just hauled yourself together, and, and –and if I, EVER, gave the impression that I blamed you for his death, *I am so, so, so sorry*” – Gary broke down again –

Tracey pulled Gary into a tight, tight hug, “*You’re not a robot Gary, and as much as you’d like all of us to believe you are totally all about that cocky, suave facade, you’re human just like the rest of us.*”

“I lost my granddad, but you so did you! He took you in like his own. That’s, that’s just how he was” – Gary looked up to Tracey again, “*If I ever had a brother, you’re it.*”

And that, broke Tracey, the both of them a heap of crying lumps as they held each other.

….If your voice is what brings Ash back to center, then, Tracey is your center. He’s home.

*Home.*

*Home*….

**So then what’s Ash?**

>You never once asked Tracey what he left behind in the Orange Islands, but it must not have been very much for him to uproot as easily as he did to come and live here. You know he and Misty go visit the Orange Islands every now and then. *Hm, if you recall, Ritchie and Ash have, err had, that Orange Island trip coming up…Maybe you guys can all go vacation there sometime, that’d be fun <3 Couples’ trip~! X3…..owo…… ono….. ;;*;

;-

Gary asked a question he wanted to say he knew the answer to, but, “If you found a better
opportunity elsewhere, would you leave?”

“What a silly thing to ask,” said Tracey with a thick sniffle, “Everything I love is right here in Kanto. *My family* is in Kanto, and here in Kanto, I’ll stay.”

*It’s still nice to hear it out loud…*

“Now,” Tracey touched their foreheads together, “If you go running off into the forest with Ash again, you will give me more of a heads up, right?”

Gary just dropped his head against Tracey’s chest, “God, I’m so sorry…I’m going to sell that stupid place and move us back into the city, worst idea I ever had.”

“How else does a scientist learn?”

“Hhhhuuurgggghhhhhhhhhhh.”

“Exactly….Okay I am a little upset about that, but, we move past it.”

“I’m sorry. Thank-you.”

“Anytime. You’re forgiven.”

*Lord….you don’t ever have to worry about Tracey Gary. You two go back a ways. Just as Ash and Misty go back a ways, and what they’ve been through, and are still friends? Yeah, you don’t have to worry about Tracey at all. Still…..it’s not like, you mean to take advantage of him….Like…… Oh…….Oooooooh….well, at least you could ask him how he puts up with you, given, almost everyone else…EVERYONE else has a ‘why I can really hate Gary’ on them. Yeah. Tracey it like….he’s like….do you do this because you know he’ll forgive you? That he, and Audi would never, ever……*

Gary clung to Tracey like a lifeline, the hole in his code like a cavern underneath threatening to eat him whole, but Tracey has a killer Ursaring hug, and he won’t let Gary fall.

*Misty had made her way over to the floor wait room to get some coffee, “I’m a coffee girl~ In a coffee wo-or-or-orld~”*

“Misty!”

“Oh my god!” Misty jumped nearly spilling her coffee cup, spinning around to see Ritchie.

“Sorry, I was looking for you!”

“Well you have found me, what’s up?”

“Ash wants to talk with you, you got a minuet?”

“Sure, be right there.” Misty chugged the coffee, chucked the cup in the trash, and followed Ritchie to Ash’s room, but when Ritchie offered Misty entry as he stayed outside, her eyebrow quirked up. Ritchie motioned with his eyes a more serious type of conversation was ahead. So, Misty entered the room with an open heart. Ash was fiddling with his blanket, an ever tell-tale sign of nerves.

“Hey Misty.”
“I was *just* here, how fast can catastrophe strike when I’m away?” She meant in jest with a half smile, but Ash was still fidgeting.

“Well you know, not to be left out of round of amends making, I um, I um, I *um*…want to apologize to you.”

Misty tilted her head, “Eh?” then understood, “Oh, _oh Ash_, we’ve been through this _a million times_”

“No, no, not like this, I want to apologize to you Misty, because, I didn’t…I didn’t take care of myself the way I should have. I, I knew there was something wrong with me, I could feel, there was something, just, _off_. But…I dunno, I didn’t want, to believe, that, it got me…Does that make any sense?”

Misty took a seat by Ash, “Yeah.”

“And…I just wouldn’t let you in because, I didn’t want what was in there to hurt you, but we all know how that turned out…It was a failure, on my part, not your’s”

“No I was a bit hard headed too”

“You were trying to help me, _for months_. I get it now, because, I caught myself doing the _same thing_ with Gary. If I don’t learn now, I never will”

“Don’t say that, it’s a process Ash, and you’ve taken very important steps. You are _making progress_. Sometimes you might take a step back or two, but then you’ll move right on ahead, full steam, like the little engine you are.”

*But what if that means leaving someone behind?*

Misty placed a hand on Ash’s shoulder, “If something is preventing you from moving forward, then you face that obstacle and move on. Just think of it as a pokemon battle, I mean, like, you can apply so much of your journey to what you’re facing, so really Ash, you’ve got this in a bag. You were just lost for a little bit. Now you’re back on course with all your loving friends and family. You got this Ash. You. Got. This.” Misty gave Ash the sweetest smile and it lit Ash’s heart up like the dawn across Ho-oh’s feathers. “And I _full-stop_ accept your apology, you accept mine?”

“Of course, but, there’s nothing you need to apologize for”

“Nah, I was a little mean when, you know, when it, happened.”

“We both were not in the best state of mind.”

“Not at all, but, that’s all water under the bridge now.”

“Yeah,” Ash smiled at Misty, he held out his hand, asking for her own, she gave it, and Ash kissed the back of her hand. “I’m really glad you and Tracey are working out so well together.”

“I am too,” Misty smiled back, “We both needed to do some growing from our time together, even if it didn’t work out, something we needed to experience methinks,” Misty curled a lock of her hair behind her ear, “Ash, can you do one last thing for me?”

“Anything.”

“Move on. Can you do that for me?”
Ash smiled with a grimace laced underneath, “Working on it.”

“Give me a hug.”

They fully embraced, as they pulled away, Misty gave Ash a kiss on the forehead, “Cutie.”

“Cuter~” Ash responded; their long lost couple’s banter.

Misty smiled warmly again.

“I um, I also made something for you,” Ash reached over to the stand next to the bed –

“Oh? Oh, Ash, it’s beautiful!”

Ash had hand woven for Misty a gorgeous hair flower accessoroy perched upon a comb, “I mean, what else am I going to do with all these flowers right? I figure I can spread the good vibes even more so! I made one for me too, sooooo,” Ash put his flower comb accessory in his hair, “twinsies!”

Misty giggled as she placed her own in her hair, “You really are the cutest, you know that?”

“It does stroke my ego a bit,” Ash blushed.

“Hm~”

“Like, I got to thinking….about, how, all these flowers are so pretty, and they’re just gonna look pretty for me, and then they’re gonna die. It felt like a waste! So, that’s why in my spare time from Tourney planning, Ritchie and I are gonna make as many flower accessories as we can, so, we can spread the love around” –

“That’s really sweet of you, but Ash these flowers were sent for you, they’re for you, you don’t have to give them away like that” –

Ash scratched the tip of his nose nonchalantly, “I kinda…feel I have to” –

“Oh nonononononononoooo~ No you don’t, I mean it’s not like we can stop you, you’re going to do what you want, but I’m telling you, and I’m sure everyone else will too, that these flowers were sent here for you, and when they do turn all dead and stuff, then they’ll just go back to the ground and make food for new flowers, circle of life. Enjoy the flowers as they are now, you’ll make new flowers with them later, trust me these people can wait.”

Ash flopped back on the bed, “I feel like Simba, how he ran away from the circle, and then realized he had to come back because he was needed so.”

“It’s up to you Ash,” said Misty, “No one can make that choice for you, and no one else should. People can wait. The league can wait. You got the Tourney off, and it’s in good hands. You just gotta focus on yourself now. Simba had to have a little me-time too, he needed to get big and strong to fully challenge Scar and kick his butt.”

“True….So, does that mean you and Brock are Timon and Pumbaa?”

“Tread lightly my child.”

Ash giggled, “Hey, how has Brock been doing? I heard he was out working with Max and Mary?”

“Yeah,” Misty sighed, “I think some of your responsibility complex is rubbing off on him, he uh, he
feels pretty bad he couldn’t do more to protect Tracey, or me, or, you, and Gary, Ritchie, ” Misty sighed again, “He’s an eldest sibling, it’s the big brother in him too. He spent a lot of time with Tracey when I was getting re-mummified, slept in our room too….” Misty tapped her knees with her fingers in rhythm, “…Bad things happen to good people all the time, grant it this was like, uber suckage, things happened that no one but Arceus could have prevented, that or a time machine to slap some sense in some people.”

“…If someone had just reached out to Lisa” –

**OMG, YEAH GARY IS IN ANOTHER ROOM, BUT I CAME OUT FROM OVER THERE TO TELL YOU TO STOP –**

“Ash, there is a fine line where someone has to recognize they have a problem and they have to be responsible to themselves, getting help is important, but just as important is being honest with yourself, that, and pulling some major, major inner heart stuff to fight back against the mental stuff. And she possessed me. Like, got into my body, messed with my code, that kind of possession. I got better.”

“That’s just it, she hurt you so badly, in one way or another – she hurt virtually everyone I care about! And I’ve been wondering what could push someone to just disregard other people’s feelings so coldly, and – Lisa was brought up that she didn’t even have a claw in her corner. What can you do about that? How do you fight against that? How do you prevent that?”

“You can’t,” said Misty simply, “Bad things will happen. Some people just get a bad draw. But she did make a decision, she ran away. I talked with Mary and she told me….she told me some stories….Lisa had some problems Ash. I’m not excusing her behavior by any means, but she, she really had some problems.”

Ash looked downtrodden. “…How is Mary?”

“She’s hanging in there, don’t worry, we’re not going to let anything happen to her, or her parents. As you can imagine, this has been, it’s been pretty rough on them. There’s a lot of upset people out there right now and they’re looking for a target, to put all this blame on, and, well, you know how that goes.”

“They’re looking for a lightning rod.”

“Exactly.”

Ash gripped the sheets, determination filling him.

“Hey now,” came Misty’s voice, “I know that look in your eye Mister Ketchum, from one Trainer to another.”

Ash looked to Moltres’ burning feather in it’s case, then back over to Misty, “Fire, they want to burn, and they need kindle, and I’ve got a whole lot of dying flowers” –

“If I have to knock you out cold with this pillow, I will Ash Ketchum” –

“No, no! I mean, let me get my thoughts straight, okay, so, how about I” –

“No, gimme your com” –
“No, it’s mine” –
“Gimmeeee” –
“Nooooooooo” –
“Gimmeeeeeeeee” –
“Nooooooooooovoltaalntttaaaa” – Ash sank under his blankets and pushed his voicemail button –
“You have 413 new voicemails.”
“…………………..”
“…………………..”
“Can you filter by number?”
“Yes I can.”
“Thank Arceus.”
“Halleluiah.”
“Praise Jebus.”

Ash filtered for his immediate contacts and found one voicemail from Gary, he opened and listening intently, he heard a squeak, then panting, running, and then “ASH’S COM IS WORKING! ASH’S COM IS WORKING!” and then the message cut off.

* That was when Gary was calling Ash’s line in trying to reach him so many moons ago, ‘member?

Ash’s heart pained him in hearing how desperate Gary sounded from a time before everything was safe. Ash, for whatever reason, saved that voicemail.

Ash resurfaced to find Misty going through her own com, “He returns,” Misty commentated.

“How do you think Gary and Tracey are doing?”

“Oh don’t worry about them. They just need to get some stuff sorted, like how you sorted with me. They’ll be fine, no worries, you know Tracey is just a big ol’ teddy bear. Gary and Tracey have this relationship that I’ll neeeever understand, but it’s not my place to understand. They have their friendship and it works for them, as long as they’re both happy and healthy and communicating it out, then what say do I have? I am no meddler.”

Ash quirked an eyebrow up.

“I’m not.”

Ash looked away with pursed lips, “I’m not sayin’ anything.”

“Uh-huh, yeah right. Well, now, they’re on a better track.”

“Questionnnnn” –
“Shoot.”

“Do you think Gary and Ritchie are really getting along well, or, are they both putting up a front?”

“….Are you asking me to meddle?”

“No, just as a point of view from the outside.”

“Well,” Misty put her hands in her pockets, “Honestly, I am the wrong person to be asking, you know that right? What brought that question to mind?”

“Ritchie. When he gets this little tick with his hand, I know something is up, and something is up, but, he hasn’t brought it up yet, and I’m wondering, and…”

“Beware that wondering, that’s what gets me into trouble,” said Misty, “Just stay the course Ash, talk it out. I know you three have had some really good heart-to-hearts, and I know that hole in you is going to be echoing in some things that you usually can ground pretty easily, so, when Ritchie comes back into the room, just do the same as Gary’s doing with Tracey, as you’ve done with me, just talk it out.”

“Yeah…Yeah you’re right.”

Misty winked, “Always am~”

“Onlyyyyyyyyyy…”

“Only what?”

Ash looked like he was subtly in pain, “We did talk earlier, and thinking back on it now, um, I have even more questions…”

*Alas, mind reading can't exactly help you here...

Ritchie, sitting under a large cherry blossom tree in the hospital courtyard, was picking apart one of the fallen flowers by its petals, his finger trembling on the final one. He swallowed down a deep, thick curling emotional lump in this throat.

He recalled the conversation he and Ash had earlier:

Ash had his arms crossed, squinting at Ritchie.

“I sense pondering,” said Ritchie without looking up as he worked on a flower accessory –

“Did you really show Gary affection, or was that just to mess with him?”

“When?”

“When you kissed his forehead.”

“Oh that. I thought my tears kinda got the point across, buuuuuuuuuuuuuuut, hm, I guess you could say half and half, mostly in the moment, but more for us to push past what had happened between us, because my goodness, let me tell you getting thrown out of 8th story window helps put things in
perspective, and I know we’ve been through what can be considered ‘worse’ but given the circumstances” –

“You’re rambling.”

* Deflecting actually.

“….Am I now.”

“Mh-hm.”

“Alright, Ash, I know you want us to be cool,” said Ritchie, “And I’m trying, that’s all I can promise.”

“That’s all I can ask.”

“Hm,” Ritchie plucked a flower from one of the many bouquets around Ash’s room, moving the bud skillfully through his fingers, “…..He’s really got your heart, doesn’t he?”

Ash smiled back shyly, rubbing his chest, “Yeah, he really, really does.”

“He’s a lucky man. Luck tends to run in our circle no?”

“We’re like walking vials of that Harry Potter luck potion,” smiled Ash.

“Hm, I think mine was filled with something else.”

Hey Ritchie, ‘tis I again. Yeah. Yeah this sucks ass man. If it comes out, then, then just put it all out there…..Oh. I see. You still don’t trust them, huh? The only person you really truly trust is Ash, and your pokémon, but that goes without saying…..Gary is currently pending, but, that might not matter anymore soon…..Ash will keep that door shut. He will…Oh boy Ritchie…How long are you going to keep fooling yourself that you’re okay? That you’re okay with this? With, how it all turned out? Well, maybe not okay, but, tolerating? Tolerating how badly you fucked up with the one person you ever, really, truly, without a doubt, one-hundred percent……

Ritchie sniffled back a couple tears threatening to fall and plucked the final petal, leaving a bare, exposed bud.

You can’t take the past back. You can’t erase what was done to you. What you did to him. You have to move on Ritchie, you have to push past this. You still mean so much to Ash. He will keep that door shut. You just, gotta figure out, a little more with Gary…..It can’t be easy with Daisy, like, you know what, she probably put him on meds – not that it’s a bad thing, not by any means, but you know, you know how she says it in ‘that’ tone. She should guzzle some herself…..Maybe she feels a kind of ownership over him or something, like a pet, ugh, UGTH……Maybe Gary did the same thing with Ash, going to that cabin out there in the middle of nowhere….Did he even realize…..You always had your guard up around him, you would second guess every word that came out of his mouth as you smiled at him. But, you two are better now (?), and Ash and Gary are working out their issues – if Gary feels ANY kind of ownership with Ash, he’ll snap out of it….. They are, they are fully going at it and good, good for them. Besides, Gary most likely got that shit from Daisy anyway. Fine, Ash will pull him out from her web, set fire to it, burn it all out, he’ll set Gary free, and it’ll be okay. They are going to be okay. They are going to be okay. They will. It’ll all be fine, it’ll be fine. You have nothing to worry about. Your past history with Ash is no one’s business but your own……How much does Daisy know…..And who the fuck told her….
Ritchie attempted to take a couple calming breaths when he heard some pokemon chattering and saw Sparky and Ash’s Pikachu pouncing towards him.

Daisy doesn’t know anything, she doesn’t, she’s just blowing shit from rumors she got from the other Rangers jealous of you and Ash – trying to fish you for answers. You trust Ash. And you both have never, ever uttered a word to another soul about the time when your entire world was just being at each other’s side.

That belongs to you and Ash and no one else.

Ritchie’s com rang with a group chat notification, Brock had sent to everyone a picture of Max and Mary with Mary signing something, Ritchie scrolled to see Brock’s caption. “Indigo League has OK’d a grant to Kanto and Tohjo Ranger groups for reconstruction efforts, whoop whoop!”

Woo.

When Misty returned to her and Tracey’s room, she found Tracey and Gary cuddled up together asleep, her heart melting on the spot. She quietly took out her com, snapped a picture of them, *Adorkable, the two of you, honestly,* and sent it to the group chat with the hashtag #sciencebros.

Ritchie meanwhile stared at the group chat as Ash poured in his responses, absolutely gushing over the both of them.

But it’s not just the two of you anymore Ritchie. Hasn’t been for a long time. Maybe it never was. No, you know better, it WAS NEVER just the two of you, no matter how much you wished it was.

Ritchie watched the group chat go back and forth between Ash, Misty, and Brock.

You’ve got more in common with Gary than you think buddy. No wonder Daisy got to play you like a harp. Who owns what again?

***

Mismagius took a couple deep, deep calming breaths, “Lucky Chant is now prepared, beginning soothing illusion technique: Clarity.”

Ash and Gary had their eyes closed, holding each other’s hand, listening as Mismagius began their song, the notes soft and repetitive, a peace filling their beings from the inside out. After a couple fruitless individual practice sessions (their Telepathy* kept intruding), Gardevoir gave the okay to try together, grant it, with conditions.

When the couple opened their eyes, they were back in the white depths of their shared Dream Space.

*Ah, it worked!* Ash started –

*Testing, testing, can you boys hear me?*

*We can hear you just fine Mismagius!* Gary replied.

*Nice.*

*Man it must be eating Gardevoir alive that they’re not a part of this,* said Ash sadly.
*Don’t worry,* said Gary, *This is being thoroughly documented by Mismagius.*

*Correct~* Mismagius chirped, *Alright, first things first, lets get the frame of your homes up! Remember how we discussed to think of the roots of your personality~ Our goal is to create a ‘home’ but that home doesn’t necessarily need to look like a home. We just need to create a shortcut within yourselves to access important core memories.*

Ash put his hands on the side of his head, *Thinking, thinking, initiating critical brain deep diving homing skills!* 

Gary raised his hand and concentrated. Nothing happened.  

*Well that didn’t work,* he grumbled, *Hm…..*  

*Don’t think of an actual frame with wood and nails and whatnot,* said Gardevoir, *Make it *more*, this is the Dream Space of your beings* –

*Gardevoir?!*  

*You’re here?!*  

*You’re supposed to be resting!*  

*…..I am resting* –

*Really,* said Mismagius in a most flustered tone, *Ash, Gary, you two carry on, I will be right back* –

*No Mismagius I’m fine – THE RESEARCH!*

Ash and Gary felt both Mismagius and Gardevoir’s presences disappear, they sighed.

*Well, while they’re solving that,* said Ash, *Let’s seeeeeee, basis of myself, what makes me, me…..Hmmm.* Ash went into a pondering pose, *Okay, they said for us to harness our imagination into something that can help us quickly access our memories, our Dream Home can be anything we want….It doesn’t have to look like a home, yet…..Hmmm.*

*You love,* said Gary, *You love like it’s going out of style.*

*And you think!” Ash chirped, “You think like you have a million brain cells!*  

*Actually humans have around 100 billion brain cells.*

*Wow…” Ash scratched his head, “what the heck are mine doing then?*

*Plenty,* Gary nudged Ash, *Try again, you love, you’re a Pokemon Trainer and Ranger, you help your friends* –

Ash closed his eyes and cupped his hands, taking deep, long, breaths…..A glow that seemingly dripped out of his heart into his cupped hand shot forth like a shooting star, landing on the pale landscape, making a large glowing rectangle – Ash squeaked with joy – *The frame, the frame! I got it!!! I got it Gary!!! I’M GOING TO DO IT JUST LIKE ELSA!!!* – without another passing thought, Ash ran forward, his steps sparkling on the glowing rectangle, and stomped his foot down right in the center sending sparkles and gleaming light rays everywhere! Up from the glow of the rectangle, Ash’s Dream Home began to take shape – shimmering, twinkling walls, the sound of tinkering, tickling emotion fluttered around Ash like flower petals as the home moved and creaked
and sowed to the mere whim of Ash’s imaginings –

*Keep your focus!* Gary called, looking on in utter wonder – *Your house will only do as you will it! Tell us who you are Ash! Show me the man I know you are!*

*Pop~* In a flurry of light confetti, Ash’s Dream Home, that looks a whole lot like his mother’s home (big difference is this one is two stories), came into existence all around him; inside, Ash had the biggest smile on his face as he jumped up and down, *YAY!!!! YAY!!!! YAY!!!! YAY!!!! 8D!!!! IT ALREADY LOOKS LIKE A HOME!!! AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA 8D!!!!*

Gary took a step back to marvel at the structure that had enclosed in around Ash. The two story house was adorable in every sense of the word, it was very modest, had traditional traits, totally a call back to simpler times seemingly immortalized and nursed in the quiet, peaceful region of Pallet Town.

...a tiny bit of flare wouldn’t hurt, maybe soooooooommmmmmmmmeee – SILVER –

Gary walked up to the front door and knocked.

*Who is it~?* Ash’s voice sang.

Gary cleared his throat and made his voice sultry, *Pizza delivery~ I have an order here for sausage, hold the cheese* –

Ash opened the door with his hips tilted, eyes lidded, arm length-wise on the door frame, and if he had them, titties out. He bit his lip, his other hand rode down his stomach to his abdomen, *You have sausage you say~?*

*Thick and meaty and made to order,* Gary stepped inside Ash’s Dream Home with all the swagger his body could conduct.

Ash licked his lips, stepping backwards slowly, his eyes singing a siren’s song, captivating Gary as their heartstring strung them along. Ash winked, and a stereo in the background kicked on with one of Ash’s favorite sexy times songs, Hysteria by Def Liepard. *What would you think if I told you this is pretty darn close to my very first wet dream of you?*

*Is it really?*

*I am a man of simple tastes, yet you are anything but~* a mewl smile quirked up over Ash’s lips, *Technically you’re already inside me~ I could show you around, but it feels like you already know your way~*

What has come over the two of you owo;;;

*Indeed, not to mention this pizza will get cold if we wait any longer~ And I always deliver on time~*

Ash’s smile spread wider with every word out of Gary’s mouth till he was full on wheezing in laughter and Gary couldn’t hold himself from laughing back any longer either –

*Oh my god,* Ash laughed, snorted and stumbled back, *That was perfect!* he clapped his hands and let himself tumble right into Gary’s arms as they laughed and laughed into each other.

*Porno Pizzaman never fails~* Gary kissed the side of Ash’s face, still giggling, he looked around, observing the home that was “Ash.”
*Do you like it?* came a shy question.

*It’s so you, I love it.* They were in the living room, it much like a bachelor’s pad with posters and figurines and everything else someone in their mid-twenties with the whims of a 10 year old would have. From where they stood, Gary could see into the kitchen, a dining room, down a corner hallway a rec room that looked like a portal into a wilderness enthusiast’s dream, and just on the corner of the hallway, a pink door with cherry blossoms and the biggest bolt locks Gary ever did see –

*Well,* Ash kissed Gary on his cheek, bringing his attention back around, his eyes were lidded, *You are already in me~* Ash let himself fall back and pulled Gary along with him, both tumbling on top of a mattress pad that appeared out of nowhere, Gary giving an oof as he was sprawled out over Ash, he quickly pushed himself up –

*No no~* Ash chided, he wrapped a leg around Gary’s hip, *Let’s finish this~*

Ash fully laid back on the magic floor mattress, encouraging Gary to crawl over him,

*Just, right here?* Gary asked, normally he’d be all over this, but the warnings they had earlier of “meshing” in Dream Spaces was sounding off loud and long in Gary’s mind –

Ash snapped his fingers, prompting a more proper bed to sprout up underneath them, *Orrrrr, you want to go full porno and do me over the kitchen table?*

Gary gulped, the sultry look Ash was giving him was pushing his pulsing blood much further south, leaving less rational thought in his brain, never mind the Dream Specs Ash already seems to have mastered with ease – *I don’t think I’ll make it* –

Ash snapped his fingers again, transporting them to the top of the kitchen table, *Got you covered~*

*You’re going to be the end of me* –

Ash just smiled, pleased at the spell he was weaving over Gary, once it clicked in Ash’s mind that the Dream Space was not something to control but to conduct, he may as well become a wizard! Besides, what harm could a little fun come from it? He’s got this, He’s. Got. This. And he just wants to make his love feel good, honestly, what harm could come from that? *Christen my Dream Home with me Gary,* Ash cupped Gary’s cheek, *My Dream Boyfriend.*

GOOD ENOUGH 8D!!!

Gary began kissing Ash, putting his weight down on Ash’s hips, wrapping his arms around Ash, putting a hand behind Ash’s head for added support. *I’m your Dream, am I?* Gary asked in-between kisses, Ash only moaned in response, nipping at Gary’s lips for their continued contact, Ash going in deep with his tongue sending sparks right to Gary’s crotch and then –

*OH MY GOD YOU TWO* – Ash and Gary jumped up at the sound of Mismagius’ voice, *I AM GONE BARELY FIVE MINUETS AND YOU’RE ALREADY ABOUT TO SCREW EACH OTHER IN ASH’S DREAM HOME!!!!! GARY!!! YOU DON’T EVEN HAVE YOUR OWN HOME UP YET* –

*We were just messing around, we both like se* –

But apparently Mismagius has had one too many flicks on their nose because they were NOT HAVING IT – *GARY GET OUT!! OUT!! SHOO!! SHOO!! ASH NEEDS TO HAVE COMPLETE AND TOTAL MANAGEMENT OVER HIS HOME!! OUT OUT OUT OUT OUT OUT!!!! LOOK AROUND AT WHAT YOU’RE DOING!!!!!!*
The boys looked around and Ash gasped, his own kitchen was almost unrecognizable, the color pallet had been completely swapped, and the hallway out of the kitchen suddenly looked more, *twisted*? There were silver pieces, silver décor – a chandelier was over them that certainly wasn’t there before –

*GET OUT NOW!!!* Mismagius screeched again –

***

“Sooso, you couldn’t get it up?” Daisy asked.

“My Dream Home,” Gary hissed.

“He will,” said Ash.

“I just have a lot on my mind,” said Gary.

“Like?” Daisy pressed.

“Thoughts,” Gary hissed further.

“Daisy can you just go?” Ash snapped, “We need some couples time to figure this out.”

“As the Master wishes~” Daisy got up to leave, “Good luck.” She let the door to lightly shut itself, leaving Ash and Gary to have another privatized moment, no Clefable (though they will be right back) or Chimecho, Mismagius, even their pokemon which were off doing who knows what with the Tourney and hospital or Ranger help.

Ash nudged Gary, “She’s gone, you okay?”

“Noooooooooo000000000000000.

“What is it?”

“Thouuuggghhhhhhhhhhhhtttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttt
“Why don’t you just do it?” asked Ash, “Can’t be that hard.”

“It’s not, it’s just tedious,” said Gary, “She has her ways, but I owe Daisy a lot, she likes doing it anyway if it’ll help me.”

“Hm,” inside, Ash began to ponder.

“I know what you’re thinking Ash, I love my sister, but yeah, she can be a bit much sometimes, I know deep down she cares, *I just wish*….”

“You wish…?”

Gary let himself flop face down on their pillow “……I don’t know.”

*Odd for a scientist…..*

“I feel, *chained,∗” came Gary’s muffled voice.

Ash rubbed his wrist, “I can sympathize.”

*Oh boy… :(*

Annoyed, Daisy walked down the hallway to the floor wait room, going right to the coffee pot to empty it out right down the hatch –

“Daisy” –

Daisy didn’t even flinch as she drank, she just held a hand up signaling to whoever it was to wait till she was done with her warm drink, she sighed in relief, “That’s some good coffee, oh? Mary!”

“Hey, how’s it going?” Mary asked. She looked like hell, bags under her eyes, and her Ranger hat hiding a very sloppy and greasy pony tail.

“I could very well be asking you the same thing,” said Daisy, “You look beat.”

“Everyone and their grandmother has told me, a lot has been going on, just getting things under control for my boys.”

“You and me both sister,” said Daisy, “We are the damage control squad, the containers of boons, the absorbent rug for any and all accidents.”

“Have you seen Ritchie by any chance?”

“Nope, but I’m not surprised he’s scuttled off somewhere,” said Daisy, “How much time did you get off for them?”

“I got Ritchie three months, and Ash, as needed. Honestly though I can give them whatever they want by pulling some strings no problem.”

“Okay, but what about your time off?” Daisy asked.

“I got a month, it’s all I need.”

“I can pull strings too,” said Daisy, “Send you on a scout that’s the living room of the lab, I doubt
Gary or Tracey would mind.”

“No, no, it’s okay, but thank-you,” said Mary.

“Just let me know,” said Daisy, “Offer will always be there.”

“….Thanks…..How are, they?”

“They’re working on some stuff,” said Daisy, “But it’s just one thing after another, after another, after another,” Daisy leaned on the counter, “And now with this Dream Space stuff, yeah, I kinda want to stick them in pokeballs, know what I mean?”

“They can’t help what’s been done to them” –

“No, but they sure as hell can try a little harder in seeing the bigger picture of all of this, if you keep moving inches at a time, you’ll get nowhere fast.”

“But they are moving, this can’t be rushed” –

Daisy pushed off the counter, “I’m not asking them to rush, I’m asking them to think about what they’re doing. Where is this leading to? What’s the endgame? Are they serious about this relationship or themselves?”

“Those are questions they have to figure out” –

“Yeah well, the longer they piddle around, the more they’re going to hurt themselves. Especially Gary.”

“Listen….Don’t take this the wrong way, you’re my friend, and I need you to see it this way, just another perspective, but, maybe you should take a step back.”

“….Take a step back how?”

“I know you’re still pretty peeved about Gary doing that whole cabin in the woods thing, but maybe that was sign, a, a cry for help.”

“Oh my god Mary, all the reason for” –

“But it wasn’t for you.”

“Oh my GOD, are you EVEN suggesting I stand by and do nothing?” All Mary got out was nod because then Daisy pounced, "Okay, okay that's it, everyone here has OFFICIALLY lost all their marbles - sure, I can see it from YOUR perspective because when this went down, I was the LAST to know, YOU ALL JUST LEFT ME BEHIND! AND WHAT HAPPENED!"?

“I know, I know, I’m so sorry, I know, it’s hard, but you might not be the person he needs right now” –

“I’m his sister.”

