Running Hot: An Omega Ruby Nuzlocke

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/7989289.

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning: Major Character Death
Category: F/F, F/M, M/M, Gen
Fandom: Pocket Monsters: Omega Ruby & Alpha Sapphire | Pokemon Omega Ruby & Alpha Sapphire Versions, Pocket Monsters | Pokemon - All Media Types, Pocket Monsters | Pokemon (Main Video Game Series)
Character: Ren Kosugi-OC, Yuuki | Brendan, Mitsuru | Wally, Senri | Norman, Tsuwabuki Daigo | Steven Stone, Higana | Zinnia, Josh Takamoana-OC, lots of OC minor characters, Matsubusa | Maxie, Aogiri | Archie, Homura | Tabitha, Kagari | Courtney, Ushio | Matt, Izumi | Shelly, Gym Leaders (Pokemon), Mikuri | Wallace, The Elite Four
Additional Tags: Nuzlocke Challenge, Screenplay/Script Format
Collections: The Storylocke Compendium, Nuzlocke Forums Content
Stats: Published: 2016-09-09 Completed: 2017-08-19 Chapters: 25/25 Words: 305300

Running Hot: An Omega Ruby Nuzlocke

by zephyr_iphis

Summary

Ren Kosugi moves to the Hoenn region with no idea what she is going to do with her life, but it isn't long before she gets sucked, perhaps reluctantly, into the family business of pokemon training. But this is a tumultuous time in the normally peaceful Hoenn and Ren is about to be caught in the middle of it. Will Ren and her team stop the awakening of a primal horror and save the world? Will they survive and become champions? Statistically speaking not all of them. The main cast consists of Ren, Brendan, Wally, Steven, Zinnia and Josh. Wallace also has a decently big role in the second half. This nuzlocke has all of that good stuff we've come to expect: friendship, adventure, brawling, trust, responsibility, guilt, loss, heartbeat, and working through personal trauma (plus poke-shenanigans, am I right?).

This is based on an OmegaRuby nuzlocke run completed in 2015. It's is pretty character driven since the game plot is very basic, but character is what I'm best at. Interpersonal relationships of all stripes feature pretty heavily. Also give it a read for world-building and diversity.

Notes

This is based on a nuzlocke run I played in 2015. I took pretty good notes most of the time,
but since I played on public transit a lot, some things got lost. Most of the main details are intact but some things are changed to serve the story or make the world work a little better. This is in script format because I would like to do a comic but drawing pages on trains and buses (where the bulk of the writing happens) is more than I can handle at the moment. If you want more info, this project has a tumblr (https://rhnuzlocke.tumblr.com) with bonus content such as character pages and art. It is also on the Nuzlocke Forums (http://s7.zetaboards.com/Nuzlocke_Forum/profile/5005214/). As you are probably aware, all nuzlockes are a little different, so the rules I used are below.


Rules:

1) If a pokemon faints, it is “dead” and must be boxed for the rest of the run.

2) Only catch the first hidden pokemon that appears in an area. If it runs away or faints, no pokemon for that area.

3) All pokemon must have names.

4) No catching repeats and repeats do not count as first encounters

5) No using legendary pokemon.

6) Items can only be used outside of battle.

7) Battles are “set” instead of “switch”.

8) TMs, Pokémon-Amie and Super Training are all fair game.
Chapter Summary

In which Ren gets her starter.

Chapter Notes

There is a character chart in the end notes for every chapter that contains all the characters appearing in the chapter. If a name is underlined, you can click it to see their character sheet. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Scene 1: [ Ren is jolted in her seat and wakes up. She slowly pulls her feet off the dashboard of the cramped car and stretches. She looks out at the scenery which is mostly lovely woods although the trees are a bit different than she is used to. The car crosses a bridge over a broad estuary at high tide. ]

Ren: How long was I asleep?

Asuka: Not too long, maybe an hour. Anyway, we’re almost there.

Ren: Oh, sorry okasan, I was supposed to keep you company.

Asuka: It’s fine, Ren. You needed the rest and it’s been such a pretty drive. [ She glances over at her daughter. ] Are you nervous at all? I know this is a lot.

Ren: I guess a bit. I mean, I haven’t even seen the house.

Asuka: It’s very nice! You are going to love your room. The region is really beautiful and the town is just lovely. Maybe you could work in the lab for a bit while you figure things out… [ She trails off because Ren is staring out the window and not responding. She takes a breath. ] I just want you to know that your father and I are really grateful for how well you are taking all of this. You’ve been such a big help, even if you maybe aren’t as excited about it as we are.

Ren: [ turns back to face her mother and smiles ] Aw, okasan, no one could hope to be as excited as you. I think it will be fun!

Asuka: [ sighs ] I just think you put on a brave face for us sometimes, but I want you to know you are allowed to feel however you want about this.

Ren: [ takes a deep breath ] I think it’s a good time to pull up roots. I’ll miss Johto and stuff, but I just graduated. Everyone will be going their separate ways anyway. Besides, otosan has been gushing about Hoenn for years. I’m pretty hyped. And we’ll get to see otosan all the time. This is so awesome for you guys. [ She squeezes her mother’s shoulder. ] Try not to worry so much.

[They pull into a small rural town behind the moving truck.]
Scene 1:

Asuka: Here we are!

[ Ren looks up at a cute two-story house with a red tile roof. A mover and a few machoke pile out of the moving van and mother and daughter climb out of their car. We pan out as a woman comes up to greet Asuka and the machokes open the back of the van. Several panels of the three women and the movers bringing in furniture, unpacking boxes, etc. The women are sitting around a table in the kitchen/dining area surrounded by boxes having lunch. Mrs. Birch makes a comment to Ren who proceeds to flex her muscular arms. All laugh. ]

Scene 2:

[ Ren is sprawled on her bed, taking in her new room. Her mother pops her head in. ]

Asuka: How’s it going, Ren-chan? [ Ren gives a thumbs up. ] I’m going over to the Birch’s to help Nikau. I was hoping you could stop by the lab and see if you could gently remind Prof. Birch that we are all having dinner together. He was supposed to be here by now. I think he is a bit like your father and just gets very wrapped up in his work.

Ren: [ no visible reaction ] Okay.

Scene 3:

[ Ren walks out to the lab. She walks in and looks over the cool equipment. There are a few people working, but she doesn’t see the professor. She approaches one of the lab techs. ]

Ren: Excuse me, I’m looking for Prof. Birch.

Lab tech: He’s still out in the field. [ Turning to face her ] Ah, you must be Senri’s kid. Welcome to Littleroot!

[ The other scientists all look up except one in the corner who is listening to music. ]

Ren: Thanks. Any idea where I can find the professor? I’m supposed to remind him about dinner.

Lab tech: [ laughs ] Sounds like Alan. Route 101, just north of town.

Ren: Thanks again. Nice to meet you.

[ She waves to everyone and backs out. ]

Scene 4:

[ Ren is looking around Route 101 when she hears a cry. She runs toward the sound and nearly trips over a shoulder bag in the tall grass. She picks it up and keeps running. She finds Prof. Birch on the ground, an angry poochyena shaking his pant leg vigorously and snarling. ]

Ren: Hey!
The poochyena eyes her for a second then continues. Ren takes a step forward.

Prof. Birch: Don’t! [Ren freezes] In my bag—my pokemon—AHH! [He screams again as the poochyena tugs harder.]

Ren looks in the bag, pulls out a pokeball and throws it. A treecko pops out, surveys the situation for a moment, then charges the poochyena, smacking it in the face with his tail. The poochyena rolls off and Prof. Birch scrambles back but doesn’t manage to stand. The poochyena lunges at the treecko who dodges, but when he looks back at Birch, the poochyena lands a bite and the treecko flinches, leaving him open for a tackle.

Prof. Birch: Oh, ah, pound!

The treecko obeys, but the poochyena grabs it by the tail and flips it. The treecko lands heavily, winded. Ren can tell the treecko is losing badly and Birch has no idea what to do.

Prof. Birch: [uncertainly] Leer?

The poochyena shakes it off and lunges again and the treecko just barely dodges. Birch is freaking out. Ren’s face sets.

Ren: [to the treecko] You are faster than that thing! Wait for it to charge, then dodge and use pound!

The treecko’s eyes flash to hers, then it tenses, waiting. When the poochyena charges, the treecko jumps over it and flipping, brings its tail down on the poochyena’s head, slamming it into the ground. The treecko lands gracefully just behind it.

Ren: That’s it! [The poochyena gets up and shakes its head.] To the side this time!

The treecko dives towards the poochyena’s tail and spins as the poochyena wheels around, teeth bared. The treecko’s tail connects heavily with the poochyena’s side, sending it rolling away.

Ren: Now hit its back!

The treecko leaps over and brings his tail down on the poochyena before it can get to its feet.

Ren: Great!

The poochyena shudders, trying to stand.

Ren: Pin its head and look it in the eye. You’ve won this fight. Let it know.

The treecko does as instructed, snorting into the poochyena’s face as he pins its muzzle to the ground with a hand. The treecko holds the poochyena’s gaze until it looks away, then he lets it up slowly. It slinks off with a whine.

Ren: Great job! You kicked that mutt’s butt! You sure are fast!

The treecko looks up at Ren with what looks like a huge grin and she smiles back. He is a light grass green with small red stripes on his head and back. His throat is a light blue and his tail a deeper green. Little gold scales are sprinkled sparingly over him.

Ren: You okay?

He nods. Ren turns to Birch, offers him a hand and pulls him up.
Ren: You okay, professor?

Prof. Birch: Yes, just a bit shaken up is all. [Trying to straighten himself out a bit] I must admit this is not the first time this has happened. Thank you for saving my neck, or maybe I should say my leg. You must be Ren.

Ren: [deadpans] Once again my reputation precedes me.

Prof. Birch: [grins] It certainly does! You look a lot like your father. You battle like him too. I should have expected as much, I suppose. Only, I though Senri said you weren’t a trainer yet?

Ren: I’m not, but I used to practice with otosan and stuff.

Prof. Birch: You are very talented. I’m a terrible trainer as you’ve probably noticed. I always just panic and blurt out the first move that comes to mind, even when my leg isn’t being chewed on. [Looking sheepish] I should really work at it more since I’m out in the field so much.

Ren: Well, you are really good at your job. [Hands him his bag.] I’ve seen your work in the news and I read of few of your papers in school. It’s great stuff.

Prof. Birch: Thank you! And thank you again for the help. [He rummages in his bag, pulls out a potion and sprays it on the treecko, who looks refreshed.] There you go. Thanks, bud. [Turns back to Ren.] I better get home. I was supposed to help my wife with dinner like a good husband for once. [He pulls out his PokéNav and tries to call his son. Mutters] He’s still not picking up. [looking back up at Ren] You know, I hate to ask a favor when you just saved me, but do you think you could fetch Kai for me? He should be just north of here on Route 103.

Ren: Sure thing. Don’t worry about it.

Prof. Birch: Thanks! Hey, why don’t you take this treecko with you? It can get a bit rough out here and you two seem to get along.

Ren: [to the treecko] How about it? [The treecko nods excitedly and climbs up to her shoulder. She laughs. To Birch] Will you be alright?

Prof. Birch: Yeah! I still have a few pokemon and it’s not far. [He hands her the treecko’s pokeball.] Dinner probably won’t be for a while anyway. We have to wait for Senri. So you two have fun. It was a pleasure meeting you, Ren. [as he hurries away] I’ll see you soon!

Ren: Nice meeting you too! See ya! [to the treecko] Ready? [The treecko nods and they set off.]

---

Scene 5: [Before long, they run across a wurmple. The treecko goes rigid and tugs at Ren’s top.]

Ren: What’s up? [The treecko wiggles while pointing at the wurmple, then plants a fist in his other hand with an audible smack.] You want to battle? [The treecko nods vigorously. She eyes him seriously for a moment.] Alright, go get ’em, tiger! [She braces as the treecko vaults off her shoulder and lands in front of the wurmple. The wurmple immediately string-shots him in the face and he stagers back.] Keep your cool. Listen for it. [The treecko crouches, eyes closed, and the wurmple shifts, readying its stinger.] It’s gonna try and sting you! Hit it with your left! [The treecko aims a punch with its left hand and it hits home. He uses the contact to grab the wurmple and flips it,
quickly hopping on top of it. He holds it down until it stops struggling, then lets it up, turning back to Ren as it slips away into the grass. ] Masterful job, tiger! Hold still. [ She kneels down and peels the silk off his face. His golden eyes blink open, looking satisfied. He climbs back aboard and they head off. ]

---

**Scene 6:** [ They find a clearing near the edge of the woods on Route 103 with a deep, round pool. A young man Ren’s age is sitting next to it, talking to his torchic which is in turn talking to a zigzagoon. ]

Kai: *Really?* [ He scrawls excitedly in his notebook. ] Could you ask it if it’s seen any recently, or maybe what time of year it’s seen them? [ The torchic nods, turning back to the zigzagoon who is nibbling on something. They converse for a minute and then the torchic repeats the conversation to the young man, who scratches something in his notebook again. ] That’s great! We’ll have to keep coming back here for a while to see if we can confirm. Thank it for me would you, Jay? [ The torchic turn back to the zigzagoon, but it has obviously spotted Ren and picks up its food before scurrying away into the bushes. The young man and torchic look up at Ren simultaneously. He grins brightly. ] Hi there!

Ren: Hi, I’m Ren Kosugi. [ She offers her hand. He takes it and they shake before she pulls him up. ]

Kai: I’m Kai and this is Jay. It’s nice to meet you. Are you a trainer?

Ren: *a bit slowly* [ The treecko moves on her shoulder, interrupting her and makes a gurgling sound. The torchic cheeps loudly at Kai and he looks down at her, then back up at Ren. ]

Kai: That’s funny, your treecko says you are.

Ren: [ muttering to the treecko ] I already said I’m not. [ to Kai ] And he’s not my— [ The torchic interrupts with another excited cheep. ]

Kai: [ to Jay ] Are you sure that’s Dad’s—[ to Ren ] Wait, did you say your name was Kosugi?

Ren: Yeah.

Kai: *looking flustered* So you must be Senri’s kid! I’m sorry I wasn’t—I didn’t expect—I mean I guess I just thought you’d be a guy?

Ren: *deadpans* Well I’m not.

Kai: I guess so—I mean obviously, haha. [ Kai laughs awkwardly, blush showing off his freckles. Ren looks kind of annoyed, but after a moment of internal struggle, her face softens. ]

Ren: It’s fine. Anyway your father sent me and the treecko to bring you back for dinner.

Kai: Oh, right, jeez. I’m sorry about that. I turned off my nav because the notifications kept spooking my subjects.

Ren: No big deal. I wanted to have a look around anyway. Want to head back? It’s getting kind of late.
Kai: Y-yeah. [ Ren turns around to head home but Kai lingers for a frame before jumping to follow. He is clearly too embarrassed to make further conversation. Ren sighs and takes the initiative. ]

Ren: So I take it you are a trainer?

Kai: Yeah! I just started… [ looks away ]

Ren: But you can already talk to your torchic. That’s pretty cool.

Kai: Thanks. She’s great and really smart. [ Jay headbutts his leg affectionately. He smiles at her. Ren watches out of the corner of her eye and grins a bit. ] It was really awesome to actually be able to speak to a pokemon after waiting practically my entire life…

[ There is another beat of silence, so Ren swoops in once more. ]

Ren: Do you help your father with his research a lot?

Kai: Yeah. [ He smiles again. ] I sort of grew up doing it, but now that I’m old enough I’m an official research assistant. And because I have my own pokemon, I can do field work, which is the fun part. Jay is the best. She is always helping me find rare variants and interviewing wilds. Just back there, this zigzagoong was telling us—

[ Pan out. We can see Ren looking satisfied as Kai continues to babble excitedly about his work. It is getting dark and the sun is setting over the trees to their left. ]

Scene 7: [ The two families, including the torchic, treecko, a mudkip, a vigoroth and an ursaring, are gathered around a table at the Birch’s house finishing dinner. Senri is sitting on one end, tilting back in his chair with his wife and daughter on either side. Ren is seated next to Kai and has one arm on the table so she can better see past him to the other end where Prof. Birch is telling the story of his rescue, gesticulating wildly for emphasis. All laugh as he nearly falls out of his chair in the re-enactment. ]

Prof. Birch: —and I’m blithering out inane commands like an idiot so of course my poor treecko is getting his ass kicked—[ to the treecko ] no offence, bud—so I’m just panicking even more. But then Ren steps in—thank Arceus—and starts telling the treecko what to do. And it works, like right away! They had this thing literally beaten into the ground in less than a minute. I’ve never seen anyone turn a battle around like that before. And this poochyena already knew bite, so it was no slouch. I mean, that should have been a tough battle even without the rocky start!

Senri: I can’t say I’m surprised. [ He grins, making brief eye contact with his daughter and she gives him an irritated look. ] She’s always been a natural.

[ The treecko chooses this moment to climb Ren like a tree and rest his head on hers, standing on her shoulders for support. She lowers her other elbow to the table and rests her head in her hands to make the position more comfortable. All are quiet for a moment, watching the pair grin at each other. ]

Prof. Birch: What do you say to taking that treecko off my hands, Ren?

Ren: [ with and embarrassed start ] Wha!—really?
Prof. Birch: Of course. He is a bit of a handful, but he seems to like you already. [ The treecko has grabbed hold of her head so that he can nuzzle it with full force, messing up her hair quite thoroughly. ]

Ren: [ to the treecko ] What do you say, tiger? [ The treecko stops, eyes blowing wide. It has clearly not been listening to the conversation. Ren repeats ] Would you like to be my pokemon? [ The treecko bounces ecstatically for a moment before leapfrogging over her head and landing on the table in front of her. He whirls around to face her, nodding frantically, whole body quivering with excitement. ] Well alright then, I guess you are. [ The treecko does a summersault, which sends a few things flying, then jumps into her arms, nuzzling her neck. After a moment, she puts him back down on the table. ]

Senri: Are you going to battle him?

Ren: I’m not—[ She snorts mid-sentence because the treecko is furiously waggling its eyebrows at her. ]

Prof. Birch: [ chuckles ] He’s been with humans for a while now. He’s picked up a few things… Is that what you are going to call him, Tiger?

Ren: Nah, I’ll think of something better.

Prof. Birch: Do you think you could do me another favor?

Ren: Sure!

Prof. Birch: I know you haven’t decided what you are going to do yet, but I’m sure you won’t be in Littleroot all the time. Would you take one of my pokedexes and log the pokemon you see while you are out?

Ren: That’s hardly a favor, professor. I’d love to have a pokedex.

Prof. Birch: You can come by the lab and pick one up tomorrow then. And you can call me Alan. We’re all friends here.

Ren: Of course, Alan. Thank you. [ Ren smiles. ]

[ Zoom out to show the whole dinner party. The treecko is back on Ren’s shoulder and Jay is nestled between Kai’s arms on the table. Senri has his arm over the back of his wife’s chair as she leans in to talk to Nikau. Alan has started clearing the dishes away since he missed most of the prep work. ]

Scene 8: [ The next day Ren is unpacking more of her things. The treecko is trying to help, but mostly he is just bouncing around and climbing all over her walls with his sticky pads. Ren doesn’t appear to mind his antics. Later they are downstairs helping her mother unpack dishes etc. Asuko is unwrapping and directing while Ren puts things away and the treecko helps put things in the cabinets that are too high for the women to reach. After lunch Ren sees the treecko staring out the window, tapping his foot absently on the sill. ]

Ren: Hey okasan, I think we are going to head out for a bit.
Asuka: Sure thing, Ren-chan. Thanks for the help!

---

**Scene 9:** [The treecko is bounding ahead of Ren on Route 101. He spots a zigzagoon and bounces in place, looking eagerly at Ren.]

Ren: I’ve told you twice I’m not a trainer. I’m serious. [The treecko just waggles his tail, grinning at her. She sighs.] Alright, but we can’t just do this all the time. It’s dangerous because we’re not registered. Do you understand? A real trainer can take you to a pokemon center if something goes wrong. And I’m not even sure I really want to… [She trails off as he gestures at the zigzagoon, as eager as ever. Her expression softens for a moment. She straightens up.] Try not to jump around as much this time. These zigzagoons are pretty good at getting you in the gut. [He nods, bounding forward as the zigzagoon crouches.] And watch for the front claws! They’ll do a lot more damage. Try to get around back!

---

**Scene 10:** [The next few days follow a similar pattern: unpack, lunch, afternoon foray on Route 101, battles with wilds etc. Just a few frames of this and then focus in on a battle with a poochyena. The treecko is panting as the poochyena watches him carefully from several feet away. It uses growl and he shudders.]

Ren: This is getting us nowhere. You’re not gonna land another pound without it getting a better hit. Use absorb! [The poochyena staggers while the treecko perks up a bit.] One more! [This time the poochyena collapses.] Great job, tiger! [She crouches down and they high-five, grinning. Ren pulls some jerky out of her bag and places it in front of the poochyena. It gets up and takes the offering cautiously before slinking away. Kai and Jay emerge from the grass behind Ren.]

Kai: You are a good battler.

Ren: Thanks. [She stands, looking sheepish.]

Kai: How come you two are out here battling wilds?

Ren: It was his idea. [The treecko puffs up and Jay titters.] I mean, we shouldn’t be, but he really likes battling. He gets so damn excited. It’s really hard to say no.

Kai: Maybe it’s not my place, but when I saw you two battling just now, it looked… right? Like you’d been doing it for a long time already. You two were in sync and, well, at least it looked like you were having fun. [Ren looks unsure and a bit uncomfortable. Kai pauses for a moment before continuing.] I don’t even have a badge yet, so feel free to totally ignore what I’m saying, but I think you are super talented and you two could totally take the league in time. [Jay chirps at him.] Jay says you should do what makes you happy, what feels right, and not worry so much.

Ren: [Her face brightens a little.] Smart cookie.
Scene 11: [ Later that night, Ren is lying on her bed with the treecko resting on her chest. She pulls a hand out from under her head and rests it gently on the treecko’s back. His eyes open and he looks at her. ]

Ren: So I’ve been thinking… how do you feel about “Tāraki”—as a name, I mean? [ He scooches up and boops her nose with his. ] Haha, so is that a yes? [ He nods and flops his head down on her collarbone. ] Okay, Tāraki, I’ve also been thinking about what we’re going to do, you know? [ He rumbles against her. ] It seems obvious to me that you really want to be a battler. And I know I’ve been sort of… unclear on whether I want to be a trainer. I really do like battling with you, but I… [ She sighs. ] Maybe I’ll save that explanation for another time. The point is… I’m willing to train you [ His head snaps up, eyes boring into hers. ]—no, I’d be happy to train you. We can even challenge a gym if you want, I just can’t promise we’ll take the league challenge or anything right now, okay? [ She splutters and as he launches himself at her neck, hugging her tight and rubbing his head roughly against her cheek. Giggling ] Tāraki!

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I have more than half of this written already, so updates should be pretty regular at about a chapter every 2 weeks. I am publishing this scene by scene on my tumblr (https://rhnuzlocke.tumblr.com) if you don't want to wait and read it chapter by chapter. There are also character sheets and other helpful stuff up there if you want to check it out. I'm gonna add the character pics here too at the end of the chapter.

Character Chart:

HUMANS:
Ren, our protagonist
Kai, Ren's neighbor who likes science
Senri, Ren's dad and a Gym Leader
Asuka, Ren's mom and a writer
Prof. Alan Birch, Kai’s father and head of Littleroot Labs which studies pokemon habitats and distribution
Nikau Birch, Kai's mom

TEAM REN:
Taraki the Treecko

TEAM KAI:
Jay the Torchic
We Make A Beautiful Team

Chapter Summary

In which Ren makes some new friends and life decisions.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Scene 1: [ Ren is standing at a counter in a pokemon center, flanked by her parents. Tāraki is lying back on the counter doing “tail-ups”. Ren signs her name on a tablet and slides it back to the nurse. ]

Nurse: Okay, that should be it for the paperwork. Here is your PokéNav, which comes loaded with all of the basic apps and functions. You can buy anything else you might want online and it will download pretty much anywhere that’s not a cave or tunnel. Let me just print out your new trainer card and you’ll be all set. [ She returns with it a moment later. ] Here you are! Just show that the next time you go to a pokemart. Most offer some free items for new trainers, including the one here. Congratulations, you are now a registered trainer!

Ren: Thank you so much!

Nurse: You’re welcome!

[ Ren looks down at her trainer card as Tāraki clambers up her arm to crouch on her shoulder, tail swaying. Her father leans back on the counter to face his daughter. ]

Senri: Congratulations, Ren. I was beginning to think it would never happen.

Ren: Don’t you dare be smug about this.

Senri: Who’s smug? I’m just happy is all.

Ren: Good, cuz Tāraki’s the one who roped me into this

[ Senri looks pleased. Ren turns to her mother who is trying not to tear up. ]

Asuki: Oh, Ren-chan, I’m so proud. [ She hugs her daughter tightly. ]

Ren: [ chuckles ] Thanks okasan.

Senri: Well, I really have to get to work. I can’t wait to tell everyone my daughter is finally a trainer!

Ren: Otosaannnn.

Senri: [ He walks towards the door, grinning. ] See you both at dinner! [ He exits. ]

Asuki: You should go to the mart to get your supplies. I’m gonna head home and unpack for a bit. The joys of moving! I’ll see you for dinner, I hope?

Ren: I’ll be home before dinner to help, silly. [ She kisses her mother on the head. ]
Scene 2: [ Shot of Oldale. It is a small town but unlike Littleroot it has all of the amenities like a pokemon center, pokemart, grocery store, post office, fire station, etc. Ren enters the pokemart with Tāraki on her shoulder. ]

Clerk: [ sliding a bunch of items across the counter ] Here’s your new trainer kit—well, ah—mostly. We actually just sold out of pokeballs. I’m sorry, more were supposed to come in days ago already.

Ren: Don’t worry about it. It’s not your fault. I’ll come back. In the meantime, could I get another two antidotes please?

Scene 3: [ Tāraki bounds excitedly ahead of Ren on the path. He climbs a tree and starts leaping from branch to branch, inserting unnecessary flips and flourishes as his confidence builds. He keeps his path meandering so that he doesn’t get too far ahead as he zips from tree to tree. He lands on a low branch and swings underneath it, holding a Spiderman pose as he waits for her to catch up. Ren laughs. A bush rustles near the path ahead of them. Tāraki jumps to the ground and launches himself into the bush after it. There are sounds of struggle and a moment later he comes tumbling back out and lands on his face. ]

Ren: Tāraki?!

[ Jay emerges, making a disgruntled noise. She cheeps angrily at Tāraki as he picks himself up. He makes a quiet gurgle, looking moderately contrite. Jay turns to Ren and chirps a greeting. ]

Ren: Hi Jay. Sorry about him. Is Kai around?

[ Jay trills loudly into the woods. ]

Kai: [ distant ] Jay? [ She trills again and soon he is emerging onto the path as well. ] Hey Ren! [ Jay peeps something to him. ] Ha, sounds like him. [ Jay says more this time, then jerks her head at Ren. ] Um… [ Jay peeps and jerks her head more forcefully this time. To Jay ] Okay. [ to Ren ] She says she already told him, but you should also tell your treecko to be more careful because he’ll listen now that you are his train—[ to Jay ] no she’s [ Jay chirps emphatically. ]—wait, that’s a trainer PokéNav! So you are a trainer now?

Ren: Yeah, we were just in Oldale registering.


Ren: Tāraki talked me into it. [ to Tāraki ] And Jay is right, please don’t go pouncing on things without looking. There could have been an growlithe in that bush for all you knew.
Kai: [chuckles] Not in this region… BUT, um, it’s great that you’re a trainer now! [his words start to run together] The only other trainer I know is your dad and he is like super busy all the time but now we can battle and, uh, um, that is, like, if you want? …SOOO, Tāraki? His name is Tāraki?

Ren: Yep.

Kai: Oh, I like it. It really fits. [Kai looks like he might still implode from embarrassment despite the clever distraction from his totally bald-faced excitement.]

Ren: [Grins to herself. To Tāraki] So, what do you think, tiger? Ready for your first official battle?

Tāraki hops up, fist in the air, then flexes unimpressively. Kai remains dumb for a moment.

Kai: Oh! How about you Jay? Ready to take ‘em?

Jay trills and tenses into a fighting stance, eyes glinting.

Kai: Okay! [He taps his PokéNav and Ren follows suit.]

Ren: We’ll start! Pound her legs, she’s only got two!

Tāraki dives forward and spins, tail sweeping low.

Kai: Catch him!

Jay reacts fluidly, grabbing Tāraki’s tail with one foot while spinning on the other. Her talons dig in as she uses the momentum to fling Tāraki away.

Ren: She only needs two. [Her face lights up] Alright, hit with your fist this time. Use your tail as a counterweight!

Tāraki leaps forward again and he is too fast for Jay to dodge. She catches his punch, but he swings his tail as he wrenches his arm to the side. Jay hits the ground and releases him.

Ren: She’s open!

Tāraki is already diving on top of her.

Kai: Kick him!

Jay rolls onto her back just in time to meet Tāraki’s chest with both her feet. Tāraki goes flying, but flips in the air and gracefully sticks the landing.

Ren: Nice save, tiger! Try a one-two combo.

Jay catches the first strike, but can’t catch the second and goes sliding back, even more winded because she was holding on.

Ren: Let her up and aim high this time!

Jay hops to her feet and Tāraki leaps up into the air for his usual overhead somersault tail-strike.

Kai: Bring him back down!

Jay flips as Tāraki comes down, catching him mid-air so that Tāraki lands on his back with Jay on his chest. He groans but when his eyes re-open they are full of defiance. He grabs her leg, but before
Ren: Alright, you beat us. [She crouches down to check on Tăraki and Jay hops off him.] You okay, Tăraki? [He hauls himself up heavily into a sitting position and grimaces, but nods.] Good battle. Maybe just lay off some of the unnecessary flipping, at least when your opponent is almost as fast as you. [They smile at each other. To Jay] And you have some moves my friend! [She offers her fist and Jay pounds it with her foot, making a “preee!” that sounds like “thanks.”]

Kai: That was a close match. You guys did great.

Ren: [scooping Tăraki up] Thanks! I better go patch this guy up.

Kai: Bring him back to the lab! We have a health care machine there. No one will mind you using it and it will save you a bunch on potions and stuff.

Ren: Thank you, but I’ve never used one.

Kai: Oh, I’ll show you! It’s super simple. I’m sure Jay could use a break too after that.

Ren: Lead the way.

[They start off towards Littleroot.]

Kai: [looking at her bag] So is that your starter pack?

Ren: Yep, plus some other stuff.

Kai: Are you planning to catch any more pokemon?

Ren: Well, I thought it would be good to get at least one, so Tăraki can have a training partner, but the mart was out of balls so I guess it will be just the two of us for a while.

Kai: Oh Jeez, I bought them out! And we’re out at the lab too. I feel terrible.

Ren: Hey, it’s okay.

Kai: No, no—hey, I know, you can have a few of mine!

Ren: You really don’t have to—

Kai: Oh, and when we get back to the lab we can put DexNav and some other apps to your nav. You’re helping with the pokedex so it’s totally fine!

Ren: [She rolls her eyes at his excited talking over her, but smiles.] Thanks, Kai.

---

**Scene 4:** [Black background and someone is calling Ren’s name. Her eyes blink open and she is in her bed with Tăraki leaning over her.]

Tăraki: Ren.
Ren: Hhmm?

Tāraki: Ren— [ trails off into gurgles ]

Ren: [ snapping bolt upright ] Wait! Did you just talk?

Tāraki: [ more unintelligible gurgling ]

Ren: You said my name! I heard you say my name!

Tāraki: Ren!

[ Ren squeals in excitement, picking Tāraki up and hugging him. She spins him and then tosses him up. He grabs onto a beam in the ceiling and snickers. ]

Ren: [ laughing/whining ] Tāraki! Come back down here!

---

**Scene 5:** [ Ren is in her room putting her nav in a small shoulder bag when a voice calls from downstairs. ]

Asuka: Ren! Kai is here!

[ Tāraki jumps to her shoulder as Ren hurries downstairs. Kai and Jay are standing in the doorway. ]

Kai: Ready?

Ren: Let’s go! Bye okasan!

Kai: Bye Mrs. Kosugi!

[ Panel of the four heading out onto Route 101. Tāraki mostly tools around: running/jumping/climbing etc. Kai is alternately scratching in his notebook or talking to Ren, who is mostly relaxing. Jay keeps bringing Kai things to look at. Tāraki wants to battle almost every pokemon he sees, which annoys Jay and they get into a scuffle. Panel of Jay interviewing a taillow. Panel of Tāraki battling a wurmple. All are having lunch when Jay notices something and alerts Kai. ]

Kai: [ squinting off into the woods ] [ to Jay ] Hmm. You’re right. [ to Ren ] Hey Ren, seems like a poochyena has been watching us. [ He points at a tree at least 10 yards away which is only partially obscuring a poochyena. It is not like the other ones they have seen. The base color is still gray, but it has a black stripe down its spine and many more scattered across its sides, legs and tail. It still has the black mask and throat, but its paws are gray. It sees him pointing, but doesn’t move. ]

Ren: [ seeing it ] It looks different.

Kai: It’s a striped variant. Almost all the one’s around here are cloaked. That’s because stripers are usually the result of a manectric or arcanine cross. You see them sometimes along the inner coast or from breeders. So either this one has traveled a long way or some asshole is releasing the pups they
don’t want.

[ Ren looks a bit surprised because she has never heard Kai swear before, or use that tone of voice. ]

Ren: Jay, would you see if it will talk to us? I’ve got some food left.

[ Jay and the poochyena confer for a bit across the distance, then Jay reports back to Kai. ]

Kai: She asks that we not approach and just toss the food to her, but she will stay for a while. [ Jay grumbles. ] Jay also adds that she is “kind of rude”.