“Family doesn’t mean ownership,” said Mary, and Daisy’s eyes flashed something dangerous, “I have, had, a sister, a sibling, and I thought that my responsibility to my sister meant that I could,” Mary struggled to say it, “That I could, do, things, that she thought she didn’t need, but I knew she needed, and I was wrong, I was wrong, I was so, so, so, wrong,” Mary blinked back tears. “You can’t take over their lives and expect them to be independent. Gary is strong headed, his head is about as hard as Ash’s, that’s not going to end well with you Daisy, it’s not. I know you want to help
Gary, but you’re going about it the wrong way” –

“He’s not a baby, he’s not a child, he’s an adult, and for him to act this way, I’m sorry, it’s repulsive,” Daisy hissed, “Ash and Gary, their bodies have grown up, but this,” Daisy pointed to her head, “Who the fuck knows what’s going in there!”

“Daisy please, please, from one older sibling to another, listening is more important than” –

“Okay, I’m going to stop you right there,” Daisy put her hand on her hip, “Are you, you, trying to tell me the difference betweeeeeeeen – tough love, aaaaaaand, let me guess, emotional abuse?”

“I wasn’t heading for it to be that way either – the line might be closer than you think, and you don’t mean it, but it could be heading that way” –

Daisy rubbed her head, “Oh my god you’re serious.”

“Daisy please” –

“That’s everyone else’s problem too,” Daisy spat, “Can’t say, or admit, what they really, truly, deep down in their heart of hearts feel! No guts, cowards, all this tip-toing bullshit, no, no, enough is enough, if it hurts, too bad! You put yourself into this, now it’s time to pull yourself out.”

“You know what they’ve been though!”

“And I’m not belittling that, it’s all the more reason! If they don’t toughen up, their code will kill them. Kill them. At this point, I’m trying to keep my brother alive, and I will do what he needs, whether he likes it or not, because I am not going to bury him,” Daisy took a step back, “And you? You’re going to have to bury your sister twice.”

With that, Daisy turned to stomp out of the room, their air around Mary hot and piercing.

"You're only 'family' by word of mouth," said Mary, Daisy stopped in her tracks, "Nowadays, that feels pretty cheap."

***

“Gary look! Brock sent me the vid when Charizard and I battled Daniel! Hashtag swag~”

Gary was lying back on the bed, eyes closed (Chimecho to the right of him doing the same) and smiled, “Send it to me please, I’m going to have it playing on a loop.”

“Maybe I should reach out to Daniel” –

“I brought your com into existence and I will take it out,” said Gary, Ash stuck his tongue playfully out at him,

“I will send him a friend request though.”

Gary groaned, “You’re killing some of my brain cells.”

“You wanna see how the Tourney is coming along?”

“Sure,” Gary sat up and nuzzled up to Ash.
“Oh!” Clefable perked up, “That reminds me loves, you got a letter Ash!”

“A letter?”

“A letter!”

Ash made cute grabby hands as Clefable handed over to him a letter with the seal of the Indigo League,” Ooooooh, is this what I think it is~”

“What is it? Gary asked.

Ash pried he envelope open with his finger and pulled out a brand-new Trainer’s card.

“What was wrong with the old one?” Gary asked.

“It went buh-bye during ice-hell time,” said Ash.

“Oh…”

“What would you need your Trainer card for love?”

“Um, because I’m a Trainer?”

“Hm, ‘kay, just wondering.”

“You and Misty have that suspicious sixth sense thing about meeeeee.”

“We worry because we love.”

Ash leaned over and kissed Gary on the cheek, “You don’t have to worry about this, I’m not going to be battling, ugh, as much as I want to now, like you said earlier Gary, that itch, it has shown itself to me as well.”

“Sooollllooo, about that Tourney?”

“YES!” Ash piped up again, he pulled out his com, but before he could show anything to Ash, there came a knocking at the door.

*If that’s Looker, you’re throwing him out –*

Clefable opened the door, and alas, it was Max.

**NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO – GOD WHY HAVE YOU ABANDONED MEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE –**

Max smiled brightly against Gary’s fake facade, he tipped his hat to the couple as he pulled over a chair that had been pushed aside, “Ash and Gary, man Gary it is good to see you awake, glad you’re okay, I’ve been away too long!”

ene….

Gary just irritably nodded his head and kept his legs and arms cross.

Chimecho, in feeling Gary nosedive, sent him a Heal Pulse® to give him a small boost. Ash smiled back at Max, but that smile quickly went away, “Hey Max, I’m, guessing you have news on Stormfront.”
Nothing about this conversation is going to be comfortable. Gather yourself and power through it, you can do this. Have faith Gary. Garyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy.

“News I have on Stormfront, thought I’d come over and personally deliver it myself, a call or text just, seemed a bit less than what this info has to cover,” Max slumped down on the chair.

**DANGER, DANGER WILL ROBINSON** –

Gary looked to Ash, *Stormfront?* and felt from Ash the term was a hunt on information.

Max gave a big inhale and exhale, “The short of it is, there’s a snag in the Tourney, people want time to digest Lisa’s trial, don’t want these two things to intersect, grant it, they’ll probably happen pretty darn close to each other, we’ll see how the public sways.” Max took a moment, “Listen, if Lisa isn’t sentenced to anything less than life stored in a box somewhere or death, then there might just be a mob willing to do the deed.”

“Great,” Ash said flatly, “I told them I’ll get on the stand” –

**HOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOLD THE FUCK UP HERE** –

* X(

“Time out,” said Gary, “Ash, what, are you doing dear?”

Ash blinked, “I’m, talking to Max.”

“No-no-no~ I mean, what are you doing about Lisa’s trial? About getting up on the stand? What for?”

Basic Bitch Mode is now in full activation.

*Prepare defenses! DX Oh we don’t have any ;_;*

Ash unconsciously gripped the sheets, “Because I’m technically her guardian at the moment? I caught her remember? And yeah, even though I surrendered her, my testimony does have some say so power regardless, so let me just say it in front of everyone, if they’re so bloodthirsty” –

“Don’t worry Gary,” said Max, “Mary is doing all of the leg work, Ash might be her guardian, but Mary is her sister, and immediate family gets the brunt of the fun. Ash does not, look at me Ash, does not, need to get up on the stand, we do have your testimony. Compiling that with the testimony gathered from Looker, written statements, a host of other witnesses – this is all but in the bag in the trial of public opinion, buuuuuu we all know going through the swamp of litigation, this is going to be messy.”

“Then why even bring any of this up now?” Gary snapped, for once, he wished Daisy was here to throw Max out –

“Ash has a legal right to know what Lisa’s proceedings will be and how to act accordingly, in the end, the choice is your’s Ash, I can tell you one thing, Gary can tell you a million others, but that choice is your’s and your’s alone.”

“Then let’s hear it~” said Gary with the fakest smile he ever produced.

* This is just how Gary is, he’s abrasive when he’s uncomfortable or nervous, you’ll push past this, you always have before –
Ash side eyed Gary with some hesitance, all he felt from him was wave after wave of anger –

* At least it’s not a panic?

“I want to know,” said Ash, “That’s why Max is here, please Max, continue.”

Max pulled up his chair, fidgeting with his hat, “Well, to start things off, the process as it stands right now, *sigh* could be at an impasse before it even begins.”

“How so?” asked Gary, “It seems pretty cut and dry to me. Burn the witch.”

“Gary” –

“Well,” Max leaned back on the chair with his hands folded behind his head, “For one thing, classifying her is going to be tricky given her, unique circumstances.”

“Classify her how?”

“As a human, or a pokemon,” said Max.

“They should have a separate class for demons,” Gary spat, and something deep within Ash stirred very unpleasantly.

Max sat up again, illustrating his words with his hands, “Well, we all know the laws go in two very different directions for our respective species, and governed by two rather different systems. Humans tend to be hit or miss in their rulings while the legends are swift to deal out punishments as merciless as the powers of nature they embody – but that’s beside the point, the main point is, Lisa, as a Froslass, technically has a Trainer that is” –

Gary interjected, “Okay, but, why is any of this being discussed right now? No one here is supposed to be under stress yes? Much less asking for it – Ash’s code, and my code, still has major healing to do – Ash, does Gardevoir or Mismagius know about this?”

Chimecho chimed, but Gary wasn’t about to trust that sneaky bell hopper –

A flip switched in Ash, he looked to Gary with offence as Max’s eyebrows furrowed, “Oh my goodness.” Ash blurted, “I’m not a child Gary, just because I have this,” Ash pointed to his blue eye, “doesn’t mean I’m going to break into a million pieces – I do have some obligations I have to fulfill” –

“You have more pressing obligations to yourself right now,” Gary snapped back, “And I’m not referencing your eye – didn’t you just say you weren’t taking on any more responsibility?”

“I’m not, this is something I’ve already been dealing with, I caught her” –

“Be that as it may,” said Max raising his voice to drive attention back to him, “I wouldn’t be doing any of this if there was even the slightest splinter of danger directed at Ash, and there is isn’t. Zero. Ash is being hailed as a hero, you ask any Tom, Dick, or Sally on the street and they would have nothing, nothing but admiration and praise for Ash” –

HAVE YOU CHECKED ONLINE MY GOOD SIR~?
— “He’s got a lot of good positive vibes coming his way, I mean just look around the room! Look at all these flowers! There’s nothing negative here, and the information I am giving Ash, with all due respect Gary, is his rightful business.”

WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO IF THAT JUST DIDN’T LIGHT THE FIRE OF MOUNT DOOM IN GARY’S PIT OF ‘I’M GOING TO KICK MAX’S ASS –

Max continued, “Mary has been moving mountains to make sure her sister is at least tried fairly because the outrage over all this is really, really overwhelming, and not to mention – but she wouldn’t even have the tools to do so if we didn’t have Ash’s testimony.”

“What did you tell them?” Gary asked.

“The truth,” Ash snapped.

Ow.

“I believe,” Ash swallowed, trying to get a grip on his emotions, “That she should have some form of trial to get her side of the story out. I think it’s important to at least hear what she’s been through, mh,” a shudder ran through Ash in feeling the mood in Gary take a dark and abrupt shift, reminding him that he is very much the minority on that front as Gary’s mouth dropped at Ash’s statement.

Ash couldn’t help but briefly think back to the first interview he had with the police, surrounded by friends and his mother, feeling he had all the support in the world, and then having the rug just pulled clean out from him:

‘With the way it’s looking, we may be entering a sentencing phase as early as’ –

‘She’s not even having a trial?!’ Ash blurted, and from that phrase, came a moment in time Ash would never forget, ‘I mean, everyone has a trial right? Lisa is no exception!’ Ash scanned everyone’s faces for backup, but found none; it deeply registering within how hard everyone was looking at him instead. Open mouthed, disbelief almost, at him....As if everyone was saying ‘are you FUCKING stupid?! BURN THE WITCH’ –

Ash’s chest tightened, he shut his eyes momentarily, trying to get the chill of the accumulation of his friends and family’s, and now, boyfriend’s, opposition out of him. The feeling wound itself into a painful coil in Ash’s chest –

That’s not a nice feeling, is it? Is this how you will be thanked when it’s all said and done?

Needless to say, it didn’t surprise Ash one bit that Gary’s opinion of Lisa would be any better than the rest of his friends or family.

* ...Can you really blame them though? You can't ask them to be okay with this. Everyone has to make their own peace.

“How could you even THINK...after, all she’s done?! If that gets out...? You’ll have a MOB coming
after you?! Did, did you even think how that could effect the Tourney you’re trying so hard to bring together?! Did you think” –

It was taking every, single, ounce, of strength Ash had to not SNAP at Gary right now, but by Arceus he held it in like a champ –

Unlike SOMEONE –

Ash swallowed again, his voice a growl, “I know, I’m, in the minority here, but, that’s how I feel. I know you might think I’m crazy, but that’s what I feel Gary. Lisa should at least get to tell her story.”

“Even still,” said Gary, unwavering on his position, “Max, Lisa was taken under a lawful Seize Order, no?”

“She was.”

“Then in that case Ash, even though you are Lisa’s guardian, and Kanto has many laws in proceedings with ‘captured pokemon’, or ‘pokemon with guardians’ – should she be tried as a pokemon – all of that can be overwritten under the Seize Order alone because in special circumstances, Lisa would be submitted outright to the Laws of Nature and turned over to the legends. I’m sure Zekrom would be happy to dish out the sentence.”

All Ash said in response in a quiet voice was, “That’s cold Gary.”

Gary shrugged, “Well that’s how I feel. If she’s tried as human, that speaks for itself.”

“Well,” said Max, playing with his hat again, “That’s only if the pokemon in question caused a massive, massive infraction, and yes, Lisa has screwed the lot of us over, and them some, I know what she did to our own Rangers, I was there! But we’re talking about her committing disaster level loss of life, and Espeon was the main cause of death at the hospital, as was that freaky Ditto that also committed an attack on the Viridian Emergency Control and Dispatch Center, and, not to mention, Moltres set the hospital on fire! We know Lisa did some damage to our wilderness, but we’re still gathering an estimate on that from Zoroark’s testimony, and we’ve called for the forest pokemon to come forward with their accounts. Compared that to what we know for a fact that Espeon and the Ditto did, Espeon picking off patients, helpless, helpless people, seemingly at will and at random for no reason other than that those poor souls were at the wrong place at the wrong time, Zekrom had a pretty good rightful ol’ ‘fear the gods of old judgment’ on those pokemon for such mindless slaughter, that’s the Laws of Nature at work, what crime is without a doubt committed, is punished severely.”

Max took this moment to stand up, “Now, as for Lisa, she did injure many at the police station, many of our Rangers, and yes, killed the Onelings, but the root of the case here is motivation.”

“Pretty sure she was dead set on trying to kill us all when we were rescuing Ash,” said Gary about as sarcastically as every atom in his being would allow.

“Well, yes,” said Max, “Those pushing for her to be tried without a trial have quite the bit the hunk of testimony as, you mentioned, the very strong case of her trying really hard to kill us when we were rescuing Ash yes, and, she kidnapped him, tortured him, and stuck that Link* in him, buuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu….” Max strung along the word as Gary’s demeanor grew more hostile – “Teeeeeectchnically, she has not killed any humans, that we know of, only pokemon – and yes, YES I know how horrible that sounds, but in the eyes of the law, pokemon against humans and pokemon against pokemon have many, many channels of interpretation from predation, to territory disputes, to self-defense, so it’ll be very important to try and get inside her mind to at least figure out
her motivation. As a pokémon, did she feel threatened by our presences?” –

*Oh that is beyond BULLSHIT – WE KNOW SHE MANIPULATED EVERYTHING, EVERYTHING – YOU CAN’T SPIN THIS TO HER BENEFIT WHEN SHE FUCKING KNEW WHAT SHE WAS DOING –*

*Hmmmmmmm X(*

NO ‘HMMMMMMM’ YOU HUSH WITH THAT.

Gary had to turn away he was so upset, fuming, Max continued, “Now, aside from, all that trouble, she is technically under guardianship, Ash was the one that caught her, soooooo even though Lisa is in the custody of the police, of the League, protection I should say really,” Max looked to Ash, “no final decision can be made without at least informing you formally, although, I have no doubt you’ll want to be a part of the process, no?”

“Of course I do,” said Ash, bracing himself as he felt another wave of most unpleasant thoughts from his significant other, followed by a squeeze on his wrist, a ghost pain as Gary’s hands were not touching him since his arms were crossed.

“That’s not the issue, this anger, everyone feels, if it’s left unchecked, it’ll consume, and destroy, and just, hurt, it won’t stop, but it has to stop somewhere.”

You’ll never forget what you felt from her. Never.

“Of course I do,” said Ash, bracing himself as he felt another wave of most unpleasant thoughts from his significant other, followed by a squeeze on his wrist, a ghost pain as Gary’s hands were not touching him since his arms were crossed.

“You’re trying to put out a wildfire Ash….**
Ash was still making a point to not look at Gary. “If someone had just, talked to her, reached out to her…”

“It’s not your fault,” said Gary with a voice shades and shades softer, and apologetic, but Ash wasn’t having it – true he was more mad at himself than anything, but the outward reaction was still hostile.

*For the umpteenth time, you guys are raw and bare, things hurt easier!!!!....God, how much do y’all tolerate of the other? How much does Ash tolerate from YOU...? You said you support him Gary, but is that only when there’s benefit for you? Is it? What’s underneath it all huh? What’s your foundation? Are we going to go through this again? AGAIN?*

Gary’s gut was pumped full with more regret than ever, his thoughts making a breakneck curve to cool down. His stomach turned, how did this all tank so drastically? Ash doesn’t seem to even want to look at him –

Max cleared his throat, “I’m of the opinion that everything happens for a reason, whether we understand it, or not. What’s done is done mate, and we can’t change the past, but we can move –”

Max’s com rang, “Hang on blokes, I need to take this” – Max quickly stepped outside.

There was a silence in the room, even with Clefable and Chimecho on the outskirts of the conversation, they waited for the couple to make a move at each other, but there was only silence….till….Gary made a soft attempt to hold Ash’s hand, Ash let him.

“I’m sorry,” said Gary, “I don’t know what came over me….”

“….It’s okay,” said Ash. Gary leaned over and kissed Ash on the cheek, prompting Ash to look at him, “Gary….I know I can’t ask you to be okay with this.”

“But I should be okay in trusting you to, do the right thing.” Gary kissed Ash on his forehead, “Just, remember, hole in code, the moment it’s too much, back off, please.”

Ash looked like he wanted to say something, but…..Ash’s com rang, it was Ritchie, “Hello?”

Gary watched Ash’s soft demeanor fall, and fall, and fall, and the blood drain out of his face.

Gary nudged him, asking him silently what’s wrong, and Ash replied in a voice that didn’t believe it’s own syntax, “Mary is quitting.”

“Quit, quit being what?”

“Okay, okay, no, don’t do that, just, okay, okay – bye,” Ash hung up the com, “Mary is quitting being a Ranger.”

“What?”

“Oh no, that poor lass!” Clefable couldn’t hold their bubbles any longer, “Oh that poor dear” –

“She’s leaving just before the heat of summer” –

“Who-who is taking her place?!”

“Rose.”

Ash tapped Mary’s call icon –

“Ash you know everyone is probably on her” –
“Well now I’m trying,” said Ash, “She can’t quit, not like this, something is forcing her to act this way” –

“Gee I can only imagine what!”

Ash got up and out of bed, half stumbling –

“Where are you going!?”

“I need to do this Gary, you just stay there!”

Clefable almost barreled over itself trying to get to Ash before he left the room, “Dearie! This isn’t the way!”

Gary just racked his hands down his face, “What the hell, what the hell is he thinking?! Chimecho, go after him!”

“Nnnnnnnope.”

“No?!?”

“Because once you find out Audino lost their powers, you’ll be acting worse than he is.”

“……what.”

“Ah…”

And thus, the most important time where someone, Chimecho in fact, should have kept their damn mouth shut, came, and went.

Chapter End Notes

God this chapter kicked my ass, personally I don't think the quality is up to par, but then again, if I don't post it now, this story will never get done =3=;;

Thanks for staying with this story <3

I hope you guys find some peace from this crazy ass world we live in.
Meltdown: Part 2

Chapter Notes

3/26/19 Fuck you EU and your shitty copyright directive that will destroy so much of what we all hold dear. I don't know when I'm going to update, or if I'll be able to update at all! I'm rather depleted by all of this, all of my motivation is gone. There are so many other important issues to be discussed, but no, you all go for the money because of course you do, you're all shitty, vile politicians who think nothing but of themselves and the slaves you've brainwashed into voting your stupid ass into power. Pride goeth before a fall. You have no idea what you have destroyed today. Shame on you.

3/2/19 THE NEXT 30 PAGES HAVE BEEN ADDED 8D Meltdown Part 3 was reaching 70 + pages SOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO, I'm putting 31 pages here bringing this, god, fuck, the longest chapter yet I'M SORRYYYYYY I write alot ;n;; If you have already read through, scroll down till you see "BELOW ADDED 3/2/19" and that's where the new content begins <3

--------

10,000 FUCKING LIGHT YEARS LATER, HOLY GODDAMN SHIT, FUCK YOU 2018, GET BENT OVER A PIT OF FIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIRE~!!!!

I've got about 30 pages finalized, fuck it, I'm posting what I've got now, which means Meltdown will be in 3 parts, and I'm more or less going to do the same with the remaining chapters so it will *hopefully* allow me to update more in 2019, shortening the final chapters will allow me to post more updates, in theory, so, fuck it, 2019 we gon' get SHIT DONE.

I AM SO SORRY ABOUT THE LONG WAIT, LIFE IS A BITCH, SAY "I LOVE YOU" MORE TO PEOPLE WHO MATTER TO YOU ;_;

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You ever get that feeling you’re having an out of body experience, but you’re still in the driver’s seat? You feel the impact, you feel the glass on your face, but it doesn’t hurt. You’re just numb because you saw it coming and knew there was nothing you could do about it.

Now it’s done.

And you’re just left wondering where you go from here.

“Hello?!” Clefable was being dragged as they pulled against Ash rounding the corner of the hallway (drawing the ire of several other nurses passing through), “Is there a brain in that head of your’s?!”

Ash was stumbling, surprised at how strong Clefable’s tugging was with those tender arms, “I have to get to Mary Clefable, this isn’t like her! Something is wrong, something is very, very wrong!”

“It’s her decision! We might not understand it Love, or even LIKE it, but it’s her peace!”
Ash turned to face Clefable, knocking their arms off, “She is NOT in peace right now!”

“Neither are you! You think your emotions are going to help this situation?! May I remind you of your situation?!”

“I’m not going to breathe down her neck, I’m just going to listen. I know what I’m doing Clefable, she doesn’t need anyone to yell at her right now, she needs an outlet” –

Clefable stomped their foot, “STOP MAKING YOURSELF A TARGET FOR OTHER PEOPLE!”

Ash jumped, surprised at Clefable’s outburst – Clefable surprising their own self too, the fairy pokemon quickly fanned themselves to cool off their burning feelings,

“Do forgive me for the outburst,” Clefable was flushed, “but you must understand Ash, there’s an alternative approach to this other than just throwing yourself in headlong! I understand Mary is someone who is so dear to you, but right now, you must, must take care of yourself! With that hole in your code, if this goes south, I shudder to think the consequences! Haven’t you been through enou –”

With Clefable just talk, talk, talking away, Ash reflected (?) on his impulsive action. He felt an unpleasant stirring with how worked up Ritchie was, with the way he sounded, it was like Mary was fixing to throw herself off a cliff! And then he just straight up felt bad, especially for dropping Gary like a newborn Girafarig…their Heartstring…Ash’s hand clutched his chest.

Their connection felt cold as ice.

Ash could hear something that was greatly muffled, as if someone was screaming through a blanket or a pillow – if their communication came in clean, Ash can bet he would be cursed out to the moon and back –

“You’re not the only one helping Mary right now,” said Clefable, “I’ll bet the twinkles in my eyes that Max got the same info about Mary as you did, why it was Ritchie who told you, no? I’ll bet it’ll spread like wildfire throughout the Ranger units.”

* Ritchie’s call was like a bombing raid siren to be honest. So, yeah.

“Watch each other’s backs, bring each other home.”

“Hm?”

“Watch each other’s backs, bring each other home,” Ash repeated, “it’s the creed we have….We…..” He took a deep breath, then felt the pressure of a tall, commanding presence behind him as two big clawed hands placed themselves on his shoulders. Ash looked up, and saw a Kangaskhan nurse with a translator around their neck looking down at him with narrowed eyes,

“Clefable,” came their deep, rich voice, “do you need help getting this patient back to his room?”

Ash squeaked.

Clefable waved off the Normal Type, “Oh no no precious, I’ve got him, thank-you!”

“Mh-hm~” Kangaskhan let Ash go, side-eyeing him heavily as she walked away.

Ash gulped, his com was ringing and buzzing away in his hand and pulled his attention back around. He had a torrent of messages coming through individually and via the group chat with one line
immediately sticking out from Mary,

Mary: Everyone, please calm down, 1.) yes, I am stepping down from being a Ranger 2.) NO IT IS NOT PERMANENT 3.) obviously, I need some time with the current issues at hand

Mary: Stop blowing up my com, or I’m going to start blocking people.

Mary: STARTING WITH YOU MAX.

*....Something isn’t adding up here,* Ash thought. He scrolled through the messages, most of them all in disbelief because it’s so fresh, *Ah….* Mary had directly messaged Ash.

Mary: I’m okay, please don’t let anyone work you up into a fit.

Mary: I sent Ritchie a text.

Mary: I’ll talk with you both later okay? Promise.

* Deflection….? Maybe…. She said she’s okay Ash….Hey…buddy, friend, how much longer can you keep going…. And honestly, how far would you really have gotten with so many eyes on you….Seriously….Besides, Mary has already made her statement, there are people around her, this is not just you and Lisa, it’s you and Mary and everyone, everyone in your circle. Don’t panic, don’t throw yourself where you don’t need to be. Just think of what everyone else is already doing….You have to sideline yourself for this one Ash, I know it hurts, I know its sucks, but people have to be responsible for themselves. This is Mary’s choice. And now, you’ve got make one…

Ash sent Mary a text back ‘please take care yourself <3’ followed by ‘you know where to find me if you need me.’

* Compromise =3=;;;;;;;;;;;;

Ash ran his hand through his hair, *…..I messed up…AGAIN* “Oh boy….” Ash looked to Clefable…as much as he wanted to help Mary right now….

* You can’t do it son. And that’s okay. For the record, you got a Tourney up and running, sooooo?

Clefable took Ash’s hand gently, “What’s on your mind Love?”

Ash swallowed, and sighed, “Could, you help me back to my room, please?”

The warm smile that spread over Clefable’s face made Ash feel a little better, “Of course Love.”

In returning Ash to his room, they ran into Ritchie, Pikachu, and Sparky, with everyone miles and miles relieved that Ash came back. Ritchie apologized for his ramblings, hugging Ash dearly, “Oh my god I’m so glad you came back, I’m so sorry, I just” – “I’m fine Ritchie, really I am,” Ash deepened their embrace.

* Haaaaaaaaaaaa, no you’re not.

Pikachu jumped on Ash’s head, hugging him hard, “Pi-pi-pi! Pika-pi!”

“I’m okay little buddy,” Ash turned his attention back to Ritchie, their hands clasping together as they stepped back, “It’s okay, I know, I know Mary is…” the two were suddenly caught in watching the other tear up, Ash swallowed to jump start his voice box from the building lump in his throat,
“It’s gonna be okay,” they squeezed each other’s hands, “Mary is so strong, she needs this time” –

“I thought it was permanent, I was wrong, that's why I freaked” –

“Yeah it’s not permanent,” said Ash, the both of them were absolutely flushed and tearful, Pikachu patting Ash on his head,

A shaken breath left Ritchie, “She’s our Ranger mom, she gave us the chance to be Rangers, after, you know, how well our Ranger Trials went” –

“Yeah, she did that for us, she’s done so much for us, and it’s like, I look back on it, and realize how much I owe her, and she was just always supporting us, and once we took off, she was like our guardian angel, and now, when she really needs someone, when she really needs help, here I am all busted and broken and, I’m so,” Ash felt as if he was scattering like raindrops, “I’m so sad, I can’t do anything for her right now, but if I did something on her behalf and got even sicker, then, heh, what then? So, I know better, I knooooooow, better, and right now, the best thing I can do for her right now, to ease her burdens, is to get myself better, because I know…heh, yikes. If, if I went to her… oooh…”

Still means you’re up to your eyeballs in ‘emotional debt.’ No wonder you feel so urgently to help people, in the ways they’ve sacrificed to save you, I’d be desperate to cling to any validation you’re even worthy of their efforts as well. Self-fulfilling prophecy. You doom yourself time and time again and here they come, again, to pull you out. Tsk tsk. At least you ARE taking responsibility for yourself now. ‘Tis a much needed step.

Ritchie let one hand go to wipe his eyes, “Yeah,” he smiled, “Dragon mom.”

“Dragon mom,” Ash smiled back against a sudden ringing in his ears.

“I dun wanna get blocked,” said Ritchie, “so I’m abiding by her texting rules, and I guess I’ll leave it at that, the olive branch is there, so,” Ritchie shrugged hopelessly, letting his shoulders fall, “It’s what I can do, what I’m able to do, so, I can just leave it at that for now.”

“I did the same thing,” said Ash, “I know she won’t request me though. I guess it was more for my peace of mind,” Ash made a face in being slightly disgusted with himself. His com buzzed in his pocket. Pikachu put their ears back. “And, I need to apologize to Gary.” *Big time…*

“Gary isn’t in the room,” said Ritchie with careful air.

“Eh?”

“Let’s just say I was a part of a tidal effort to reach you before, something silly happened, it was me along with Brock, Rose, Pikachu, and Sparky, we all made our way over to you guys as fast as we could once we got word about Mary, and we saw you were gone, and it was like crap, and then Gary was…not well.”

Ash felt like he had been stabbed in his heart all over again. He checked his connection, there was only more ice.

Ritchie continued, “We thought, well, he caught us off guard when he begged, and I mean begged us to take him over to the Pokemon Center –”

“The Pokemon Center?! What on earth for!?” Ash gasped internally, “Is there something wrong with Audino?!”
Ritchie gulped, but Ash could read him like a book –

“Ritchie please tell me!”

“Uh” – Ritchie bit his cheek –

Ash put his hands on Ritchie’s shoulders, “Why can’t you tell me?!”

*IRONY, BURNS* . . . . . .

“Audino is not dying, I can say that much,” Ritchie was trying his best to keep eye contact with Ash, “…Gary – wants to be the one to tell you anyway.”

“Then take me to the Pokemon Center.”

“….And he wants you back in bed…”

“How can I” –

Clefable cleared their throat so loudly, they scared Ash, Ritchie, Pikachu, and Sparky (forgot they were still there almost…) Clefable standing with their little stubby arms crossed, tapping their foot night impatiently.

“Ah…..” Ash started, “Right….”

“Pikapi…”

Ritchie wanted to bite his tongue off, “Long story short, Brock and Rose took Gary while I went to go find you…” Ritchie finally looked away, “I mean…I didn’t exactly aide in your decision to stay put…”

“It was still my decision,” said Ash bitterly.

“Gary will take care of Audino, he just wants you to rest, and…” Ritchie grimaced. “…I’m so sorry Ash…but you know Rose and Brock will take good care of him, Brock especially, I’m pretty sure he or Rose will give us a call, or, uh Gary…”

*I seriously doubt Gary is in a mood to talk to me if he doesn’t even want me there…* Ash thought. Dare he try pushing their Heartstring connection, their Telepathy*….? Ash lightly touched on the connection, aaaaaaand….felt nothing but static. *Well….I’m not surprised it’s acting up now….at least it’s not ice anymore.*

*There’s interference, so to speak. And if Gary really wanted to talk with you, which he doesn’t, he would have thrown open your connection, sent you a text or called, but, there’s nothing from him. Is this irony? It feels like irony.

Ash checked their Heartstring again and got back even more static. *Yeah, no surprises there….*

Ritchie motioned to his head, “Can, can you reach, him?”

Ash just shook his head.

“Then I’ll go talk to Gary, in person,” said Ritchie, “It’s my fault you jumped out of bed, I pushed you” –

Before Ash could speak, Clefable got their attention, “Well whatever needs to get done, Ash needs
to be back in bed. Let’s get to the room, and sort ourselves from there.”

Ash just nodded, he was starting to feel very ill anyway, his hand went to his stomach, “…oof….”

“Hey,” Ritchie turned his back to Ash and knelt down, “Let me give you a lift back,” Ritchie gave the most apologetic smile, “Hop on.”

Ash gave his own apologetic smile in return and climbed on. Ritchie hoisted himself up holding Ash (with Pikachu still on Ash’s head) piggyback style, Ritchie suddenly gave a wink looking back at Ash, “You know I’m always good for a ride.”

Ash rolled his eyes, but Ritchie saw that subtle blush.

On their way back to the room they were stopped by several (VERY) annoyed staff members checking to make sure everything was okay, followed by two cops chiding the lot of them (Clefable shooing them away saying they had the situation under control), and then finally a Rotom joined their group to ‘assist’ with Ash, just because. Meanwhile, Chimecho may as well have been a stuffed balloon merely hovering near the hospital bed.

“Chimecho? You okay?”

They only ching-a-linged in response. Rotom went up and poked them with no acknowledgement but floating.

Ritchie whispered to Ash, “They were like that when we got here, I think they took a Distraught-Gary-Beam to the face.”

* Yikes….

Ash could hear chatter outside his room that he had been ‘secured.’ He sighed through his nose. *I’m an idiot.*

“Alright, let’s get you tucked in now,” said Clefable, Pikachu snuggled up right with Ash; Sparky jumped up onto Ritchie’s shoulder.

“Oh, I’ll be back,” said Ritchie, “I’ll text you when I’ve made it over there,” and he and Sparky left.

Ash’s stomach rumbled, but before he could even begin to tell Clefable to not worry about his appetite, they made all the show for it, and went to go get Ash all the food, all of it.

Ash plopped down on the bed, Rotom kicked on the a/c unit, the wind lightly blowing around the balloon that was Chimecho. Ash pursed his lips at the apathetic psychic type. Pikachu nuzzled under Ash’s hand, prompting him to pet his best (pokemon) friend from their head to their tail, “You and Sparky been busy huh?”

Pikachu playfully fell on their back, “Pi-ka-chaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa~!”

“I really appreciate it my little buddie, honestly, I don’t know how I’m ever going to repay you, or Charizard, or, anyone really.”

You’ll be a slave to the world for life. Come to think of it, Gary did you a solid stealing you away from the public when he did. That cabin in the woods is still there, waiting.

“Pikpika, chu~”
Ash com buzzed again, “Ah, I should, answer some of these…” – Ash decided he’d straight up call Gary after taking care of some chatter. Whether Gary wanted to talk to Ash or not, Ash can at least leave a voicemail.

Oh, voicemails~ These com devices are quite the medium for channeling a conversation you’re having and not having at the same time! Technology!

Ash read a little through a bit of the group line,

Ritchie: ASH IS OUT OF BED, PLEASE FIND HIM, I’M SORRY

Misty: WHY IS ASH OUT OF BED????????

Brock: MARY IS FINE WILL EVERYONE PLEASE CALM DOWN

Misty: HEY WHERE THE FLIP ARE YOU GARY??????

Misty: GARY YOU BETTER RESPOND

Ritchie: HE’S AT THE POKEMON CENTER

Misty: WHO TOOK HIM???? WHY????

Misty: GARY. ANSWER.

Misty: ASH IS MISSING WHAT THE HELL YOU PEOPLE I SWEAR I’M GONE FOR FIVE FREAKING MINUETS

*That is a lot of capslock,* Ash thought,

Misty: WHERE IS DAISY????????

Misty: HAS ANYONE SEEN DAISY????????

Ash: I’m back in bed you guys, I’m sorry, please don’t’ worry

Misty: ARCEUS’S LEFT EXPOSED NIPPLE.

Misty: GOOD. STAY THERE. I’M ON MY WAY.

Ash sighed, he saw back up in the group chat Tracey trying to bring Gary into the conversation with no luck, and still, Gary hadn’t texted at all, individually or group wise. Ash tapped Gary’s icon and called him. No answer. He left a voicemail, “Gary, hey there, I’m so sorry, I’m back in bed, I didn’t go, sense, got knocked into me, call me back please?” and left it at that. Ash sighed again, *Oooh… He’s very upset with me…Please, please let Audino be okay…*

*Who remembers when Gary was desperate to just hear Ash’s voice one more time on the com? Peoples, ouch.

“Pika?”

“I just ran off…as I typically do…”

Ash’s com continued to buzz and chime non-stop in his hand. He turned off his notifications as his chat groups were going nuts. He texted his friends and family individually, Misty, Brock, Tracey, and Gary, and sent some sparkles to Ritchie; aaaaand while he’s at it, better inform his major Ranger
channels and his Tourney channels that everything is fine –

Ash’s com suddenly lit up with a call from his, “Mom!” Ash answered, “Hi mommy” –

“Sweetie where are you right now?” Her voice was very tired and rugged, “I woke up and I heard people saying you were gone” –

“I’m not gone momma, I’m in my room, in my bed, I’m fine, I promise.”

“Okay sweetie,” Ash heard some shuffling, then Mrs. Ketchum’s voice sounding far away, “MY SON IS FINE! STOP WITH THE YELLING PLEASE!”

*Aigh mommaaaaaaaaa.* ^_^;

“Okay baby, you be good now.”

“How are you feeling?”

“I’m just very sleepy right now,” she yawned, “They’re going to run another test on me, and go from there, but I told them I’m fine.”

“Please take the test momma.”

“I am baby, I’ll be fine, don’t worry. You get your strength from me. You can’t see it, but I’m flexing right now.”

Ash giggled, “Okay momma.”

Ash heard his mom yawn, “I’m going to go back to resting now, okay?”

“Okay.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“Bye bye.”

“Bye bye.”

Ash felt warm, soothed, and at the same time he was so, so, so upset at himself.

Mrs. Ketchum lay back in her bed, but she couldn’t fall back asleep.

Ash raked a hand through his hair, *I am an idiiiiiooooooooooooooooot.* Ash tried one more time with his connection with Gary, but just got more static. He tried not to let it eat at him too much, yet that was an uphill battle and then some. Ash rubbed his face with an idea popping into his head that sent sparks to his heart. He pulled out his com and searched for the nearest flower shop, one being right across the street from the hospital because that’s just good business. He searched their inventory and was happy to see the bouquets offered. “Pikachu, my bestest buddie, can you do me a HUGE favor?”

“Pi-pi-pi!”

“Thank-you, could you go to the flower shop across the street and get two bouquets? They have a bouquet called the ‘Shades of Mt. Silver’, it has all of Gary’s favorite colors, and a bouquet of roses.”
“Pika-pi chu~!”

Ash dug around his things and pulled out some money, “This should cover that and the tip.”

“Chu!”

Ash clasped his hands together, “Thank-you, thank-you so, so, so, so much!”

Pikachu gave Ash some Pika-nuzzles and set off. Ash flopped down back on the bed again, he felt his com buzz evermore, but the chime this time, revealed a direct text from Mary –

Mary: Hey, you got a minuet?

Ash shot up, his fingers couldn’t type fast enough –

Ash: Yes, anything, you okay?

* 8’)

Mary: I know it’s sudden, but could we talk now?

Ash: Sure! Call me ;)

Mary: I mean in person, I don’t mean/ want to make a scene, is anyone with you?

Ash: No, I’m all alone, except for Chimecho, and Rotom, and Clefable will be back, and Misty is coming, but please do come over! I doubt they will mind!

There was a pause, then,

Mary: I’ll be there soon.

Moltres soared high above the clouds, yet their gaze was as focused as the edge of the horizon.

A sharp cry rung out from above them followed by the bite of a chilling wind and snow flurries – out from the clouds, Articuno, in a couple of powerful wing flaps, was flying even along side Moltres.

Moltres quirked an eyebrow but is honestly surprised by their sibling’s visit, “I thought you’ve left to take winter” –

“I was, I mean I am, can, we land please?”

Adding agitation to the swirl of emotion in Moltres’ gut, with a sharp tilt in their wings, the legendary birds landed full stop on the tops of two opposing trees, making them sway with the weight of their momentum releasing; pokemon below scattered this way and that, they know well of Moltres’ temper, fire and forests do not mix!

Moltres narrowed their eyes, “If you are Mew in disguise I will burn you and this entire forest down” –

“It’s really me, Artie.”

“Articuno,” Moltres corrected.

“You can call me Artie.”
Moltres scoffed, “It really is you then.”

Articuno was entirely floofed out, their pouting red eyes barely visible from their plumage, “I am here to” –

Moltres snapped their beak, “I don’t have time for any frivolous banter, if you have something exceptionally det” –

“YOU HAVE BEEN A TOTAL JERK TO ME!”

Moltres rolled their eyes as hard as they could –

“You have been a total jerk to me, and I DON’T appreciate what you have accused me of in this, mess – I work, VERY HARD to be Articuno, I am Articuno! This is the real me – I might not be who I was before, but that’s because I’m working on becoming something better……” Articuno’s plumage settled, giving them their defining shape, their legs pulled close together, “And…..I hope you can be better too! Someday……”

Moltres was not amused in the slightest, “Did Ho-oh put you up to this?”

“It’s part of your penance to bear the damage you have done, no? They said –”

“Damage? What damage have I done to you?”

“You’re mean. You’re mean, and you don’t bother with anyone or anything unless it serves you somehow…That fight we had on the roof of the hospital, where that young man was staying” –

“That young man, is Ash Ketchum, and he’s destined to become the greatest Master there ever was! And I, am destined to be by his side!”

“…..m’kay, but, if he’s destined to be the very best, won’t other legends be after him?” –

“I’ll take them all on! Eternal or Reincarnation, my fire will burn their ambition to ashes! I FEAR NO ONE! OR ANYTHING!”

“….Rockslide, Rock throw” –

“SHUT UP! YOU HAVE A CRITICAL WEAKNESS TO ROCK TOO!”

“True…..but I don’t have your confidence….Even though you’re mean to me, and Zippie” –

“Zapdos” –

Articuno sighed, “Mean as you are…..I do admire your courage. You go after whatever your heart moves you, for the good, eh, and the bad. The fight we had on the hospital roof just showed me how much further I still have to go to live up to my legacy…I…I need help” –

“Shocking!”

“See? See? That right there, you always put me down any chance you get, and you, HATE Zippie” –

“Dear Arceus, please use the given name” –

“Why is it so hardwired into you to be mean? Why? We’re supposed to support each other, we’re the knob that turns the seasons, the titans of fire, ice, and lightning, our collective power brings
balance to the changing weather throughout the year…….We’re siblings! Aren’t we?” Articuno looked away, “At least, that’s what everyone says….that’s what our design entails. Our birthright, our reincarnations are tied eternally as the Kanto Trio….And yet….we rarely talk, much less even see each other, how, how can we possibly be who we say we’re supposed to be if we deny the bonds we were meant to uphold?”

“We’re not required to be close, you make an egregious mistake if you think everyone just gets along with each other because they’re supposed to. There are plenty of legendary relationships where they just HATE each other!”

“I don’t want to hate” –

“Good for you! I shall rule my emotions however I please, good day to you ice sibling” – Moltres turned, taking off to leave, but Articuno spread their wings in challenge, leaping up after their sibling – crying out their roar –

“I’m not going to let you walk away from this!” –

Moltres immediately whipped back and got into their attacking stance, “Dear sibling, are you looking for a battle? Against me? PLEASE! You’re not even worth my ti” –

If Moltres blinked they would have missed it, but with a single flap of Articuno’s wings, the entire area around them five miles out was encased in ice under Articuno’s freezing red-eyed glare – even the flurries in the wind were frozen in place, a moment in time perfectly preserved in the shine of winter.

And the ticks and tocks that Moltres claimed superior to Articuno’s presence, were thus under the spell of the Freeze pokemon.

Articuno exhaled, and time moved again, the ice retreating from whence it came, back into Articuno’s core, Moltres watching the veins reverse their blistering course, giving animation to all it freed, but the skies overhead stayed overcast, and once the ice, the chill in the air dispersed, the flurries turned to rain.

Truthfully, Moltres was impressed by that display of power, but it was reckless.

Articuno looked like they wanted to cry, “….I want answers. Believe me, this is my last resort…I want answers on why you hate me so much. You asked what you’ve done to me, so what have I done to you? What did I do to make you so revolted of me? If I can understand that, maybe I can understand why I hate myself so much too…” A tear fell off the legend’s cheek.

Despite the rain flowing through their feathers of fire, it was Articuno’s tears that doused Moltres completely. Moltres is (currently) the oldest sibling of the Kanto Trio, and thus far they have failed in every single duty that title carries. If all their siblings can look up to is failure, disregard, anger, and disgust…..

Moltres cleared their throat, “….I see….My penance demands reflection, so, I’m, I’m sorry……If it helps, my assessment of you, is no assessment at all….I….I have learned that I act, and say things without interest of my company’s feelings…case in point, eh, just now…..I’m selfish, self-centered, and…my faults have been under extreme scrutiny as of late from imperiling many innocent lives, including that of my future Master’s closest friends, and lover….If you base your worth only on your powers, then it’s no wonder you feel such a lacking of confidence….We’re more than our duties, otherwise, why do we feel?”
“Well I don’t like this version of me at all,” Articuno sniffed, “Controlling my powers is hard! I don’t want to hurt anyone, but ice, ice, ice traps. It holds, it takes a snapshot in time and makes it eternal, it preserves, it, its very nature is to hold still. Ice is hard to adapt. It’s hard to change – and yet, in an instant, it can become steam, water, it can completely change its disposition, and the whiplash leaves you wondering, why on earth were you holding still for so long…?”

Moltres wasn’t sure of the comfort they could give their sibling, so they listened instead.

“How we feel illustrates the depths of our abilities. I’m trying to understand myself, my worth, so I can understand my powers, so I can understand my place in the world….Because….I’m so lost……I’m so lost on who I am, what I can do, what I can just….even be…..I’m tired of trying to figure this out on my own…..I need help…….Maybe if you set me on fire, I’ll” –

“That is out of the question,” Moltres snapped, “Just, put that thought out of your mind, out of your memory” –

“I don’t know what else to do, this version of me isn’t working” –

“You just said you’re trying to be better, setting yourself on fire, literally, is not – killing yourself is not the way, period.”

“My next life might actually get something right –”

“Stop it, stop, thinking like that. I am the older sibling here, so you’re going to do what I say, and I order you to not die, ever, you’ve just become an Eternal legend.”

Articuno tilted their head, their sibling’s attempt not lost on them, “Am I?”

“If anyone needs a personality reset, it is me. I have done acts that even I must admit were atrocious in reckoning…You think controlling ice is hard? Fire…..fire consumes without a moment’s thought, without hesitation, and without fail. Fire eats, and eats, and eats, and satisfying its hunger begs of sacrifice that asks far too much of way too many…..In short….I know how you feel, Artie.”

Articuno looked up, their eyes wide.

“Please accept, my most heartfelt apology,” and Moltres bowed to their sibling, making Articuno’s mouth drop. (Ahem*), Moltres quickly righted themselves, “I’m afraid I can offer you no other counsel in that I am not a worthy counsel of you. P-Perhaps, you could seek out a Trainer, ask for a recommendation from our Eternal brethren t-to find someone to raise you in the quality you desire…”

“…Humans still make me nervous….I think in how my previous life died, that chasm has only deepened.”

“Fair enough, then perhaps I can recommend you of someone in Ash’s circle? There are good people there, I must say….Minus the scientist.”

“Clemont? He’s a sweetie –”

“No, Gary Oak.”

“Oh, but, he’s just sad, like me….Hm…..What about Misty?”

“Perhaps. She is a water trainer, she would have at least an idea of ice techniques.”
The brightness in Articuno’s eyes made Moltres feel something for the first time in their lifespan, and realize something too….

In how much they miss their siblings, they really, honestly, do.

“Artie…Do you remember, anything of your past life?”

Articuno tilted their head, “…..No….but….I heard that if a death is violent, it can completely reverse the order of the next life…..I suppose that’s why we’re having such a hard time finding our way around each other….we must have loved each other dearly….I would like to have that again…”

It was Moltres’ turn to tear up.

When I was reborn, the first thing I saw, was Articuno. Though an ice type, I never saw a more warming gaze.

For an entire year, we were nearly inseparable. Where they flew, I flew, until I grew into my powers to take over the passage of Spring, of which Zapdos had been covering proceedings. Many would say we hated each other in our past lives, which is why we love each other so much now.

And then Articuno died.

And the warming gaze that used to wash over me was replaced with unfamiliarity, confusion, and at worst, fear.

Zapdos kept reassuring me that Articuno was still Articuno, and that death gave us a new opportunity to rediscover who we were before.

But I grew bitter.

I grew conceited.

I tested Zapdos’ patience greatly.

And then they died too.

Our elder suddenly became the youngest of us all, even more lost, even more reserved, and I was to take the lead in raising those that I had once looked up to.

And I abandoned them to pursue my own interests.

If those that loved me left me, then I would do the same.

Childish.

Call me every distasteful name in the book, I deserve it.

I have had this punishment long coming.

I let my grief consume me and it turned my soul into something truly ugly.

I miss the nickname that Articuno gave me, I would love so much to just hear it in that voice just one more” –
“Mollie.”

Moltres’s eyes went as wide as dinner plates, “…..What did you” –

“I’m sorry, I’ve been wanting to call you that name since forever – I’m sorry, I know you hate nicknames, it just came out! I won’t say it again” –

“No, no it’s okay….really…Do you, do you feel…anything…? Do you remember…?"

Articuno was totally thrown off by Moltres’ nigh 180 turn in the tone of their voice, and they suddenly realized, “Oh…..OH…OOOOOOOHHHHHHHHHHH…..Mollie, Mollie, Mollie! Mollie!!!”

“Mollie!”

“Mollie!!”

The titans of ice and fire touched foreheads and cried and cried together until the clouds above themselves couldn’t weep anymore.

*I needed you, for so long…for so long…for so long…..for so long….*

And when the sun shone through, they gathered themselves, they were legends after all, there were duties that must be fulfilled, penances to be kept.

“We should be, (*sniff*) getting back to our, obligations….”

“(sniff)..I should be getting on with carrying Winter to the Orre region, if one could even call it that, but, there’s still so much adjusting here to do, I can’t just leave things as they are! I’ve been working on restoration, th-there’s this Avalugg assisting in reconstruction underwater, underneath the ground, poor thing got stuck down there, deep in the formed ice caverns and it took them forever to get out! They’re now carving out a tunnel system to help the water flow which will give the geysers more breathing room. Brilliant they are, I must say!”

“Hmmm…An Avalugg?”

“Yes, they are rather impressive, I’m so proud of this fellow ice type! And once they’re finished, they’re going to join the Kanto Rangers.”

Moltres smiled, “Well, that will make my Ash very happy to say the least.”

“I hope so, poor thing needs it. This pain he is going through, it’s like he’s going through a Reincarnation’s Rebirthing phase as well.”

Moltres tilted their head, “Well by the time he’s done, I’m sure he’ll come out all the better for it.”

“Ah, if I may ask, where are you going?”

Moltres ruffled their feathers, “I am seeking out the Oneling Leader, I was able to pick up on some intel from the Swords of Justice” –

“You spied on them.”

“(sniff), picked up on some intel, that the Oneling Leader is nothing more than a Delphox.
Hmp. But to their credit, this Delphox was once a human, however this Transformation invoked the catalyst of the ‘Shadow Heart.’”

“…….”

“Right, you wouldn’t know” –

“No I’ve heard of it, I think the humans call it a Nega-Evolution, and it is very scary to me.”

“Soon it will be a forgotten dream as I will be the one to dispatch this blight on our earth.”

“Be careful Moltres….Don’t underestimate them. I’ve heard of all the terrible things the Oneling group has done, and I’m very, very worried for our region.”

“You have nothing to fear,” Moltres spread their wings wide, “Because from this day onwards, I will not let your fears go unassessed. Take sight of my vow before you, my sibling, my brethren, I, Moltres, the spark of Dawn, the emissary of Spring, will see you blossom into the Articuno you always were.” Moltres now truly prepared themselves to leave, “Our bonds are true, we are bound to each other, in this life, and the next, and forever on into antiquity….I’m so sorry I forgot….so much….”

“It’s okay……I’ll see you soon.”

“Yes, you will.”

“Will you speak to Zapdos too?”

“It is certain. Farewell.”

And Moltres flew off, Articuno watching them until they disappeared into the sky.

*……I can’t remember the last time I felt this happy…..Oh –* And then Articuno was blessed with a brief memory of the brightest blue eyes to blink open, of a tiny squeak, before their little firey self stumbled from the flames and looked up, and such warmth, such warmth (not so much from the fire mind you) from their chest radiated out, the past Articuno exhaled, and knelt to touch their beak to the newly born Flame Legend, *It’s so good to see you again, my Mollie.*

Ritchie arrived at the pokemon center, Sparky trotting lightly at his heels, he asked the receptionist where Professor Gary Oak, Brock Slides, and Rose Wood were in the building and the look she gave him was akin to being able to peel an entire onion with one’s eyes alone; she pointed him to where Audino’s room was. Ritchie backed away slowly, then dashed down the hallway as her dead glare followed beyond the door.

Ritchie caught his breath as soon as the double doors swung shut behind him, “Sparky, I think we just met a real life Dementor.”

“Pika, piiiiii….”

“Okay, down the hall, down the hall, down the hall…."

Ritchie’s brisk pace didn’t catch too many eyes, but he heard a whisper, “Isn’t that Ash Ketchum?”

“I thought he was very ill!”
Ritchie’s lips pulled tight, *Ash’s hair is black, mine is brown, Ash’s eyes are brown, mine are blue* –

*Ash’s right eye is blue NOW though.*

Ritchie lost in thought bumped into Rose coming out of the restroom – “OOF” –

“**HEY! Oh! Ritchie!”** Rose hugged him hard, bones creaked, “Thank goodness you found Ash!”

“Yeah,” Ritchie squeaked, “he wasn’t that far,” Rose let go, letting him catch his breath, “and Clefable was with him, so…”

“Ash can be a bit of a Houdini when he wants to though,” said Rose, she suddenly lowered her voice, “….you didn’t bring him did you?”

“No, no, of course not, he’s in bed where he should be.”

“Okay, good, you could have just called us, didn’t mean to run you all over the place” –

“I wanted to come back, I need to talk to Gary, face to face.”

“Well Commander Nerves Center is a bit preoccupied at the moment,” said Rose, Ritchie’s mouth pulled taught, “I had to step out, the vibes,” Rose shuddered, Ritchie rolled the eyes of his soul, “the vibes are VERY strong from Gary, but, it’s not like I blame him or anything…with everything that’s happened, I mean one can only take so much, and so much it’s already been…!”

**Understatement………**

“I’m really, really worried,” Rose’s nose crinkled, bunching up her freckles. “There’s so much, darkness, that hole in the code business is no joke, it’s like a void, like a black hole, just sucking in all the negative energy and Gary is trying to cry it out, but it’s just no use!”

“Okay Rose, I know you think you can like,” Ritchie made quotation marks in the air, “‘feel out’ someone’s aura, but with Audino losing their powers, of course Gary is going to react strongly!”

“There’s something underneath though, something that’s broken…missing….”

“We know, and I need to talk to Gary so he doesn’t blow up at Ash, I panicked, I pushed him to react, I have to explain that to Gary, I’ve got some responsible-pulls for this.”

*You also want to explain how you’re really responsible?*

“You actually think you’re gonna reach him right now? ‘Hey Gary, I know you just learned that Audino lost their powers right after Ash dumped you like an expired carton of milk but I’” –

“Ash didn’t dump him,” Ritchie growled, “Oh my goodness, is that was Gary is saying?!”

*It’s amazing how one, one, ONE, action can cause such turbulence. (*COUGH COUGH RITCHIE*) When you’re acting on gut, you’re acting on program, and Ash is hardwired to help those in need…..Priorities, and Ash gets himself nailed, every, single, fucking, time.*

“Move, I need to get in there” –

Rose didn’t, “Ritchie, think about this, please.”

“Pi! Pikapi!” Sparky tried to protest, alas they’re only about a foot tall –
“I’m not going to watch Ash guilt himself into another corner!”

“Watch the vibes Ritchie” –

Ritchie wanted to pounce on Rose, *FUCK THE VIBES* –

“Look,” said Rose, taking a more firm stance, “I know you think you’re adding water to a fire, but this is a grease fire, and I don’t want him popping off on you, because I know how protective Ash is of you, and I don’t think their relationship can take much more” –

Ritchie felt like he had been doused in cold water, “What, do you mean by that?”

“If I told you vibes, you’ll just roll your eyes again, so this is empathy.”

Ritchie still fought to not roll his eyes.

“I’ve been there,” said Rose, “I ended a ten year relationship with someone who I thought was the one, and you know what broke us up? A fight over toilet paper.”

“Whut.”

“That’s all it takes, when there’s so much kindle to burn, all it takes is a match and apparently we had 10 years’ worth piled up…don’t be that match Ritchie – and I know, I know you want to help, but not right now, please.”

“You don’t know him like I do, either of them.”

Rose face palmed, “…..Listen…..everyone is struggling right now, to make sense of all this….I’m trying to look out for you Ritchie…I know I’ll never, not in a million years, be Mary, but you want to talk about responsibility-pulls? Well now you’re mine.”

Ritchie paused.

Rose sighed deeply through her nose, “I was kinda taken back Mary asked me to cover for her, that, she trusts me to take care of you and Ash, I mean, you guys are her babies, well, so to speak…”

Rose smiled broadly at Ritchie, “’specially her lil’ Spark.”

Ritchie’s throat suddenly closed up, he struggled to get himself under control –

Timberrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr~ Or kindle rather…Grant it Mary hasn’t called you that in FOREVER, but it’s better than what your OWN mother called you – and for the record since you’re on this subject, you and Ash’s nickname was Spark N’ Bolts…..It was funnier back then….Perhaps now it should be Nuts and Bolts….Haaaaa that’s not funny >3>;;

Rose ran her hand along her arm, “I totally, totally get why she needs this time though, not everything is on our terms, and I know, grief, loss, can push many good people to do some, rather questionable things, I think, I’d be better if Mary was able to approach this with a clear head, but I called her and…she did not sound well…at all…..”

Ritchie wasn’t sure what to do. Sparky just continued to stay on standby.

Rose continued, “But that is so selfish of me to want her to be better, just because I feel bad as an effect…like….” Rose put her hands to her face, “Ritchie, I’m sorry for just dumping all this on you, but I have to tell you to show you, a breather is needed, please Ritchie, give Gary some time so when you talk to him, he’ll listen, because right now all he hears is Audino’s broken heart.”
“……”
“……”

“…Do you know where Mary is right now?” Ritchie asked.

“I know Max is with her, Max’ll take care of her,” Rose’s face softened, “pbbth, be glad Mary didn’t ask him to cover her, hm,” Rose giggled softly, “To live up to Mary’s standard, for you boys, by Arceus’ might, I’m gonna try.” Rose fitted her hat more soundly on her head, “You two need anything, and I mean anything, you let me know.”

Ritchie was truly touched, “….Thank-you Rose.”

A shadow slipped out from under Audino’s door, shifting into a vapor form that took the shape of Gengar. Gengar’s resting face is typically a smile, this one though, had no smile. Rose looked to her partner, “Do I really want to know?” Gengar began speaking in sign language,

Rose tilted her head, “A Sylveon? There’s a spirit of a Sylveon in there?”

“Pi…ka…”

Ritchie tilted his head, “A Sylveon…?……*Oh my god….” “A Sylveon?” *OH MY GOD….*
Ritchie felt light-headed with all the questions spontaneously manifesting in his head – Gengar continued to sign with Rose speaking her responses –

“So the Sylveon is being drawn to Gary? They feel the need to protect him that strongly? Goodness, are there any other presences? No? Alrighty, so” –

Ritchie braced himself against the wall as Rose and her pokemon talked. *A Sylveon….A Sylveon…….* It had to be that Sylveon….It had to be….But what did it mean…? *They feel the need to protect Gary…? From what…? How could a soul be…UUUUUUUUUGH* –

Ritchie walked (stumbled) slowly over to Audino’s door. He could feel Rose’s eyes watching him. He could definitely hear Gary crying, and Brock’s soft tones. He could also hear Gary’s pokemon, Umbreon, Alakazam, Blastoise, Arcanine, they were all in there. He could hear Audino crying too. And silently among them all, from beyond the grave, was the poor Sylveon Ash felt he failed to save.

So, were they trying to return the favor?

*Now Ritchie, you know how far kindness reaches, are you really surprised it surpasses the distance of the after-life? Afterall, think about how far Ash has reached for you, and he reached into Hell.*

Ritchie raised his hand to knock, but…

It’s funny how in such a state of turmoil your mind will pick the most random of thoughts that yet directly relate to the situation at hand, Ritchie fully recalling that one scene from one of Ash’s favorite movies, ‘Frozen’: Knock…..Just knock…..Why isn’t she knocking?…Do you think she knows how to knock?

*I’m…..* Ritchie thought back to how useless he was when Ash was tearing himself up over Sylveon’s death, and now, how utterly useless he is here again with Gary’s grief over Audino.

*Seems to be a pattern here.*
He swallowed, *I’m so bad at this….it’s no wonder…* Ritchie smirked haplessly to himself, *It’s no wonder I’m always going to end up alone….* Ritchie looked to Sparky who was giving him the Saddest Eyes. *Oh boy Gary…..At least Audino is alive….* Ritchie sighed heavily through his nose, retreating from the door (Rose breathing an inner sigh of relief) *Dammit…*  

Ritchie moved just enough to let his back hit the wall and not the door, his body sinking down unceremoniously onto his rear; Sparky jumped into his lap, and Ritchie hugged his dear friend, Sparky hugging back as hard as they possibly could. He took out his com and sent a quick message to Ash, *Gary is fine at the pokemon center, please don’t worry, he and Audino are surrounded by friends.*Colorful

*And you just have to leave it at that.*  

Gengar suddenly perked up, looking off down the hall,  

“What’s up?” asked Rose. Ritchie giving the situation one eye up.  

Gengar signed they now feel another presence aside from Sylveon.  

“A visiting presence?” Rose asked.  

Gengar shook their head, their look growing more alarmed by the second, *Vengeful* they signed. Suddenly Gengar flinched and signed, *Evil!* they took off down the hall –  

*Hey! Gengar WAIT* – Rose bolted off after her pokemon, followed by Ritchie and Sparky –  

Misty burst through Ash’s door with the same force as Explosion*, (scaring the poor Rotom but Chimecho was unphased), “I AM HERE!”  

“So am I,” said Ash weakly.  

Misty walked right over, hauled herself up the bedrails, and sat on him.  

*Oof – is this necessary?* came Ash’s squashed voice.  

“For causing my heart rate to spike, yes, I’d say it is Ash Ketchum.”  

“I’m learning, I came back.”  

“Well thank goodness for that, do you even know what’s going on with Gary and Audi?”  

“I know he went to go see Audino, and I’m supposed to be getting a text from Ritchie soon, and that he said Gary wanted to talk to me about it when he got back. Ah! And here it is, ‘Gary is fine at the pokemon center, please don’t worry, he and Audino are surrounded by friends.’”  

Misty suddenly pumped the breaks on the news, “Well,” she bit her tongue, “Yeah, Gary should be the one to talk to you about it.” She slid off Ash to sit beside him on the bed.  

Ash looked to Misty, “So you know too?”  

“I have my sources.”  

Ash clicked his tongue, he could read her face, the anguish behind it, between her and Ritchie, he could guess, “….Audi lost their powers, didn’t they?”
Misty looked down, biting her cheek.

Ash gripped the sheets, a feeling of sheer coldness ran up his arms, “…oh wow…oh no……”

Misty spoke softly, “It’s looking to be permanent, but they’re not sure just yet…So yeah that’s what’s going on.”

And you weren’t there for him. For them. After all he’s done for you. After all Audi’s done for you. You weren’t there. You could have BOTH gone to the pokemon center, you could have been with GARY, RIGHT NOW –

Misty rubbed her temples, “Has Mismagius come by for today yet?”

“Um no, um, I need to get to Gary” –

* BOY –

“No what you need to do, is just sit here until Gary gets back, and apologize to him.”

“I really should be there with him, with Audi, through this?!”

* DO YOU HAVE A MEMORY OF A GODDAMN MAGIKARP?????