Ren: [ she chuckles ] Understood.

[ The poochyena approaches them, stopping about 10 feet away. Ren tosses an apple and some jerky over. The poochyena sits and accepts the food, but looks tense. ]

Ren: Please ask her if there are any more stripers around. [ Show Jay and the poochyena talking as Kai interprets. ]

Kai: [ pulling out his notebook ] She came from north of here. The only stripers she’s seen were her siblings. Now there’s only her.

Ren: She must be tough. Did she get those scars from battles?

Kai: She says that is how you survive. Pokemon draw strength from battling, but it’s risky. …Wow, that’s basically what all the research says. It never occurred to me to ask a pokemon if they thought about it that way, or if it was just something they felt like they should do.

Ren: [ to the poochyena ] Would you like to train with us?

[ The poochyena looks puzzled so Tāraki repeats the question and they go back and forth with Jay butting in when Tāraki starts to look very incensed. ]

Kai: She says she wants to battle you and Tāraki first because no matter how tough it is out here, she’s better off on her own than with a bad trainer. [ to Jay ] I see what you mean about her being rude.

Ren: Sounds fair to me. [ She and Kai stand. ] Ready Tāraki?

[ Tāraki nods, muscles coiling. ]

Ren: [ warningly ] Good, but it’s over when I say it is. [ The poochyena readies herself. ] Pound her left shoulder, Tāraki!

[ She tries to dodge but Tāraki is too fast and sends her tumbling. However she rolls right back to her feet and comes at him. ]

Ren: Aim low!

[ Tāraki hits her front legs and she flips due to the momentum. Tāraki slams her belly while it’s exposed, but she manages to grab his tail and there are sparks. Tāraki falls to one knee, trembling. ]

Ren: [ under her breath ] Paralysis! [to Tāraki] Watch out!

[ The poochyena uses his immobility and barrels into him. He is knocked back but lands on his feet. ]
Ren: You’re not going to be able to outspeed her anymore. Absorb!

[ The poochyena is charging but slows as her energy is drained. ]

Ren: Let her come to you.

[ The tackle lands because Tāraki cannot move and he is knocked back. ]

Ren: Backflip!

[ This time Tāraki backflips as the poochyena closes, hitting her jaws shut with his tail. She goes reeling back and collapses. Tāraki stands up, readying an attack. ]


[ Ren reaches in her bag and pulls out a potion as she approaches the poochyena. The poochyena stands and eyes her suspiciously. Ren kneels down. ]

Ren: That was a great battle. Let me heal you up, okay?

[ The poochyena looks wary, but lowers her head slightly. Ren sprays her and she shakes. Ren puts the potion back in her bag and pulls out a pokeball. She holds it up to the poochyena. ]

Ren: What do you say?

[ The poochyena’s eyes bore into Ren’s for a moment, then she steps forward and presses her nose to the pokeball. She is swept up in a flash of red light before disappearing into the pokeball. Ren looks down at the pokeball, a soft smile on her face. ]

Kai: Was it just me, or did she use thunder fang?

Ren: I guess you were right about the manectric heritage. [ to Tāraki ] How are you? Do you need a paralyze heal? [ He nods. As she applies the meds ] What do you think? Are you two going to get along?

[ Tāraki makes a show of considering it, then gives her a thumbs up. ]

Ren: Good! [ She releases the poochyena from her ball. She sits down in front of Ren. Huge smile ]

It’s great to meet you, Akahata! Welcome to the team!

---

**Scene 6:** [ Ren and her pokemon are wandering through open woods. Tāraki is hopping through the trees while Akahata trails by Ren’s side. Akahata lifts her head in Tāraki’s direction and asks if he is getting them lost and he replies with a smug negative. Very soon they emerge onto fields of grass and brush. They make their way towards a pond with reeds growing around it. Kai is sitting on the bank with Jay napping at his side. ]

Ren: Hey Kai! How’s it going?

Kai: Good. Jay and I did some battling this morning. How about you?
Ren: [sitting down next to him] We did some exercises.

Tāraki: I feel great!

Ren: Tāraki’s still pretty hyped up. [leaning in to look at Kai’s notebook] Whatcha working on?

Kai: [blushing lightly] I’ve been counting and sketching the different masquerain variants on this pond. See, masquerain sort of mimic their predators—mostly bird or other bug-types in the area. So, unlike most variants, you often see several on a single pond. [pointing them out] So far I’ve seen ninja, kite, and pale.

Ren: These are great. You draw very well.

Kai: [embarrassed] Not really…

Ren: [elbowing him] Oh, just take the compliment.

Kai: [quietly] Okay, thanks.

Tāraki: [looking out at all the masquerain darting around] So many! [grabbing at Ren’s shirt] Can I battle a few? Can I? Please!

[Akahata looks at Tāraki like he is an idiot.]

Ren: Aka’s right. Those things have a double type advantage on you. It’s one thing to battle wurmples but those suckers have evolved. Maybe when we’ve trained a bit more.

Tāraki: [He groans and dances from foot to foot. Perking up] What about a surskit? I could totally take a surskit!

Ren: [chuckles] That’s a better match up. They look kind of skittish, but we could give it a try. [to Kai] Do you mind? I don’t want to mess up your work.

Kai: Nah, I’m done here.

[Ren surveys the surskits skimming the surface. One of the ones near them catches her attention. It is blue with a golden yellow crown and a red spot on its forehead.]

Ren: [pointing] Hey, Kai, what kind is that one?

Kai: [whipping out his pokedex] …I’m not sure. It looks kind of like a ninja, but that doesn’t explain the red spot. [Show him looking through photos and other info on his pokedex] That’s funny, there is a different ninja variant in Kalos that it resembles a bit too. See, the problem is that it’s kind of hard to tell when they’re surskits. The mimicry hasn’t fully developed. When they evolve—

[He stops and blushes when Ren throws out a hand to cover his mouth. The surskit in question has noticed the group on the bank staring at it and looks very nervous.]

Ren: [quietly] Tāraki, why don’t you ask it nicely for a battle.

[Tāraki takes a step towards the water and calls out to the surskit, asking it for a battle and promising a reward. It glances around in confusion and skitters back a bit, politely declining. Tāraki tries to convince it by telling it that his trainer thinks it looks cool and pointing out that it has a type advantage. It stops backing away and considers. Jay butts in to point out that it probably only knows bubble, which will do nothing. Tāraki just grins and Akahata rolls her eyes. The surskit asks if Tāraki will kill her if she loses. He insists that he would never because he has a trainer who feeds]
him and that his trainer will heal her after if she wants because that’s what she did for Akahata. Akahata concedes this is true with a nod. The surskit skims up slowly, pausing near the bank.

Ren: Took a little convincing, huh? Let her make the first move.

[ Tāraki readies himself and the surskit crouches. Her antenna glows lime green and she launches herself at Tāraki. He dodges but she keeps jabbing and gets him in the tail. He goes down on one knee for a moment. ]

Ren: Spin!

[ Tāraki spins, righting himself and knocking the surskit off her feet. She spins rapidly on her antenna, pointed feet glowing. ]

Ren: Get out of range and use absorb!

[ Tāraki backflips away and uses absorb. The surskit slows and rolls back onto her feet. ]

Ren: Atta boy! Now pound!

[ Tāraki leaps forward but the surskit counters with another fell stinger. Tāraki shudders again ]

Ren: Her side!

[ This time Tāraki is fast enough and the surskit goes rolling away. She slumps and Tāraki jumps over to her, placing a hand on her head. She looks at the ground, clearly defeated. ]

Ren: Nice job!

[ Tāraki lets the surskit up, looking pleased. She begins to shuffle back towards the water. ]

Ren: Hey wait! Don’t you want some food or something? [ The surskit pauses and looks up at Ren ] Or I could heal you, if you like. Tāraki got you pretty good. Come sit by us for a bit at least so you can recover.

[ Ren kneels down and fishes a fruit out of her bag, placing it on the ground a few feet away from her. Tāraki sits down beside his trainer and gestures encouragingly to the surskit. She settles down in front of the fruit, facing the group. She looks up and them and Ren smiles. The surskit starts eating and Jay compliments her on the battle. Akahata nods in agreement and Tāraki winks. The surskit blushes deeply. ]

Ren: [ giggling at the interaction ] All good things, I hope?

[ The surskit swallows. All sit comfortably while the surskit eats. Kai starts talking to Ren about something nerdy, no doubt, and she only half listens. He doesn’t need a lot of prompting to talk your ear off. Ren notices the surskit taking its last bite. ]

Ren: You seem a little shy, so maybe this isn’t your game, but I think you could be a battler. Would you like to train with us?

[ Tāraki translates. The surskit looks shocked, then considers the offer. We can see the wheels turning in her head. When she looks back up at Ren, her face is full of determination and she nods. ]

Ren: Awesome! Welcome to the team!

Kai: Are you building a team now?
Surprise and confusion pass over Ren’s face before her eyes narrow and her jaw sets.

Ren: Maybe I am!

Scene 7: A week later Ren is walking through the reeds back up from an estuary. She is carrying Tāraki in her arms, Ikki is balancing on her head and Akahata is trailing in her wake. She looks up across the open space, scanning the treeline along the bank. Her eyes catch on something white and she stops, focusing in on it. There is a wingull with a pink underside sitting on a low branch about 100 feet away.

Ren: Is it just me or is that the wingull variant Kai has been on about since I met him?

Ikki: Well, um, did he say they were pink?

Ren: [starting towards it] Yep! [Ikki is clearly alarmed. Ren pauses again at a respectful distance away to snap a pic and send it to Kai.] Could you ask it to talk to us for a bit?

Ikki: [shifting uncomfortably and hunkering further down on Ren’s head] Um…

Ren: [glancing up in amusement] Relax, little bug, you’re with us now. You’ve got nothing to worry about.

[Ikki still looks nervous but calls out a greeting to the wingull.]

Ikki: She says sure.

Ren: Great! I just hope Kai hasn’t turned off his nav… again.

[Pan out as Ren and her team approach the wingull. They interview her for a while with Tāraki doing most of the talking because Ikki is still nervous. We can tell time is passing because the groups positions shift and the light changes. An orange sunset is settling in over the trees behind them, casting its glow on the water below.]

Ren: Geez, she’s been everywhere, huh?

Akahata: [grumbles lazily] Seems like.

Tāraki: It’s so cool. I like traveling. There was nowhere to go back on my island. Now there’s a whole continent!

Ren: [staring off into the distance] Yeah…

Ikki: [tapping Ren’s knee to get her attention] Um, she says she has to go find a roost for the night.

Ren: [starting] Right! Uh… [looking sheepish] Could one of you ask her if she wants to be on the team?

[Tāraki steps up immediately. The wingull listens to his proposal with interest and then looks very thoughtful. She asks Tāraki some questions and they go back and forth for a while. Finally she flits]
down in front of Ren and gives a small nod. Ren holds out a pokeball and she presses her beak to it and is enveloped by red light.

[ Ren is headed back out of the trees onto the path with the wingull on her shoulder and the other three pokemon flanking her, when Kai comes running up, Jay in tow. ]

Kai: [ yelling before her even reaches her ] I came as soon as I got your message! Is it still there? Did you—

Ren: [ gesturing to the wingull on her shoulder ] No worries, dude. I got you. [ Kai squeals in delight, dancing from foot to foot before his exertion catches up with him. He takes a minute to catch his breath, hands on his knees. Ren waits for Kai to compose himself. ] Kai, meet Panahi.

Kai: Does this mean you’ve caught another one?

Ren: Yep! So how about we hold off on the interview until tomorrow? We should be getting home. [ winking ] Or you could just read through my notes.

Kai: You’re the best.

Ren: I know.

---

**Scene 8:** [ A few days later, Ren and her pokemon are in a field at midmorning. Ren is yelling instructions as Panahi shoots bursts of water at Tāraki who is managing to keep just ahead of shots by flipping, tumbling, and zigzagging. Akahata watches the exercise passively while Ikki looks on anxiously from a few feet away. She casts a nervous glance at Akahata, then sidles over to her. ]

Ikki: Akahata, can I ask you for some advice?

Akahata: Sure. What about?

Ikki: Just any general advice you might have about battling. You always seem like you know what you’re doing and I… Well, I have no idea.

Akahata: [ She doesn’t answer immediately, clearly considering her response. ] …You need to look out for yourself. Don’t let her put you in danger.

Ikki: [ glancing worriedly at Ren, then questioningly back at Akahata ] She wouldn’t do that, would she?

Akahata: I don’t know and that’s the point. [ Ikki visibly droops. ] Look, the way I figure it, any trainer that puts up with that spaz [ jerking her head at Tāraki who is currently taking a water gun to the face because he did a fancy backflip instead of ducking sensibly ] can’t be that bad, or that picky. That’s why I agreed to be on her team. But this battling business is a competition for them. They play for themselves with our lives. She’s good at this, so if we stick with her, we’ll get stronger. But the stronger we get, the greater the competition. Some day one of us might not be strong enough, might not compliment the roster enough, might become expendable. I can hope she stays grounded, gets attached to us, takes care of us, but it’s not wise to rely on it. Humans can be fickle and cruel.
Ikki: [ She watches Ren and her teammates for a minute ] …You’re right, and if anybody’s going to be expendable, it’s me. I’m just a bug. Battling scares me, but I’ve got nothing to go back to. This is my best shot at a real life, a life that means something…

Akahata: [ She sighs. ] Same here, bug.

---

**Scene 9:** [ Close up of Akahata snarling. Pan out: Ren and her pokemon are in a small clearing in the woods. Akahata is battling a large and rather tough looking zigzagoon while Ren directs her and the others watch from a nearby tree branch. Taraki is in the middle allowing Ikki to keep her distance from her flying-type teammate. We pan out a bit further to see Kai and Jay approaching. Akahata lunges, using thunder fang, grabs the zigzagoon by the shoulder and tosses it. It lands heavily and does not immediately get up. ]

Ren: [ stepping forward and stroking Akahata’s head ] That’s my girl. [ She removes some berries from her bag and offers them to the zigzagoon, who takes them gladly. ]

Kai: [ tries to wipe the shock and admiration off his face as he steps into the clearing ] Well, you all are certainly improving.

Ren: [ hesitantly ] Thanks. [ She can tell he is nervous but has no idea why, so she pretends not to notice. ] Maybe we should train together some time. I’m sure Jay has a few moves she could show these gals.

[ Jay puffs up a bit with pride, but Kai only looks more nervous if anything. ]

Kai: [ looking away and fidgeting ] Thanks, but I’m not sure we’ll have time. Jay and I should really start packing and stuff.

Ren: You’re going away?

Kai: [ nervously ] Yes, well, yeah… [ attempted nonchalance ] We’ve got a lot of data on the area now and we’ve got some other locations we’d really like to check out. We were actually planning to leave earlier, but then we were waiting to see if we could confirm the rosy wingull sighting and we already did that a while ago, so, um, yeah.

Ren: When are you leaving?

Kai: As soon as we can get everything in order. So, like, the day after tomorrow probably.

Ren: [ Something like hurt flickers over her face before it settles into a half-smile. ] Aww. I’m gonna miss you, dude!

Kai: [ starting to blush a little and stammering in surprise ] Wha? Uh, y-yeah?

Ren: [ smiling softly ] Of course I am, you dork. We’re friends, aren’t we?

Kai: [ fidgeting and staring at the ground ] Yeah.

Ren: [ spreading her arms ] Come here, you. [ Knowing he is too shy, she doesn’t wait for him to
bring it in. Instead, she steps forward and hugs him. He goes rigid and blushes crimson, but after a moment, hugs her awkwardly back. She straightens up and takes hold of his shoulders while his arms fall back at his sides. ] Give me a call every once and awhile, alright?

Kai: [ half smiling ] Sure. [ She lets go of him. Edging away ] Ah, we should get going. [ over his shoulder ] Good luck with your training!

Ren: [ waving ] Later!

---

**Scene 10:** [ Later that evening, Ren dries her hands after finishing the dishes and sits back down at the table, chin propped up by her hand as her mother preps something in the kitchen. Her father sits just around the corner in the living room reading. ]

Asuka: That’s a bummer that Kai’s going away so soon. He’s such a nice boy.

Ren: Yeah. He kind of talks too much, but I’ll miss him anyway.

Asuka: You know, you keep saying things like that, but I don’t really see it. He’s always perfectly charming when I talk to him.

Ren: I know. It drives me a little nuts actually. You should see him when it’s just the two of us. He’s always either blabbing non-stop or, like, painfully quiet. And sometimes he’s kind of… rude? Like I don’t think it’s on purpose, but I can never tell if he’s joking or just not thinking or what.

Asuka: [ carefully ] Well, you know, I don’t think he’s really had a friend his own age before, so maybe he just isn’t sure how to act around you.

Ren: He doesn’t have to act any different at all. I’m not—And what’s up with him not—[ She sighs. ] You’re probably right, okasan. I guess I’m just a little annoyed he didn’t tell me sooner.