“Have you tried calling him?”

“Didn’t answer.”

“What about your Heartstring connection?”

“It’s acting up.”

“And where does Gary want you right now?”

“He’s not thinking clearly” –

“And he’s not alone,” said Misty as she scooted closer, “Like how Mary is not alone.”

“This is more dire than I thought, Misty I’ve made a HUGE mistake” –

*AND YOU’RE ON THE VERGE OF MAKING ANOTHER ONE!!!! OH MY GOODNESS

ASH – what did you JUST talk about with Ritchie? Are you going to sideline his efforts too?!

“Oh you are going to, are you going to not listen to Gary, again?”

Ash’s hands clenched up, “I’m trying to make it right…!!…Audi lost their powers…!! Gary is going to be in pieces! How I feel doesn’t matter!!”

“Oh it matters,” said Misty darkly, “It matters to Gary, and Audi. The least you can do, the bare minimum, is what? Say it with me, stay here. If you undo what Audi scarified so much for, then shame. On. You. You will not fix this. There’s nothing you can do about it.”

Ash gave Misty an extremely pained look. She continued, “Avalugg is presumed dead, and there’s nothing you can do about it. People are boiled up over Lisa’s trial and there’s nothing you can do about it. People died, and there was nothing you could do about it. Oh, you may think there’s something you can do, because that’s just who you are, but in the end, there really isn’t, not in the way you want. Those that will hate, will hate, those who are sad, will be sad. Gary is extremely
upset with you, but there is nothing you can do, until he’s ready to listen...And yet, on the inside, you’re screaming, just, screaming to help, to act, because that’s just who you are...You would throw away, every instance of you, you would go down in a blaze of glory to help some random stranger in need. I will tell you till it sinks in, you cannot take on the world. You cannot. There will always be someone in need. There will always be someone in danger. There will always be a threat, big and small, personal or public. No matter how much you think you can try, no matter how justified you feel in doing so against your own needs, or needs of your loved ones, you cannot solve everything. Sometimes the chips just have to fall where they may. That’s, life, and it can be very unfair.” Misty wiped her nose, her voice soft, “What was it that made you question yourself, all that time ago when you were a Trainer, what made you become a Ranger? What made you realize something was wrong?”

Ash bent, his wrist tingled a touch that wasn’t there, tears threatening in his eyes.

“You scared yourself, badly, because you didn’t realize how terrible it had gotten, inside,” Misty pointed to her head, “In here....”

Ash’s breathing turned labored.

“It was eating you alive Ash. We all saw it. We all did. The weight of the responsibilities before you. You did, so much, so fast, sure everyone was impressed, and everyone wanted more, and they were going to pick you apart piece by piece and you were going to serve yourself up to them on a silver platter. And now...now...you're going to go through that again? I saw you in the hospital, Ritchie curled up next to you, praying, praying his heart out that you would see what was happening to you....”

Ash bent further, he gripped his wrist.

“Maybe, he partially got through to you, I know as Rangers, you two rose up really fast in ranks, as you do, you are just a step below Mary, but there’s a reason she hasn’t let you two file up. And then we were together, and...” Misty clicked her tongue, “And......and we were good for a while, but...I guess you never got over leaving the Trainer circuit, for your own health, because....”

“I’m sorry....”

“My question to you is this Ash, are you really, really, going to toss Gary aside, like how you tossed me?”

Ash flinched and looked up to Misty just in time to see a tear drop off her cheek.

And thus, the cycle begins again.

Misty started to cry, “What will it take to get you to listen to us to take care of yourself? What’s going to do it huh? I know it’s awful, awful, that Audino lost their powers, and that Mary, is, being pushed to her limits, but you know what Ash? What also is awful? Watching you go down the same path that you went with me, with Gary. I know, I know he is far, far from perfect, well so am I, but he loves you, more than anything, and sure, he’s got his issues too,” Misty swallowed, “That he needs to sort out, but so do you, and right now, you need to look deep inside yourself and answer, what are you going to do now? Okay, you made a mistake in running off, how are you going to absolve that? Yes, by all means, talk to Gary, talk to him, he is your boyfriend, but right now, he needs some space, there’s nothing you can do about that, but wait.”

“....I left him a voicemail to call me, I said I was sorry.”
Misty wiped her face, gaining her composure back, “You might need to do a little more than that. And you act, you act on your words to him, and you continue to work on it. Don’t you dare throw away all the progress you’ve made Ash Ketchum.”

“I won’t” –

“Swear it!”

Ash sniffled, his voice was wobbly, “I swear it.”

_I know what you’re missing Ash. It starts with ‘self’ and ends with ‘worth.’ And you are looking for it in all the wrong places. You see the value in everyone, and yet, for some reason, you continue to lose sight of your own._

Misty unlocked Ash’s grip around his wrist with a single touch, she intertwined her fingers in his, squeezing his hand tightly, “It’s unbearably sweet that you want to help people as much as you do Ash, but one day, I hope you’re going to remember that you’re worth saving too…you don’t have to keep giving yourself away. You fight for so many Ash, just know, how many people there are willing to fight for you.”

**And die. Because you’re not strong enough.**

Despite what so many put on you, you are not the legend they make you out to be.

You’re just a person way in over his head.

Ash’s hands went to his face as he broke down in tears, Misty pulled him into a tight close hug.

It’s easy now for you to understand why Lisa snapped when you forgave her, why she lashed out against words spoken so frequently to her. Words spoken so frequently to you. How much everyone loves you...how much they care about you, and yet underneath the grind of it all is a truth that cuts right through their best of intentions. A truth that only you can put to rest, alas, if you could just do the one thing everyone is asking of you. If you could piece back together the meaning that repetition has ground away.

**Truth of the matter is, Gary is not the only one who lies.**

When you repeat a lie so much, it fools you into becoming truth.

Lisa had had enough of it.

But you Ash, you tell yourself you’ll do better, you’ll do better, honest, honest you will....Honest you will.....

*…Why can’t I do anything right anymore….?*

¯\_(ツ)_/¯

Tracey in the other room could hear Ash sobbing.
*sigh* What can you do when there’s nothing you can do until the dust settles? Well, what a good Pokémon Watcher does is, well, watch. Watch and wait. You’ve made a lifetime on the sidelines, but when you’re needed, you do rise up. When Misty needs you, you’ll be there, right now she has to be there for Ash, you’re just, not the help that is needed right now…and that’s okay. Ash became a Ranger to remember how to live, you became a Pokémon Watcher to survive. You know how a bruised heart is desperate to seek redemption from itself. You’re a survivor, because you learned to value your needs at a very young age. You’re a lucky one you are.

Tracey pulled up his com, Gary’s call icon showing several unreceived calls followed by a call duration of two minutes and forty-six seconds. Tracey sighed again.

You’re no stranger to prayer, you just hope to god that you did enough when you could. Now, you just, hope for the best. Gary did…NOT sound well….The last time you heard him so broken was when Gramps died. Audino is still alive….You don’t want to criticize someone’s grief but they’re still alive! And you know, you knew exactly how Gary is quite the emotional one, he loves Audino so much, he loves, quite a bit in fact, he’s just, he can be a bit, out of the park in showing it sometimes, unless you’re Ash, because he can just mount him and whatnot. It’s odd. Gary’s affection is so familiar and so alien at the same time and it’s so unfair to be almost constantly misunderstood….Yes he can be an ass. But he’s your ass. And Ash is your dear friend.

Tracey pulled up his past text conversations with Ash, scrolling through them.

And you kinda miss him. Oh, it’s not like you guys don’t talk, because you do, it’s just, maybe you could have given him some pointers or something….I dunno. It is pointless to put blame where there is none…..Bottom line, sidelines SUCK, but….you’ll be there when you’re needed Tracey, and with open arms, that’s just the kind of person you are.

Perhaps…

If you guys had just talked a little more….

You know Gary better than anyone here.

Maybe, just maybe….

You’ll drive yourself crazy on what could have been.

How much could happen from one single conversation? A sentence? A word?

¯\_(ツ)_/¯

Gary cradled a shivering Audino. The dark circles under his eyes were prominent, his hair was a tussled mess, the color from his cheeks were gone, and in the crater of his self, was the steady beat of a hollow drum to pass off a black hole as a heart.

We all know Gary can exaggerate, but nothing of that description was an exaggeration. Yeah it’s me, Gary’s inner voice, and I Am Tired.

There came a knock at the door. Brock stood up, but Alakazam beat him to it, “Oh…please, come in, Gardevoir.”
Gary, Audino and everyone looked up to see Gardevoir getting rolled in on a wheelchair by Mismagius (giving Gary’s ragged look a run for its money).

“Gardevoir…?”

Gardevoir smiled at Gary and Audino as Audino curled up in shame in Gary’s keep.

“No, no,” said Gardevoir, “No, no, don’t do that. There’s no need for that.” Brock and Mismagius helped Gardevoir up to sit on the bed next to Audino and Gary.

Audino looked at Gardevoir with big round eyes, as if they were looking upon a deity far, far beyond themselves.

Gardevoir cleared their throat, “Now what’s this I hear that, hm, you’ve think you’ve lost any and all value because your powers are gone?”

“……………” Audino just curled up further.

“You can’t possibly believe that Mon chou…?”

“…………”

Gardevoir placed their hand over Audi’s, “…Does that stop you from being the cutest Audino ever?”

“………”

“Does that somehow, change your kindness?”

“………”

“Does that change your selfless acts? Nnnnnnnnnnnnnope.” Mismagius settled on the other side of Audino as Gardevoir continued, “Someone with a great talent can use it for awfully selfish means, but you? You made an incredible sacrifice to save Gary and Ash, Ash multiple times in fact…! Audi, look at me. I know I’m just repeating what Gary, and Brock, and Alakazam, and Nurse Joy, and everyone before me has said, so maybe it’ll start to sink in that you are, in fact, believe it or not, more than your talent. I know you can’t see it right now, because your talent gave you attention that you, never thought was possible, and that without it, you can’t continue? Oh no, no, no it doesn’t work like that – people will tell you otherwise but those are Bitter Betties who couldn’t get over their own roadblocks and just, want to be jerks. And I know you’re thinking, ‘sure, you can talk because you still have your powers – you can’t possibly know how I feel’ – well, to be completely powerless against an adversary that has taken what you thought was the core of your essence, to feel shut out by the one thing you believed made you whole, the purpose that gave your life meaning suddenly destroyed by the acts of heartless individuals…? Darling I’ve been there, and you know what brought me around to center? The young man that is holding you in his arms.”

Gary smiled at his friend.

Gardevoir smiled back, and continued, “I owe my research principles to him, I owe, my education, I owe my confidence, I owe my drive, I owe my success to Gary, mother friggin’ Oak because he believed in me when no one else would. I can admit it now, yup yup, and Audino, I believe in you. I believe you can still be an incredible Heath Transfer Pokemon, maybe not in the way you once thought, you may not have your powers, but you will have mine. My door will always be open Audi,” Gardevoir held Audino’s hands, “Consider my hands your own.”
If anyone didn’t think Audino couldn’t cry any harder, they were proven wrong. Alakazam told Audino ‘Improvise, Adapt, Overcome’ what that one wilderness guy says, I don’t remember who, but I’m sure you know the guy. Also I’m just going to throw this out there, Alakazam is really good with pole arms, like Jedi level skill, how cool is that?

“Audi,” came Gary’s waterlogged voice, “I need you to hear yourself answer this, do you regret using your powers?”

Audino held themselves, rubbing their arms, “……..No,” they wobbled, “No I do not. I am sad, they are gone, I had this, incredible gift, and I used it to help, to, to the best of my ability…I have regrets, that it is gone, but, I don’t regret using it to save you and Ash. Not. One. Bit.” And then they burst into tears again, Audino fanned themselves as they gained their composure back, somewhat, “I never believed in myself until I met you,” they croaked, “Your faith in me gave me strength, afterwards I knew I could do it!….What’s done…is done. My powers are gone, but Ash is still here. You’re still here. I’m still, here…..I want to think I did enough, I don’t know how I’m going to do more, but,” Audino looked to Gardevoir who smiled warmly back at them, “I guess…..maybe….it couldn’t hurt to, try…….”

“It never hurts to try,” said Mismagius, “I decided to work in the medical field because I wanted to prove that ghost pokemon could be healers too, there’s so few of us in this profession, I wanted to help in what way I could, and that journey led me to meet you, someone so inspiring, if I had breath, it would be stolen away!” they giggled.

“Just don’t give up,” said Brock, “Look at me, becoming a doctor is hard! I have no powers, I just have my own two hands. But humans, our own powerless selves, we like to think we’re in control of situations we have totally no hold over whatsoever, and yet, somehow we pull through! We can’t fly, so we built airplanes, we can’t swim for very long, so we made boats! Your journey to follow your dreams will wind and dip and swing all over the place, and you’ll never know what you can accomplish unless you try! You’re not limited Audi, far, far, far from it. You can still help, you can still do amazing things!”

Alakazam nodded.

“Bre, breon!”

Gary nuzzled Audino, “My special, wonderful Audi. You’ll always be my amazing Audi. That will never change, never, ever, ever.”

Brock took a seat next to Gardevoir, “You ever want any field training, I’m your man,” he said, “I can show you quick-help tricks, and I’m sure Ash and Ritchie would be more than happy to teach you what they know too.”

“A school may be more appropriate,” said Gary.

“Well yeah,” said Brock, scratching the back of his head nonchalantly.

“Oh we have amazing schools in Kalos!” Gardevoir chimed.

“Especially for Heath Transfer, yes,” Gary agreed.

“That sounds, very interesting,” said Audino, taking a tissue to blow their nose, “So I would be learning more on the sciences of Health Transfer applications?”

“Oh of course! The true intricacies, the methodology, we always need minds in figuring out the gritty sciences to piece together Healing Techniques! For instance, just this morning, we had a break
through in understanding Heartstrings!”

Gary’s eyebrows were raised, “Have you now?”

“Yes! I need a pan or a flat surface of some kind to help me demonstrate please,” Gardevoir received a tray from Brock, “Thank-you,” (*ahem*),” bonk, bonk, bonk, bonk –

Gary -> =n=

Mismagius -> =n=

Audino cocked their head, “Banging your head is, part, of the process?”

“No” –

“For relieving frustration~!” Gardevoir chimed, “Something to prepare yourself for when testing out hypothesis, for you see dear Audi (*bonk*) it is tradition for researchers (*bonk*) to bang our head on things (*bonk*) once we figure out something (*bonk*) so obscenely obvious (*bonk*) that we must make sure (*bonk*) that we are still present (*bonk*) within the reality of this plane (*bonk*) so we initiate (*bonk*) physical (*BONK*) CONTACT” (*BONK*) –

“Let me put it to you this way Audi,” said Gary, “the more you accomplish, the more responsibility you feel you have, so if you mess up in a big way, it can reflect over your team as well, so the first thing we’re going to teach you are healthy habits to deal with frustration when you come across such a situation because it can really mess with your confidence too.”

“Like overtly announcing how you screwed up,” said Brock, “Because the alternative is giving up, and you don’t want that.”

With the tray still stuck on them, Gardevoir rolled their face to the side to look at Mismagius, “He gets it.” Mismagius rolled their eyes as hard as they could. Gardevoir sat up properly, a notable red bump on their forehead, “SO! My friends, heartstring, heartstring not rare, heartstring related to bond between humans and pokemon. Bond between humans and humans not reflected upon as much. Misty Tracey, heartstring, family ties, heartstring, friendship, heartstring – BUT~! But, heartstring can disappear, heartstring can” –

“Can you PLEASE just use sentences,” Gary hissed rubbing his head, Audi themselves trying to absorb the information as much as Gary was being beaten to a pulp by it –

Gardevoir cleared their throat in the most obscene way possible, “Essentially, now that the basis code for a heartstring has been unlocked, it can be safely concluded that they are as common as grass.”

:o

“I have been looking through code after code after code on my database and nearly every single one, has a heartstring trace” –

HEY GARY YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH ASH IS NOTHING SPECIAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAL – you’re just, a relationship.

“That being said, your heartstring with Ash, Gary, is still exceptional because the traces you and Ash have are so vibrant and bright – I’m willing to declare that the heartstring you two have is a class above the more ‘common’ types that I’m discovering” –

Oh thank god –
“Doesn’t change the fact that heartstrings can come and go like any other relationship be it platonic or romantic” –

GODDAMMIT –

“Soooo,” Brock began, “What about all the other stuff that tied them together like with the Link* Catalyst* thing, and the Dark Place*, their Transfer Effect connection into one another?”

Gardevoir just waved their arms around like limp noodles, “Research is fun because knowledge evolves with the amount of data and observations and experiments performed to test and understand the natural world within and around us~!”

And suddenly Gary felt he knew nothing.

And that’s okay. It happens. You’ll figure it out later. You always do.

An ease settled in, cloudy, milky, but transparent.

An irregular soothing. What he felt was true, yet, underneath his calm, stirred anguish, and underneath his anguish, stirred regret, and underneath his regret, stirred anger.

Gary’s com chimed, it was a text from Tracey, ‘How are things going?’

And Gary left it unanswered.

**BELOW ADDED 3/2/19**

There came a knock at Ash’s door.

He groaned.

“Expecting someone?” Misty asked.

“Mary.”

“Really.”

Ash groaned more, sliding down into a log of shame.

Misty hopped off the bed, and opened the door, “Ah, Daisy?”

Ash immediately sat up. Daisy, arms crossed, entered the room like a cool breeze, but the shade of her eyes threatened to turn anyone into a pile of ash under her glare, speaking of which –

“Um, hi?”

“Hey there,” her voice was even, sounding like someone ‘very’ in ‘control’ standing on the edge of a ‘very’ big cliff, “going anywhere anytime soon champ?”

Misty put herself in-between Daisy and Ash, “He sure isn’t, he’s fine right here.”

“He was fine at Viridian Memorial too. Just checking.”
“Well we’re all good and clear here. So you can go now. Like right now,” Misty smiled, like a predator – to which Daisy answered right back with a smile of her own,

“You’re baring your fangs at the wrong person sweetheart.”

“Daisy what do you want?” said Ash, “If you’ve come to chastise me, let’s hear it already.”

“Chastise? Moi~? True, I came to see what all the sudden hub-hub was about, I mean what with my bro’s nerves just going absolute BAT SHIT off the rails, but, my comings herald yet another fork in this road to ruin, for I also come bearing a bit of news that I’m sure will be a surprise to you as much as it was to me. (*ahem*). Mary is lying to all us all, just a bit of a heads up, you know, before she has a chance to come in here and lie to your faces.”

Ash blinked, “Ex-cuse me?”

“Oh no, you heard me, but do I expect you to believe me? We’re going to find out!” Daisy suddenly poked her head out the doorway and looked down the hall, ‘Oh hi Mary! Hello Liar! I’m so sorry for throwing a wrench in your plans, but seeing as how those plans REALLY SUCK, I thought they could use a, you know, bit of a tweak? Oh, you’re still walking, so you really are coming to lie to Ash?” –

“Daisy can you just stop it” –

“Hang on sweet peas – Mary! I just want to be sure to give the most updated report to them. It’s the least I can do because everyone’s been lied to so much right now, and nobody knows how to talk right anymore!”

* Hm, all things considered, you can figure that Daisy is what a ‘high functioning Lisa’ would be. Good lord. And by the sound of it, she is fresh out of fucks to give –

Daisy turned to an extremely annoyed Misty and Ash, “Mary is actually not leaving before the heat of summer, she’s like leaving tomorrow, as in 24 hours from now, as in holy shit where does that leave all these unresolved feelings, and issues, and downright totally unpalatable situations aka MAX – and now~ I’m gonna go talk to Tracey and work on some coding before these hands just start having a mind of their oooooown~”

* And Tracey is like the only person on the planet that can deal with Daisy when she gets like this. Even Ash’s iron stomach (HA) of emotional collateral damage can deal with just SO MUCH –

**HEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEELP –

“Toodles~”

Ash and Misty both had a look that read Bitch Bye.

Misty looked to Ash, her face a plethora of I AM SO DONE – “Tracey will be fine, he has the patience of a saint he does, um, I’m gonna go check on Mary, be right back, with her, hopefully.”

Ash nodded as Misty left him with the ever balloon-like Chimecho and studious Rotom piddling in the cabinets of the room.
Ash let out a sigh as if the building itself was sinking in retired despair. “When it rains, it, pourssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuugggggggggggggggggghhhhhhhhhhh
Pbbth.”

As if on a timer, Chimecho came to life and floated down and unwrapped the curl of their tail which held a single pill,

“Oh wow, my medicine, I, totally forgot, thank-you!” Ash took the medicine, gulping it down with some water. “Thanks again Chimecho, hey, you feeling okay?”

No response, Chimecho just floated back up into place, Ash quirked his eyebrow, “Alrighty, then?”

He tried listening for any sounds coming down the hall, but could hear none. He knew Daisy was right next door with Tracey, but he couldn’t hear anything from them either. Ash pursed his lips. He laid himself back in feeling a sudden spike in drowsiness.

“Bluh.” *Maybe if I just fall asleep, when I wake up, everything will be better.* Ash knew for a fact it wouldn’t be, but he was just so tired in dealing with, so much. *A break, just a little…break…..but Mary is coming to talk to me….uuugh, I need to stay awake just a little longer…..* Ash felt something soft curl around his hand and saw Rotom with a ghastly sparky tendril around his palm.

The pokemon could easily taste him if they weren’t careful, but the delicacy in which Rotom showed Ash, touched his wounded heart; a total stranger, come to give him comfort. “….Thank-you…” *Maybe, I could just rest, just for a moment till Misty brings her…just for, one, moment…..* Ash closed his eyes, and promptly fell asleep.

Rotom doted over Ash’s sleeping form, making sure he was comfortable, and thought to themselves that they would wake Ash when company returned, they knew he was expecting Mary, and was the last thought they ever made.

Chimecho sprung forth with an incredibly powerful Psychic* attack, using the bulk of their powers to freeze Rotom right in place, intensifying the radiation of their aura to the point where Chimecho bled out of their orifices, the only sound the ambush produced was the soft crackle of electricity burning out of the ghost type’s body, the light from their scorching aura concentrated into a pinpoint beam around Rotom’s outline, making the poor ghost and electric type burst into flames, their form feverishly incinerated into nothingness within a contained inferno.

Chimecho inhaled the blood that came out of them, cleaned up themselves quickly and any ashen trace of the poor Rotom, and returned to their apathetic balloon-like state just before Misty, Daisy, and Mary all barged into Ash’s room – Mary ripping her arm out of Daisy’s grip – Misty prancing around them like a Herdier tailing around two warring Tauros –

“Don’t you touch me again,” Mary hissed –

“And look at that, he’s asleep,” said Daisy, “Why is he asleep?” –

“I can see that,” said Mary –

“Still, Mary,” Misty tried to get a word in – “you can wait in here till Max comes and picks you up – it’s fine, it’s fine, Daisy” –

“No it’s not,” Daisy growled, she brought her voice down to a harsh whisper, “You shouldn’t have done that, a better person, wouldn’t have done that, for all the you claim to be, you, Mary, wouldn’t have done that!”

“Daisy stop it, just stop it,” Misty hissed right back, “Enough, just back off” –
“Or what? What? Mary! What are you doing?”

“Listen. I had my reasons, I was going to explain it all myself, if you’d be so inclined to allow me to” –

“HE PASSED OUT” – Daisy brought her voice down again, everyone looking to Ash who hadn’t budged an inch, “He’s passed out, his heart can’t take this” –

“Like you’re being such a big help right now!?” Misty hissed –

“Listen, you’re the one who told him I was lying,” said Mary, “I was going to break it to him gently. But no, you were so kind enough to announce my arrival. Him overloading is your fault.”

Daisy almost blew a fuse, no, in fact, she did, and whipped around to Misty, “Misty do you seriously not see what’s going on here?! I’m not crazy!”

“Okay, let’s move rooms,” said Misty, “let’s go, let’s go, all of us out, out” –

“Mary, tell me what we were doing the night I learned that Blue and Red ran off to Alola. Tell me that.”

“What on earth for?”

“Tell me or I’m going to punch you in the face.”

“Daisy!” Misty hissed, “Stop it! Just stop it!”

Daisy walked right up to Mary and looked her in the eye –

Mary popped her lips, “You going to kiss me love?” And Daisy clocked Mary right under her chin, her head flinging back under her scrambled feet –

“DAISY WHAT THE HELL?” screamed Misty –

“THAT’S NOT MARY” – Daisy froze, a psychic aura giving a glow to her outline –

“Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh,” came Chimecho’s shrill hollow voice that cut right through them –

Misty hurried to Mary’s side, “Oh my God – Mary, I’m so” – but when Mary looked up into Misty eyes, Misty did not see Mary’s eyes – she gasped, then she too was engulfed in the psychic hold. Mary(?) put her hand to the side of her head and corrected her eye color with a couple blinks, as if adjusting the filter over a camera lens –

“Inside voices from now on please, we’ve drawn enough attention.”

*A Ditto?!*

“Not a Ditto,” said Mary(?), they winked, then instantly went into a crying face. Chimecho’s psychic powers manipulated Misty and Daisy’s bodies to sit down in chairs, Daisy looking at her com, Misty looking to Ash, still sound asleep – there came a sharp knock at their door – Mary(?) opened it with a snifflly sobbed voice, “Yes?”

Daisy and Misty couldn’t speak, couldn’t move, couldn’t see who it was, Chimecho was puppeteering their bodies, their aura glow muted. Misty, struggling to accept that once again the worst has come, and came to the realization in watching Ash’s even sleeping breaths underneath the commotion that he must have been drugged...!
“Just coming to check, I could hear you all down the hall, things sounded like they were getting pretty heated. It’s a nuisance to our patients and staff.”

“It was just rising emotions, you know, given everything going on, but we’ve got it sorted it out now, thank-you,” Mary(?) opened the door fully, “I’m sorry to cause a ruckus….For his sake at least, he’s gone and conked out again.”

“Hm. Clefable will be back soon. They can give him a look over. If you need services yourself, I can lead you to our on-site –”

“Oh no, no thank-you, I already have my appointments made, but thank-you.”

Whoever it was didn’t question any further, probably signaling in gesture or otherwise, but then –

“I guess that’s my queue! Excuse me Kanga, let me just squeeze in here, full tray comin’ in! Oh! Oh Mary! Fancy seeing you here, oh I would have brought more food if I knew, oh bubbles” –

“No, no, it’s quite alright,” said Mary(?), “please come in” –

“I’ll chat with you later Kanga~!” Clefable chimed, waving their friend off.

“Later.”

Kangaskhan left as Clefable made their way inside with a tray full of food; Mary(?) closing the door, quietly locking it, looking upon the oblivious Fairy type with a small simple smile.

Clefable sighed looking over Ash’s sleeping form, “Oh I felt him drowsing up, but I thought he’d pull through. Well, he needs his rest regardless, sweet boy.”

Mary(?) walked up cautiously behind Clefable, her hand slowly reaching for a sheath on her hip, Misty and Daisy helpless to do anything –

Clefable began prepping a couple plates, “I’ll be sure to give him a good helping when he comes to,” they smiled.

Mary(?) softly pulled out her forest knife, raising it high, the look on her face was not human –

“Now, Misty, Daisy, here loves, won’t you help yourse” – (*GNASH*), (*GNASH*), (*GNASH*), (*GNASH*) – Misty would have shut her eyes if she could, but every function of her body was at the mercy of Chimecho’s control.

Clefable didn’t hit the floor, their body became surrounded by psychic energy emitting from Mary(?) burning, burning to fever pitch, until Clefable burst into flames, and like the Rotom before it, burned within a contained inferno into nothingness.

Mary(?) took out several towels from a cabin drawer and began cleaning up what blood and soot was left over, “Quick, clean, and efficient, how I prefer to work…..You know I really could have just cut to the burning, but sometimes you just want to get your hands dirty, you know? That and I need to use my power wisely till I get a more stable energy source~” They cleaned up Mary’s(?) forest knife and slipped it back into her belt sheath, “You have to strike right at the center, right here, punch through the skull, and with a good strike, they never knew what hit them. Grant it, it won’t work for a psychic or ghost type, but you can get the jump on about everyone else if you slip into their crease of comfort. Easy. I want this all to go as seamless as possible, it won’t, but, I’d still like to try,” Mary(?) walked over to Ash’s sleeping form, running their hand through his hair, “He’s just been through the gauntlet of misfortune, he deserves this much at least, he deserves to be free.”
Misty was shaken to her core –

Daisy, through Chimecho’s hold, felt their powers focus on her hand, gripping and gripping – crushing – if she could cry out in pain she would – her com shattered in her hand, her fingers creaking and crackling and bleeding from what Chimecho forced upon them.

Mary(?) giggled as they cleaned up the com pieces, “I’m glad you run your mouth so much, no one believed you when you said Mary was acting strange, they all thought you were just being a bitch!” Mary(?) then pulled from their hip a pokeball, unleashing a real Ditto. They rubbed a towel that had Clefable’s blood all over the pokemon’s body. “Become Clefable, and be extra bubbly and annoying,” the Ditto transformed into the pokemon as ordered, “Off you go then, feel through the connection, and wait for my signal.” Mary(?) looked to Misty and Daisy as they pulled out a small box from one of Mary’s deep pockets, “Now, ladies,” Mary(?)’s smile became wide, just on the edge of psychotic, “I’m not in the mood for any funny business, once I get inside you, you either comply, or die.” Out from the box, Mary(?) pulled two shots holding a bright neon blue liquid and swiftly administered the shots to Misty and Daisy, “Don’t worry, this is not poison, or anything like that, reminder, you’d be dead right now if I deemed it so, but you’re not, this is an agent that will help me read your codes like a book, well I can already, but this will open them up even more and give you two access to the Dream World’s finer workings, just like Ash! Like I said, I want things to go as smoothly as possible, plus this stuff can taste awfully nasty so I’m really doing you a favor by giving you the shot version, my own concoction, but, reaaaaaaaally hard to make.”

Mary(?) pulled out a glass flask from another of Mary’s pockets, “Ah yes, here’s the, such delicious version, I’m sure you’ll both get a kick out of the faces I’m going to make,” she held up the flask, Misty and Daisy seeing through the glass that a portion of Mary’s face was overlapped by that of a pokemon, a Delphox? The amber eye visible glowing like a burning flame.

Misty gasped internally, cold surging through her body, so much so the Chimecho shuddered, *A Delphox...!!...According to the testimony gathered...The leader of the Onelings....is a Delphox...!!!*

“Bottoms up~” (*gulp,gulp*) “Oh god, god, BLECH! That shit is nasty, nasty! Eeeeeeuuuuuuuuuuugh,” Mary!Delphox cleared their throat, “And now,” they turned back to Ash, “Now, here comes the real work.”

:

“Gengar! WAIT UP!!!”

But Gengar was on a speed run of their own, shadow shifting across a busy street and right into Boulder-Dash Public Park, Rose and Ritchie taking a chance on their parkour moves by dodging some very upset drivers and their screeching tires and car horns –

“SORRY!”

“MY BAD!”

“PIKA PI” –

It’s just like dodging charging Rhyhorns, and for the record, those hit HARDER – RANGERS FTW 8D~! I’m Ritchie’s voice! This is all I have to say this chapter byyyyyyyyy~
Both of them landed on the sidewalk (Sparky staying right along Ritchie) and bolted into the park –
“GENGARRRR!!! WHERE ARE YOU?!”

Sparky’s ears twitched up, “PIKA!!” Sparky charged forward and led Ritchie and Rose into the park
depths where people were suddenly running opposing the Rangers to get out of harms’ way –

“GENGAR ON THE LOOSE!”

“RUN! RUN! GENGAR ON THE LOOSE!!”