Asuka: That’s fair, but I’m sure he didn’t mean to upset you. I think he likes you a lot.

Ren: I know. Thanks okasan. [ She throws her mother a little smile and gets up. ] I think I’m gonna turn in. Come on gals.

[ Ren heads upstairs, her pokemon following. Asuka finishes what she is doing and walks over to her husband. She leans against the arm of Senri’s chair. ]

Asuka: It’s funny the things she notices and what she doesn’t.

Senri: [ not looking up from his Johto newspaper ] That’s our little late-bloomer.
Scene 11: [Upstairs, Ren is changing into a nightshirt while her pokemon settle down. Akahata has a dog bed in the corner, Ikki has a cushion on top of the dresser, and Panahi has a cushioned basket hanging from the ceiling. Ren sits/leans against her bed, not really relaxing.]

Ren: So, gals, I’ve been thinking maybe it’s time for us to go too.

Panahi: We going after your boyfriend?

Ren: Wha?—he—Really, Ahi? And here I was getting all hyped because I could understand you already.

Panahi: [looking amused] I’m sorry, hun. I guess I was a bit miffed because I’m just getting used to my new nest. But if that’s how it has to be, then that’s fine, I suppose.

Ren: Aw, you old fuss-pot. We can bring your bed with. I’ll get a vapor box… But anyway, the reason I think we should travel is that there is only so strong we can get if we stay. We’ve had what? two-three trainer battles that weren’t with Kai? And with him leaving, there’s no way we can have regular battles. And besides that, I’d really like to have battles more regularly so we can earn a little money, start supporting ourselves a bit. I think I’ve been draining my parents long enough now. But I don’t want to make you guys uncomfortable either. If you don’t think you’re ready or something… Well, what do you think?

Tāraki: Let’s do it! It’s nice here an all, but I’ve been here forever already. [hopping up and down]
It’ll be so awesome!

Akahata: You’re right about all that stuff. We won’t get that much stronger here.

Ikki: If you think we’re ready… then we are.

Panahi: I already said I’m down for whatever.

Ren: Thanks, gals.

Tāraki: When are we leaving? How long will it take to get the supplies and stuff?

Ren: It won’t take long to get everything together and to do a bit of research, but I’m not going anywhere for at least a week. I don’t want to spring this on my mom. I’ll tell them tomorrow and we’ll see how it goes.

[Everyone settles in. Panel of Ren and her pokemon sleeping. All are in their own beds except Tāraki who is curled up next to Ren.]

Chapter End Notes

And so the squad begins to form. Now we have the leader, hyperactive idiot, quiet cynic, cowardly lion, and embarrassing mom. Tune in next time for even more garbage. Thanks for reading!
Character Chart:

HUMANS:
Ren, our protagonist
Kai, Ren's neighbor who likes science
Senri, Ren's dad and a Gym Leader
Asuka, Ren's mom and a writer
Prof. Alan Birch, Kai’s father and head of Littleroot Labs which studies pokemon habitats and distribution
Nikau Birch, Kai's mom

TEAM REN:
Taraki the Treecko
Akahata the Poochyena
Ikki the Surski
Panahi the Wingull

TEAM KAI:
Jay the Torchic
Chapter Summary

In which the plot peeps over the fence and Ren gets her first badge.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Scene 1:** A little over a week later Ren is beginning her journey. She hitches a ride with her father to Petalburg. The car pulls up and parks next to the Petalburg Gym. Senri gets out of the driver’s side followed by Ren and Tāraki on the passenger side. Ren has a new backpack, belt, gloves, and boots. They make their way to the front of the gym where a middle-aged man and a teenager are standing.

Senri: Good morning, Mr. Scott, Wally. How are you?

Mr. Scott: Very well, thank you, Senri.

Senri: Oh! This is my daughter, Ren.

Mr. Scott: [shaking her hand] It’s a pleasure to finally meet you, young lady.

Senri: [as Ren shakes hands with a tentative Wally] I should have introduced you two a while ago. I wasn’t thinking. Ah, maybe it’s just as well. When’s the big move? Soon, no?

Wally: In a week, sir.

Senri: So, what can I help you with today?

Mr. Scott: Wally here finally got his trainer license. He’s ready for his first pokemon.

Senri: Wonderful, let’s see it! [Wally fishes it out of his bag and hands it to Senri.] Look at that photo! I’m jealous. My first made me look like a convict. [He chuckles and hands it back.] Well then, let’s go in and meet the greenhorns. I’m sure you’ll find someone suitable.

Wally: Actually, sir. I was hoping for a loan. I want to catch my first pokemon.

Senri: Oh? Very Good! Now let me see, who can I give you… [He looks thoughtful, then has an idea.] Actually, Ren, would you mind helping Wally with this?

Ren: [She looks taken aback for a moment but reins it in.] Sure.

Senri: Great! Ren has already caught three pokemon so you are in good hands, Wally. I’ll see you two later.

[The two men head inside. Wally shifts nervously, staring at the ground.]

Wally: Thank you for helping me. I hope this isn’t getting in the way of anything.

Ren: You’re welcome, and it’s no problem. It’s not like I’ve got a schedule to keep.
Ren gestures towards Route 102 and they start walking together.

Ren: So, what made you decide to become a trainer?

Wally: I’ve always wanted to be, ever since I was very young. But, um, I’m not very healthy, so my parents wouldn’t let me before.

Ren: What changed their minds?

Wally: Well, I’m going to live with my aunt and uncle soon because the air is cleaner there and they thought it would be easier for me if I had a friend.

Ren: Oh, well, whatever it takes, right?

Wally: [He looks surprised, then smiles a little.] Yeah.

Ren: [pulling a pokeball off her belt] I’m gonna lend you Akahata for this. [She hands over Akahata’s ball and he accepts it reverently. He just cradles it in his hand for a minute.]

Wally: Thank you! [He throws the ball, Akahata pops out in a flash of red, and he catches it again.] Oh, what a cool poochyena! I haven’t seen one like her before.

[Akahata looks up at him.]

Ren: Akahata, this is Wally. We are going to help him get his first pokemon. [She nods. To Wally] So she knows growl, tackle and thunder fang.

Wally: Whoa! Really?

Ren: Yep, and thunder fang is great because—

Wally: It has a chance of causing paralysis!

Ren: Yeah, and Aka here is good at it… You sure know your stuff.

Wally: I sorta have a library on pokemon training at home. I read about this stuff obsessively since I couldn’t really go out much… [He trails off in embarrassment.]

Ren: That’s great! Whatever pokemon you catch will be super lucky. So what species did you have in mind?

Wally: I would really like a ralts.

Ren: [She pulls out her pokedex and looks them up. When she first sees the image, her eyes flash to his hair and back. We see her evaluating the now clearly intentional resemblance in her mind’s eye. She shakes her head and turns her attention back to the data.] Looks like they aren’t that common. We could be out here a while.

Wally: I’m sorry.

Ren: Hey, don’t worry about it. This is super important. Besides, it’ll be fun.

Wally: [smiling] Thank you.
Scene 2: [ Wally and Ren wander around through the grass and brush. Wally consults his nav while Akahata sniffs around and Tāraki scouts from anything he can climb, mostly Ren. They chat while they all have lunch and Wally meets the rest of Ren’s pokemon. They are out looking again when Wally spots something. ]

Wally: Oh!

Ren: What is it?

Wally: I found one!

Ren: [ Her face slides into an expression of absolute disbelief as she catches sight of it. It is indeed a ralts, but instead of a green helmet, this one’s is blue. ] Nanda, is that a shiny?

[ Akahata calls out to it and asks for a battle. It accepts and Akahata tenses. ]

Wally: Okay… [ He takes a deep breath, determination spreading over his face. ] Akahata, use thunder fang!

[ Akahata surges forward and the ralts glows purple, attempting to counter with confusion, but it has no effect. Akahata lands thunder fang on the ralts’s arm and it shudders. ]

Wally: Great job, Akahata! Now a tackle!

[ Before Akahata can take more than a step, the ralts opens its mouth, pink sound waves pouring forth. Akahata slides to a stop, shaking her head. ]

Wally: Hang in there! It’s still paralyzed. You can get around back and tackle!

[ Akahata nods. The ralts goes for another disarming voice, but Akahata is ready this time and lunges forward, skimming past its shoulder. She turns as she lands and leaps again, her head connecting powerfully with its back and sending it sprawling. It tries to get up but wavers from the paralysis. Akahata presses a paw to its back and growls, it holds stubbornly before its head lolls, admitting defeat. Akahata releases it and walks around to address it properly. Rather than answering her, it rights itself and looks directly up at Wally. He starts, listening. He pulls out a pokeball and kneels down, offering it to the ralts. The ralts pushes the button and is engulfed by red light. Wally clutches the ball tightly for a moment. ]

Wally: [ jumping up, ball in the air ] YES! I can’t believe it!

Ren: Great job, dude! You really kept your cool. That’s a tough thing for most beginners.

Wally: [ slightly too elated to process her compliments, he swoops down on Akahata, hugging her tightly ] Thank you, Akahata! You were so awesome! Thank you so much!

[ Akahata is clearly shocked by the affection, but doesn’t pull away. ]

Wally: [ straightening up and turning to Ren ] Thank you, Ren! This means so so much to me. I don’t think I could have done that without you here.

Ren: I’m happy to help, but don’t give me too much credit. That was a pretty even match and you won it on your own. [ placing hand on his shoulder ] Always remember that.

Wally: [ blushing ] Thank you. But I still want to pay you back some day.
Ren: [smiling] Deal. Let’s go the Pokemon Center. We can heal these guys up and get your trainer card updated. Any idea what you’re going to call him?

Wally: [He looks down at his new ralts’s pokeball, his face lit up with pure joy.] Kihei.

---

**Scene 3:** [Next panel they are walking into the Petalbug Gym, talking easily and grinning. Wally’s good mood is infectious. Their fathers come over and Wally sends out his ralts. Both are shocked and Senri congratulates him. The Scotts leave, Wally waving to Ren. Senri puts a hand on his daughter’s shoulder.]

Senri: I’m proud of you, Ren. That was a lovely thing you did. [She just shrugs.] So, I guess I won’t be seeing you for a while, huh kiddo?

Ren: Yeah, but I’ll call you and okasan regularly, okay?

Senri: Of course. Get out there and knock ’em dead! You have the family name to uphold!

Ren: [pffff] Will do!

[She heads out of the gym, waving to her father and then heads out onto Route 104.]

---

**Scene 4:** [On a grassy knoll Ren and Panahi are battling a girl and her zigzagoon. Off to the west a ways we can see the ocean. The zigzagoon charges and Panahi hits it in the face with a water gun. It teeters, dizzy, and collapses.]

Ren: Nice shot, Panahi!

Panahi: Why, thank you.


Ren: Thanks. [Panahi flies to her shoulder and they part.] You see that, she said you were a good battler.

Panahi: I never said I wasn’t.

[Ren opens her mouth but is interrupted by a loud chirp. She looks up into a lone tree and sees a taillow sitting on one of the branches. It calls out to Panahi and Ren again, gesturing with its wings.]

Panahi: She saw you win that match and she wants to battle. [narrowing her eyes] She also says she will join your team if we can beat her.

Ren: Huh, well that’s unusual. How about it, Ahi?

Panahi: Sure thing, hun. I think I can take a taillow, even a cocky one.
Ren: Alright, open with a water gun.

[ Panahi takes to the air and so does the taillow a second later. Panahi fires off a water gun, but the taillow opens its mouth and a huge wave of concussive sound bursts out. The water gun falls apart before it can land and the sound wave hits Panahi like a hammer. She reels backward through the air before her wings crumple and she plummets. Ren runs forward and catches her. ]

Ren: Arceus! Ahi, are you okay?

[ Panahi just groans and Ren recalls her. The taillow is back on her perch, her eyes glinting in anticipation. Ren sends out Akahata. ]

Ren: Okay. We have to end this quickly. You won’t be able to take more than one hit from her. Wait for her to dive and use thunder fang.

[ The taillow swoops towards Akahata and lets out a boomburst before she gets in range. Akahata dodges and takes a glancing blow. She tumbles but springs back up immediately in one fluid motion. Akahata coils low, waiting. The taillow swings around for another pass, diving low this time. She waits until she is very close before opening her mouth to fire. ]

Ren: NOW!

[ Akahata springs into the air, fangs glowing with electricity as the sound wave passes beneath her, ruffling her fur. She rolls in the air, catching the taillow’s tail in her teeth and sending a pulse of electricity through her as she is jerked backward. The taillow’s back hits the ground hard and Akahata lands on top of her, front paws pinning her wings. The taillow twitches from paralysis, clearly incapacitated. Akahata lets out a breath and steps off her. ]

Ren: [ running forward ] Whoa! [ dropping down and rummaging through her bag ] You better not be dead.

[ She sprays it carefully with a potion and waits. Akahata sits back on her haunches. A moment later, the taillow opens her eyes. ]

Ren: Thank Arceus. [ Ren sprays her again, then pulls out a paralyze heal and applies it. ] Holy shit, Akahata. [ angrily ] What the hell was that! Were you trying to kill her?

Akahata: [ calmly ] Of course not. Her defense was weaker than I expected. She could have hurt me just as bad with a point blank hit like that.

Ren: She’s a wild, you’re not. She hasn’t learned control.

Akahata: I am sorry that I hurt her. Battling is dangerous. You must know that.

[ Before Ren can answer, the taillow pops up. She hops over to Akahata and congratulates her on her victory, clearly undisturbed by what happened. Akahata thanks her. ]

Ren: She’s not mad?

Akahata: She understands.

Ren: I—

[ She stops, confused, eyebrows furrowing. She unconsciously rubs her left hand over a long thin scar that is just barely visible on her right forearm. We can see her wrestling with her feelings while... ]
Akahata: Ren, she would like to be your pokemon. She says most of the trainers that came through here couldn’t beat her. She was very impressed.

Ren: Oh, are you sure she—

Akahata: Please, Ren. She’s strong. I know we have a flying-type already, but she really wants to train with us.

Ren: I didn’t mean it like that. I’d be honored to have her.

Ren and Akahata’s eyes lock. Akahata’s are pleading. Ren is confused until she realizes Akahata must actually feel bad about hurting the taillow, even if she feels like she did what she had to do.

Ren: Of course. I’m sorry, Aka. You’re right and I shouldn’t have yelled at you. I have a really hard time with—Nevermind. That was one hell of a battle.

Ren offers her hand to Akahata, with a cautious smile. Akahata hesitates for a moment, looking at Ren’s face, then presses her head into Ren’s hand.

Scene 5: Ren and her pokemon are having lunch on the beach. Tāraki and Māia toss a shell back and forth. Akahata wades a bit in the surf, looking out at the sea. Panahi stands contentedly on the sand, eyes closed and wind blowing over her outstretched wings. Ren leans back on her arms while Ikki crouches beneath her tented knees.

Scene 6: Ren and the gang are deep in the woods. The trees are tall and the canopy is fairly thick. Moss and lichen climbs everywhere and mushrooms and ferns sprout from rotting logs. Tāraki is leaping through the branches ahead of them, attempting to lead them, but his path wanders. Māia titters at him, then swoops in a new direction, calling for the others to follow. She and Tāraki begin to argue. Ren catches up. We see Panahi sitting on her head while she carries Ikki in her arms. She slumps, letting out a sigh.

Ren: I don’t even mind that we’re lost. I just need a break.

Panahi: I hate how closed it is in here. Hey, can I go in my ball for a while?

Ren: Absolutely.

Ikki: Me too… It’s scary in here.

Ren: Who wants to tell her she’ll be doing lots of training
in this forest?

Akahata: I think we are starting to attract attention.

[ Ren looks up and begins to notice there are very large mushrooms everywhere. Then she sees one of them move and she can hear it quietly snickering. She pulls out her dex, which informs her that they are all shroomish. ]

Ren: [ scanning her surroundings again, observing all the different variants ] Whoa… Kai’d be in heaven.

[ Akahata grumbles and Ren doesn’t blame her. It is rather disconcerting. Ren opens her mouth to inform the bickering pair of their current situation, when one of the shroomish makes itself known. It makes fun of them for being lost. Tāraki insists that they are not lost while Māia assures it that they can find their own way. Akahata interrupts them and asks for directions. The shroomish says it could try, but they would probably get lost anyway. Akahata rolls her eyes. ]

Ren: [ not absorbing much of the substance of the conversation ] Remind me what we were even looking for in the first place, cuz I could just use the GPS on my nav to get us back to the path.

Tāraki: [ Māia and Tāraki droop ] But—

[ The shroomish interrupts, saying they are close and she is willing to take them there. Akahata accepts and thanks her. She heads off and Tāraki and Māia shrug and follow. ]

Akahata: [ to Ren ] She says it’s not much further. She’ll take us.

Ren: You’re the best, Aka.

---

**Scene 7:** [ Ren and her pokemon are on the edge of a large tea pond (a pond that’s water is naturally dyed with tannins from leaves). Ren is in her bathing suit sprawled out on a towel to dry, Panahi and Ikki are out on the water, Tāraki is on a rock near the shore putting his hand in the water and watching it disappear, Māia is napping in a tree, and Akahata and the shroomish watch. ]

---

**Scene 8:** [ Ren is walking through the woods lead by the shroomish. Tāraki pops his head out of a nearby tree. ]

Tāraki: Is there any way she could move a little faster? I know she has short legs and all, but I swear she is going slow on purpose.

Ren: [ grinning ] Whine all you want, but I’m glad she found us.

Tāraki: [ face scrunched up ] I guess the tea pond was pretty cool, and the berry patch—

Ren: And let us not forget how much you loved that moss rock.
Tāraki: Well—

Ren: And that fern grove was pretty sweet.

Tāraki: Yes, yes. It was all pretty cool, I’ll admit that. I just think maybe it’s time to get back to the main path.

Ren: [ teasing ] Why so goal oriented all of a sudden, sourpuss?

[ The shroomish chooses this moment to direct a disparaging comment at Tāraki. ]

Tāraki: [ face contorting in indignant rage ] That’s why!

Ren: Got some mouth on her, huh?

Tāraki: [ through clenched teeth ] Yes .

Ren: Well, if it’s any comfort, this should be the last stop on the tour. We are pretty close to Route 104. Then it will be back to the battle grindstone for you. I want to make sure you are well prepped for the gym. [ Tāraki perks up a bit at that. ] Not to mention we could use at least a little money for food and—

[ The shroomish stops, listening and Ren also stops. Tāraki drops out of the tree onto Ren’s shoulder. She notices other pokemon moving around them, mostly in the opposite direction they are headed. Tāraki listens intently. The shroomish says something to Tāraki. ]

Ren: What’s going on?

Tāraki: She says there is something strange going on ahead. Maybe a human in trouble?

Ren: Let’s find out.

[ They head off and the shroomish follows. They hear raised voices before they actually see what is happening. A Team Magma grunt is standing over a scientist who is on the ground with a poochyena snarling in his face. Ren takes in the scene for about a second before snapping into action. ]

Ren: HEY! What the hell is going on here?

Scientist: [ eyes flashing up to Tāraki on her shoulder ] You’re a trainer right? Please help me! He’s trying to steal my equipment!

Magma Grunt: Stay out of this, kid. It’s Team Magma business.

Ren: Well you must be lucky , because I have no idea what that means. Tāraki, quick attack!

[ Tāraki jumps off her shoulder and body-checks the poochyena off of the scientist before they can react. The scientist scrambles backward and Tāraki and Ren step between him and the Magma Grunt and his pokemon. ]

Magma Grunt: You are making a big mistake.

Ren: Mega drain!

Magma Grunt: Bite!
Tāraki’s mega drain hits before the poochyena can reach him but it keeps coming and lands a bite. Tāraki twists away, face hard and muscles coiled.

Ren: Keep the distance, Tāraki, and keep using mega drain.

Magma Grunt: If that’s how you want to battle—Fang use howl then bite!

Fang uses howl while Tāraki charges up another mega drain. Fang charges but Tāraki manages to dodge and land another mega drain. Fang shudders, clearly weakened, but keeps coming. Tāraki is more cautious than usual, knowing that a bite with boosted attack will do serious damage. Tāraki dodges again leaping well out of range, causing Fang to trip. Fang is looking pretty wobbly by this point, but her trainer shows no signs of withdrawing her.

Magma Grunt: Come on, Fang! Get—

He stops because golden powder is drifting out of the tree above him and his pokemon. Ren follows his gaze and sees the shroomish in the branches using stun spore.

Magma Grunt: Shit! He recalls Fang and begins to stumble away, clearly feeling the effects of the powder. He braces himself against a tree for a moment and looks back. This isn’t over! He continues to stumble away.

Ren: muttering to herself as she watches him go He’s got some nerve calling me ‘kid’. That gangly asshole can’t possibly be over seventeen. When he is out of sight, she turns back to the scientist who is standing now and brushing himself off. Are you okay?

Scientist: Yes, thank you miss. That was very clever with your shroomish.

Ren: Oh, no. She’s wild. That was all her.

Scientist: Well, thank you anyway. You and your treecko were very brave.

Ren: No problem, but if you don’t mind me asking, what exactly was that all about?

Scientist: I don’t really know myself.

Ren: Really? to herself What was up with that uniform? and the ‘Team Magma business’?

Scientist: looking genuinely taken aback I take it you are new to the region. Team Magma is an environmentalist group.

Ren: So they’re not like a criminal organization?

Scientist: No, or at least they weren’t before.

Ren: Hmmmm…

Scientist: Well listen, I should really go report all of this. Thank you so much. Here is my card. I work for Devon. If you ever need a favor, please don’t hesitate to ask.

Ren: taking the card (we can see that his name is Dr. Aarden and he is the head of the fossil revival department) Sure thing, but let me at least escort you to the road. I was headed that way anyway.

Dr. Aarden: Thank you, you are really too kind.

Ren: She is about to head off but stops. Oh, Tāraki, I know we had that battle, you did great tiger,
but thank the shroomish for me please. That was super clever of her and she didn’t have to do that for us.

[Tāraki nods and thanks the shroomish while they head for Route 104. The group walks out of the frame and then we zoom in to a figure leaning against a tree in the distance. It’s another Magma grunt (Azalea) talking to someone on her nav.]

Azalea: What did you want me to do about it? I’m a consultant, not a thug. Besides, whose bright idea was it to trust that kid with this assignment in the first place?… Listen, you’re lucky I was here to report because I sincerely doubt he will anytime soon… Yeah, no, I know he is dedicated. Honestly he might try something else before he admits— Hey! I’m not his babysitter, alright? I have better things to do than tail that fuck-up. I have to get back to my assignment… No, she’s strong but she’s only a beginner. I wouldn’t worry about it. Besides, it’s not like she works for them or anything. She was just passing by… No, I seriously don’t think it matters. She is literally just some kid. Azalea out… [She sighs and looks down at her whismur.] Sometimes I wonder why I bother, Aster.

---

Scene 9: [Frame of Māia battling a trainer’s lotad. Frame of Akahata battling a wild slakoth. Frame of Panahi battling a trainer’s nincada. Frame of Tāraki battling a shroomish. Ikki is battling a trainer’s seedot while her teammates and the shroomish watch. She lands a fell stinger and it keels over. The other trainer recalls it.]

Trainer: Wow. I haven’t lost like that in a while.

Ren: Hear that Ikki? Nice job! [Ikki smiles tentatively. To the trainer] Oh, and nice battle by the way. It was smart to use bide like that.

Trainer: Thanks.

[Pan out and we do not hear the rest of their conversation. They wave goodbye and he walks off. We can see light ahead on the trail, meaning they are close to the edge of the forest.]

Ren: I guess it’s time to get out of here. I’m feeling pretty good about us and I kind of miss the sky. [She turns to look at her team and her eyes fall on the shroomish.] …Hey, would you like to come with us? There’s one more spot open.

[Tāraki looks a tad annoyed and Akahata is surprised. Panahi steps up and conveys the offer. The shroomish looks shocked.]

Ren: [encouragingly] You’ve proven you’re clever at the very least. Besides, I think it’d be cool to have a fighting-type.

[Ren smiles and the shroomish looks flustered and then cautiously excited.]

Panahi: She wants to know if you really think she’ll evolve.

Tāraki: Of course she will, Ren is a great trainer!

[The shroomish hops up to Ren and shakes, clearly ecstatic. Ren crouches and pulls out a pokeball.]

Ren: I’ve been thinking of a name for you, too. How does ‘Putenga’ sound?

[ The shroomish nods and hits the button. Ren stands up and looks fondly at the pokeball. ]

Ren: So, Tāraki, this isn’t going to be a problem for you, is it?

Tāraki: Of course not. If you think she should be on the team, than I’m sure you’re right. I can’t guarantee we’ll be best friends, but I’ll do my best to get along.

Ren: Thanks, tiger.

---

**Scene 10:** [ The team is out of the woods on the edge of a pond. Ikki and Panahi are floating out on the water together while Akahata and Māia rest by the edge. Māia is chattering excitedly about something while Akahata listens passively, head on her paws and one eye closed. Nearby Ren is having Tāraki and Putenga practice mega drain on each other. Ren excuses herself for a bit and they keep practicing without her. Tāraki lands a mega drain that seems to have very little effect, fails to dodge Putenga’s far more powerful comeback, and launches another much too quickly. It is visibly feeble and seems to have no effect. ]

Putenga: [ looking very annoyed ] This isn’t about speed, you know. If you did it right, no one would be able to dodge you anyway.

Tāraki: I just thought getting in two attacks was better than one.

Putenga: Not if they’re that weak! Even if you were hitting harder I would still be beating you because of all the energy you waste trying not to get hit.

Tāraki: Ren says dodging is good!

Putenga: And just how many of my attacks did you dodge, smart guy? [ Tāraki glares and grumbles. ] Alright, hit me again and take the time to do it right.

[ Tāraki is too pissed to really try and lands another pathetic hit. ]

Putenga: What was that? How is it you are getting worse at this?

Tāraki: I’m just tired! We’ve been at this for ages!

Putenga: Oh, please! You are always bouncing around like a hyperactive idiot until we have actual practice! You’re just lazy.

Tāraki: I work just as hard as you!

Putenga: Not at this you don’t!

Tāraki: That’s not fair! I’m just no good at special attacks.

Putenga: That’s why we are practicing them! You have to work to be good at something. You just expect things to fall into your lap!

Tāraki: I do not! And I don’t mind working on my other moves. I just don’t like this one, okay!
Putenga: It doesn’t matter if you like it or not. It’s your strongest move. Not using it is stupid.

Tāraki: It doesn’t feel right. It doesn’t make sense, I know it doesn’t make sense, but this is how I am. I can’t focus like you. I’ll never be as good at mega drain as you and what does it even matter anyway? I’m still a better battler than you even without my ‘strongest move’. You’re just jealous!

Putenga: As if! I—

Ren: [ reemerging and stepping partially between them ] Whoa! Break it up! What happened? I can’t leave you two alone for five minutes to take a piss without you getting into a fight?

Tāraki: She started it! She always—

Ren: Don’t give me that. Just tell me what happened as straightforwardly as possible. You know I can’t understand her that well yet so I am trusting you to be as fair as possible.

Tāraki: [ sighs ] She got annoyed because I wasn’t doing well. She said I was lazy and stupid for not working as much on my special moves as on my physical ones. [ muttering ] And I called her jealous for not being as good a battler as me.

Ren: Well, first of all, she is definitely not jealous. You know that right? If she has a beef with you, it’s for something else. [ Tāraki nods. ] And Putenga definitely has a point. Your species specializes in special attacks. All of the strongest moves in your pool are special, so if you really want to be a battler, it would really be worth it to work on them. [ turning to focus on Putenga ] That being said, we are a team and we should all treat each other with respect. Special attacks are more difficult for Tāraki than they are for you. You should not put him down for something he can’t control. He has plenty of other strengths and he doesn’t need to be strong in the same way as you. Understood? [ Putenga nods. ] Good, because I really want you guys to work together for this gym. [ They glance at each other. ] You two are the ones with a type advantage, [ looking at Tāraki again ] but that only works if you use mega drain. [ Tāraki nods. ] Not to mention these guys are bound to have really high defense and pretty low special defense. Does that make sense to you?

Tāraki: Yeah.

Ren: Great. Let’s give this a rest for now.

[ Ren pats him fondly and calls the others for lunch. ]

---

**Scene 11:** [ The team is walking through Rustboro looking for a cafe. Ren is looking rather laden as she is carrying Ikki in her arms and Māia and Panahi on her shoulders. She spots the place they are looking for across the street. ]

Ren: Alright, everyone but Tāraki is going in their balls for a while.

Panahi: Ready for your date, honey?

Ren: Ahi.

Panahi: You’ll do fine, just don’t do anything I wouldn’t.
Ren: [groans and rolls her eyes] Ohmygod. What does that even mean coming from you anyway? You’re absolutely shameless.

[Panahi waggles her eyebrows suggestively in response. Ren’s face scrunches up in annoyance and she pulls out Panahi’s ball. Panahi laughs as she flows into it. Ren sighs.]

Ren: I just feel like there are so many more legitimate things she could tease me about.

Putenga: Very true.

Ren: [long-suffering smile] You can tell me all about it later. And make sure she hears you. [She withdraws Putenga.] At least I knew what I was signing up for with her.

Māia: Hey, will I get to meet your friend? What’s he like?

Ren: Uhhh.

Ikki: [trying to be helpful] He’s nice.

Māia: [her expression shows this is not the answer she was looking for] Is he strong? Akahata said his torchic was pretty tough, that she beat her and Tāraki.

Ren: [chuckles] Yeah, and you will get to meet him after. Next time he wants to battle, I promise you can participate, okay?

[Māia nods, looking quite satisfied, and Ren withdraws her and then the other two. Tāraki climbs up to her shoulder as she crosses the street.]

---

**Scene 12:** [Kai is sitting at a table inside the cafe and Jay, now a combusken, sits in a chair next to him while the chairs opposite remain empty. Ren greets him excitedly as she enters and he waves awkwardly back. Jay partially shoves him out of his chair as she gets up. He gets the message and stands up to greet Ren properly.]

Ren: Hey Kai, how are you, bud? [She holds out her hand for him to shake.]

Kai: [awkwardly shaking her hand] Good, I guess.

Tāraki: Jay, you look awesome!

Ren: [enthusiastic] Ditto to that. Congratulations on evolving!

[Jay chirps, pleased, and they high-five.]

Kai: [excited] You have no idea how cool it was!—I mean—not that, uh…

Ren: [sitting down in the chair next to his] No, no, give me the deets right now.

[Everyone settles in. Tāraki has to stand on his chair because he is too short.]

Kai: Well, we decided to challenge the gym here and Jay was doing really well, but it was tough because of the type disadvantage. Roxanne’s geodude almost had us beat, but then Jay evolved as
she caught one of its rock throws and took it down. Her nosepass didn’t even land a hit.

Ren: Ohmygod that is like the coolest thing ever! [punching his arm] Congratulations on the badge, man!

Kai: [very quietly] Thanks…

[ Kai turns red and falls quiet, eyes fixed on the table. A waiter comes over to take their order. Ren can’t let the silence stand for too long and her face lights up with an idea. She takes out her nav and pulls up the photos she took of the shroomish glen. ]

Ren: [sliding it over to him] As it happens, I have a little something for you.

[He pours over the pictures with eyes like saucers and Jay leans in to look over his shoulder. Ren smiles fondly at him, her face propped up on one hand. ]

Kai: There must be at least ten variants. Holy—holy shit.

Ren: I marked the location for you.

[He actually tears up with gratitude. She laughs. A few more panels of them all talking and laughing while the food disappears. ]

---

**Scene 13:** [The group is walking through the city park. They come to a gazebo and Kai and Ren lean side by side against the sill and admire the view while their pokemon socialize. ]

Kai: Seems like things are going pretty well for you. I can’t believe you have a full roster already.

Ren: What can I say? I’m a total sucker.

Kai: Actually, it’s got me thinking I should probably get Jay a training partner too. She does so great on her own, but I don’t know. It might be nice.

Ren: Do whatever you feel man. Or you could just ask her about it, see what she says.

Kai: Yeah…

[Panel or two of silence and for once it is Ren that looks awkward and uncomfortable. ]

Ren: …So, uh, I didn’t mention this over text cuz I didn’t want to freak you out, but I sort of got involved in an incident in the Petalburg Woods. [He looks at her, eyes widening, quickly] Everything turned out fine! I was just hoping to get your input on some things.

Kai: What happened?

Ren: I sort of stumbled on this Devon scientist getting mugged. Tāraki and I jumped in there and battled the guy and Tenga helped. I let him get away because I didn’t want things to get ugly. Anyway, he was trying to steal some package and he said that it was “Team Magma business”.

Kai: [looking confused] That doesn’t make sense. Why would they be stealing from Devon? They’re a humanitarian organization.
Ren: Wait, the scientist said they were an environmentalist group.

Kai: I guess that’s kinda true too. They are a humanitarian organisation. They do a lot of housing and development work to help with overcrowding and improve low-income neighborhoods and stuff. Like they were really involved in getting the Rusturf Tunnel built so people in Verdanturf could commute to Rustboro and get better jobs. Actually they worked directly with Devon on that project.

Ren: Huh. The plot thickens, I guess. So what exactly is the environmentalist angle?

Kai: Well, their primary focus is land use. They argue that developmental restrictions are too high and that too much land is being held in parks and reserves and stuff like that. They say the Hoenn government is too focused on tourism and isn’t doing enough to help it’s people. So they really aren’t what you would call environmentalists, but they do talk a lot about people’s relationship with the environment. The real major environmentalist group is Team Aqua. Maybe he was getting them confused? Anyway, they have pretty opposing views most of the time and get into some very public scuffles about it. They are both kinda on the extreme side and things have gotten heated a few times, but I’ve never heard about them actually breaking the law.