Ritchie and Rose finally came upon the scene of Rose’s Gengar harassing some poor random young
man! They had him suspended in the air with their powers and the young man was fighting back for
all he was worth –

“GENGAR STOP!!”

“PUT HIM DOWN!! GENGAR YOU PUT HIM DOWN RIGHT NOW!!”

“GEN-GEN-GENGARARARARARARAR!!!”

“PUT HIM DOWN!!”

Sparky turned to Ritchie and signed to him ‘that’s NOT a person!!’

“Wh-what do you mean that’s not a person!?” Ritchie gasped, “A DITTO?!”

The ‘young mans’ arms and legs became as long and spindly as spaghetti and tried to wrap
themselves around Gengar, the display at best a distraction – because then his neck elongated the
same way, his head morphing into nothing but snapping jaws wielding a crushing Crunch* attack
like a loaded gun in Gengar’s face – Gengar let loose a Thunderbolt*, Sparky joining in on the
action, and the both of them combined were able to KO the freakish creature, Gengar finally dropped
the heap of flesh and flimsy limbs into a rubbery pile, electrical sparks of paralysis showing this
‘thing’ wasn’t going anywhere anytime soon, and speaking it to truth, Ritchie popped out a Ranger
ball and flung it at the Ditto, sucking them inside, the ball boomeranging back into his hands –
Ritchie promptly tapped the ball button twice to lock it up.

“Gengar, are there anymore!?”

The sounds of police sirens whistling up let the group know Pewter City wasn’t playing around –

Gengar nodded –

“GREAT!”

Gengar signed, ‘hard to focus, presence is multiplying – decoys everywhere!’

“That means there’s a target they’re after that they want defenseless – !”

“Want to take a guess who?!”

A rustle from the brush made Ritchie, Rose, Sparky, and Gengar tense up, but the pokemon sensed/
smelled who it was and quickly rushed over and fished out from the vines – “MAX?!!?!?” Ritchie and
Rose bolted forwards, he was COVERED in blood – !!

“MAX!!”
Gengar and Sparky tried to prop him up, he was limp, Ritchie and Rose swarmed him, their hands immediately doused in red, Ritchie assessing him as fast as humanly possible – “*Multiple stab wounds, blunt trauma, oh my god Max, WHO DID THIS???”*

Rose whipped out her com paging the Pewter Emergency Control and Dispatch Center – “ROSE WOOD FROM THE TOHJO RANGERS – I NEED AN AMBULANCE OVER AT BOULDER-DASH PARK, RANGER DOWN – ALERT ANY AN ALL ABLE EMERGENCY PERSONNEL THERE IS AN ATTACKER ON THE LOOSE, ALERT ALL SENSITIVE TRANSIT AND SPACES”–

“*Took my blood, left me for dead, decoy,”* Max croaked, “*find Mary, find Mary*” –

Rose ran out and flagged down the approaching officers

“*Was it the Onelings?!”* –

Max gripped Ritchie with strength he shouldn’t have – “*Listen! Y-You’re*” – Max couldn’t speak anymore, his body demanded he focus on breathing as Ritchie, poor Ritchie tried to dress what wounds he could –

*Ritchie!*

Ritchie blinked, the rims of his vision flashing, “What?”

*Ritchie! Where are you!?*

Ritchie turned all about, that voice – *there’s no mistake it was Ash!* He sounded as if he was just beyond the bushes – ! But that was impossible – !!!!

*RITCHIE! PLEASE!!!*

“*Ash?!”*

“*Pikapi?!”*

“*Gen,gar?*”

Max grunted, trying to move further, “*Ritchie, d-on’t*” –

*RITCHIE!!*

“*Do – n’t, lis – ten!*”

“*You two take care of Max*” –

“*PIKAA??*”

*RITCHIE HELP ME – HELP ME, HELP ME – THEY’VE GOT ME TOO!!*

“*ASH! I’M COMING!!*” – Ritchie suddenly felt as if a lid was popped off on his subconscious and –

(*Ba-bump*) –

Ritchie’s hand clutched his chest, a soft gasp and a sharp feeling pulled from his mouth the taste of metal –
“Pi-pi-PIKA!?”

Ritchie couldn’t breath, his body fumbled, he stumbled back, falling back, his vision drawn up to the sky and a bright, bright, bright light –

(*BA-BUMP*) –

Wow

Wow.

Ha!

Ha!

You were not hard to reach at all.

You were not hard to reach at all.

;

Ash shot up awake.

He looked around, but his room was empty, he rubbed his face, he felt like someone had placed a plastic sheet over it, “Ugh, how long have I been asleep?!” He could hear people talking outside, “Oh man, how long have I been asleep?!” He searched for his com, but before he could reach for it, his door opened and in came in Mary, smiling at the company talking beyond the door, “Yes, thank-you so much, please take care of them for me,” Mary waved the company off, she closed the door, and turned her attention towards Ash; she and her Ranger protégé, taking in the sight of each other under an extended pause. Mary took a long, low breath, and swallowed, “Hey there, Ranger.”

Ash swallowed, “Hey, Mary.”

“So……can, I take a seat?”

“Yes, yes! Please do, please.”

Mary took a seat, just off to Ash’s side, her hands in her lap, her thumbs circling each other, “So… ….” Mary sighed, “I know you must have, a ton of questions for me….and….I may not have all the answers…I’m sorry I didn’t stop by sooner.”

“No, no Mary, it’s fine, really….um…”

“………”

“………”

“………”
Mary cleared her throat, “So, how are you?”

“…Just confirmed Audino lost their powers, how are you?”

“…..Lisa will be tried as a pokemon under the Laws of Nature.”

“Oh…wow…..So, um, about the same,” said Ash.

Mary nodded her head, “…..Yeah.”

“…………”

“…………”

“……………”

Ash felt the tiniest of pinpricks in his heart. He wanted to say something about Lisa, he had rehearsed it over and over in his mind, but now, with Mary before him, it all dried up in the back of his throat.

“…Poor little Audi,” said Mary.

“Yeah….It’s really, not fair, all of it.”

“Speaking of fairness,” Mary sniffled, “Lisa’s trial will be quick, that much, is certain…and then everyone will just, move on. Heh.”

“That’s what they expect, but that’s not what is going to happen,” said Ash.

“Oh no, I am leaving….soon……sooner, that is a fact…”

Ash looked up, “…where are you going?”

“…..Sinnoh, family, you know…..”

“Oh…I….I understand……” Ash forced himself to smile as much as he wanted to cry, “That’s not too far away. I always liked the mountains there, so much to climb. Lot’s of good places to camp.”

“Yep. That’sssssssss, my home.”

“……”

“……”

“So you’re really leaving then. Like for good?”

Mary nodded, head down, she couldn’t look at Ash.

“Mh….That’s what you wanted to talk to me about. You just put up a cover until the smoke cleared, but by the time it would, you’d be gone.”

“Smart boy. I should have known I wouldn’t have been able to pull a fast one over you.”

“No, I know because that’s what I did when I slipped away from the Trainer Circuits.”

“Great minds think alike.”
“I guess.”
“………”
“………”
“………”

Ash cleared his throat, “………You, always know where you can find me, and Ritchie, you’ll always be welcome with us. Just drop by whenever you feel like it you know?”

Mary looked like she was trying to keep it together, “Thank-you….You know, it works both ways….Ash, if, things ever turn sour, if things, ever, don’t go as planned, you’ll always have a home with the Rangers, I want you to know that.”

“….Thank-you, honestly Mary, thank-you, but I think you’ll be happy to hear that I’m trying to build a home with Gary. Well, rebuild it, heh.”

Mary smiled earnestly, “That’s good to hear. You two always looked so content around each other, especially Gary, I mean, every time I saw you two together, Gary was almost always hanging onto you, oorr,” Mary giggled, “over you, bit of a helicopter no?” –

“He’s really affectionate when he wants to be,” Ash blushed, “And plus, I really like how he touches me.”

“Ha. I see Max is rubbing off on you.”

“Well I can be a bit blunt, heh….eh…. Maybe sometimes I’m too blunt…. ”

“It’s important to speak up Ash, get that stuff out, come on, practice on me, let something out, speak it’s peace, I mean, I know you’ve just been beaten with that message inside and out,.”

“What’s one more right bump right?” said Ash; they both laughed softly. Ash appreciated the gesture, Mary still be Mary, Ranger mom, “I still waiting for it to sink in to be honest, trying to find that balance of expressing myself, and, not letting myself get carried away in it….Like, when I’m okay, or not okay, either way – I wear my emotions on my sleeve, and so does he, we both just need to learn to dial it back a bit, I guess….I mean with, us being so in tune now with all this mind power, and, stuff. I guess that control will come in time….I love him too much to think otherwise, you know? I’m just annoyed at myself that I thought I was where I was needing to be, but, somehow I just keep slipping backwards…. ” Ash blinked to keep his eyes from watering up and coughed to clear his throat, “It’s frustrating you know? I want to go forward, but, I can’t just let go of everything that’s happened to get me where I am, it wasn’t for nothing, none of it, was for nothing….even though,” Ash sighed, his lips turning into a small pout, “Some of it sure felt like it was, rather avoidable, (*sigh*) but I went through it anyway….Honestly, I think I’m going forward, but I guess I’m just going in circles…. ”

Mary placed a hand on Ash’s knee, “Just keep at it Ash. Making yourself better isn’t exactly a one-way road, and adding on top of that, son, relationships are not easy – especially when faced in adversity. Relationships can really tell you who you are, and that can make your feelings stronger, or destroy them, and honestly, sometimes letting go of something that got broken as a result of stress can be for the better, sometimes you have to break to rebuild yourself in who you want to be.”

“How much further can I break?” said Ash quietly, his chest feeling heavy, “I kinda, don’t want to find out.”
“You might not have much of a choice, don’t get me wrong Ash, you’re strong, very strong, one of the strongest people I know to have made this far with all you’ve gone through alive. You’re alive Ash. Others are not. Don’t waste that gift, that absolute miracle. You’re going to be okay. And when you get yourself together, in the end, I just hope you’re everything, and your, future, relationships, whatever you’re aiming for, I hope it’s you’ve ever dreamed of.”

Ash smiled honestly, “I hope so too. No, I know so. Positively!” Ash swelled with happiness, “I’m going to get better, with Gary, together, we’ll get through it! I will make that truth!”

“Hm~…..You really love that wacky scientist, don’t you?”

“Yes, I do… I want us to work,” and down came the shades, “…but….”

Something prickly in Ash’s heart moved further.

Mary tilted her head, “But?”

Ash shook his head, “It’s on me to right what I’ve done wrong, otherwise, I’m not the man I thought I was….And he deserves so much better….So I’m going to be better, for our sake.”

“Well, he’s got to step up to the plate too.”

“I know, I know, it lines up and all.”

“Just be careful where you put certain pieces, don’t compromise by cutting edges off. Our shapes make us unique and wonderful. It’d be a shame to lose that just to conform to someone else’s ideals.”

“No, I know, I love every bit of Gary for who he is, all the edges, all his curves” –

“‘All his perfect imperfections~’”

“That’s such a sweet song,” Ash smiled.

“Isn’t it? ‘Give your a~ll to m~e, I’ll give my a~ll to you~’. Hm~ Hey, what’s that song you and Gary have?”

“‘Can’t Help Falling in Love?’”

“Oh, that’s another good song, love it, love it~”

“Really? I remember you telling me it was a song for pre-pubescent teens who didn’t know any better.”

“Yes, it captures you both so well~”

Ash smirked, “In that case I need to get my smarts up, I shall attend the school of boyfriend-hood, there’s SO MUCH, I’m just, so bad at, bleh.”

“Naw, all you really need to know is…(*ahem*)……. ‘When the night, has come…..and the land is da~rk…..and the mo~on…is the o~nly, light we’l se~e…..’”

The smile that spread across Ash’s face made his eyes sparkle, “’……No I won’t, be afraid…Oh I~ won’t…be a~fra~id….Just as lo~ng, as you sta~nd, stand b~y m~e~’”

“ ‘So darlin’~ darlin’~ sta~nd by m~e~’” –
“’Oh sta~nd, by~ me~’”

“O~h, sta~nd, stand by me~”

“Stand by me~”

Mary ruffled Ash’s hair, making him giggle as he playfully shied away, “I am very proud to say that I am of only two people on this planet to have ever heard you sing. With effort.”

Ash snorted, “Because you are strong enough to have coached the beast out from its dwellings and suplex it back into hell. I can’t take a chance on my peoples like that. It’s mean.”

“You can hold a tune Ash. A tune, just not many –”

“Yeah, the tune of despair.”

“Dis pear~?”

“This pair!”

“Pbbth” –

“Pbbth!”

Ash and Mary laughed at each other, traces of a happiness adorning their features.

Mary sighed, “….You know, for all the crap you give yourself, underneath that, what’s always been so amazing about you Ash is, you just, take the challenges head on. And I know, it can get you into trouble sometimes,” Mary inhaled deeply, “Lord, it can get you into trouble” –

“Eh, heh…”

“And I have cleaned up those messes on occasion, but seriously, there’s not a single bad bone in your body. You don’t mean to hurt, anybody. And with Ritchie, you two, y’all are just…” Mary made a gesture of her mind being blown, “I gotta say Ash, you can really tell a lot about a person by the company they keep, and your friends are well connected. That’s a good line of support to have, quite the, chain, of command. Hm…..You guys showed me something I almost forgot existed. After, what happened between, my sister and I…..”

Inside. Up here.

A tingle rang up Ash’s spine as he took Mary’s hand, Mary fighting to hold back herself, she ran her hands through her hair, biting her lip, eyes welling up, she sniffled, “Rrrrr, this is such a mess. Such a mess. I’m glad you have so many people who care so much about you Ash, if, if I had,” Mary covered her mouth and shut her eyes, tears squeezing out the corners to stream down her face – she messily wiped the tears aside – “If I had only done more for Lisa, none of this would have ever happened!!” –

Ash squeezed Mary’s hand hard to let her know through the sorrow that he’s right here with her.
“I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry she hurt you so much, she hurt everyone so much! And it’s, ALL, my fault” –

Something piercing was cutting through Ash’s heart –

“No, no, nonononononono – Mary, Mary please, please listen to me, listen – like you said, this has been beaten into my head so I know what I’m talking about, Lisa made her choices, this is NOT your fault – you weren’t the one, torturing me, or possessing Misty, or blowing half to hell our squad” –

“Everyone and their grandmother has told me that, but you don’t know what I did, I’m no better than the Onelings, I’m no better than their fucking LEADER” –

“No Mary, no don’t say that, I know you, I know the person that pulled me and Ritchie up by our bootstraps, hauled us up when we had, NO IDEA, what we were getting into when we signed up, and that’s what made me realize, gee, hmm, maybe I’m not the person I thought I was, maybe I really did have a long string of sheer dumb luck!”

Mary just squinted her eyes at Ash, “Are you kidding me? You were born to be a Ranger Ash, you and the wilderness go hand in hand! The only reason you two initially had such a hard time was because there’s this little thing called ‘protocol’ you two had such a hard time following, you just, threw yourself into any and every situation head on, you were trying to save every single little thing you could, and, need I remind you that you and Ritchie were the fastest to rise up through the ranking that our Rangers had EVER seen. Don’t sell yourself short….Don’t take yourself apart…Trust me there’s plenty of people that would be so willing – don’t give them that chance!…..My sister, was very proud of herself, but everyone around her……” Mary tried not to break down again, and failed, “Everyone around her just tore her to pieces….And that demon, the one who took apart the last of her screws, I don’t know what they put back together, but that’s not my sister…”

“Mary, Mary, listen to me Mary, the leader of the Onelings is going down, one way or another, I, might not be able to do anything right now, but so many people are! People and pokemon, legendary pokemon, all working together, it’s what we do best! ‘Watch each other’s backs’ – and with all of us working together, the Onelings will be brought down for good!”

Ash saw the tiniest of smiles bloom underneath Mary’s tear-puffed eyes, “Oh, (*sniff*) trust me,” Mary wiped her eyes again, “I know all about the operations they’re going to do to try and take the Organization down.”

Ash nodded heartily, “Good, so don’t you worry Mary, justice will happen.”

Mary sat back up, the rest of her tears almost evaporating, and smiled warmly at Ash, “Yes, yes it will, I look forward to it.”

“Right.”

“Mh. The Onelings shouldn’t be underestimated however…Considering the lengths they’ve gone to thus far, I wouldn’t put anything past them, especially their leader.”

Up, further. Good.
Ash rubbed his hand, “….Lisa told me that if I were to face the Oneling leader, talking to them wouldn’t do anything, they’d have to be killed. I mean, at this point, whoever confronts them, they’re going to be killed on sight and…It’s like, woah. I mean, I’d capture them, for sure, and let the system do their work, and then….they’ll be executed…” Ash gulped, “There really is, a case to do that, to not, even hear what they have to say because of what’s been done and that’s pretty scary to me –”

“Oh pbbth anyone can be talked to, I mean I talk to Daisy, so.”

“But Daisy isn’t a manipulating demon.”

“We’re talking about the same Daisy right?”

“She really isn’t, she just, cares in her own way, that is super annoying….”

“(*SIGH*) Ash, that’s another thing that gets you in so much trouble, seeing the good where there isn’t any. Some people’s personalities, they’re just hardwired a certain way – there’s no sugarcoating it, some people are just, bent.”

“Because they got bent that way,” said Ash, “And I know, I know it’s important to be responsible for yourself, but no one ever just woke up one day and decided to be evil. They’re influenced, raised, consumed, tortured, wronged – the list goes on and on.”

“And here you are telling me I shouldn’t blame myself” –

“I’m saying to prune the buds that are wilted. No one on this earth is perfect, the main thing anyone, anywhere can do, is to be responsible for their actions. Right what was done wrong. You can apologize and make it right to the best of your ability.”

Mary just stared at Ash, “And how do you possibly propose I begin such repentance?”

“Talk to Lisa. You can start there, there’s still time to do that. She’s not gone forever yet.”

“Oh boy…..” Mary looked off to the side of the room, anywhere, anywhere, but Ash’s face; she crossed her arms.

Look here, feel here. That’s it.

Ash rubbed his chest, the pain was gnawing at him, but Mary needed him more right now –

Mary side glanced him, “You okay Ash?”

“Yes, just, feeling something in my chest, it’ll pass,” Ash tried to settle himself, “Mary, if I may, I know I might be preaching to the choir here, but, just, don’t do, anything rash.” Mary tightened her posture and quirked an eyebrow at Ash. Ash dropped his head, “Okay yeah, um, I know you’ve got a level head and all, but just, be careful, even more so than usual. With everyone just throwing emotional daggers left and right, I don’t think I can stand to see anyone else get stabbed.”

“Oh honey,” said Mary, “That’s like asking the sun not to set.”

Ash sighed, rubbing his chest more, “I know…..”
Look at me.

Ash’s eyebrows furrowed in feeling the prickling movement in his heart shift further –

“Ash…? Can I ask something, very personal of you?”

“Of course.”

“Like….I need something…..”

“Anything.”

“Your heart.”

Ash smirked, “What? Is that some kind of – *uHURK*” – Ash’s body seized up as if he just got punched in the gut, he coughed, and looked down, and saw Mary’s hand was buried in his chest. His voice was hollow, a gasp at best – “*Ma…Ma-ry*” – there was no red spilling forth, this was something else she had grabbed instead of a fleshy organ –

“Thank-you for inviting me in, I made this look easy, but trust me, it wasn’t.”

Mary did indeed grab Ash’s ‘heart’ and what she pulled forth, his soul, his essence – “Good gracious your aura is bright!” The moment Mary pulled Ash’s heart out of him, it was like unveiling the sun, deep shadows cast all around them both – Ash couldn’t move, he couldn’t do anything – there were strings attached to Ash, attached to his heart, woven all around it and intertwined, almost like a radiant yarn ball. “You know last time my subordinate stuck a catalyst in you, this time, I’ll just jump to the source.”

Ash gasped as his entire being went cold –

*Now now, there’s nothing to be all afraid of.*

*Now now, there’s nothing to be all afraid of.*

Ash’s heart was pounding in Mary’s hand –

*What you feel is completely normal for someone like yourself.*

*What you feel is completely normal for someone like yourself.*

*Gary…! H-Help – m-me* their connection was still static –!

*To feel so confused, helpless.*

*To feel so confused, helpless.*

Ash’s entire world was tilting – spinning –

*You can’t help it.*

*You can’t help it.*
He was feeling fainter and fainter by the moment –

You’re just…

You’re just….

As if something was trying to pull him right out of his body – !!!

B E N T

Ash was completely disoriented, he was seeing double, and couldn’t tell how his body was moving, any sense of anchorage, and power he had to control his body, keep himself together – everything was curving, everything was going out of sync, his chest felt cold and hollow, he could feel strings moving in his chest attached to his heart in Mary’s hand, the sensation making him want to scream – !

(*BA-BUMP*)

In a futile attempt to do something, Ash’s body moved to get out of bed and fell right to the floor, all his strength gone from him – the strings stretching from him – his breathing became terribly labored as his chest felt like it was being pulled apart – it hurt! It hurt so much! Ash heard a humming, buzzing noise, the assault of voices in his head was coming from all sides – !

There might as well be something stabbed right into your heart, no~? This works just as well, if not even better. You opened wiiiiiiiide up <3.

Mary kneeled down beside Ash, on his back, desperate to catch his breath, his lungs spazzing out, virtually forgetting how to function – “Hey there champ, you’re not looking so well,” she said as she tugged on Ash’s heart – finally pulling a scream from him –

Ash. Look at me.

Ash gathered his strength and turned his head to Mary, looking right at him, right through him with black, black eyes sending a chill right down Ash’s spine –

*MARY – !*
She’s not here. Now, let, go.

The visage of Mary cracked as she smiled with a row of long dagger-like teeth – that one nightmare scene exchanged for another as Mary suddenly caught fire, her visage literally burnt away, revealing the monster manipulator that had over-taken her, their long ears bouncing freely from Mary’s burning hair, her chest falling away to reveal tufts of fur, her face breaking open to reveal a long snout with plenty of room for those sharp teeth –

Let go.

The hospital room cascaded in pieces around them, transforming in a flurry of twinkling light, pieces and pieces being replaced by all too familiar furniture conjured up from the recesses of Ash’s mind – his Dream Home creaking itself into creation around them, over-taking the hospital scenery tile by tile, plank by plank –

Let go.

And altogether, the transformation of the hospital room into Ash’s Dream House, the transformation of Mary into Delphox, was completed. *Ah, so much better, (*ahem*) Salut~* Delphox now had Ash’s heart in both of their hands, Ash watching in horror as their clawed paws lightly tapped themselves around the core of his glowing light.

Let go. I have already won.

Ash had to fight back – strength or no – he tried to push himself up, only to find that both of his wrists and ankles had circlets of light, thread of the same material that connected his heart – tying him down – Delphox then single handedly pulled from their own chest a needle with a single glowing thread, resembling the glowing threads of Ash’s heart – needle and thread in one hand – Ash’s heart in the other – *Tsk~ tsk~* Delphox stomped their foot Ash right in his gut – Ash crying out in pain from the strike – he had no time to recover as his arms got pulled outspread even more – and Ash once again found himself pinned spread eagle on his back –

Let go. You will not win against me.

His breathing erratic, Ash tried to see what pulled his wrists bound, but Delphox with a flick of their finger fixed Ash’s neck still, Ash feeling the psychic power over him, in him, violating the reaches of his home, of his very soul –
*Oh sweetheart, how do you keep getting into these affairs?! Never fear, you don’t have to worry about anyone else attempting to mold you, or use you, or abuse you for their needs ever, ever, ever again~!* Ash pulled helplessly against his restraints, against the pain, ultimately, he could do nothing but watch Delphox slowly touched the needle to his heart, the demon smiling with glee for the torture they were embarking on him – Delphox completely unresponsive to his cries. The demon pushed and pushed the needle as they began to sew their own Heartstring straight into Ash’s heart –

Let go of who you are.

*Because now~*  

YOU’RE MINE.  
YOU’RE MINE.

Gary opened his eyes from his own mental hell against all the friendly chatter he zoned out from, and felt something was, Not Right. He let his vision wander and focused in on Mismagius and how their eyes were tightly, tightly shut, as if they were putting everything they had into listening beyond the happy banter between Gardevoir, Audino, Brock, and the rest –

“Mismagius? You okay?”

Gardevoir perked up, “Eh?”

Mismagius’ eyes snapped open, “Everyone! Listen to me, I need you all to make your minds blank!”

“Eh?” –

Mismagius began casting a protective Lucky Chant*, “Minds blank! I need to lock everyone safe!”

Gary hugged Audino so tightly that their lungs were emptied – “FROM WHAT?!”

“Mismagius what’s going on?!”

“Please god, don’t tell we’re under attack AGAIN – I CAN’T, I CAN’T” –

Mismagius completed the chant, and everyone in the room, human and pokemon alike were shielded, “A presence, tried to get inside me! We’re not alone, not alone, keep your minds clear, if you hear a voice, don’t listen to it!”

Oh my god Gary –

“DON’T LISTEN TO IT!!”
“Oh my God Gary –

“Even if it sounds like your own voice in your own head, IT’S NOT” –

WAIT, ARE, ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT ME?!

“BLOCK IT OUT!!! BLOCK IT OUT!!!!”

WHAT DID I DO???

Mismagius’ aura was burning to a fever pitch in powering the chant, “Sylveon! Who are they focusing on?!”

Gardevoir looked all about, “S-Sylveon?”

Gary caught on far faster than expected, “You’re, talking to a spirit, “he breathed – “Aren’t you?!”

War flashbacks to his desperate search for Ash in Nightmare Ice Hell sent him reeling –

“I am,” said Mismagius, they split their focus to the one only they could see, “Alright, go on ahead! I’ll call for help! What, its already got them?!”

Gardevoir’s hands went to their face, “Oh my Arceus’ Blinding Light, we’re under a Cerebral Doxx!”

“A WHAT???”

“Mismagius this won’t be enough – I need to help” –

“DON’T!!” Mismagius screeched, “You are in no condition, I can handle this, I can do this! I promise I know what’s at stake!”

Poor Audino’s ears were burning, wearing quite the plain ‘I guess I’m just useless here’ façade (Alakazam wasn’t in a better position either…).

Nurse Joy walked into the room, “My goodness gracious what is all the hullaballoo about?!”

A Cerebral Doxx diagnosis? My! I would expect nothing less from the number one Health Transfer Pokemon in the world.

Everyone in the room stilled minus Nurse Joy.

Wait – who are you?!

:)  

WHO ARE YOU?!

;3

“Hello? Are you all okay? What is going on here?!”

Gary felt himself turn cold, Brock breathed heavily and saw the cool chill of his own breath before him!

“Nurse Joy” – but everyone saw Nurse Joy freeze as if someone pushed pause on her functions.

Dear, dear, oh dear, we can’t ever get anything done right around here, what a mess! What a mess!
“Who are you?”

Why I’m the little voice in the back of your head :)

>:O

“No, you’re not,” Gary shook.

You sure? You just never noticed, but I have been here~

LIES –

“LIAR!” Mismagius yelled, “Don’t listen to them! They’re just trying to get inside you! Don’t let them!!!”

“You…are a powerful psychic type,” said Gardevoir with an air of fear and more fear and slight reverence.

Correct! Alas I cannot pass up an opportunity to gloat on my accomplishments, like you Gardevoir~! We deserve to be recognized, even, well, if it means taking on what we just despise so dearly~!

Everyone saw flashing blue lights begin to shine in through the window, Brock with a confidant nod to everyone, com in hand.

BLESS YOU – TEXTING WORKS YOU GUYS 8’D!!!!

Pbbth. They won’t be of much help. I’ve already gotten this entire city within the palm of my hand, well, paw, hehehehehehehehee~ I don’t necessarily have to worry about spreading myself too thin here~

Gardevoir’s hands went over their mouth, “You’re channeling from the Dream World!”

You are correct~!

“You’re using it like a satellite dish!”

Correct again~! You should consider joining my –

“MANGE DE LA MERDE ET CRÈVE!!!!”

Rude. Use your manners!

Mismagius was looking more and more fatigued –

“Mismagius!”

“I can take it, right now, we’ve got to find his Conductors! They must be spaced out all over Pewter City!”

The pokemon nodded – Delphox laughed.

Good luck with that~! Do you any of you even know what they’re talking about~? Honey, if you’re a weak sauce simpleton of course you would need multiple Conductors, but I assure you~ I~ Do~ Not~!
Nurse Joy suddenly began moving again, but it, was, not, normal – she moved as if she was a puppet on strings, walking towards the group with outstretched arms, Umbreon wasted no time and pounced her down (poor Nurse Joy), but she got right back up, Umbreon hanging off of her like a scarf, trying to take her down, Nidoking grabbed her, and that stopped her, but still, she moved like an automated toy –

*Just a demonstration, because as those flashing lights decree, I’ve got some more helping hands that pack a bit more BITE –*

Two police officers entered the room with as plain an expression as Nurse Joy, drew their weapons, and pointed their firearms at Brock, and Gary.

*My dear, dear, dear subjects, you people are going NN OO WW HH EE RR EE.*

Staring down the weapon, Gary could only think of the one person he feared yet again at the center of this madness.

But where Ash was, not even he could reach.

*Ash! Ash you’ve got to wake up!*

*Please Ash! Ash! Open your eyes!*

*Ash get up! Get up!! GET UP!!!!*

*Heehee~*

*STOP IT!!*

*LEAVE HIM ALONE!!!!*

*You’re not going to reach him :3c*

*Keep trying if you must~*

*The more tired you are, the easier things get.*
ASH!!

ASH I KNOW YOU CAN HEAR ME!!!

ASH FIGHT BACK!!

ASH FIGHT BACK PLEASE!!

YOU HAVE TOO!!

PLEASE ASH!!

YOU CAN FIGHT BACK!! YOU CAN FIGHT BACK!!

To your credit, you sure do love him <3

Gary~~~

I can feel you trying to connect to him Gary but it is not going to work without help~ You want him that badly~? Need him for something? Need him to soothe the fear you carry with you day in and day out? Come on then, open up~ Open wiiiiide uuuuuuuup~

With the hole in his code, Gary’s terror was left to resonate within an echo chamber in his heart, he was trembling, breathless, “What have you done to him…?”

:3c

Open up and see~

PISS. OFF –

Before Gary could do something insanely reckless and stupid, Mismagius had him beat by dropping the Lucky Chant before their power ran out and shoved the officers’ draw up – the weapons firing – and threw them out of the room, Mismagius grabbed everyone in their aura and tried to shadow shift them all out of the inflicted radius – but they were almost immediately frozen in place – another aura engulfing them – their temperature rising so fast that Mismagius’ ghostly form was shorting out –

Oooh, nice try there!

“HEARTSTRINGS!” Gardevoir yelled, “YOU’RE BROADCASTING THE DREAM WORLD USING HEARTSTRINGS!!!”
“Maybe I am, maybe I ain’t~ I would need quite the whore, you know, someone who just, opens themselves up to anyone, friendly with everyone, can’t imagine that would be any of you rude people – except Brock, but darling, you don’t have the range of influence~”

Gary’s heart squeezed itself in agony – “LEAVE ASH ALONE –!! “

Um, no.

The two officers got up again, redrew their weapons, once again pointing them at Gary and Brock – Mismagius cried out in pain, their aura burning!

“MISMAGIUS!!”

“Everyone, G-Gardevoir – I’m, I’m sorry – !!” Mismagius burst into flames –

“NO!!”

Bye bye~!

Mismagius burned fast and disappeared just as quickly, hardly any ashen speck of a corporeal reaction peppered the floor below…

“MAGGIE!!” Gardevoir cried out –

But why stop there~?! Eeny, meeny, miny, moe, who’s someone you can’t let go~?!