Ren: The guy was wearing a Magma uniform. I looked them up. But I guess wouldn’t put it past someone to try and use them as a scapegoat. The guy did seem kind of dumb though. And like the scientist was kind of weird about it? At first I sort of chalked it up to shock, but, I don’t know. Something doesn’t feel right about it. Maybe I’m just being paranoid.

Kai: Hey, no, it totally makes sense to worry a bit. I mean, that was a pretty hairy situation. Hopefully it’s just some jerks trying to to steal Devon secrets. It wouldn’t be the first time. Whatever’s going on, hopefully it won’t involve you again. I’m glad you didn’t get hurt.

Ren: Yeah, me too.

[ They look out over the view again and watch their pokemon. Back in the city, they part ways again. Kai and Jay are headed for the Petalburg Woods of course and Ren is sticking around to challenge the gym. Ren manages to pull Kai in for a quick hug before he goes. They all wave goodbye to each other. ]

Scene 14: [ Ren and her pokemon are standing in front of the Rustboro Gym, Tāráki on her shoulder and the rest scattered around her. ]

Ren: Alright team, ready to kick some ass?

Tāráki: [ pumping his fist in the air ] Hell yes!

[ Māia is similarly excited, Ikki is scared, Akahata looks rather solemn, and neither Panahi nor Putenga seem overly concerned. ]

Ren: Let’s do this.

[ All enter and are greeted by the doorman. ]

Doorman: Hello miss, ready to take the gym challenge?
Ren: That’s right.

Doorman: And what badge will you be aiming for today?

Ren: My first.

Doorman: Oh! I would have guessed second or third.

Ren: Heh, I may have over-prepared a bit.

Doorman: No such thing. I’ll just scan your trainer ID and get you started. [ Scans ID. ] Would you like to battle other trainers at your badge level before the leader?

Ren: Absolutely.

Doorman: Alright then. I’ll put you on the roster. You can proceed to the first arena and as soon as the other trainers are ready, they will come to battle you. [ knowing grin ] I don’t think you’ll need it, but good luck, Ms. Kosugi.

[ Ren pulls a face but quickly covers it with a smile. She and her team walk into the arena, which predictably has rocky terrain. The first trainer arrives and sends out their pokemon, a binacle. Ren sends in Putenga. Putenga dodges the first attack and takes the binacle down with a single mega drain. The next few trainers only get a few frames each. Tāraki battles a dwebble and easily defeats it with his superior speed. Putenga defeats a geodude, roggenrola, and finally a carbink with a leech seed/mega drain combo. Ren is shaking hands with the last trainer when Roxanne appears. ]

Roxanne: You’ve battled all of the badgeless trainers who are in at the moment. Very thorough.

Ren: It’s such a great opportunity for experience. I didn’t want to miss it.

Roxanne: [ looking very satisfied ] Excellent. It’s a pleasure to finally meet you, Ren. [ She extends a hand and they shake. ]

Ren: Likewise.

Roxanne: So are you and Tāraki ready for your lesson?

Ren: Yep! Wait, how did you know his name’s Tāraki?

Roxanne: [ looks very satisfied ] Yeah, but you didn’t hear it from me. [ Ren grabs her head, looking mortified. ] Don’t worry about it. It’s not nearly as bad as when Wattson spams us with pictures of his grandkids. And Phoebe and Sidney are real shitposters… Actually, I think Steven and I have been kicked off a few times for talking about fossils. Apparently we’re supposed to [ finger quotes ] “keep that rock shit to ourselves” and “not freak everyone out by blowing up the chat with 863 messages”. [ That gets a chuckle out of Ren. Roxanne smiles, then leans in conspiratorially, face suddenly serious. She places a hand firmly on Ren’s shoulder. ] But seriously, this conversation never took place.

Ren: [ snapping to attention ] Yes, ma’am!

Roxanne: [ straightening up and smiling again ] I like you, Ren. Let’s get started.
The leader arena is larger and is a lot more landscaped. The wall behind Roxanne is covered in fossils. Roxanne sends out a geodude.

Tāraki: Hey Ren, can I do this battle by myself?

Ren: Alright with you, Tenga?

Putenga: I’m good on battles for today. Let the kid have his fun.

Ren: Alright, tiger. She’ll back you up if you need it. Knock ’em dead!

Tāraki runs into the ring and tenses, whole body quivering with excitement.

Roxanne: Celestine, rock throw!

Ren: Dodge and mega drain, Tāraki!

The geodude starts hurling rocks. Tāraki can’t dodge the first one but catches it so it doesn’t do much damage. He dodges the next few throws, grin broadening, until the geodude wears itself out, then launches a mega drain and is back to full health.

Ren: Nice one, tiger!

Roxanne: Tackle, Celestine!

Ren: Quick attack!

The geodude lunges but of course Tāraki is faster and he hits the geodude off balance and it rolls away.

Ren: Mega drain!

Before the geodude can recover, Tāraki saps its remaining strength and it rolls to a stop. Roxanne withdraws it.

Roxanne: Well done. She sends out a nosepass. Akivi, let’s hem in this acrobat: rock tomb!

The nosepass’s palms glow and rocks begin to hail down around Tāraki on all sides. He has nowhere to run and takes the hit with a shudder. He begins to try to free himself.

Ren: You can still hit her from there! Use mega drain!

Tāraki stops struggling and lands a mega drain. The nosepass is impassive but Tāraki looks invigorated as the energy flows into him.

Ren: Now break out!

Roxanne: Rock throw!

With his renewed strength, Tāraki busts out of the rock pile just as even more rocks begin to fly at him. The first and third throws hit him, but even with his reduced speed he is quite a bit faster than the nosepass and dodges the rest, using the landscaping and general debris as cover.

Ren: Mega drain!

Roxanne: Tackle!
[ Tāraki stops moving to charge up his attack and the nosepass runs at him. Tāraki’s mega drain lands, but the nosepass is undeterred and crashes into him. He goes flying back but lands on his feet. ]

Ren: One more mega drain!

Roxanne: Rock tomb!

[ The nosepass readies her attack but Tāraki is faster. The rocks she is lifting fall to the floor before she can fire them. Tāraki perks up and puffs out his chest as the last of her energy flows into him. The nosepass droops ever so slightly and is still. Roxanne withdraws her. ]

Roxanne: Congratulations you two. You’ve certainly demonstrated you know the basics. Plenty of trainers can win their first badge with a simple type advantage, but the way you countered my attacks shows impressive aptitude and solid strategy. [ She pulls a small box out of her pocket as she makes her way over to them. ] I’ve rarely been so happy to hand over a badge. [ She hands Ren the Stone Badge. ]

Ren: Thank you. [ Tāraki clambers up to her shoulder to admire the badge. ] That means a lot.

Roxanne: No problem. And good luck with whatever you decide. Don’t let anybody tell you what to do.

---

Scene 15: [ Outside the gym, Ren looks down at the badge in her palm again. ]

Ren: Well, Tāraki, is it everything you hoped and dreamed?

Tāraki: Hell yeah it was!—Well actually, I was kinda hoping to evolve in spectacularly dramatic fashion like Jay.

Ren: Aw, I’m sure you will, tiger.

Tāraki: That was so much fun though!

Ren: [ she can’t help but smile ] Should I put this away or do you want to wear it?

Tāraki: I don’t care about that thing. No offense. I mean it’s shiny and whatever but I don’t need it. I just want to battle like that again! Really push myself, you know? That was seriously awesome!

Ren: You were seriously awesome. I’ll take it into consideration.

[Tāraki whoops loudly, thrusting a fist in the air as they walk away. ]

---

Chapter End Notes

Wally gets a shiny ralts because I ran into one in-game on my way back to town to get
more pokeballs. I was so pissed that I actually screamed out loud and startled a bunch of people. Thanks for reading!

**Character Chart:**

**HUMANS:**
- Ren Kosugi, our protagonist
- Kai Birch, Ren's friend who likes science
- Wally Scott, a trainer getting his starter pokemon
- Mr. Scott, Wally's father
- Senri Kosugi, Ren's father and leader of the Petalburg Gym
- An unnamed Magma grunt who seems to be the resident fuck-up
- Azalea, a Magma grunt who doesn't have time for your shit
- Dr. Aarden, head of the fossil revival department at Devon
- Roxanne Harlow, Leader of the Rustboro Gym and fossil nerd

**TEAM REN:**
- Taraki the Treecko
- Akahata the Poochyena
- Ikki the Surskit
- Panahi the Wingull
- Maia the Taillow
- Putenga the Shroomish

**OTHER POKEMON:**
- Jay, Kai's Combusken
- Kihei, Wally's shiny Ralts
- Fang, the Magma grunt's Poochyena
- Aster, Azalea's Whismur
Get Off Of My Cloud

Chapter Summary

In which Ren continues picking up strays and running afoul of the plot. Also everyone's favorite silver-haired dreamboat makes his debut.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Scene 1:** [The whole team is out on Route 116. Akahata and Ikki trail behind Ren while Putenga walks beside her, Tāraki bounces ahead of them, Panahi circles above and Māia flits from bush to branch.]

Ren: [to Tāraki] Well, I think we should challenge the Mauville Gym next. You won’t have a type advantage, but you are resistant to electric so we can up the challenge without upping the risk.

Tāraki: Whatever you think is best. I can hardly wait!

Ren: Well, you will have to wait awhile, you know. Mauville is not exactly close.

Tāraki: I’ll just use the time to get stronger.

Panahi: We’re bound to run into more trainers. I always see tons of people going this way.

[Both Tāraki and Māia whoop with excitement. Māia swoops down and Tāraki jumps up to high five her as she passes. Ren laughs. Akahata stops and goes rigid, listening carefully.]

Akahata: Wait. Something’s not right.

[Everyone else stops to listen too. Faint howls and barks drift on the wind.]

Ren: What is that?

Akahata: Hunting.

[Suddenly there is another sound, like music.]

Ren: Is that singing? I can’t…

Akahata: It’s a pokemon, not a human.

Ren: Can you see anything, Ahi?

Panahi: Would have told you if I could, honey.

Tāraki: Let’s check it out!

[Tāraki heads off towards the sound. Akahata looks wary and Ikki frightened as usual, but the rest just shrug and go after him. As the group approaches the source of the sound, it is more obviously singing, but has no words. They peek into a clearing to find half a dozen poochyena snoozing on the
ground around a tree. A fluffy skitty sits on one of the branches, singing its little heart out. The party watches in awe as its song draws to a close. It slips easily back down out of the tree with the grace of regular practice and gives a low, dramatic bow to its audience. It gives a little sigh, thinking that no one is still awake to appreciate it, but then jumps slightly as it catches sight of Ren and her pokemon.

Ren: Hello there, kitty.

[ The skitty doesn't run, or even look all that frightened. Its tail twitches slowly as it looks them over with interest. It trills a sweet-sounding greeting at them. ]

Ren: Wow, it doesn’t seem very scared, even with all of you out.

Putenga: You all aren’t exactly intimidating.

[ Ren shoots her a withering look. ]

Panahi: He must be very good at sing to knock them all out like that.

Ren: [ to the skitty ] Pretty cool, kitty. Do you only sing lullabies or do you put on other performances as well?

[Akahata steps up to translate. The skitty looks very pleased indeed by the interest and compliment. He saunters over as he answers and settles in front of them. He glances at Ren a few times as he converses with Akahata to let her know that he means to talk to her as well. His posture is easy and confident and he even leans in to listen as Akahata speaks. His tone becomes more crooning as the conversation carries on and a contented but slightly mischievous smile fixes on his face. After a while Akahata turns to Ren. ]

Akahata: He says he mostly only sings lullabies to avoid being eaten, but that it's more or less a full-time job. He prefers singing tunes one could dance to, but he would be happy to cater to our tastes if we wanted a performance.

Ren: Huh. So what's theater cat doing out here in the wild?

Akahata: He was born out here. His father was a pet, his mother was wild.

Ren: Did he say anything else?

Akahata: Not much.

Ren: Really? You guys were talking for a while.

Akahata: Well he asked me some questions, mostly about myself, a few about you… He’s kind of a flirt to be honest.

Ren: Oooh?

Akahata: You would think he might be a little wary to flirt with a poochyena after a pack of them just tried to eat him.

Putenga: Maybe that’s why he dialed up the charm.

Ren: Good point.

[ The skitty’s ears seem to have caught on the word “charm” and he croons something at Putenga... ]
with a grin. She fires back at him and he accepts what cannot be kind remarks with grace and humor. Ahi joins in and even Ikki pops out from behind Ren to listen. Ren looks around to find Tāraki and Māia playing tag in the tree, having lost interest a while ago. Every once in awhile Ikki will key Ren into what they are talking about, but mostly she uses the time to relax while the pokemon socialize. After a while she pulls out lunch and they all eat.

Scene 2: [ They are just finishing when there is a commotion close by. Ren jumps up at the sound of raised human voices and caws of distress. ]

Capt. Briney: Peeko! Give her back! Please!

[ He stumbles past and trips. Ren runs to him and carefully helps him up. ]

Ren: Are you okay, sir? What’s going on?

Capt. Briney: My Peeko, my darling wingull, he took her!

Ren: Which way did he go?

Capt. Briney: He’ll head for the tunnel for sure. He stole something from Devon, a package.

[ Ren turns to go after the thief but the old man catches her arm. ]

Capt. Briney: Wait!

Ren: I’ll get your pokemon. Please just sit down, sir. [ She guides him to a stump and he sits. ] I’ll be right back.

Capt. Briney: Thank ye, lass!

[ Ren and her pokemon are already running towards the tunnel entrance. There is a car tunnel and a smaller entrance nearby to the footpath. Just as they reach it, a horrible cacophony of sound starts to pour out. Ren clamps her hands over her ears and steps to the side of the entrance. ]

Akahata: Whismur.

Panahi: And loudred probably. A lot of them to be exact.

Ren: Shit shit shit! We can take one guy but not a whole army of whismur. Chikusho! Wait, where is —[ She wheels around, looking for the skitty and finds him sitting with the rest of her pokemon. The sound from the tunnel grows louder again before tapering off. ] Hey, kitty. Could you do me a favor and try to calm down those whismur? You can name your price afterward.

[ Akahata asks him. ]

Akahata: He’ll do it.
Scene 3: [ They race into the tunnel. Another swell of sound and this time it shakes the ground and rock around them. As it dies down again the skitty projects its voice and it echoes away down the tunnel. The sound swells again as they race along but it is quieter this time and the skitty continues to sing loudly but calmly. Ren begins to spot whismur huddled here and there as the sound grows ever fainter and is replaced by the skitty’s song. ]

Ren: Oh, thank Arceus, it’s working. [ Just then there is a rumble and the rock next to her cracks. Ikki scurries between her legs in panic. ] Fuck. [ Ren withdraws Ikki, Panahi, Māia and Putenga. ] Aka, get the skitty out of here!

[ Akahata looks Ren in the eye and nods, then grabs the skitty by his scruff and runs back towards the entrance. Ren and Tāraki share a look before running forward deeper into the tunnel. The rock continues to crack all around them. Rocks falls from the ceiling and one is about to hit Ren. As Tāraki jumps up to block it he is enveloped by a blinding light for a second. He emerges a grovyle and slashes the rock with the new glowing leaves on his arms. The rock splits and the pieces fall harmlessly away. Tāraki turns to make sure Ren is okay. ]

Ren: Thanks for the save, tiger.

[ Ren spots a figure wrestling with something and charges towards it. As she gets closer she recognizes the magma grunt and his poopyena. The wingull water guns him in the face and he looses his grip on it. It soars straight for the entrance. As Ren follows it with her eyes, she notices the ceiling buckling. ]

Tāraki: Ren, look out!

[ Ren withdraws him and turns back to see that the grunt has noticed the ceiling above him crumbling. He fumbles for the pokeball at his belt. ]

Ren: [ charging towards him. ] MOVE!

[ But he doesn’t. Instead he looks back up at the rocks that are about to crush him as his pokemon flows back into her ball. Ren tackles him and they go skidding back. She lands on top of him, hands on his chest, face almost hitting his shoulder, as the rocks fall with a shaking rumble. They both remain still for a moment, eyes squeezed shut, waiting for it to be over. Nothing hits them. They crack their eyes open and she releases her death grip on his jacket. He looks up and sees a smallish rock trembling directly above them. His arms snap up, one holding her by the shoulders, the other shielding her head. She looks up in time to see it falling and flinches. They both close their eyes as the rock hits his forearm and rolls off onto the floor with a thunk. ]

Josh: Ow.

[ He relaxes, letting out a long breath, head lolling back on the floor and arms draped across Ren’s back. Her eyes snap back open and her whole body is extremely tense. It takes him a moment, but he seems to register that there is someone on top of him. He opens his eyes to look at her, then suddenly remembers he is holding her and throws his arms off. He can see her angry face loom over as she pushes off him. ]

Josh: I’m sorry!—[ She is in a sitting position, scowling. ] I mean, thank you!—I mean—[ she is standing over him now. He covers his face with his hands. ] Oh, fuck .

Ren: [ stepping off him, still scowling and tone harsh ] That’s more like it. Believe it or not I didn’t come in here to save your pathetic ass from being crushed by rocks.
Josh: [sitting up] Yeah. Right. Yeah… But, um, thanks anyway.

Ren: Please don’t thank me. You just stole an old man’s wingull. I don’t want your fucking gratitude.

[He nods sheepishly, getting to his feet. Her eyes bore angrily into him as he wipes his face and pats the dust off his uniform. For a moment Ren thinks he split his lip, but she soon realizes it is a scar and not a new injury. He goes to touch the back of his head, which probably hurts, but is halted by another pain. He sucks in breath and clutches at his injured arm. He has rather intricate black tattoo sleeves that are difficult to make out against his brown skin in the dim light of the tunnel. Ren’s face softens just a tiny bit, looking thoughtful.]

Ren: …Actually, you know what, just tell me your name.

Josh: [looking at her] What?

Ren: [looking him dead in the eye] You owe me and that’s how you’ll make it up to me: your name and the Devon package.

Josh: Here. [He pulls the package out of his hip bag, hands shaking from adrenaline, and passes it to her.] But I’m not going to tell you my name. I’m going to be in enough trouble for this already. You’ll just tell the police and get me arrested.

Ren: No I won’t. Just tell me your name and you can go. You’ll have plenty of time to disappear.

Josh: But why else would you want to know my name?

Ren: If we’re going to keep meeting like this, it’ll be useful.

Josh: [He opens his mouth to respond but then closes it again, clearly weighing his options.] It’s Josh, Josh Takamoana.

Ren: Alright Josh, I hope we never see each other again, but I have a feeling we will. You better hurry. All that noise is bound to draw some attention.

Josh: Right.

[He stumbles towards the entrance and she watches him go. She dusts herself off and follows.]

---

**Scene 4:** [Josh is nowhere in sight when Ren staggers out into the sunlight. She flops down on the ground, exhausted. She frowns as she begins to tremble from adrenaline. She fumbles, but manages to send out Tāraki.]

Tāraki: Are you okay? [placing a hand on her shoulder] You scared me.

Ren: Sorry, tiger. Yeah, I’m okay. That was just intense.

Tāraki: [rubbing her arm] What happened?

Ren: I saved that guy from getting squished and got the parts back, but let him go.
Tāraki: Why?

Ren: He owes me now. I thought if we ever have to deal with Magma again, it would be nice to have someone on the inside.

Tāraki: Hhmmm.

[ The bushes rustle nearby and the skitty emerges. It walks up to her and places a paw on her foot. It asks Tāraki if she is okay and he answers that she is. ]

Ren: Hey there, kitty. You did one hell of a job back there. Looks like I owe you my life. Thought of anything I can do for you?

[ Tāraki translates and the skitty nods. ]

Tāraki: He wants to be your pokemon.

Ren: Really? Well, we have a full team at the moment, so he wouldn’t be out with us all the time.

Tāraki: He says that’s fine. He doesn’t really want to be a battler, but it could be fun. He says it’s tough out here, especially since he’s not a wild breed. Being a trainer’s pokemon would be a lot better.

Ren: If he’s sure, then it’s a deal!

[ A whismur comes out of the cave and approaches them. Ren is about to greet it when it calls out to the skitty. It compliments him on his singing, and says it’s heard him before many times and always wondered who it was. The skitty thanks him. The whismur asks about Ren and the skitty says that she is his trainer now. The whismur looks thoughtful for a moment, then asks if she would take him on as well. Ren watches the exchange, utterly mistified. She looks questioningly at Tāraki. ]

Tāraki: Uh, so I guess the whismur is sort of a fan of the skitty, cuz he’s heard him singing before, and now that he knows who was singing, he wanted compliment him, I guess? And also he saw what happened in the cave and he wants to be your pokemon too.

Ren: Wow, okay. Just make sure he also understands about not being out all the time.

Tāraki: [ after relaying the message ] He doesn’t mind.

Capt. Briney: [ entering the clearing with Akahata ] Um, miss, are you alright?

Ren: [ looking up and smiling a little ] Yes, yeah. Just trying to calm myself down a bit.

Capt. Briney: Glad to hear it, lass. You saved my dear Peeko. If there is ever anything we can do for you, please just let us know. We have a good boat, you know, so if you ever want to get to any of the isles, we’ll be happy to take ya.

Ren: That’s very kind of you. I’m sure I’ll take you up on it at some point.

Capt. Briney: Do. It would be our pleasure.
Scene 5: [ Later that day Ren is waiting in the hallway of a fancy office building with Tāraki at her side. Soon a woman emerges from the door in front of her. ]

Secretary: Mr. Stone will see you now.

Ren: [ Ren and Tāraki glance at each other. ] Thank you.

[ The secretary holds the door open and closes it behind them as they enter the office. An old but sharply dressed businessman sits behind a large desk. He stands to greet her and they shake hands. ]

Mr. Stone: Lovely to meet you Miss Kosugi. I believe I’ve met your father at some function or other. [ gesturing to a chair ] Please have a seat.

Ren: Thank you, sir.

[ Both sit down ]

Mr. Stone: Nonsense, it is I who must thank you . Those parts you returned were extremely important prototypes. My company and I are indebted to you.

Ren: You are welcome, sir. I just didn’t want anyone to get hurt.

Mr. Stone: [ smiling ] That is very admirable of you, Ms. Kosugi. Now, it is not empty gratitude that I offer.

Ren: Sir, you really don’t have to do anything.

Mr. Stone: Please allow me to anyway. It is only fair. I’d like to offer you full access to all of our nav apps, free of charge, and of course upgrade your nav to any model you choose.

Ren: That is very generous, sir. Thank you.

Mr. Stone: Very good. Ms. Ikeda will assist you. Now, is there anything else we can do for you?

Ren: Well, I did have some questions, if you don’t mind?

Mr. Stone: Not at all. You and your pokemon were, albeit unintentionally, put in jeopardy. You are perhaps owed some manner of explanation.

Ren: Thank you, sir. So Team Magma is a humanitarian organization, not a criminal one?

Mr. Stone: Yes, that is true. Up until very recently there was no evidence that they were involved in criminal activity of any kind.

Ren: So do you have any idea why they might want to steal from your company?

Mr. Stone: Unfortunately not.

Ren: But you think it is them and not some thieves impersonating them?

Mr. Stone: Yes. I am almost entirely certain it is the real Team Magma.

Ren: And you must have evidence to support that because it seems pretty strange for a humanitarian organisation, one you have collaborated with in the past, to suddenly be trying to steal from you.

Mr. Stone: Yes, and very astute of you. Certainly the situation is highly unusual and quite troubling.
Ren: Do you think the project they did with you may have just been a way for them to get inside information about your company?

Mr. Stone: I admit to briefly considering the possibility. However, considering their history and having met with their leaders personally, I find it unlikely that their work up until this point was some kind of smokescreen for criminal activity. That is to say, I don’t think this was motivated by greed. It seems more likely to me that they have found some way other than public appeal to further their agenda and that the technology they are attempting to steal will help them in some way. Of course they haven’t gone public with anything yet. We will have to wait and see how they respond now that they have crossed the line into illegality. Obviously this incident won’t be good press for them.

Ren: [Ren is quiet for a moment, gathering her nerve.] Excuse me for asking, but it seems like maybe you were expecting them to try and steal these parts?

Mr. Stone: Yes, to be perfectly frank I was expecting it. This isn’t their first or even second attempt to get at this particular project. We took a few precautions, but obviously they managed to get the upper hand. Once again, I’m sorry you had to be involved.

Ren: It’s okay. It was my choice, sir.

Mr. Stone: Yes, yes it was… [He trails off, studying her thoughtfully for a moment. I hate to ask a favor after the great service you have just rendered. Please feel no obligation to accept. But I was hoping you might be willing to deliver a package to my son in Dewford. You will be paid for your efforts, of course.

Ren: [deeply confused and a little suspicious] Forgive me if I’m missing something here, I’m new to the region, but in Johto we have couriers for this kind of thing.

Mr. Stone: [chuckling] Ah, yes, so do we.

Ren: So then why did you send one of your fossil scientists—scratch that—your top fossil scientist to deliver those “extremely important” parts? It seems like, as the head of the department, he might have other things to do.

Mr. Stone: Ah, yes, under normal circumstances we certainly wouldn’t have. In this case, we had some fairly compelling evidence to suggest that Magma knew what our couriers looked like and would target them. We thought we could elude them if we sent someone else. Since this was sensitive material, I needed someone I trusted. Devon may make most of it’s money nowadays from navtech, but I founded this company as a fossil revival center and that has always remained my passion. Dr. Aarden has been here since the very beginning and I’ve worked closely with him on several projects over the years. He is a great personal friend.

Ren: Okay, I get that, but then why ask me?

Mr. Stone: First, you have already proven yourself trustworthy. You had ample opportunity to take the parts yourself, knowing full well that they must be very valuable, but instead returned them. Second, since you are not a Devon employee, Magma is unlikely to suspect you are carrying anything for us. And third, if they do find out, you have already demonstrated you are a competent enough trainer to fend them off.

Ren: Oh. Well, thank you, I guess.

Mr. Stone: I very much doubt they will come after you. I wouldn’t have asked you if I thought they might. However, I completely understand if you don’t want to. It is your choice.
Ren: …I’ll do it. I’d like to visit Dewford anyway.

Mr. Stone: Very good! Thank you very much, Ms. Kosugi. Once again you are really getting us out of a bind. Will you need travel accommodations?

Ren: Ah, no sir, or I don’t think so anyway. Capt. Briney just offered me a ride.

Mr. Stone: [smiling broadly] Jim? Well, that works out very well then. He has a lovely boat and his house is quite close. Do send him my best wishes. I haven’t seen the old rascal in quite a while.

Ren: Will do, sir.

[They exchange the necessary information and pleasantries before she is guided out. She gets a new nav and leaves the building.]

Tāraki: That went well.

Ren: Yeah, he told us a lot more than I thought he would.

Tāraki: I guess it’s not so good that you were right about Magma though.

Ren: Yeah, I was really hoping this wasn’t some kind of complicated conspiracy. [sighs] Oh well, Let’s just hope this is the end of our involvement.

---

**Scene 6:** [Josh is sitting on a large couch in front of a big flat-screen TV in an unadorned, red room. He is hunched over near the front of the couch, his arms resting on his knees, hands clasped loosely in front of him, feet flat on the floor. Fang is laying at his feet partially underneath the coffee table, eyes closed but clearly awake and listening. A book entitled “White Fang” lies discarded on the coffee table next to the TV remote. Josh’s expression is tight as he watches the news on the screen.]

Anchor: [showing a female news anchor at a desk] News continues to pour in after an already eventful week in Rustboro. [the screen switches to Mr. Stone at a podium in front of the Devon building flanked by a police chief] Mr. Stone, owner and president of Devon Corporation, held a press conference this morning in conjunction with the Rustboro police chief, Hine Honda, announcing his intention to support the repair of Rusturf Tunnel. [live footage of workers with headlamps picking through rubble] The tunnel collapsed yesterday after being damaged by the combined uproar attack of a stampede of whismur and loudred, stranding commuters. [footage of people milling outside the tunnel entrance] Thankfully, police report no one was injured. [back to anchor] No word yet on how long it will be before the tunnel is passable again. The press conference also announced that two separate attempts to steal secret prototypes from the Devon Corporation were made in the past few days. A young man dressed in a Team Magma uniform tried to take the prototypes while they were in transit, first on Tuesday and then again Thursday. In his second attempt to escape, the would-be thief took a man’s pet wingull as a hostage and ran into Rusturf Tunnel shortly before the collapse, preventing pursuit by police. [more clips of the press conference, this time with Honda at the podium] Chief Honda assured the public that both the wingull and prototypes were recovered unharmed. She also attempted to head off questions from reporters about possible sabotage, insisting there that while the commotion may have contributed to the stampede, there was no evidence that the pokemon were intentionally provoked. [clips of Mr.
Mr. Stone declined to disclose what the prototypes were for when asked. Despite the thief’s uniform, no allegations were made regarding Team Magma’s involvement. Both of the attempted robberies were stopped by the brave efforts of one trainer: Ren Kosugi, daughter of Petalburg Gym Leader, Senri Kosugi. Police say she happened to be in the area during both incidents and responded to cries for help. She and her Pokémon were able to fend off the perpetrator, but thus far no arrests have been made. His identity and possible affiliation with Team Magma remain unknown. This story coming amidst other recent unsettling rumors about Team Magma, the organization held a press conference in response. Tabitha Turia, one of Magma’s admins, had this to say:

Tabitha: Team Magma has been and remains a humanitarian organization. We were not involved in these attempted robberies, and personally I must admit I am extremely upset by the incidents of this past week. Today, Team Magma is launching a fundraising campaign to aid workers stranded by the tunnel collapse. As Mr. Stone has generously agreed to help the government fund tunnel repairs, any money donated to our fundraiser will go directly to providing alternate transportation for workers until the tunnel reopens. Magma continues to support the Devon Corporation and their admirable humanitarian efforts. I myself worked with Mr. Stone on the Rusturf Tunnel project and I hope that this mess will not hinder our ability to collaborate on rebuilding it and to continue improving people’s lives together in the future. I am deeply disappointed that some coward saw fit to not only attempt to steal from such an exemplary company, but also try to frame a charitable organization for the crime at the same time.

Hartmann: Geez! that’s cold!

[ They flop down on either side of Josh and Brenton scoops the remote off the coffee table, switching the channel. ]

Brenton: You shouldn’t be watching that stuff, bro.

Hartmann: Yeah, it’s nothing to worry about.

Brenton: The press is going to get a lot worse soon. It’s best to just ignore it. We’ve gotta focus on our goals, that’s what’s important. They’ll come back around when this is all over. People are fickle, but it’s up to us to help them out.

Hartmann: And don’t worry about Tabitha. I’m sure she doesn’t blame you. She’s just doing what she and Maxie think is best for right now.

Josh: It was my fuck-up, Hart. I’m pretty sure she blames me.

Hartmann: Okay, well maybe, but don’t worry too much about it. If she was going to take disciplinary action or something, she would have done it already.

Brenton: Besides, you’re not special: she thinks everyone is incompetent. That’s why she gets to boss people around while us hard-working stiffs have to do all the actual legwork.

Josh: Thanks, Brent.

Hartmann: It was a shitty assignment and you had some pretty rotten luck, that’s all. You were doing your job. Shit just goes south sometimes. You haven’t been a trainer that long and your Poochyena isn’t exactly a seasoned battler. Have you thought about maybe—

Josh: Fang did fine! That trainer just pulled a dirty trick the first time and I didn’t even battle her the second time because of the cave-in.
Hartmann: See? You just got dealt a shit hand as usual. Nothing to beat yourself up about.

Josh: I know.

Brenton: [putting his feet up on the coffee table] Just keep working hard and things will get better. They’ll get better for all of us.

---

**Scene 7:** [Ren is sitting on a park bench, watching the news on her new nav, her pokemon scattered around her.]

Tabitha: I am deeply disappointed that some coward saw fit to not only attempt to steal from such an exemplary company, but also try to frame a charitable organization for the crime at the same time.

Anchor: Hopefully we will have more information on that soon. Next up—

[Ren stops the news feed, frowning.]

Ren: Wow, she was lying through her teeth. I think Mr. Stone is right. [Groans.] Thanks for reminding me to call my parents, Ahi. I think they might have had a heart attack if they had to find out like that.

Panahi: Anytime, honey.

Ren: [after a pause] So you guys are really okay with this? I mean, I’m not even entirely sure what I’m getting us into.

Putenga: Why are you even asking us?

Ren: What?

[She looks from one to the next and sees that all of her pokemon look a bit confused except for Putenga who just rolls her eyes. A few of them share glances.]

Akahata: You’re the leader. It’s your call, trainer.

[Ikki nods in agreement and no one else raises an objection.]

Ren: Wait, hang on, that’s not the way I want to run this team. It—it isn’t right. You gals are my partners. I want your input.

Putenga: Seems a bit late for that. You already took the package from that rich guy.

Panahi: She has a point, hun.

Ren: Hey! I would go give it back right now if it mattered to you.

Putenga: Do you not want to do it anymore? Is that it?

Ren: No, I do.

Putenga: Then what do you want from us?
Ren: [ getting annoyed ] I just want to know what you think! I know I already explained things and you all seemed okay with it, but maybe I didn't really give you all a choice. I want to give you a choice. Besides, you are all smart. I just thought—well, maybe we shouldn't be relying on only my judgement all the time. Please just tell me what you think. Should we do this?

[ There is another silence and a few more glances between the pokemon before Māia pipes up. ]

Māia: Why not? Even if another one of those red-shirts comes after us, we can totally take them. We're strong!

Tāraki: That's right! We're all getting to be pretty good battlers on our own. Together we can handle whatever.

Ikki: He said they probably wouldn't know it was us anyway, r-right? It doesn't seem too dangerous. And we could use the money.