An aura began to glow around Audino – they looked up to Gary, they could only look –

You want me to break you open – SO BE IT 8D

The aura clutched Audino, their body seizing up in Gary’s hold – “AUDI” – Gary could feel the heat, feel the burn – and Audino burst into flame in Gary’s arms – Alakazam yanking him back from the enclosed fireball – “AUDIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII” –

Soot, the only remains.

Wow! That didn’t take much effort at all! They just, pfft, just PFFT, there must have been not much of them left!

Gary screamed.

Gardevoir threw any and all restraint out the window and leapt up from the wheelchair, surging in psychic power – “VA TE FAIRE FOUTRE CONNARD!!!”

:o

“JE VAIS TE CREVER!!!”

8(?

No u.

Both cops aimed and fired their weapons, but the bullets disintegrated upon touching Gardevoir’s aura.

Ah…Hm….Well, you surely won’t have a problem using your power against them then~!
Every single pokemon (minus Gardevoir and Umbreon (yay dark types!)) snarled and growled, they had succumbed under Delphox’s spell, snarling, growling, drooling with rage—

While you were all busy watching those useless scraps die, it wasn’t hard for me to slip into them~ I have to tell you, people make Pokemon Hearts, their code, like a straw home, it doesn’t take much to bring those walls down~ Unlike SOME humans, oof—

“Alaka – UNGH” – Alakazam’s grip on Gary was crushing – ! Blastoise pushed Brock up against the wall. Nidoking let go of Nurse Joy, still moving as if strings controlled her every movement—

Do something Gardevoir! You went super sayian! Don’t let it be for nothing! Oh? Oh~? Realizing now that I have you beat at every corner?! AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA –

Gardevoir focused their might, their psychic power, their thoughts, their energy, their aura reaching through the same depths that Audino once plunged, and honed in on Delphox’s transmission through the clouded wasteland of Dream World deepspace—

Eh—

*IT’S CALLED SOUL TRANSFER*, SALOPE! – AND I CAN DO A LITTLE MORE* – Gardevoir’s projection zeroed in on their aura, (*THUNDERBOLT*) AND FRIED THAT MOTHERFUCKER – *CASSE-TOI* –

GAUGH –

Real world time, Delphox’s left eye popped –

GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA –

Completely spent, Gardevoir dropped unconscious to the ground – the moment they hit the floor coinciding with the exact moment Ash’s Greninja and Zoroark burst through the window – !!!

YEAAAAAAAAAAAAAA (Gary’s voice here for reals) AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA SD I TOTALLY FORGOT YOU GUYS EXISTED SINCE WE LAST SAW OF GRENNINJA WAS TWO CHAPTERS AGO AND ZOROAK WAS JUST MENTIONED IN PASSING BUT WHOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO –

In a flash they scooped up Gary, Brock, and Gardevoir and busted out! Zip zooming, jumping, parkour, all the acrobats, around the cops’ fire from outside and busted out into an all out sprint to the city limits of Pewter –

GNARAUGH!!! You little shits – you can take their bodies, but their minds are MINE – I’LL CRACK THEM OPEN LIKE A GODDAMN EGG –

FUCK YOU DX –

Gary and Brock grabbed their heads as Delphox tried to force their way in, but a pink light flashing behind their eyelids and blocked the transmission –

WHAT???? HEY – HEY NO FAIR –

Gary blinked the sparkles and dots out of his eyes as his mind re-glued itself together (as best it could), but his heart felt broken beyond repair, his chest heavy as if a Donphan was sitting on it – his Audi, his sweet little darling dear Audi – !
Zoroark adjusted the translator around their neck as they ran, “We’re going to take you guys to the edge of the city, a massive beatdown is coming from the legends!”

“I HOPE SO!!” Brock blurted, “HOW DID THIS HAPPEN IN THE FIRST PLACE!? ALL OF OUR CAUTION, OUR PREPARATION” –

“This is the power of the Leader of the Onelings,” said Zoroark, their voice trembling, “They can make you second guess anything! They can make you feel powerless, useless, helpless, they can make you feel however they want you to feel! It’s all about control! Try not to be afraid! Help is coming! I know now, without a doubt, help is always there!”

Words that fell on deaf ears for Gary, his skin tingling where the flames that burned Audino away licked him.

What could he do? What could he really do? It all amounted to nothing. Everything, all of it, it all, amounted to nothing. The hole in his code widened –

_Gary don’t you dare give up – ! NOT NOW! NOT NOW! IF YOU FALL IN THERE WHO KNOWS HOW YOU’LL GET OUT –_

Ash felt something, far, far away….Something jolted him briefly out of this dark stupor….Sound was muted, muffled.

He was down so deep, too deep…he couldn’t see….he couldn’t move…but he tried –

*I can’t….I can’t give up….I’m, not…..going to let them control me, like this…. I’ve….I’ve….*

Ash could very much feel the restraints on him, he tried pulling against them again, he was stretched wide, so painful….*_It hurts…!*_

It felt like every time he pulled, he was being cut into, but if he didn’t free himself of this, if he didn’t fight with everything he had RIGHT NOW – *_Let go….Let go – OF ME – !! I am, NOT, going to die like this!!!*_

ASH!!!!

The connection!

ASH!! ASH CAN YOU HEAR ME??!!

Their connection?!?

WAKE UP!!

Ash tried to call back, but he couldn’t open his mouth – he was tied, he was all tied up by Heartstrings…! And not only that, he was tied to something, _someone…..this wasn’t…him…this feeling….the feeling was cold as ice – pained, confused, forgiving and warm –_

ASH!!!!!

Ash gasped –

_Missing something? 8)
Ash opened his eyes. He was in his Dream Home, the living room, but his Dream Home was being taken over by a dark crystal growth – he was tied up, in a more literal sense, he was propped up in a chair, all bound up with the strings, and set in the center of the living room. Off to the side was what looked like strange sound equipment made of the crystal (playing an odd set of orchestral strings), it was attached to a wall, among, other things, and propped up in display in the midst of all its mechanical workings was a strange high-tech looking container that had a single speck of light that flickered violently with tons of wires protruding from the device. (*Is...that my heart...? No...it's, something...else?*) Ash looked to all the wires coming from the strange container, they were seemingly hooked up to his Home, and, and....Ash's eyes followed their trail and saw they were connected to him –! Through the hole in his chest!

Behind the control board, was Delphox, looking right at Ash with one eye burning amber, the other, a hollow hole gushing, gushing black goo –

*Well, awake now are you? As you can see, I'm a little busy at the moment, so you'll have to give me a moment* – they went back to controlling the soundboard, which Ash could now see was heavily damaged by some sort of electrical interreference, the light in the container began to flicker and fade – *Oh nononononononoNONONONONONONONONO* – it went out. *UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUGH!!!*

*You...my heart, my Heartstrings*–

*A pipipipipip* –

*WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH ME?!?!?!*

*You see these big ears of mine? You don't need to yell* –

*This, this is my home – !!!*

*I am aware, sit still!* Delphox sent a bolt of pain to Ash, shocking him – but he wasn't backing down –

*THIS IS MY HOME!!!!*

*QUIT MOVING AROUND!!!!* Delphox sent more pain surging through Ash –

ASH!!! ASH!!!

*ENOUGH* –

Ash felt Delphox channel the pain bolt through their Hearstring, to the sound equipment – through the wires, then to Ash! Through the pain, Ash deduced his Heart, his core, his code – must be powering the crystal equipment! And his Heartstrings had him bound!

*Forgive me for losing my temper, but my eye exploded* –

*WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!*

*And my precious experiment is gone.*

*ANSWER ME!!*

*Again, big ears, you don't need to yell.*
Ash struggled to get out of his restraints, but no dice –

*You know I’m just amazed you didn’t get fried given, circumstances* –

**ASH!!**

**ASH CAN YOU HEAR US?!**

He could! Ash gasped, *I’m not the only one you have captured!*

*Well yes, we do have other guests, can you feel who they are? You sh* –

**LET THEM GO!!!!!!***

*If you want me to explain things then don’t interrupt!* Delphox flicked a finger and Ash felt his mouth zip up– *I am working up, a HUGE headache right now in conducting this big ass transmission! Talking will actually help me settle down, so, Ashy dear, allow me to enlighten you on the subject matter of Heartstrings– Yes the very things that are currently trying you down, the strings of light that was attached to your heart! You see there are *many* types of Heartstrings, family, friends, lovers, all connecting and intertwining that reinforces your social aspects and behaviors! They hook up to your heart, the core that has your code and some Heartstrings that are particularly strong can even prompt your heart to make new code! Isn’t that cool? I sewed my Heartstring into your heart! Your code! We now have a special connection <3 I mean since you have that hole and all, I thought I’d complete you! And guess what, your bio-code is the link between your soul and your body – love and being loved, oh, it can have profoooound effects on a person! Sooooooo, long story short, I am connected to your code and have configured your Dream Home, a type of projection of you really, into a kind of, let’s say broadcasting station, and I am using your influence to control other people because you’re just, so liked, I mean your light is so powerful it blinds people to their own* –

That’s all Ash needed to understand, and he was BEYOND outraged – Ash’s determination ripped his mouth open, surprising Delphox **How dare you – HOW DARE YOU – using my HEART, using my LOVE, using ME – to control people?!?!***

*Um….yes.*

**FUCK OFF** –

Delphox feigned shock, *You kiss your mother with that mouth?! Peace, you’re in perfectly good hands! Do you think I can do what I do without knowing well what I do?*

*You’re hurting me! You’re hurting innocent people!*

*Pain is a necessary component of life, if ANYONE should know that, it’s you.*

Ash snarled, if he is connected to this monster, then he should be able to send a frequency of his own right back! Ash bottled up his agonized emotions and shot the pain right back to Delphox, making them stumble – Delphox took it, righting themselves –

*Oh my! I am impressed! You catch on qui* –

This time Ash gathered up even more energy, despair, pain, *so much pain* – Delphox tried to counter, but his power *failed* –

*Oh poop* –
A bright bursting light erupted from Ash that sent Delphox flying out the front door (crashing through it really), and Ash was freed from the bindings! He fell off the chair to his knees and hands, but pushed himself up, wobbly, but he was up! He looked down on at his chest, hole still in him, bright strings loosely dangling from him – a bright glowing light prompted him to look up and he saw the sound equipment destroyed – and his heart floating above it! Ash only needed to reach out to draw his core back to him, the light stuffing itself inside of Ash, the strings hooking themselves up like magnets and Ash felt such a warmth, such a wave of relief as his chest closed up from exposed cold that sobs escaped him as he clutched his chest –

*Hello!?*

*ASH!!*

*ASH CAN YOU HEAR US?!*

He could hear them now, fully, feel them, trapped in his house, Ritchie, Misty, and Daisy! Ash stumbled forward and created a way to the basement, found the door locked tight with that dark crystal mess, but the moment he touched it, the dark crystals disappeared and he pulled the door open – finding all three of them captured – no, four – his mother - she was unconscious!!

*Guys!!*

*Oh Ash – !*

*I’m getting you out of here, hang on!* Ash worked to free his poor mother –

*No need.* Delphox suddenly appeared in the doorway, both eye sockets, RED – *You’re in no shape to fight young man. Strong as you are, you have limits. Everyone, has, limits. But sure, let’s take this outside.*

Delphox snapped their fingers, and Ash’s home opened up, the architectures twisting and contorting itself all about – Ash grabbed his chest, bending over –

*ASH* –

The string between Ash and Delphox flickered into sight, the Light Burst didn’t sever it, they were still connected through Delphox’s Heartstring!

Ash fought back – *STOP USING ME!!* Another bright powerful flash of light sent Delphox flying, but they caught themselves in mid-air, hovering with their powers – Ritchie, Misty, and Daisy were freed of the crystal from the attack and hurried to Ash’s side (Daisy carrying Ash’s mother, Misty helping Ritchie walk/stumble, he could barely move!) – all Ash could think about was how much he wanted to protect them – and like magic – a circular translucent barrier encapsulated them all – Ash fighting through an ache seeping into his ‘body’ –

Delphox smirked, *You’re powers within the Dream World are outstanding, I give you that Ash Ketchum, unfortunately, flash is all you have right now!*

*WRONG – !*

A Shadow Ball* and two Moonblasts* smacked Delphox from behind, Delphox turned with a genuine look of surprise – and there was Mismagius, Clefable, and Sylveon!

*He’s got us too!*
Ash was never happier to see them – how they got there he could only guess! But that Sylveon – !!!
Ash gasped –

Delphox snarled and yanked Ash to him while he was distracted via their Heartstring, summoning him like a rapidly recoiling line of wire, depleting his barrier in the process –

*ASH!!* He may as well have phased through the group’s attempt to grab him –

Mismagius zipped over to him, using their power to pull Ash back – and a tug o’ war ensued with Clefable using Psychic* along with Sylveon, all trying to pull Ash back as he hung in mid-air –

*Ungh* –

*HA~! This is all so cute, but~ Even though you’re together, you still only have yourselves~
(*ahem~*) Delphox waved his hand out, *I need more power my batteries~!*

(*BA-BUMP*)

Misty, and Daisy fell to their knees, Ritchie out right collapsing near Ms. Ketchum’s lifeless body - the pokemon could see that Delphox was siphoning their auras from them somehow!

Ash couldn’t see what was happening to his friends, but he could hear them in agony – *LEAVE THEM ALONE!!!*

Delphox sensed another Burst* building up in Ash, but smiled upon feeling Ash’s fatigue growing faster –

Mismagius let go of Ash and catapulted themselves at Delphox, coating themselves in Shadow Ball* and Power Gem* but Delphox waved their hand again and captured them in a barrier of their own, dropping Mismagius to the ground – *RRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR* – Delphox captured Clefable and Sylveon the same way – leaving Ash to get pulled up to Delphox’s claws –

*You all are too limited by reality! Come now, this is the Dream World! At least try to make it a challenge~! Think outside the box~!* Ash got in a sucker punch to Delphox’s jaw – *AUGH –!* The Trainer kicked and hit and bit and put up all the fight he could but was promptly subdued by Delphox’s power, by their aura, and intermingled in it, Ash could feel Ritchie, Misty, Daisy – his mother – all being used against their will!

And Ash felt it, an anger, a rage, unlike anything, anything, he had ever, ever, EVER felt before –

THAT’S IT ASH – USE IT – !!!

Delphox blinked, *Oh, my* – the resounding flash of light went off like a bomb. Ash was dropped, he landed on his hands and knees, the resounding sound of the explosion echoing out all throughout the Dream World until everything was quiet.

Ash looked all about, seemingly alone, *Guys? Are you* – he gasped – his Dream Home looked like a tornado had run through it – Clefable, Mismagius, Sylveon, they were all out of Delphox’s capture barrier, but were lying unconscious, all thrown yards and yards away – Ritchie, Misty, Daisy – and his mother – all were unconscious too, thrown about like rag dolls – they were not spared from the blast –!

*No…. no – no – NO –!* Ash ran to his mother’s side, *Mom, momma, mom wake up – Ritchie! Misty! D-Daisy – !!!*
No one responded.

*Ah yes…whooooo!...I remember her first outburst. Very, very, much the same (*COUGH*).*

Ash whipped around to see Delphox, standing a little distance away, but the Heartstring between them and Ash was still very much connected.

*Untrained. Anger is powerful sweet boy, but it does not discriminate in its damage. You are harboring what I consider to be a nuke in the making – it takes years to master it effectively enough so as to not sweep up innocent bystanders when it goes off.*

Ash heard signs of life, and saw Daisy pushing herself up! She coughed, *Good GOD Ash, (*COUGH*) now I know why Gary fell so hard for you, you match him in intensity* –

*DAISY!*  

*Oh haven’t we all had enough of your mouth?* Delphox snapped their fingers and Daisy’s mouth disappeared, her cursing muffled cries sealed behind a solid stretch of skin –

*STOP IT,* Ash screamed –

*You can’t protect them from everything my dear, you just have to accept that! I’ve entertained you for now, but you are really starting to get out of hand* –

*You’re the cause of all this,* Ash growled, hot, stinging tears streaming down his face –

*Me? I didn’t explode them half to kingdom come! That was your reckless display! Right Daisy?* Delphox moved their finger up and down making Daisy nod her head via their powers *See~?*

*ENOUGH! Just leave them ALONE* –

Delphox could sense the light building up in Ash again – *HA! Fire another attack~ I dare you~! See what happens next! How much more do you think your poor mother can take?! I felt the depths of her soul, she has worked herself to the bone, all her life! And Ash, such is your destiny. Beaten, falling apart before the age of 45! If you don’t think she feels guilty about instilling that work ethic in you, think again! An-ughump* –

Now Delphox’s mouth disappeared courtesy of Ash, Daisy clapping very enthusiastically behind him.

Delphox put their hands on their hips and sighed through their nose. *So, you want to be difficult?*

Ash and Daisy looked about to see where that voice was coming from – Daisy pointed frantically overhead – above them, was a giant grinning sharp-toothed mouth!

Ash tried to conjure something for protection, but nothing happened – the fatigue was settling in further –

*As stated before, you’re untrained. This might be the Dream World where empyreal imaginings are given corporeal machinations, but that doesn’t change the fact that you are a projection of your mind, and horrifyingly enough, what’s in your head here, can have very, very, VERY real consequences out there.*

Ash was panting, his limbs were shaking –
And yet, despite your short-comings, the mouth was getting closer – Hmp~ Ash and Daisy could see the shine of the teeth, You still a fresh as heck snack – AHAHAHAHAHAHAHA – a long tongue whipped out and grabbed Ash around his middle – Daisy tried to pull him back but her mere strength was no match for a conjured machination and Ash was ripped away and sucked into the mouth – (*CHOMP*) –

ASH!!!

Part of Ash’s Dream Home tumbled down in response, Daisy’s head pivoting back and forth between Delphox and the Dream Home until Delphox disappeared, blowing a kiss to Daisy as they poofed out.

*Dangit…this is not good…* came a soft disheveled voice –

Daisy looked about, and saw Sylveon pushing themselves up! Sylveon shook themselves right and faced Daisy – *Daisy! I’ll tend to everyone here, you get a start on getting Ash’s Home back in order!*

Daisy -> ?????????

A shingle fell off the roof.

Daisy signed as best she could to try to communicate to Sylveon, but Sylveon swiped their ribbon tendril over Daisy’s face and gave her mouth back, *Ah, thank-you!*

*Don’t mention it :3c*

*What do you mean by fixing Ash’s Home up?!!*

Sylveon began treated Ms. Ketchum, *Dream Homes are made of a person’s essence, what defines them, it’ll help us call out to Ash* –

*I only know Ash via what Gary says about him! I can’t make those kind of intimate decisions! Ritchie and Misty should – or if ANYONE, his mother!*

*Just try to get in the basic ball park! Whatever doesn’t stick will simply fall apart in the Home, we have to fix Ash’s Dream Home up if we ever hope to call him back from where Delphox took him!*

*And where is that?!*

This is strange.

Ash looked all around, there was nothing but darkness, and a heartbeat, yet he was floating as if he was underwater, he could breathe, he could feel the subtle tug and push of the water’s weight, but none of it was threatening, it was almost like a cradle, and Ash was feeling oddly calm. No anger, no terror, no anxiety, no doubt, no insecurity, no torment, no sadness, there was just…..

Peace
*What…is this place…?*

*Hmp.* Delphox’s disembodied voice emerged from the abyss, *An even deeper nexus better known as…A Darker Place.*

Ash watched a bubble from his mouth float up and away above him into the darkness, he himself seemed to be giving off a light.

*Ah….*

*Now, let’s take a deeeeeep breath~ We had some emotions run high, got a little volatile, on all sides, so let’s take a moment to re-center, and re-focus where our energies belong~*

*And, where is that?*

*With you of course! I was wrong about you Ash. I can full-stop admit that. I knew you were strong, so strong, even in your weakened state, that I would have to break past the limitations of my own power to reach you after everything that’s happened to you.*

*What is it that you need of me?*

*I need you to see the truth. Especially about yourself. I see a kindred soul in you, so I want to help you, I want to free you! I was so desperate to reach you that, I maaaaaaay have, overreacted in my attempts to, let’s say, possess you.*

Ash cocked his head. *I have a hard time believing that. I didn’t forget what just happened, I, just feel…*

*At peace?*

*I guess you could describe it like that. Still, to be honest I really, super don’t like you. I know I should be angry at you, but, I don’t feel angry, at all, like….I can’t feel angry….*

*Good. You know I’m not the easiest to get along with, but you? You’ll give anyone a chance and just welcome them right in! You might as well be a revolving door!*

*Heard it before.*

*I’m sure you have, again, and again, and a g a i n – but, it’s not quite sinking in yet, isn’t it? Let’s go deeper~*

Ash felt himself descend, but there was no pressure upon him, no pain, no discomfort, not even a tickle in the back of his stomach, he could breathe so easily, and the water felt so soothing, and a fleeting this is nice, crossed his mind.

Chapter End Notes

Remember when I thought ch 10 was going to be the penultimate/ CLIMAX chapter?
8'D It is, it still is, so I guess this the, second climax? I dunno, my writing gets out of hand y'all, if I had a Beta, I'm sure they would die .-

WELP 83

Here's to 2019~! More updates! God willing! PLEASE GOD, I ASK FOR SO LITTLE, STOP SHITTING ON MEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE DX

PS. Remember who are you are Ash and Gary ;;w;; Poor bbies.

3/2/19 For the characters that bit the dust this time around, oof, gomen ._. I know what you're thinking, but this story will still have a happy ending, hang in there, Delphox isn't going down easy but we've got peeps up to the challenge, and Ash is going to give them a piece of his mind >:3c
Meltdown: Part 3

Chapter Summary

Burn. Be it with passion, anger, faith, vengeance, just, burn.

Chapter Notes

EDIT: Please let me know how you're faring with this story, I know it's heavy because of the issues it deals with, and it seems there's no end to the nightmare, but there is. I'd rather know someone is upset with something placed in here and address it/fix it up rather than making someone sick and disappointed in something they were looking forward to and just leaving it as such.-.

And to further clarify, I'm not going to put a quota or something like before I update, no, I've never done that, I just want to see where I stand with y'all if I'm upsetting you guys more than entertaining you...I haven't led you down this story for over four years to give you guys a terrible ending, nah-ah, hells no, we ending on rainbows =w=b

-----------------------------------------------------

*Crawls from the fucking abyss.* March sure was something wasn't it? What a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad month! Well now it's time for Meltdown to begin to wrap up and this is how this is going to work, Meltdown Part 3 will be abouuuuuut 75 + pages, I know I'm sorry - but to post all at once what's gonna happen, because it is aLOT, methinks it'll be better to post it in sections of roughly 25-30 pages (and I keep my promise of updated more, yay!), so Meltdown Part 3 will be updated about three times as the sections are finalized, and I will update when the chapter has been updated on my twitter, which is just twitter.com/SilentAvera

Now, if you're coming back from when the last chapter was posted, I have added 30 pages to Meltdown Part 2 sometime in early March, so please catch yourself up over there or you're going to be very lost for this part OwO;;; scroll past me yelling at the EU on the past chap for instructions on how to proceed =w=b

ALRIGHT! So I've been knocked down quite a bit, but dammit, resist! Resolve! And Write! This story won't finish itself, only I can do that! And goddammit, I WILL DO IT!!!!!!! I've come this far! Fuck all who want to destroy happiness!!! (but like minus me for Meltdown Part 3 omg I know I sound like a broken record but this story will have a happy ending for our boys, I promise, I promise!)

LET THIS TRAIN WRECK OF A STORY AND/ OR RELATIONSHIP CONTINUE~!!!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Misty groaned, hand to her temple, she walked up the steps of Ash’s Dream Home to her dedicated room, "Oooh, my phantasm corporeal head…." at least she can put that in order. Her door was blue,
water themed of course, opening the door caused it to fall off its hinges unfortunately, and the rest of her room wasn’t in much better shape, but she could spot precious details of her former life with Ash, pictures, mementos, *oh*, the lure she gave him –

*Ash likes food!* Clefable chirped, running all about, *I’ll have this place smelling like the Boutary Strip in Lumiose City!!!* Oh – *Ritchie!* Ash likes singing doesn’t he?! *Start singing!* OH – what’s his favorite song? I’ll sing with you! *You must know his favorite food?!!*

*Oh my god Clefable STOP!* Daisy yelled as she cleaned out debris, *Only work on what you KNOW will help Ash, and chaos, IS NOT ONE OF THEM!!*

*Neither is a temper,* said Ritchie, *Just, stay calm.* His own hands were shaking as he worked feverishly to get the windows nice and pretty, conjuring forth Ash’s favorite color of curtains; Sylveon had brought his strength up just enough for him to be in working order.

Clefable’s muffled voice came from the depths of the home – *Oh my GOSH this room is JUST for Bergmite?!* No, Avalugg – *OH and Sylveon – Nidoran – Rattata, Pidgey – QUICK SOMEONE TOSS ME A THEME – WHAT THEME MATCHES THESE PO* –

*CLEFABLE!!!! D8<!!!!!!!* Daisy screeched –

*THERE’S ANOTHER ROOM WITH MORE* –

*A Dream Home generates rooms as needed,* said Sylveon, *it’s space within is infinite, it just goes deeper and deeper into one’s psyche.* They sighed through their nose and looked to Ritchie working as stable as he could, *How are you doing Ritchie?*

*I’m up and running, I’ll be okay* –

*Mh. I’m so glad you got the hang of creation so quickly* –

*I’m an expert Dreamer, heh* –

Meanwhile, Mismagius continued to heal up Ms. Ketchum with Sylveon –

*Any progress?* Daisy asked.

*Very little,* Sylveon responded, *We’re trying to call her back, but she’s *so weak*, Delphox took so much of her that she barely has any life left!*

*They could have used me instead!!* Daisy chucked a trash bag load of mess out the front door – *I could have given that demon HEARTBURN at least! UGH! Is getting this House back in order really the best thing we can do?! I feel we should go after that beast, who know what they’re doing to Ash!! *He can’t take much more!!*

Ritchie tried to keep himself even –

Mismagius looked up, *You guys ever see the movie Inception? It made the case that the deeper you go into the Dream World, the harder it is to maintain your sanity – that’s actually quite accurate! It’s okay to venture out on the surface level, but even then, you can still get lost and wander deeper on accident – so Ash’s Dream Home is going to keep us safe here – it’s why Delphox took it over! It tethers you to the surface, keeps your mentality afloat!*

Sylveon nodded, *But it seems Delphox got desperate and took Ash into a very dangerous part of the Dream World to get into his heart and manipulate him,* their look turned dire serious, *We
cannot follow them unfortunately, none of us here is strong enough to punch through the layers, even if we worked together, we’d get stuck! The reason Delphox was able to do what they did is by sucking from you all of your auras – they’re using that energy to power themselves – and I noticed they focused on draining Ritchie’s aura and Ms. Ketchum’s because of how easy it was to twist their aura around Ash – there were easy weaknesses to find you two’s auras I’m afraid - there’s a method to this madness, and it’s all about weaponizing this energy against Ash* –

Ritchie was stunned, *Weaponize how?!* 

*This might seem silly, but it’s the power of suggestion, the ability to define your reality via a mental perception, and it helps if you have the feeling of something familiar, or someone you trust immensely. Delphox found a back door.*

*That, is not silly at all* said Daisy –

*That’s terrifying in fact* said Ritchie –

*So Delphox is going to use all this aura power, to help them brainwash Ash?*!

*More or less,* said Sylveon, *Delphox literally sewed their Heartstring into Ash’s own heart* –

Everyone gasped –

–*and by channeling the emotions of people he cares about so much - from all of you…I’m afraid Delphox will use that to exploit the hole in Ash’s code – and if they infect Ash enough – they will be free to rewrite his code as they see fit! Code cut to their heart’s content! They’re leaving no stone unturned to have Ash under their complete and total control* –

*WHY?!* Ritchie screamed out, *WHAT DO THEY WANT ASH FOR?!*

*The main intent I felt was that Delphox is in need of strong humans with unique auras they can use for nefarious means. People like Ash with such bright auras can in turn help pokemon become stronger from their souls. Affinity Evolution, Mega Evolution, Z-moves, these are all ways of how humans can channel their strength, their very aura to their pokemon, and with Heartstrings, Health Transfer – the works – in short, we are all emissaries of energy that flows through all living things fueled by our passions, our goals, our love, our will to live. Ash has an insanely powerful aura, even though he has been struggling with mental illness, his light is bright and strong enough that it attracted the likes of monsters such as Delphox, and they have several goals in mind, but of the most horrific is trapping people within their cult to conduct experiments on, ultimately to create – whatever demon they’re set upon unleashing unto the world! Of Delphox’s work, Lisa is one of their more finer creations….She was born a human, but became a Froslass by Delphox’s manipulations – and then, in the height of her misery, she evolved with her dark emotions via Nega Evolution* –

*That needs a better name…*

*It may seem Lisa accomplished all that on her own, but may I remind you all that she had Ash’s aura within her due to eating his essence via Draining Kiss*. She evolved with their combined misery. It is no secret that for all the power we pokemon have, our strength is honed and amplified with human interaction – if we ever hope to achieve a strength beyond our limits, working together with humans is a surefire way of accomplishing that. The power transmitted through our bonds, through Heartstrings, through our love and affection creates a power that is nothing short of awe inspiring.*

Daisy crinkled her nose, *So, Delphox is attempting to cut out the middle man then? Somehow?
Regardless that strength can still be reached individually, having someone there with you just speeds up the process* –

Mismagius looked to Daisy, *You haven’t been loved very much, have you Daisy?*

She gawked at that, *I have very much been loved! Having bonds is great okay but you should never count out what you can create on your own!* *

*I don’t dismiss that, at all,* said Sylveon, *but you also cannot dismiss how the bonds between us give us strength when perhaps there is none we have on reserve.* *

*I’m sorry Daisy,* said Mismaguis, *I’m just stressed, I didn’t mean it.* *

*I’m stressed too - but you don’t see me harping how a GHOST pokemon could ever HELP* - *

*Okay, okay, please stop,* said Sylveon, *We have to be focused* -

Ritchie’s chest was tight, *When we gave our testimony to the police, what Brock and Tracey had to say of Espeon’s information really stuck with me. Espeon was totally drinking all the coolaid of the Oneling cult, they said they ‘helped’ people by, by somehow making them filter out their ‘One True Emotion’, so if they’re looking for people with unique auras….say like auras that can channel energy efficiently, or emotions, like Health Transfer, Z-moves – but now you’re compacting that…..and getting the human to transform into a pokemon….that’s not to say the newly transformed pokemon couldn’t also form a bond with someone else to increase their power even more….Say like, to an occult leader that promises you safety, understanding, compassion that you probably never had before….when you only have one emotion to declare, I’d imagine controlling someone would be awfully easy, you’d only have to play a fraction of the symphony of interests that retains their attention…..but just imagine the power you’d be able to unleash….focusing all of that concentrated aura, your soul through a single outlet – imagine what Delphox could do if their cult was nothing but a talent search to gather marginalized, vulnerable people and turning them into an army of rabid stone-hearted pokemon who are all completely at Delphox’s mercy and control…* *

An image of Delphox using their flame stick wand as a conductor’s baton to facilitate an orchestra of emotionally manipulated transformed zombies sent an outright chill to everyone in ear shot.

*These series of attacks, this stress, has the potential to reduce those at risk to behaviors they utilize to cope with such times of duress…slip in through the uncertainty, fear, anxiety, anything that pushes that person to lose themselves, what they give in to – I’d imagine it’d be easier with negative emotions in the first place…* *

Daisy had trouble finding the words to amount her disgust, *That….that’s fucking insane…* *

*When you’re someone as insane as Delphox it makes perfect sense,* said Sylveon.

Daisy stomped her foot, *But Delphox is a pokemon themselves! So…..so…they’d need a human…they’d need a human….who could connect…with anyone….* Her hands went over her mouth.

Ritchie was drowning in this information….he grasped his chest, something in there hurt – and this horrid news was NOT helping – he knew Sylveon did their best to get him up and running, considering the amount of energy they used on him, as poor Ms. Ketchum just wasn’t coming around….in terms of priority rescuing, there are no easy decisions, only regret that you can’t do more…*How, how are they going to save Ash this time?!*

There came the sound of unpleasant movement from behind Ritchie’s door.
*We’re going to get Ash back,* said Mismagius, *That is a certainty, not a possibility – everyone, just continue to do all you can to restore Ash’s Home! We’ll think of something! We’re not the only ones fighting here, Ash is fighting too!*  

*To stand up to Delphox, Ash will need immeasurable strength,* said Sylveon –  

*Do you know who Ash is?!* said Ritchie, busting himself out of despair and into action – he moved onto the couch, calling forth stuffed pokedolls of Ash’s pokemon, *Strength is his middle name! Ash will come back, he has to come back and he knows it!!*  

From around Ritchie’s cherry blossom door, a couple of blooms twisted out, the door creaked slightly, the groan of branches brushing against the door frame alerted Ritchie to try to stay focused and calm.  

*He will need help,* said Sylveon, *I just pray we’re enough, Ash must start the fight from inside, see through Delphox’s deception, lies…Espeon tried to outright transform him, but Delphox has a better use for Ash, and is trying, something far more sinister….*  

Ash, floating in the abyss, watched another bubble from his mouth float up and away into the darkness.  

*Let’s take a look at you Ash, you have had, quite the interesting life~*  

*I guess…*  

A pinpoint of light underneath Ash spread forth like a display screen, beginning with images, memories from when he was a baby, suckling on a bottle, laughing with his mother, a toddler, walking, running, his mother chasing him, playing with him outside, flowers, so many flowers, some in his hair, now 4 years old, helping mother around the house, sweeping – oh no not there! – Helping putting up dishes and plates from momma’s Pallet House restaurant –  

*You were always a good, kindhearted, and helpful child. Your mother raised you well she did. Everyone who knew you considered themselves blessed to have witnessed what could truly be called the innocence of youth….Look at how happy you were, you’re smiling in every instance….! And laughing in every other…!*  

Next showed Ash being introduced to Gary, Ash being, just a bit more enthusiastic about it all – the scenes still moved normally, but to Ash, every frame with Gary in them slowed.  

*That pout, wow, he still has that same pout, after all these years….*  

More scenes showed Ash, Gary, and his mother altogether venturing in the forest, spotting wild pokemon, Ash playing with them in the yard –  

*I remember those baby pokemon, we became such good friends that they would wait for me in the backyard to come out and play and my mom would feed us all this huge lunch!*  

*Hehehe, you think Gary might have been a little jealous those babies would take your attention away from him? How cute <3*  

A particularly fond memory played was Ash leading Gary and his band of wild pokemon babies into a forest clearing with the prettiest flower patch ever!
That kind of heart attracts pokemon like a Venomoth to a flame. There wasn’t a single creature in the forests that didn’t know your sweet, sweet nature…*

Ash was struggling to make a flower crown, but Gary just plucked the flowers off the branch and put them all in Ash’s hair – Ash jumped up and down and hugged Gary, and, tiny Gary blushed.

*Awwwwwww~! But as the seasons come and go, the winds of change blow~*

They got a little older, and Gary got swept up in his parents’ dealings, the better, uppity side of society, no time for outdoors, and dirt, and began to turn his nose up at Ash, and Ash, confused, showed for the first time, a frown.

*Ouch, it starts young it does, but what can you expect? You couldn’t offer him anything worthwhile anymore. At least you still had the forest pokemon to play with~ Until one, terrible day….*

Ash was playing in the forest with his pokemon friends when a deep, low, growl came from a dark patch of bushes – the pokemon instinctively ran away, but Ash, didn’t – and he was suddenly face to face with a very, angry, hungry Houndoom. They had scars all over their body, markings on their neck in the pattern of a chain –

*You were frozen on the spot, you couldn’t move, that Houndoom’s eyes burned into you, seemingly melting your feet in place* –

Young Ash was trembling from head to toe, and his mouth formed two wobbly phonemes, “Gah-rie” –

The Houndoom inhaled, lungs catching fire with Flamethrower – but before they attacked – a Rattata Quick Attacked the Houndoom in the face, breaking their focus, a Bellsprout whipped their legs out from under them, and a Pidgey blew a Sand Attack into their eyes – a Nidoran bit Ash’s shirt and got him to move, to run with them, and guided Ash to safety before turning back to help the other baby pokemon against the Houndoom.

*You ran to your mother and told her what happened – you screamed and cried that the baby pokemon needed help! Once your mother made sure you weren’t hurt, she gathered a couple volunteers from her restaurant and went into the forest to find the baby pokemon. She was gone such a long time, and no one could get you to stop crying. When she returned that evening, you ran into her arms, and she held you so close….From that day forward, the pokemon that waited for you to play with them, never returned. It hurt, so much, first Gary left you, then the baby pokemon, but your remarkable mother took you out into the yard, made a garden, and you two planted flower seeds all day, and she told you*

*Ash, sweetheart, do you remember watching the movie with the Deerling named Bambi and the Sawsbuck known as the Great Prince of the Forest?*

*'Yes.*

*'Do you remember the dream Bambi had about his mother?*

*'Yes.*

*'What did she say?*

*'E-Everything, in the forest, has, it’s, seasons, where one thing falls, a-another, grows, mmmmmmmaybe not what was there, like before, but something new, and, wonderful, all the same.'*
*That’s right. These seeds we are planting Ash, are going to grow into beautiful flowers. We are bringing beauty into the world by helping something else grow. This plot of dirt is going to become a flower bed. The sun will rise, warming it, and set, leaving it to rest. The sky is constantly moving as the earth turns. Nothing ever stays the same, even when you think it does. Things in our lives will change, friends will come, and friends will go, but never forget that you will always, always, have the memory of what was, and the imagination of what will be.*

*From then on,* said Delphox, *you decided you were going to change, and you were going to be someone who was brave, no matter what. You were going to fight alongside just as brave pokemon, you were going to become someone who could always save the day.*

Then Ash was ten, and getting ready to start his pokemon journey to fulfill his dream of becoming a Pokemon Master.

*With you and Gary as fresh new Trainers, your rivalry began. If you couldn’t offer friendship, you sure as hell could offer him a challenge. Both of you still just children with wildly different frames of reference despite growing up, what, blocks from each other? It’s amazing how the environment you’re raised in can mold you, but now was the time to truly find your place in the world! At the age of 10! Can’t see how that could backfire! Following in your father’s footsteps before you, you set out! With one, very stubborn Pikachu I might add– But first, a token of a fractured past, and a promise of a destined future….*

The scene played when Ash and Gary received their split pokeball parts.

Ash remembered, *Oh…..It’s gone now….It…got lost in the ruckus with the hospital take-over.*

*Pity, but you’ll always have the memory, moving on!*

The memories of the Kanto League played on fast-forward.

*Speaking of something new and wonderful, (*COUGH*) Misty and Brock came into your life, future dear, dear BFF’s, you three, four really with Pikachu, had so many adventures together, pestered by the ever troublesome Team Rocket, always trying to get your little furry friend, but you all sent them blasting off aaaaaaaaaaaaa--in! Every time! Focused on your dream, here, you really cared about your needs, your confidence was never higher I dare say, you thought you could do anything, overcome any obstacle! Sure, you might have been a little obnoxious, hotheaded, stubborn, but hey! A bump in the road here and there kept you in line, and you never once crossed the threshold of being outright selfish…..sometimes – you had places to go! People to see! Sometimes even running right off a cliff in your efforts! You had quite the adventure streak for sure! Traits you carry with you to this day! Not to mention a knack for getting into life-threatening situations one after another, after another, after, ANOTHER! Anywho, it was nice to have friends tagging along, and lord knows you could use an audience to witness you whip Gary’s butt – you learned so much, so fast, and you felt every emotion, the gamut, elation, disappointment, bitterness, regret, surprise, joy, anger, disgust – EUGTH! Who eats rock covered candy?! You’ll try anything once!*

*I still remember that tooth ache too, but Misty and Brock fixed me right up!*

*True. You grew and trained, and together with your friends, all of your friends, you made it to the Indigo Plateau Conference* – the frame rate of the display came back to normal upon reaching the Gates that beckoned every Trainer from every corner of Kanto, opening, Ash’s heart felt just as it did when he first set foot there, a Trainer of only 10, on equal ground with those years older than he.

*These are the same steps Red and Blue passed themselves, that you now had earned the right to traverse yourself, and here was also the first time you would come face to face with, a Moltres. The
pure essence of their flames saving you and your friends from Team Rocket just in time for the conclusion of the Opening Ceremonies! At least you had some experience what the fire of Moltres can really do.*

And then there was Gary.

And, another boy –

*Oh Ritchie, sweet Ritchie….You two became fast, fast friends, and then, lo, it would be he that would be the first to really pump the brakes on your dreams of becoming a Pokemon Master, and it wouldn’t be the last time he interfered with you in such a way, mh, we’ll come back to that later….*

Ash remembered how disappointed in himself he was…and how he felt……so bad.

*Sure you moped, but there was more for you to experience, you pushed yourself back up. Why, one second you’re brushing off the regret, the next, you’re out on an errand to get some GS ball for Professor Oak, and your journey in the Orange Islands began! Hello Tracey! Goodbye Tracey! You know, looking back on it now, brief as it was, I mean in the span of your life, you did have SO MUCH FUN in the Orange Islands – looking back on it now, that was the pick-me-up you needed, you actually won the Orange League! In spite of your ‘friends’ you know, having other needs and using you as a vehicle for said needs, kudos to you for still achieving a goal in the company of vampires* –

*Vampires? Seriously?*

*Tracey just wanted to meet Professor Oak, and Misty, well, I mean that speaks for itself, you still owed her a bike mister! She can hold a grudge!*

*We traveled together because we wanted to, we liked each other enough to help each other achieve a goal we wanted.*

*And the Lifetime channel shows Christmas movies in the summer – NEXT, was Johto, and Brock, after making a fool of himself, needed you to throw him into another whirlwind adventure to help him get his groove back, and Misty, well, you know…(*AHEM*) You would bump into Gary every now and then, and was it just me, or was Gary just, EXTRA? The cape?! Really, really.*

Ash chuckled, *I secretly thought he looked so cool.*

*Now Johto was where you began to, let’s say, gave some pause to your needs. Of course it is naturally the duty of a Trainer to care for the needs of their pokemon, as you always showed the kindness stored in your heart since you were a wee toddler, and so Legends….the Gods of our world, began to turn a studious eye to you…In the Orange Islands you met incarnations of the Legendary Birds, Moltres, Articuno and Zapdos, even Lugia – the Beast of the Sea, and before that, you met the infamous Mew and Mewtwo, and, it was nice of Mewtwo to have finally given your memories back of that trite world domination incident they manufactured no?*

*Sure, like ten years later,* Ash muttered, *But they were sorry, so I forgave them.*

*Is that all it takes to rescue a relationship in your mind? A single apology?*

*A heartfelt apology, I mean nobody is perfect.*

*What about me?*

*You suck, even I have to draw a line somewhere.*
*I’ll concede~ Moving on~ Come the Silver Conference, that would provide an important turning point in your life, your battle against Gary was one of the most exciting logged in the history books, you would emerge the victor, and Gary, rightfully put in his place, saw you once again as an equal… You did something for Gary he would never be able to repay you for, you gave him clarity of his future, you shared with him the gleaming dawn that always beckoned yourself forward, and set him on the path to become the world renowned scientist he is today.*

Ash watched him and Gary part ways after the Silver Conference….Despite knowing he’d see Gary again through the years, and become his boyfriend as an adult, watching Gary leave made him feel….

*And then you parted ways with Misty and Brock….That was hard wasn’t it? Once again, your precious friends had to leave you…And you really, really….loved them, they had become as family! But your needs, no longer aligned, there was no…purpose for you in their lives, you longed for them, and if venturing with them just one more time meant putting your dream of becoming a Pokemon Master a little further down the road, you’d be willing to make that sacrifice. The more you expanded your world Ash Ketchum, the larger your heart grew, unfortunately, its growth rate may have had a little trouble keeping up with all you wanted to store in there…So thankfully, in your eyes, your split with Brock wasn’t that long, honestly that young man needs a compass for how many times he backtracks, and he went with you to Hoenn. Doctors are not a boxed market at least~*

*Sometimes I think becoming a Pokemon Doctor is as hard as becoming a Pokemon Master* –

*Oh yes, it’s a lot to learn, but Brock does have a day job of being the Pewter City Gym Leader to fuel his ultimate goal. Out of the three of you, you, Brock, and Misty, Misty is the one living her best life, achieving her dream job, and relationship, you served her well you did <3. How you and she turned out in your mid-twenties are night and day, tsk, tsk, tsk – *

*She’s my friend, I’ll do whatever I can for her.*

(*SIGH*) Dear oh dear, moving on~ Now, as much as I’d LOVE to go through every venture of your life, we can begin summing up the parts of your whole as such, because you know what you’ve gone through, you don’t need me babbling on and on about it, however, as you are now, you’ve lost sight of something very important. You’ve felt you’ve been missing something, correct?*

*Yeah, I have.*

*Let’s take a look~*

The display made itself into a split screen, showing further adventures of younger Ash on the left, with the right side showing him on his journey as an adult.

*How would you compare yourself now as opposed to when you were a child?*

*It looks like, I, smiled, a bit more.*

*Oh very much more….you hadn’t developed, the illness, yet, so, looking back on your youth now makes you feel…?*

The bliss that had enveloped Ash gave way slightly.

*It makes me feel kinda sad.*

*Yes. You may not think so, but you sacrificed so much Ash. Grant it, look what you did manage to
accompany before it all went downhill, for every loss you had in a League as a child, you moved up in rank, in adolescence, your reputation for exciting and daring battles began to give you esteem, more and more League Officials noticed you, more and more Legendary Pokemon came to you with admiration and acknowledgment of your accomplishments to aid them in keeping the peace, altogether, people and pokemon alike that knew you as a child only accelerated your celebrity status by recommending your talents. You still had some time before becoming an ‘official adult’ but you had experienced so much in your life, many treated you with the maturity they projected onto you, some surprised when you showed your naive playful side, but, it was welcomed. Many noted you an ‘unofficial’ Champion on your merits alone, however, having a title to add to your Master’s Candidacy was needed…..At the age of 17, you entered the Indigo Conference once again, it was like a coming home party for you, for by then, in Kanto you were a household name, you soared through the rounds, everyone on the tips of their toes, jumping up and down, would this be it?! Would this be it?! You kept winning! WOULD THIS BE IT?????! – When Pikachu dodged Dragonite’s Dragon Claw attack and BOLTED it with Volt Tackle – Pikachu landed on their feet – but the dragon fell – unable to battle – ASH KETHCUM AND HIS AMAZING TEAM WON THE INDIGO LEAGUE! 8D!!!*

There was so much confetti being pumped through the stadium that it was like a blizzard, the cameras barely captured Pikachu leaping into Ash’s arms, Ash holding his buddy, dropping to his knees in tears, then all his pokemon popped out of their pokeballs jumping everywhere, screaming in delight at the top of their lungs, everyone glomping Ash and falling over in a pile of happy, happy sobs, and then getting up and jumping around again! That scene was in juxtaposition with Ash winning another League as an adult, a smile, waving to the crowds with his pokemon, reserved, mature, but the joy in their expressions would never betray their gratitude for the accomplishment.

*It was said the entire world heard Kanto cheering all night long, what a feeling, what a moment, your first League win, your title as the Kanto League Champion cementing you in the books, it’s an elation you many never again experience in your life, but one you will never forget, not even as you are now. You had the entire region of Kanto lifting you to the stars, and the world at your fingertips – and then, Lance retired, like literally the next day saying that the future of Kanto was in good hands, wink wink, nudge nudge, you Ash, he meant you – and despite everyone and their grandmother expecting the mantle to just be seamlessly transferred to you, you were only 17, and there was NO WAY, anyone would tie down the shooting star you were. Thus, as an active Champion, you were almost immediately recommended for an internship with a Master, Lance, he had a more hands-off approach that suited your style…..And he didn’t hold back in what situations would be expected of a Champion to overcome, much less a Master. but you knew, this was to be expected, for as the world around you grew, so rose in difficulty the challenges you would face. This was nothing you did not expect, nothing you couldn’t handle….Ooooh honey….. You had traveled so much, you thought you knew the real world…..you really did….sweetheart….you had no idea…..you thought you knew, cruelty* – on the child side, Lapras getting hit, on the adult side, a Tyranitar with chains bolted into their skin – *you thought you knew despair* – on the child side, getting knocked out of the Indigo League, on the adult side, a mother and father being told their daughter was never coming home – *you thought you knew….bad* ….On the child side a person laughing manically in their tower as they were confronted by a Champion *And you learned, what was evil.* On the adult side, a crumbled building with bodies being pulled from the rubble.

Ash rubbed his chest.

*You began to have sleeping problems. You had many questions with answers that upset your stomach. At the end of it, Lance agreed it was important for you to travel again outside of Kanto, you had enough of his perspective, it was time to gather more. You made a stop at a small town near the Kanto border to restock on supplies when a most fateful encounter occurred….one fateful moment that would eventually alter your life forever….you ran into an old friend on a bridge, their memory as
fond as the day it was made, Ritchie! As if it was meant to be….Ritchie from the golden years of your childhood…!*

The bridge was adorned in cherry blossom trees.

*My god it was a scene straight out of shoujo anime, the pink petals flowing behind you both, from the dark clouds of adulthood that were beginning to shroud your way, you bolted over to him and sunshine, and hugged him so hard, the wind was knocked right out of you both! You two just had to catch up over lunch, you just HAD TO! You took him out, your treat, and you began to talk, and talk, and talk, and aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaalk! Turns out Ritchie didn’t really have too much going on, but he never missed a match of yours that came on TV~! Ritchie mentioned that perhaps he needed a change of pace to help him on his journey – and you Ash, just couldn’t hold yourself back and invited him to join you on your way! It brought Ritchie to tears, you hugged him, and he hugged you back, and he just couldn’t let go…for the longest of time….Did you ever wonder….?!*

*It’s not for me to say. He needed me….*

*Oh yes, he did. He really, really did. SO! Together with Ritchie, you started traveling again, entering other Leagues, winning them handily, building up your Candidacy application, and building, and building….Meanwhile, people back home began to get, shall we say, impatient. ’Become a Master already!’ ’What did you spend all that time with Lance for?!’ ’Don’t be like Red and Blue and forget about us!’ ’Don’t abandon us!’ So you got into Social Media so you could take everyone along with you. I mean, not to mention that everywhere you traveled shone more and more light on Kanto anyway, on Pallet Town, and almost single-handedly, you brought up your Region – because goodness almighty, what was it that produced such a remarkable young man?!*

*My mom.*

*And your experiences. From then on, for every League you entered as an adult, you won. Again and again! Children from all over the world watched your matches, you helped them plant the seeds of their own futures, instead of helping people one at a time, you were helping millions all at once! Yes the world had its ugly, ugly cold and cruel side, but so long as you brought hope to those who looked up to you, everyone had a fighting chance. You kept in contact with your many friends and family, face-time, Placebooking, it was like you had your bedroom in the palm of your hand, and of course, you had Ritchie and your pokemon ever at your side.*

*It really took me back traveling with him, we played so many games together on Placebooks, but I think Pecker is my favorite platform, for the memes.*

*Mine too <3. If there was danger, people would whisper to themselves ‘I bet Ash would beat them’ or ‘I bet Ash would know what to do’ or ‘I bet this is nothing to Ash’ and so on and so forth, in fact, you BECAME a meme! ’When Dialga uses Draco Meteor, Ash Ketchum grabs a bat.” ’When a Bouffalant is charging, it stops for Ash Ketchum.” ’When it’s Spring, Ash Ketchum makes the pollen sneeze”* –

*Ugh, don’t remind meeeeee* Ash blushed, covering his face with his hands, *Goodness, Ritchie came up with so many! I bet you he was the one that started that whole thing!*

*Hmmm <3. People were so familiar with you, you were so accessible, approachable…It’s almost as if they could call themselves your friend from miles and miles away….That’s why they flocked to you Ash….That’s why their voices cried out to you, because you could never ignore a cry for help. On your Social Media accounts, people from all over the WORLD had access to you! And every day, you gave yourself away, not knowing that you were slowly tearing down the foundation that
built you up, but, regardless of their needs of you, regardless of what the world threw at you, you grew into a fine young man, no one would deny that…none but you….You were beginning to struggle a little in keeping the wonder you felt as a child from fading….Your pokemon noticed. Late at night, you’d catch it trying to slip out of your dreams….Ritchie noticed. It’s hard to try and continuously ride that high, eventually…something has to give. You confided in Ritchie and your pokemon, and they were ever supportive of you, and you thanked the stars they were there beside you because they gave you a strength that cannot be conjured alone. You confided in Lance about the responsibilities you were training for, and he reassured you, sure, ol’ Lance who knew better, and you, who still wanted to believe….like you do now, but, now, you know better…yet you prefer the lie.*

*People are inherently good,* said Ash, *that’s not a lie. There are things that make them bad, and for those willing to see the err of their ways, there’s always a chance to make it right. Very rarely have I ever met anyone who was truly evil….Who would hurt others just for the sake of hurting…*

*But you have met them.*

*Yes.*

The screen switched from its dual display back to a single one, it was Ash’s birthday and Ritchie and their pokemon were waking Ash up by singing him Happy Birthday with a cake they all worked together to make, the number 2 and 0 stuck right on top.

*On your 20th birthday, how many celebrations did you have?*

*Oh my gooooooooooooooooooood, it was how many people celebrated my birthday ‘for’ me I should say,* Ash laughed, *Let’s see, there was the one where it was just Ritchie and I and our pokemon, and then there was the one my mom threw me where it was her and Brock, Misty, Professor Oak and Tracey, and then there was the one Pallet Town threw me, and then there was the one the Gym Leaders had for me – that was a surprise one and Misty and Brock ooh they got me good! Then the Indigo Council threw me one, then there was the Champions gathering, and then the International League where Masters and their Legendary Emissaries attended! That was so cool! And then Serena organized with Clemont and Bonnie the Traveling Family one and that had May and Max, Dawn, Iris, Cilan, Lana, Kiaew, Lillie, Sophocles – Gladion, like everyone! Basically, it was like, I got to see everyone, and I mean ‘everyone’ important to me and it was so awesome, and I don’t know how I ate all the food and didn’t put on single pound but I did!*

*I envy your metabolism so much.*

*Don’t hate, appreciate~*

*Pbbth. So then Ash Ketchum, you became an adult. You were in your prime. You had what people spend their entire lives trying to find, much less achieve and if you thought you had been playing on Hard Mode, now it was time to experience the ‘OH MY GOD CAN EVERYONE JUST GET ALONG AND LEGENDS NOT PISS THEMSELVES FOR TWO MINUETS PLEASE MODE!’ Despite that~ Did you appeal any of what was asked of you? No! Of course you could take it! Bring it on! There was still so much to do! And people who needed your help, and you told yourself over and over that you will become a Master on your own time, on your own terms, ‘be patient please, yes I am Champion, but a Master is even more than that!’ ‘Surely you have the credentials now for your candidacy!’ ‘I do, but I’ll get to that when I can…’ ‘What’s stopping you?’*

Ash watched himself get rescued by Ritchie from the overbearing reporter and was whisked away to safety, both their Pikachu waving them goodbye.
Ash sighed through his nose.

*…..Ash…..You knew you were going to become a Master, but, when did you start to think you probably couldn’t become a good one? If you were doing all of this now, and being a Master was more, how much more could you possibly do? It started to pile up in you……the stress, the exhaustion….gnawing at you day in, and day out, and you kept putting it off, putting it off, you had calls from friends and family, Legends were needing your assistance – Conferences were inviting you to compete….Your ‘friends’? You felt awful, just awful if you were already busy when they needed you, but somehow, you made time, after all, if you should be helping anyone, it’s them, they helped you become who you needed to be to win when it mattered, to come through when it mattered, you had obligations mister, and then, you started to hear ‘Ash, are you okay?’ ‘Yeah, I am, why wouldn’t I be?’ ‘You look a little tired.’ ‘I’m okay, don’t worry <3’…..No matter what Ash, you just couldn’t let anyone down…..Do you remember the first time you cried yourself to sleep? When you awoke the next day, Ritchie and Pikachu were beyond worried….But you were okay weren’t you?*

Ash began to feel aware of his weight getting moved by the water.

*Thus two years just flew by! In celebrity terms, that’s ages! TV, social media, League Conferences, and Tourneys, and everyone just on your ASS about that Candidacy, and in leading Kanto where no other Master had led them before! Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaand then finally, one day, you just broke down.*

Ash watched himself on the display stumble as he outright fainted, the screen going dark.

*Just plum ran out of gas, your body said, I'M DONE!* 

Ash sighed, *…..I learned afterwards that Ritchie made a diving leap for me and broke my fall so I wouldn’t bust my head open on the ground…I was taken to the hospital and treated for exhaustion… Ash rubbed his arms, *I think that was the first time I made Ritchie cry, and my mom…she was so worried….Misty and Brock came and got us, and took as all back to Kanto in secret….It was pretty evident that I needed a break, a vacation…But I needed more than that….Ritchie and I came up with a plan to attempt to ease me out of the limelight, which, pretty much added up to me announcing that I was taking a temporary leave of absence, only, I wasn’t planning on coming back for a, long, long time…..* 

*Yes, and wasn’t it he who made the suggestion that you two become Rangers together?*

The screen kicked back on and showed Ritchie and Ash putting in the application, unbeknownst to them, Mary was the one that accepted them into the system.

*Yes, to help me remember how to ‘live’, how to be ‘me’ again, not….whatever everyone else wanted me to be….I missed just, having fun…Being a Ranger, was a new opportunity, but oh boy, once again I would be proven that there’s still so much I don’t know. Ritchie and I got our butts whooped in the Ranger Trails!* 

*Honestly Ritchie held you back, did he not get severely injured?*

*He did, but it wasn’t his fault, a Scyther got the jump on him and sliced him right across the chest, and I…….* Ash paused, a shudder going through him – it didn’t help the display showed that exact moment when one of the most precious things in Ash’s life was so violently threatened –

*Don’t sugar coat it, you saved his life. That moment was a stern reminder that you are not one to lead a life devoid of danger, and being a Ranger, arguably puts you in just as tough a position as a
Master in terms of dealing with the wrath of the pure forces of the planet itself. At least, you get to stop and smell the flowers in the downtime, right?*

*Yeah….After that, Mary took Ritchie and I under her wing, she wanted to know why on earth I was there, I was ‘Ash Ketchum’ what was I doing out in the bush with them? Why should she let us become Rangers after that terrible performance? I thought back to the time when I played with the baby pokemon of the forest….I came to the reason that I knew pokemon in terms of battling, I knew them as my dearest friends, but it turns out I had no idea what the wilderness brought out in them, to truly know pokemon, you have to know nature….the wilderness itself, and it was like a breath of fresh air in discovering a whole new side to something I thought I had all figured out…To think, honestly, I don’t think I was ever so arrogant in thinking I could come up with a plan to help anyone on the spot, oh no….When there’s an avalanche coming at you and a poor injured Oddish that was caused by a tornadic wind flow made by Fearow as a display challenge to Rhyhorns, your first thought isn’t ‘I got this’, it’s ‘holy crap!’*

*True.*

*Camping wasn’t just camping, it was observing, it was watching, it was waiting, it was taking in all around you, and it was such a welcomed change, it was, like a dream I didn’t even know I had, or needed….And, it was nice being out of the public eye….At least in being a Ranger, I didn’t have to stop helping, my efforts were just far, far more focused to the wilds of Kanto, Tohjo, and areas of Johto. This was to get myself back in order, this was how I was going to make myself be the best Master I could be, not, all that other stuff people wanted me to do….I was going to become who I wanted to be, on my own terms with the love and support of my friends and family.*

*Mh. You were always meant to be a hero Ash, and even heroes need rescuing every now and then…One thing you had now that you so longed for was time. Time to rest, time to think, and time to explore. Most importantly of all, you had time to remember.*

*Mh. After seeing my pokemon have a blast as Rangers, I felt so guilty for narrowing their outlet to battling, I mean, I only learned this as I got older but there’s more to being a Pokemon Master than just battling…And I always think, if a younger me had known that….what would I be doing now? My pokemon totally didn’t blame me of course, they loved being in the Trainer Circuit, they were just as decorated as I was, but if my horizons were to be expanded, then so would theirs. I told my pokemon I would support whatever they wanted to do, I wasn’t going back into the Trainer Circuit anytime soon, if they wanted to try out another career, or go to school, to just let me know and we’ll get the ball rolling on it. So we went on and did our own things, Pikachu and Charizard decided to stick by me though, and I can always get in touch with the others. I think it’s only fair. And if they decide they don’t want to battle anymore, that will be their choice and no one else’s, and I’ll defend it.*

*Interesting. So tell me, with all this free-time you suddenly had, what did you re-discover?*

The display showed forests, grassland, mountains, the plains, the desert as if in pictures, Ritchie, Ash, and their pokemon in nearly every shot with a silly pose, waving, smiling, or doing all three.

*That our planet…is beautiful……* 

*And….what else?*

The pictures began to narrow down to Ritchie.

*What did you allow yourself to feel for the first time Ash? What did releasing yourself from a poisoned dream allow you to ponder? It was something you had not given a two second moment
about up till now because you had a nigh one track mind to become a Master, but, since that was on hold….what else could you devote yourself too…? Or rather, who else…?*

A picture of Ritchie looking over the balcony with his arms crossed at sunset made Ash’s heart skip a beat, the exact same way he felt the moment he first snapped that picture.

*Oh Ash….if you weren’t doomed before, you are now. Before Gary, before Misty….Ritchie was the first time you totally, absolutely, fell head over heels in love for someone; he was without a doubt, the first love of your life. Now Misty and Serena get an honorable mention, Misty especially since you’ll date her right after Ritchie, you had crushes sure, puppy love, you’re pansexual, you’ll love anyone! But Ritchie was your first prime time status boyfriend relationship. You spent so much time with Ritchie, your feelings for him grew as naturally as the earth turned, you’re not sure when those feelings shifted romantically, but you certainly realized when you couldn’t live without him – the Ranger Trials, when he was nigh mortally wounded…Did you not give up your own blood to save him? Don’t down play your efforts! That was truly heroic! And then, when you two became Rangers, you both had so much alone time together, just you two, your pokemon pals, and the wilds. More and more, you began to think of, being so affectionate with him. Hugs, and, you’d let him sleep on your lap if you both were out on the loooooong observations, you would ‘card your fingers through his hair’, nuzzle him, nudge him – you’re a pretty loving person already, but with Ritchie, that got turned up to 11! Ritchie never objected to any of it, he welcomed your affection, you attention, your everything like a touch-starved Growlithe, and when you first kissed Ritchie on his forehead his bodily functions almost shut down from the burst of endorphins radiating out of him like a nuclear reactor….And theeeeeeeeeeee – You began to think how would it feel if you kissed him, like for real? Not on the forehead, but on those sweet, tender lips…How would that feel….How would it feel to hold him close at night? Hehe, naked? How would telling him that you love him as you hold and kiss him numb feel? PRETTY DAMN GOOD – but what would he do? How would he react? What would he say? Would you be risking your friendship by confessing? Could you bear to lose another travel companion with needs going askew? This type of courage needed, whoooff, facing a rabid Hydreigon would be easier!*  

Ash gulped as he watched the memory play out, his heart racing as it was before –

*After an afternoon scout flight, you both made it back to the station, and your feelings, were just, too much, you had to say something, you had to act or you would go crazy, you just had to know…! Could it be possible? Could it happen? You had to take that leap of faith! You were prepared to crush your feelings flat if there was even a hint of Ritchie rejecting you, you didn’t want to lose him, you couldn’t STAND to lose him – !! If that meant living out your lives as friends so be it!!! But more impossible things have happened than you falling in love! Maybe? Could be! GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA THERE WAS SO MUCH TO GAIN AND LOSE AND JUST DO IT ASH, JUST CONFESS, CONFESS TO HIM AND FUCKING PRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAY –*

The display showed Ash and Ritchie talking, there was no sound, but Ash knew exactly what was being said, because he was hearing it from his heart….Ash and Ritchie were both so focused on each other that they were not aware of what their legs were doing until Ritchie bumped into the lockers from behind and they both paused where they were, looking each other dead in the eye, their faces shades pink, and then slowly, cautiously, a smile, an acceptance –

*Ritchie couldn’t believe you had feelings for him…and he was so….happy……He straight up thought he was dreaming….He had feelings for you too….For a long time….Heh, but like you, he just wasn’t sure of what he could say! Gosh you two are so alike when you want to be….Like you, he always dreamed but couldn’t believe….he would ever actually have someone to hold close at night that would hold him back…*
Ash and Ritchie’s hand intertwined, their foreheads touched, Ritchie sniffling, happy tears, so happy, Ash was misty-eyed too while wearing the biggest, most serene grin that made his face blush red, so red! Ritchie too! They tilted their heads, whispers of words, fleeting, soft, vows, till their lips met and their eyes closed to relish in the moment of their first real kiss. Their arms wrapped around each other, Ash placed a hand behind Ritchie’s head so he wouldn’t bump into the lockers again; he deepened the kiss with Ritchie melting right into him.

Ash’s hand found itself over his heart.

*You essentially became his disciple, your mind, body, and soul, belonged to him….There was nothing, nothing that you wouldn’t do for him, if he requested your heart on an open spit you’d reply ‘medium or well-done?’ What could you do? You were hopelessly in love, for the first time, and you didn’t know any better…*

Ritchie broke the kiss momentarily to catch his breath, hot, humid, they both were a wreck, both feeling a need, an urge to take things Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay further than they needed to go that night, their lips drew back like magnets, the both of them kissing as intensely as they possibly could, caps knocked off, their hair was disheveled, Ash’s pants were getting awfully tight, and their pesky clothes kept getting in the way!

*I mean, just look at you peoples go, you’re essentially dry humping each other. Ritchie was also your first sexual encounter, no~? And I don’t mean this, mutual masturbation hump, I mean, in time, you legit hooked up your equipment and split fluids. Yes? Of course he was – oh no don’t worry, the screen won’t play that! That is a, MMMMH, that is a very private moment for the two of you in traversing your libidos! (*ahem~*).*

They were still kissing, Mary walked into the locker room, saw them making out just one step under from Ash mounting Ritchie right then and there, and promptly walked back out with an eyeroll, *About time,* she muttered, Ash smirked at the thought.

*In the time you had together, Ritchie was your everything, your sun and moon and stars, your universe. He was the person that made you entertain the thought of giving up everything for his sake. And you do mean everything. If it meant letting your dream of becoming a Pokemon Master go for his sake in any way, consider it done, no hesitation. You would give your life for him, easily, no questions asked. Someone so precious, you wanted Ritchie protected – and like, he could take care of himself sure, suuuuuuuuuuuure, but don’t deny that Ritchie didn’t actively encourage your protective side out to near Momma Bear levels. You never wanted to say, whisk Ritchie away and stuff him in a cabin in the woods, no, that’s not you, if someone ever made a move on your love in public, fuck it, you’ll make them the example and DARE anyone else to fucking try and place hands on him – you have enemies Ash just for being who you are, and being cautious never hurt anyone, but regardless, Ritchie himself said he was more comfortable hidden, and your relationship was easy to hide. You both were out in the forest so much because of your Ranger duties, no one but nature and the divine gods on high could see, what you did, to each other, in private (*AHEM*), and anywhere else, you two were either home, or at the station, and yeah, you weren’t a hermit, but you also weren’t about to announce this one, most precious person to the frothing, crunching jowls of the internet – hell no! Keep it on the down low~*

*Ritchie can defend himself, it’s just…for the longest time I saw there was something, very, very vulnerable in him that he was putting on a brave face for, I didn’t, want anyone to catch him off guard, and it was as if, he was always on guard, even around me….* Ash smiled to himself, *But in the end, he trusted me to help him, just be him…* The somber returned.

*Yes, and you two had some close calls, but, at the end of the day Ash, you were the hero you
needed to be when push came to shove, someone who could provide Ritchie, everything he could ever want or need….True fact, Ritchie is the only love interest you confessed your feelings to. Misty, and Gary? They confessed to you. After Ritchie, well, you never said it out loud, but you weren’t too keen on telling anyone else your feelings for them. Ever. That pain rears its ugly head sometimes, even to this day, no? After it’s all been said and done with for so long….Or, so you think.*

Ash rubbed his chest again, looking away from the screen that showed him one of the most painful moments in his life, when he made a promise to never, ever speak of what they had, to just let it go! Like Elsa!…To leave it in the past….It was good what they had, when they had it, those moments are forever, nothing won’t ever take that away, but, they couldn’t be a couple anymore, from then on, they can just continue on as good ol’ best buds.

Right ........

*You beat your mentality to a bloody, messy pulp in thinking, ‘what did I do wrong?’*  

The display showed Ash crying as hard as he had ever cried, holding himself, curled in a ball on his bed, his pokemon at an absolute loss on what to do to help him.

*Something very important in you fractured, broke, downright shattered – you got so swept up with Ritchie that you forgot this was the time you were supposed to be healing and now you’ve been tossed a devastation you were NOT prepared for – call it foolish, call it naïve – sure, love hurts! And perhaps the blow wouldn’t have been so bad if the reason Ritchie broke off your relationship was clearer! Even I think it was insanely cruel what he did, because it left your mind to its own fascinations, and after the life you led, you could only imagine what the truth of it all was, half-assed at best, and completely heinous at worst – you couldn’t bear to think that of Ritchie! So it had to be you! You had to be the problem! What did you do? What did you do wrong!? Why, why, why, why, why? When you both were so committed to each other, when you two were so happy! All you had to go on was Ritchie suddenly had to make an emergency trip back to his hometown, you couldn’t come, which worried you something fierce, and when he came back, Ritchie was ‘off’ – you knew something was wrong with him, but he would just say he was fine! Not to worry! And not, what, a few days later, your relationship was done…..Just like that. It came out of nowhere! Once again, you thought you knew pain, despair, but this was a whole other kind of hurt! Admit it, what you felt above all else…was betrayal.*

Ash wiped his eyes (futilely), but the tears came quietly to add to the depths. *…(*sniff*)……I would have done anything for him…Anything to make it right……and if that meant…if that meant shooting a hole though my heart….so be it….*

Delphox gave another long-winded sigh. *This is going to be rather difficult for you to hear Ash, but you need to, because you need to know the truth about your life. You need to know that your purpose has been brought up as nothing more than a means to an end.*

Ash looked up.

Delphox was standing on the other side of the screen.

*Oh, you may remember it a totally different way, but that’s because you choose to. You prefer the lie. You prefer the story, the illusion, because the truth? Hurts. Too much. Oh, you were done so
dirty sweetheart….so dirty….There’s one thing that can be agreed upon by all, adulting, is hard. Very hard. Even Misty with her stupid perfect life, adulthood is, hard. What reward have you gotten in turn for all your efforts? Ah – a dead career, depression, low self-esteem, two failed relationships and one on the rocks – I could go on and on! You didn’t morph into this shell of a person you are on your own! Oh Ash, don’t you realize that the reason you felt so bad all the time was that over the years, you had been trained to believe that everything was your responsibility, and thus, your fault.*

*……*

*You were trained to blame yourself for the actions of others! You have been groomed into a collective emotional dump-heap where anyone, anywhere, can put a stake in you at no cost to themselves! Le siiigh~ Being a celebrity is hard~ Being a boyfriend is harder! And to do both? Virtually impossible. They couldn’t take responsibility for themselves so they forced it upon you, and you had an entire region on your back! And your goal was to help the entire planet?! Then you and Ritchie got together, and he convinced you that being devoted to one person instead of millions would be easier. Regardless, control is control, and boy did he have you wrapped around his little finger.*

The display showed Ritchie being somewhat bossy, no in fact straight up demanding to Ash about whatever dealings were going in their home that day –

*I…don’t remember it like that* –

*Ding dong~ Oh what a lovely DOORMATE, I MEAN ‘MAT’* –

*It was never like that! I don’t, remember* –

Delphox rolled their eyes, *Of course you don’t, ‘cause rememberrrr~ You prefer the LIE – Ash come on! You have a big heart you do, you truly do…so it’s easy for people to take what they need from you, and oh, oh, oh~! Ritchie needed, so MUCH! This, this is the person that really put a dent in your life, your dreams, your future, Ritchie Trails! Who was it that suggested you both become Rangers? Him! Who pulled you away from facing your Master challenges head on? Him! Who convinced you to step back from your dream?*

*He was trying to help me, I was getting bad – !*

*Define, bad, darling you were stressed yes, my god anyone would be, but it was nothing you couldn’t handle. You were on your way, you were on your way! And you know what? I know you loved him, pardon, love him, but dear he was just like everyone else you wanted to help, and he, Ritchie, helped himself to you, and you were only so willing to give him, say it with me now, everything. You were a shoulder for him to cry on, a willing ear, a pep talk here or there, you went out together, did, oh my favorite word of the day – EVERYTHING together! You just couldn’t be apart from one another!* –

*I wanted him around! I invited him to come with me in the first place!*  

*Arguably the biggest mistake of your life. You gave him an opening is what you did, and when you confessed your love for him, you gave him the power to own you….But no friend, lover, would ever do that to you right? You know bad guys, you know the villains in the stories….You’re a good person! Unless, you’re, (*GASP*) not…? Ash….during your Internship with Lance, and the days got loooooooooong, and the nights got hollooooooooow…what did you dooooooooo~?*

*I…I made up stories.*
That’s, right! You made up stories! Fantastic little adventures, and they all ended happily! It would help you sleep, it would help you dream because goodness KNOWS how many hours of rest you were actually getting, but yes! And you’re a wonderful storyteller, aren’t you? You can spin up some whhhhopppers! Like how your friends would never, ever, e v e r, hurt you like how so many bad guys strived before – you know a bad person when you see one, don’t you? Or, once aga~in, (*sigh*), you actually don’t know who can be a bad guy, and I’m here to tell you, anyone can be, bad.*

The display started to show random occurrences of people mistreating each other, pokemon, instances that Ash witnessed and thwarted – there was no one brush stroke to them, anyone – anyone had the potential to be mean –

*Mh, maybe that cop was having a bad day~ Oh Ash, sweet Ash, all you ever wanted to be was the very best, like no one ever was, helping people and pokemon alike, putting their needs before your own… You became such a bright beacon of goodwill, good faith, good tidings, that of course you would attract the very worst of what our society has to offer….You have lost…a lot – okay, e v e r y t h i n g, and it wasn’t your fault….*

Ash looked sternly to Delphox. *….Of course it was my fault… I let myself… I didn’t… take care of myself – *

*How could you take care of yourself?! With you being pulled in a million directions at once?! To keep yourself SANE, you spoon fed yourself a fairy tale that you were actually cared about! That you were loved and cherished and whole. No one cared about you Ash, no one – they only cared what you could do for them.*

*That’s not true* –

*And you couldn’t deal with it! You knew!… Deep down… you knew…. But you prefer the lie.* Delphox snapped their fingers, and the display changed again, this time three ways, showing Ash with Ritchie, Ash with Misty, and Ash with Gary. Ritchie playfully leading Ash down a forest trail, Misty nudging Ash to come with her, and Gary literally seating himself down in Ash’s lap as he was trying to read pamphlet.

*We all know the public is a selfish being, but I’m talking about those closest to you, the ones you gave your precious heart to, the ones you trusted to do as they pleased to you, and it wasn’t anything nice. We know that Ritchie was the one that damaged you nearly beyond repair, I mean, after him your perception of yourself twisted further, edges bent, you were terrified of falling in love again, but somehow, Misty and Gary convinced you that you were worth their time, they needed you after all, why else would they go through with the effort considering your piling emotional baggage? Were you not betrayed again with Misty? Fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice, shame on me, fool me THREE TIMES…..*

The screen with Gary showed Ash and Gary sitting at their table in the cabin with nothing but silence between them.

*How come you’re not getting better Ash? Despite all your promises, commitments and endeavors? It’s because, you’ve been down this road before. And now, you’re on the cusp of the point of no return in the hands of a scientist who tried to stash you away in the woods…. Boy, you sure know how to pick ‘em Mr. Ketchum.*

The display showed three different scenes. Ritchie was going through their mail, pulled up a notice addressed to Ash and stuffed it in the trash. Misty and Ash were talking, and Misty was hen-pecking whatever came out of Ash’s mouth apart. Gary was putting up clothes, saw some of Ash’s old T-
*Look at how fake she’s being afterwards…! After mouthing off on you like that?! Honestly! She always had to make it a problem. Gary always had to react to the problem. Ritchie expected you to always solve the problem – Misty had little off-hand comments, Gary had accusations, and Ritchie changed the subject – their methods of control may have varied, but the purpose was the same. To steadily steer you into what was easier for them to manipulate. What they needed you for. I’ve had the extreme misfortune to be able to peer into some terribly painful memories and see them for what they really were, not the excuses you made up for them. You told yourself that letter from Alain was the Tourney invite you two had already discussed and weren’t going to attend, Misty just naturally knew more, and you were going to throw those old shirts away anyway, never mind the sentimental value they had!* –

*Donate.*

*Eh?*

*Those shirts went into a donation pile.*

*(*SIGH*) Whatever you say sweetpea. You’ve been so shaken and stirred to your core that you just can’t help it! And they say you can’t change the past, HA~! It’s all a matter of willpower! I mean, you, tried to stand your ground, but after Ritchie, you felt it was on you to bend the corners and edges of yourself into someone you thought would be better presentable for Misty! But she, WHOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOF – oy vey, I’m not going to go into too much detail with her, y’all had a relationship, it was fun, so you were trained to think, you stuck your dick in her periodically, had a minor pregnancy scare, but WHATEVER – its not like you would have abandoned her or the kid! Like some other family member whom you never, ever even MET, but NUANCE – Misty only knew she was pregnant for less than a week before she miscarried and she was going to abort ANYWAY and that was that! POOF BEGONE THOUGHTS~! We’re not gonna unpack daddy issues that should stay as dead and buried as your hopes and dreams of MARRYING RITCHIE – ANYWAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAY – you have such powerful fail-safe, full-stop memories so cemented in place that to break such an illusion would snap something in you that you can’t afford to lose right now!*

*…………………….Are you okay?*

*RUGH!! Listen….I know you loved these people Ash, each one with all your heart, or, what was left of it – but you need to see them for who they really are. You know that’s not normal right Ash? Staying friends with people that hurt you so severely – that’s not forgiveness, that’s creating a narrative in an attempt to keep their hands in your cookie jar, and you played along with them! You escaped into your head, if you all were still friends, then, things couldn’t have been ‘that’ bad right? You came up with excuse after excuse after excuse – the social media that served you to the world now served to fuel your preferred ‘world’. Low and behold here is this tool that can help you shape memories into your desperate perception that ‘everything is okay, I’m okay.’ Filming, posting, blogging – a picture is worth a thousand words – and aren’t you so good at stories? Did you not admit that you were scared of forgetting what ‘real’ happiness was? Weren’t you supposed to ‘be’ happy? Thankful for what you had? Why would you fear forgetting that? Unless you knew deep down something was wrong* –

*Um. Something was wrong with me* –

*No Ash, they made you believe you needed a narrative to keep yourself sane around their behavior. They know their pieces of shit compared to you.*
Gary, cross-armed, turned his nose up at Ash, Ash in his Ranger gear frowned with a sigh through his nose.

*'Just ignore me when I do that' is a lazy excuse for them to not fix their painful behavior, and for you to just, 'deal with it.' Gary is the KING of that, he and his prickly, mean-spirited comments, accusations, and posture and stances that could just drive you UP A WALL. Disrespectful, dismissive, and delighted in stomping down anyone who would attempt to undercut him.*

*Gary is working on that, we talked, we want to get better, things may have gone wrong with Ritchie and Misty, but we forgave each other, we’re going, to be better for each other and for ourselves! You’re, confusing me – *

*Yeah, uh-huh – and how is that working out? Think you’ve actually made any progress? You think he’s your rock hmm? Your center? Keeps you grounded? Well, he’s more than that Ash, he’s your drain, to just, flush yourself right down in, honey, his baggage alone could take down a plane* –

*I LOVE HIM!!* –

The display showed several instances of Ash leaving Gary behind, to go to work (an extra shift), to the store (just for a couple items), to do some volunteer work (that Ash well volunteered for) –

*Well! You sure do an awful lot of trying to get away from him….I mean, before this whole fiasco blew up and you suddenly thought oh yeeewwwwwwwwwwww, I kinda like getting laid by this guy* –

The display showed Ash running off to find Mary, leaving Gary behind.

*Oh, right~ Well, at least you were trying to do something noble Ash…as for Gary….*

The screen went blank, dark. A new scene began to slowly fade in.

*There is something important I discovered Ash, and you should see.*

The display suddenly swelled up and all around, encompassing Ash in its depths –

*If this doesn’t convince you, nothing will, this, perhaps, the most damning moment of all….*

Ash was suddenly dropped down on his rear, the feel of water gone, when he looked up, he was in a living room with the afternoon sun shining through the windows. He got up and took a closer look around, he could hear people talking, a familiar voice in the mix, he knows that person, somehow, then a young lady in summer clothes walked into the living room and Ash’s breath left him.

*…..Lisa?*

Ash knew the look on her face well, something inside was wrong. Her façade was nearly perfect, nearly.

For a second Ash thought he’d be spotted, but no, Lisa walked right through him, this wasn’t real, it was projection, a memory, a recollection of an event long past, long, too late. Lisa was gathering up her things into her backpack – *I’ll be back!* Lisa called, her voice sounded totally normal, but her face gave her away, she looked scared –

*Bye!* came a voice from within the house – they hardly sounded concerned at all.

Lisa was tearing up as she left, crying quietly as she locked the door behind her, Ash following her
out, wanting to reach out across space and time to comfort her, tell her things she longed, so longed to hear, to help her! To reach out to her! But….

The landscape outside was a sweeping grassland and beyond that was an impressive mountain range the Trainer knew well. *Mount Coronet…This is Lisa home, Sinnoh* –

Lisa sniffled, she was mumbling something, Ash tried to listen….Her voice was soft, and melodic….

She was singing.

*’……..I may not always love you….*

*But as long as there are stars above you….*

*You never need to doubt it….*

*I’ll make you so sure about it….’*

Ash knew this song. It would come on that golden oldies station Gary listened to; he mouthed the next lyric with her:

*’God only knows what I’d be without, you….’*

Lisa was now walking with all due haste, looking at her watch, almost breaking out into a jog before she got to the tram station stop. She was on her toes, quiet head down, she kept looking at her ticket in her pocket to make sure it was still there, that it was real. Ash looked around at the people in the station, not a single one noticed poor Lisa in such distress.

No one cared.

*I was alone…Even when surrounded by people…I was alone…..’*

*What is the matter with you people?! She needs help! Anyone of you, anyone of you could just –*

Nope, too busy. She’s not their problem. They all had their own worries to attend to.

Lisa’s tram came, Ash followed her on, bumping past strangers that growled at her as mean as a cranky Snubble would, Lisa took her seat and Ash’s mouth dropped upon seeing whom she was sitting next to –

*Gary?!”*

Lisa was clearly, clearly in distress, leg bouncing in place, tears speckling her eye lashes, hands wringing themselves constantly, and Gary, *not once*, looked up from his readings –
Gary…Gary!

Gary just, continued to read. Lisa was RIGHT THERE –

Ash watched him, watched Gary do absolutely nothing…What on earth could he be so engrossed in reading to not, even notice, to not even LOOK UP when someone is fixing to have a mental breakdown right next to you! If you’re not going to do something FINE, bring ATTENTION TO THE SITUATION AT LEAST –

*It was a business trip in Sinnoh,* came Delphox’s voice, *He was only there for a couple days. Why should she interest him? She has nothing to offer him.*

Ash didn’t know what to do with himself, with his heart – if, if he would have just reached out…If Gary could have spared but inches of movement – much, MUCH, MUCH – SO MUCH – Ash couldn’t FATHOM how much would be different!

*How could anyone have known that a single word of kindness, or comfort, or just, a simple glance could have so drastically changed your future?* Delphox sighed, *You want to talk about taking responsibility for your actions but when push comes to shove it is survival of the fittest. Watch her, look at Lisa’s eyes when she gets up to get off the tram…She is not prey anymore* – Lisa’s eyes were full of, anger – pale, pale, pale blue – glowing blue – !!! – *She is now the predator.*

Lisa simply exited the tram, and walked off to her fate –

Ash reached for her – *LISA* – before the projection dissolved away he swore she turned around – but the memory was now gone. Now, they were back to the depths, to the darkness.

Ash felt a pressure on his chest, the water getting choppy around him.

*That was the point of no return, the second she got off the tram…she was to meet her fate, and become Froslass….She was indeed a remarkable young woman. So much potential….And to think, of what could have been if Gary only really was the person you made him out to be, if he could have been the one to have, reached out to her….much would be different.*

Ash hands went to his face, the bliss that protected him in this space, was gone.

A crack shot through the walls of Ash’s Dream Home, bits of paint from the ceiling trickling down – the Home’s foundation began shaking maniacally as if it was in an earthquake!

*OH NO* –

*ASH!!!*

*DELPHOX GOT HIM!!* Clefable screamed –

The pain in Ash resonated in an echo chamber, emptied from the bliss of the water, the damage was multiplied exponentially –

Misty was looking through a photo album of their time together when Ash’s Dream Home began to shake, knocking it right out of her hands – *WHAT THE – ?!* She stumbled out of her room, shook
down to her knees, *GUYS!?* She could hear everyone panicking below, but her attention was commanded down at the end of the upstairs hallway – there, a pale blue door was glowing in pulses with a mist coming out from under it –

*GET MS. KETCHUM OUTSIDE!* – Sylveon hauled Ms. Ketchum’s body out with Mismagius – *THE HOME IS GOING TO COLLAPSE!!*

*NO IT’S NOT!!* Ritchie tried reforming the cracks in the walls, but they broke further underneath his hands – *NO* –

The house groaned, everything on the walls shook off, the furniture crumbled like tumbling matchsticks, the cracks in the walls only grew –

*ASH!* Ritchie screamed, *ASH! DON’T FALL! DON’T FALL!!*

Daisy tried making planks, pillars, anything, anything to keep the home from dying –

An idea struck Ritchie – he saw through the crumbling plaster falling, his room, his door, something within was pushing the door so strongly a lock-bolt shot off as he door creaked –

Instead of running towards the exit, Ritchie ran towards his door –

*RITCHIE!*

The walls seemed to grow taller, higher – the house crumbled but it was not falling –

Daisy watched as her planks fell off, the color of the walls were morphing – *Wait a second,* new items began spawning inside – *this house, isn’t falling – IT’S CHANGING* –

And it was getting very, very cold inside.

Misty reached the glowing door and saw it was made out of ice, *This is…!*

Open it!

Ritchie’s breath was visible by the time he reached his door and wrapped his hands around the doorknob – *ASH!! ASH DON’T LOSE YOURSELF!!! DON’T LOSE YOURSELF!!!!* He tried pulling it open, but ice, ice was sealing it shut – !

Open it!

The windows began freezing over –

*Is this ice forming?!*

*Sh-should we make a fire?!* –

*THAT IS THE WORST IDEA EVER!!!!!!!* –
Open the door!!

Misty wrapped both of her hands around the frozen door knob –

Open it! Please!!

Ritchie put his foot on the wall as a brace as he tightened his grip – *HANG IN THERE ASH! I KNOW YOU CAN PULL THROUGH THIS!! PLEASE!!! DON’T GIVE YOURSELF UP!!!* then Ritchie screamed at the top of his lungs, *ASH, YOU HAVE A REASON TO BE HERE! YOU HAVE A REASON TO BE YOURSELF! I LOVE YOU, JUST FOR WHO YOU ARE!!!*

OPEN YOUR HEART ONE MORE TIME ASH!!!

With all their strength Ritchie and Misty pulled opened the doors bound by ice and a blinding pink light burst forth from them –

Ash hands went to his chest, a small gasp, a bubble, escaped him to the darkness above. When he looked up, Delphox was standing right in front of Ash, the Heartstring between them visible, attached from chest to chest.

Delphox sighed through their nose, shrugging, *I know…it hurts….it maybe too late to help you with the others, but if I can shine this light of truth upon the person that currently has your soul on lockdown, then, maybe you can finally do some good for yourself…..You can’t have both Ash. You can either have a responsibility to yourself, or a responsibility to others, and they never cared for you. Why give them the time of day anymore? Those that say you can do both are trying to sell you something, I mean, how many self-help books and videos and programs are out there?! It hurts, so much….This pain that comes at you again, and again, and again, and again, and again, and again… It will always be there Ash. It will always be there. In the day, in the night, to undermine you at every single turn. All the progress you scrounge up for yourself, all the damage control you had to deploy, it will always be waiting and watching, priming itself for you to make but one mistake, a flaw, any flaw, can turn fatal.* Delphox snapped their fingers, *Just like that. You’ll be fighting for every moment of every day for the rest of your life…* Delphox put their hand on Ash’s shoulder, *But I can take that from you. You won’t have to play make-believe anymore, because you won’t need them. You won’t need anyone. You’ll be whole,*

*will be the happy ending!* *

……………..*

*You have been through a lot Ash….Heh….Everything….All because you thought you were doing the right thing, but, you weren’t….You let Lisa in….You tried to protect Gary….You listened to
Misty…..You loved Ritchie…..Your only crime was, you just wanted to do the right thing.*

*………What is the right thing?*

Delphox put their other hand on Ash’s shoulder, *To let go. Stop caring so much about people who would just use you for their own means.*

*………I’m confused…Why do you want me so badly? You need me? Like them? If you want to help me, why don’t you just kill me?*

Delphox looked slightly taken back, retreating their hands. *…Do you want to die?*

Ash voice was so quiet, *………I don’t know.*

*You’ve entertained the thought, haven’t you? Pictured yourself in a coffin? Certainly no one could ever mess with you again then…..You’re desperate for help, but you’ve been searching for help in all the wrong places. How you managed to hang on this long is a testament to your strength against adversity. These so called friends, honestly I’m upset for you – if they truly loved you, then you would have been sorted out long ago* –

*I – I avoided….*

*Ash…it’s okay, it’s okay to admit the truth. You avoided it for their sake. To appease them. To give them the façade they wanted of you to entertain their selfish needs. You kept this burden to yourself and you rotted from the inside out.*

*……What do I do…?*

Delphox perched a finger under Ash’s chin, *I can help you.*

Like a little voice in the back of your head.

Ash swallowed.

I have been listening to you Ash.

*It’s time to stop pretending to see the good in everyone and look at what you really want to say to those lazy, stupid, ignorant, pathetic excuses for sentient slobs. It’s time to take off these chains. Either the world will devour you, or you will devour it. Are you predator or prey? It’s time to stand up for yourself and let them cower in your shadow.*

They’re going to come for you Ash…
Delphox caressed Ash’s face, *I can give you the tools to make yourself better~ You can start over, and you won’t remember any of this terrible plight, I’ll put all the pieces back into place, just as you left them before you got sick! You can be what you’ve always wanted to be! You’ll be whole! You’ll be free to follow your dreams with a sound mind, a sound body, you’ll be free from it all...!* 

And when they finally break you...you’ll turn into something horrible, perhaps even worse than I am.

*Surely you can feel me…just as you felt her….You reached out to her, well I am reaching out for you!....I feel you...Your deepest desires...I feel the connection between us and it’s only growing! You want to be free from this, anyone would, sweetheart, anyone would....You have suffered for years at the hands of the people you loved and trusted the most and you’ll only suffer more.....Your blue eye, is not a symbol of wrong-doing, you are a victim…! You’ll get cuts and burns and scrapes but that blue eye will never change….unless.....*

*They’ll strike at what you hold so dear, at what you love the most, and they’ll destroy it without so much as batting an eye, no, they’ll do so with a smile....*

Delphox reached for Ash’s blue eye, and Ash let them, Ash felt their nails dig into him, but no pain, and what Delphox takes, can only be described as a puzzle piece of Ash, his blue eye and eyebrow flexing and looking around independently in Delphox’s grasp. The pokemon examined the puzzle piece against the blank space where it made Ash whole, *You’re literally coming apart, but not to fear,” Delphox blew on it, and they showed Ash, his eye, the blue eye, was back to being brown, *See?* Delphox stuck the piece back in, Ash immediately touching his face and finding it all as it should be – and Delphox’s removed eye, turned the shade of blue Ash’s eye once was....

*It is intoxicating to control people...*

*I promise, no more pain, no more sadness….you’ll be cured….you’ll be free.....Don’t you think it’s time that you’re the one in control?*
Ash let his head fall, shoulders slumping in defeat, and nodded.

Delphox smiled a wide toothy grin, but quickly controlled themselves, they cleared their throat. "Let me see it Ash, let me see your heart. Let me fix what is broken."

Head still down, hands over his chest, Ash called forth his heart and all the beautiful, gleaming Heartstrings that made the weavings of his love.

Delphox was almost drooling — "Now, open up!!"

Ash opened his heart completely up; he became a beacon of light in a sea of darkness – a star in the vast void –

"THAT’S IT >8D!!"

Delphox could see it, the conglomerate of Heartstrings – the hole in his code, his heart, his soul – manifested in representation of a missing connecting thread that flowed through it – and the one connection that should not be there –

"Don’t worry, it’ll all be over soon, trust me" –

Delphox went to grab Ash’s heart, but came in contact with a translucent icy barrier – freezing solid Delphox’s hand, wrist, arm – all the way to the elbow – "Wha- what?!" They looked to Ash, and saw both of his eyes were a pale, pale, ANGRY blue – his breath showing from the cold in his lungs –

Delphox gasped –

"YOU…* Ash!??!! grabbed the most revolting Heartstring connected to them –

"Li..Li-sa?!"* 

Snarling, they ripped Delphox’s Heartstring out of Ash’s heart, tearing a great hole in it –

"NO DON’T* – Delphox lunged at them – but their power was for naught as the icy barrier blew a cold, cold wind that incapacitated the demon –

Gripping the Heartstring’s edge, Ash!Lisa pulled back a taught fist –

"RAAAAAAAALWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWW
Delphox smiled widely under their grip, showing all of their sharp teeth, their eyes glowing an even sharper amber. *Oh Lisa,* Delphox’s body began to shine in their aura, Ash! Lisa’s grip feeling the heat rise on them, Delphox grabbed their hold - *it’s so good to see you again, my Lulu.*

Chapter End Notes

You don't know how satisfying that punch scene was to write oh my god. I have met irl Delphoxes, monsters, all of them .-.

Song lyrics are ‘God Only Knows’ by the Beach Boys, but I guess in the Pokemon world, they would be the Hano Beach Boys :p

I'll see myself out >w<;;;

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!