Akahata: It's sensible.

[ The last two aren't as forthcoming so Ren prompts them. ]

Ren: Putenga, what do you think?

Putenga: I think you worry too much. Low risk, high reward, seems like a no-brainer to me.

Ren: Ahi?

Panahi: I agree with everyone else, honey. But listen: it's great that you wanna know what we're thinking and all, really it is, but it doesn't change the fact that you have the final say in the end. You are the leader and you need to own your decisions and take responsibility.

Ren: I—thank you, Ahi. [ She takes a deep breath and nods, looking determined. ] Okay. We are going to do this and I'll take full responsibility for what happens, but I just want all of you to know that I never want to make you do anything you don't want to do. You gals should be able to make your own decisions too.

———

Scene 8: [ Ren and her Pokemon greet Mr. Briney and Peeko at his dock on the shore on route 104. He has a cute cottage and a very nice small yacht. Peeko and Panahi fly alongside as it's speeds along over the waves. Māia sits on the top feeling the wind over her wings. Tāraki leans out over the prow like a figurehead while Ren stands behind him. Akahata and Putenga look out over the side and Ikki is at the helm with Mr. Briney who is showing her the various instruments. They land in Dewford, Ren thanks Briney and they go their separate ways. ]

———

Scene 9: [ Ren and her pokemon hike north around the cape until they reach the entrance to Granite Cave. A sign outside says “Only one pokemon per person. All sound-based, concussive and/or earthshaking moves are strictly forbidden.” Ren withdraws all but Akahata and they enter. The most
of the tunnels are lit by strings of lamps and Ren follows the main tunnel as it winds deeper in. Akahata alerts her to a sound and they turn down a side tunnel. A chamber opens up around them and the tunnel starts to drop off precipitously ahead. Akahata spots something above them and nudges Ren. Ren looks up to see a young man in spelunking gear hanging from the wall above her. He chips away gently with a small pick, then returns it to his belt and grabs a brush. The light of his headlamp gleams off his safety goggles as he leans in to carefully brush some dust away from whatever he is excavating.

Ren: Hello!

Steven: [ looking down at her with a friendly smile ] Hello down there!

Ren: Are you Steven Stone?

Steven: Yes I am. Give me a moment. I’ll be right down.

[ He stows his equipment and repels gracefully down. He unhooked himself and takes off his helmet and goggles. He runs his fingers through his hair and shakes it out so it is no longer plastered to his head. Ren is trying and failing not to stare. He is absurdly gorgeous. A look of consternation flickers over her face as a subtle blush creeps over her cheeks. She blinks owlishly. ]

Ren: I’m Ren Kosugi

Steven: A pleasure to meet you, Ren. [ He extends a hand and they shake. ] So are you a fan of cave paintings or did you need me for something?

[ Ren pauses for a moment before answering, her blush deepening a shade. Despite the mental preparation, her tongue still betrays her. ]

Ren: I needed you—[ blushing harder ] I mean—I didn’t even know there were cave paintings here. Your father asked me to deliver a package. [ Ren pulls it out of her bag and hands it to him. ]

Steven: [ taking it ] Thank you. I take it things haven’t been going well with Team Magma.

Ren: [ blush calming back down ] Seems so.

Steven: [ He sighs. ] Well, trouble always comes in twos. I was waiting for the other shoe to drop.

[ She fidgets while he looks thoughtful. Akahata gives her trainer a confused look, puzzled by her unusual behavior. ]

Ren: [ breaking the silence before she has actually thought of anything to say ] So… do you usually run errands for your father?

Steven: [ blinking back to the present ] Depends on how much fun they are. [ He grins and winks at her. ] But to answer your real question, this is a special case and top secret for now, I'm afraid. You'll hear all about it in time.

Ren: I figured as much. [ She shrugs. ] Well, now that you have whatever that is, I think I'll check out the cave paintings. They sound cool. Are they down this way?

Steven: I'll take you. It's the least I can do. Actually, hang on a moment. [ He picks his bag up off the floor and rummages through it. ] Do you have any flying-types on your team?

Ren: Two, actually.
Steven: Excellent! [He pulls a TM out of his bag and offers it to her.] Please take this. It's steel wing, my favorite move.

Ren: Thank you. [She takes it but looks a little unsure.] You don't have to give me anything. Your father paid me already.

Steven: I'm sure he did. This is just… a small gift from one trainer to another. [He smiles winningly as she stows the TM. He gestures down the tunnel.] Shall we?

[She nods and they head off down the tunnel.]

**Scene 10:** [Steven points out various mineral deposits and formations as they go along. Soon enough they emerge into a large oblong chamber covered in murals. Directly ahead of them is a huge painting of Groudon and Kyogre.]

Ren: Whoa.

Steven: These paintings were made by the Draconid people approximately 2,500 years ago. It contains most of their history. The central mural depicts the formation of Hoenn and the surrounding islands as a battle between the legendary pokemon Groudon and Kyogre. The part that draws most scholars is the portrayal of the climate pokemon. Their forms are different than usual. Once most historians just wrote it off to artistic license, but in recent years many have theorized that this depicts their mega evolutions. But it is also unlike any other mega evolution documented in a few important ways. Here they draw their power from deep in the earth rather than humans or mega stones. Draconid elders say that this represents their primal forms, distinct from their normal forms but also not mega evolutions. I tend to think that story is closest to the truth since it was their ancestors who made the paintings. But the debate wages on.

Ren: Wow, I can’t believe I never heard about this. I guess Johto has its own mysteries to focus on. Thanks for showing me. This is unbelievably cool.

Steven: Ancient studies isn’t exactly my area of expertise, but I often come down here to look at them.

[They both hear voices approaching and turn to look back the way they came.]

Steven: [expression hardening] Magma.

Ren: You sure?

Steven: [nodding] Go. There’s a tunnel just down there.

Ren: Hey, I’m not just gonna leave you to whatever the hell is coming!

Steven: The last thing we need is for them to see you with the parts again. Trust me. I’ll call you if I need help. I should be able to handle myself though. [winking, a confident smile on his face] I am the League Champion after all.

[Ren and Akahata run off down the tunnel and stop as soon as they are out of sight. Magma grunts (Hartmann, Brenton, Terra and Blaise) and an admin (Courtney) pour into the chamber.]
Steven: So Maxie didn’t even come to face me himself. I must admit to some disappointment. I suppose it doesn’t matter terribly.

Courtney: [ She laughs shrilly and maniacally. ] Take him.

[ The grunts all send out their pokemon and advance on Steven. ]

Steven: Do you really think it wise to take on the League Champion?

Terra: No one’s invulnerable, Stone.

Steven: [ grinning ] Very true, but some of us are a little closer than others. [ He sends out his, armaldo, cradily and shiny metagross. ] X-scissor! Zen headbutt! Giga drain!

[ As the battle ensues, we switch back to Ren and Akahata. They are both straining to hear what is going on around the corner. A tremor shakes the tunnel. A makuhita comes running up behind them, readying an attack. Akahata hears it coming and swivels around. ]

Akahata: Ren, look out!

[ Ren turns around in time to see Akahata diving between her and the enraged wild. Akahata takes a heavy blow but bounces back up and lunges at the makuhita, landing a thunder fang. The makuhita twitches, clearly paralyzed, but it’s fist begins to glow a rusty hue. Before Ren can make a move it nails Akahata, sending her sprawling. She does not get up. Ren’s face contorts with horror. She takes a step forward then freezes. Her hand snaps to her belt and she sends out Māia. ]

Ren: Wing attack!

[ Māia hits the makuhita on the shoulder and it staggers back and collapses. Ren ignores it and runs to Akahata. ]

Ren: Aka! [ She touches her side. Akahata is breathing but doesn’t respond. ] Arceus, don’t die on me! [ rifling through her bag ] Kuso! SHIT! [ spraying Akahata with a potion ] Just hang in there! We can’t get out right now. Please just hang in there!

[ Ren crouches over her fallen pokemon and strokes her, hand shaking. Māia flutters over to them looking over her teammate before swiveling her head this way and that to make sure they don’t get ambushed by anything else. After a while the sounds of battle fade. Ren doesn’t really notice. She is too focused on watching Akahata’s shallow breathing. ]

Steven: Ren? What happened?

Ren: A wild attacked us. My poochyena…

Steven: We have to get her to the Pokemon Center. Come on.

---

Scene 11: [ Ren carefully lifts Akahata and they run out. Team Magma are gone. When they get to the entrance of the cave, Steven sends out his skarmory. They both climb aboard and fly to the pokemon center. They run in and the nurses take Akahata. ]

Nurse: You have to wait here. We’ll keep you updated.
Ren sits down in the waiting room and Steven stays with her. He offers comforting words and she nods, face hollow. Later a nurse comes out and tells her that Akahata is doing well, but will need a few days to recover. Steven leaves and Ren goes to visit Akahata in her recovery room. Akahata is asleep. Ren sits down in the chair and puts her head in her hands.

Chapter End Notes

The action is finally picking up a bit. Plot things are happening! The next few chapters are gonna be more character and world-building stuff with plot things happening in the background until chapter 8 when all hell breaks loose. It will be worth it I swear. Anyway, I wanted to try developing some of the Magma grunts so that we could get a better idea of what the organization actually is and humanize our antagonists. It is really difficult to make some kind of halfway reasonable rational for something as silly as Team Magama, but dammit I'm going to try.

Don't worry about Steven. He'll be back to steal your heart, your girl, your man, whatever. ;)

Character Chart:

HUMANS:
Ren Kosugi, our protagonist
Mr. Briney, a retired sea captain with a Wingull named Peeko
Josh Takamoana, Magma grunt and resident fuck-up
Mr. Stone, president of the Devon Corporation
Tabitha Turia, one of Magma's co-admins
Hartmann, a Magma grunt who is friends with Josh
Brenton, a Magma grunt who is friends with Josh
Steven Stone, the Hoenn League Champion who is low-key flirty all the time

TEAM REN:
Taraki the Grovyle
Akahata the Poochyena
Ikki the Surskit
Panahi the Wingull
Maia the Taillow
Putenga the Shroomish
Mele the Skitty
Hauoro the Whismur

OTHER POKEMON:
Fang, Josh's Poochyena
Street Fighting

Chapter Summary

In which Ren gets her second badge and Ikki gets a friend.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Scene 1:** [ Akahata blinks awake and looks around her recovery room. Ren has fallen asleep in the chair. Akahata looks startled to see her there. ]

Akahata: Ren?

[ Ren starts awake and rubs her eyes. ]

Ren: Hey, you're awake. How are you feeling?

Akahata: [ expression nervous and guarded ] Not bad. I've lived through worse. It's nice to have a safe place to recover this time.

Ren: I'm so sorry. This is all my fault.

Akahata: [ looking confused ] It was an accident. It's okay.

Ren: But it's not okay. I rely on you so much and you've never let me down but I keep failing you.

[ Ren tears up but refuses to cry, her face screwing up with the effort. Akahata is shocked and doesn't know what to do. ]

Ren: [ angrily wiping her face ] I'm sorry. I'm even mucking up this apology. Listen, I promise to do better if you still want to be my Pokemon.

Akahata: Of course.

Ren: [ looking relieved ] Thank you.

---

**Scene 2:** [ Ren is sitting on a piece of driftwood on the beach with her Pokemon (sans Akahata) gathered around her. She is explaining to them what happened in Granite Cave. ]

Ren: When she's awake I'll take anybody who wants to go in and see her.

Ikki: I'll go.

[ The others all nod. ]
Ren: Again, I am so sorry you gals.

Panahi: I think that maybe you are being a bit hard on yourself. None of us blame you, honey.

Putenga: It wasn't even one of Magma's pokemon that did it. It was a wild. The whole thing was just an accident. No one is at fault here.

Ren: [intensely distressed] We wouldn't have been in there if it weren't for the stupid package and it must have been Magma that set it off and—[She breaks off her rant and takes a steadying breath.] You know, it doesn't even matter. I panicked, okay? If I had done what I was supposed to do and recalled her in time, she wouldn't have gotten hurt.

Māia: This is dangerous sometimes. We all know that. She knew what she was signing up for. Besides, you sent me out. You did what you could and I'm sure it saved her life.

Tāraki: Yeah, you're a good trainer!

Panahi: I know I just lectured you about taking responsibility, but there is a difference between that and blaming yourself for things you can't control.

[Ren's eyes fall and her face tightens. She bites her lower lip and says nothing. Ikki steps forward.]

Ikki: I understand if this scares you. Battling still scares me a little. But I don't think you're a bad trainer and we are a lot safer with you than we would be alone.

Ren: Thank you. I'll do better next time. I promise.

[The pokemon still look concerned, especially Panahi. Ren clearly hasn't forgiven herself at all.]

Ren: In any event, we'll be here a few days at least while Akahata recovers. I was thinking we could challenge the gym here. We were definitely more than ready for our first badge and to be honest we are probably ready for our second. Māia, I know you missed out last time, so I want to give you the opportunity to take the lead on this one. [Māia chirps and flutters excitedly and Ren smiles.] I'll take that as a yes. Do you mind backing her up, Ahi?

Panahi: Not at all, honey.

Tāraki: Can I run back-up too?

Ren: Of course, tiger. Great! I'm getting a bit warm out here. I'm gonna wade in the surf for a bit. You gals can all relax.

[Ren gets up and walks down to the water, shedding clothing. The pokemon stay huddled together, watching her and then looking at each other.]

Putenga: Okay, can anybody tell me what that was all about?

Ikki: It was a bit weird.

Māia: I don't even know what she feels so guilty about.

Tāraki: This isn't like her.

Panahi: I think we are ready for the gym, but I'm a little worried about her.
Scene 3: [ Ren and her pokemon are all out in front of the Dewford gym. ]

Ren: I know we won't all be battling, but I would like everyone to stay out and watch. We are a team so we are going to do this together.

Tāraki: Yeah! Go team!

[ Panahi and Putenga roll their eyes at his enthusiasm. Ikki looks a bit horrified and guilty. ]

Ren: Everyone else ready? [ All nod. ] Māia, you ready to throw down?

Māia: One hit, one victory.

Ren: [ She chuckles, light glinting in her eyes. ] Let's do this.

[ They register at the desk like last time and sign up for trainer battles. While they are waiting in one of the arenas, Ren confers with her Pokemon. ]

Ren: Māia, do you want to warm up on a few of these guys?

Māia: Nope. I'm ready. They'll never know what hit 'em.

[ A trainer enters. ]

Ren: Looks like you're up Tāraki. Make mama proud!

[ Tāraki starts battling a mienfoo. Focus on Akahata and Ikki watching from the sidelines. Akahata is wearing her usual passive expression while Ikki fidgets with nerves. Akahata looks over at her and Ikki squirms for another moment. ]

Ikki: It's just—it's—You are all getting so strong and I feel like I can't keep up. We're supposed to be a team now and I can hardly even talk to Māia and Ahi. I can't back you guys up when something goes wrong. I'm not on the same level as the rest of you. I'm the weak link. [ looking down dejectedly ] I don’t know why Ren keeps me on the team.

Akahata: [ She studies her teammate for a moment before answering. ] I think I was wrong before. You should always look out for yourself, but I don't think she is going to get rid of us.

Ikki: I'm still upset.

Akahata blinks at her, unsure of what to do. She nudges Ikki gently with her nose. Ikki smiles and wipes her tears away with a slender limb.

Akahata: [ She studies her teammate for a moment before answering. ] I think I was wrong before. You should always look out for yourself, but I don’t think she is going to get rid of us.

[ Ikki still looks upset. ]

Akahata: Pokemon like us will always have a disadvantage. But not everyone on the team has to be equally strong. None of us have been able to compete with Tāraki since he evolved. [ Show Tāraki battling a timburr. ] There will always be someone stronger. [ Tāraki lands wrong and clutches at his arm. ] But that only means that we have to work harder. [ Tāraki lands a fury cutter with his good arm and the timburr goes down. ] I know what it's like to feel weak. [ Tāraki tries not to grimace as Ren feels his injured arm. ] I know it feels like you'll never be good enough, but bugs grow fast. [ Ren laughs as Tāraki grudgingly agrees to sit out the rest of the gym. ] You will catch up, trust me.

Ikki: [ She tears up. ] T-thank you, Akahata. I've never had such a good friend.

[ Akahata blinks at her, unsure of what to do. She nudges Ikki gently with her nose. Ikki smiles and wipes her tears away with a slender limb. ]
Ren: Okay, Ahi, you're up. This will be great practice for you.

[Panahi battles a few trainers (mankey, tyrogue, riolu, pancham, scraggy) and wins with ease.]

---

**Scene 4:**

Ren and her Pokemon enter the main ring. Akahata and Tāraki head up to the stands to watch while the rest stay with Ren. Brawley is waiting for them. He tips down his shades to get a better look.

Brawly: Reeeen! [walking over to her] I didn't know you were the challenger. Pleasure to meetcha, dude. [He offers his hand and they bro-shake.] What brings you to Dewford?

Ren: I had an errand to run.

Brawly: Awww! That's no fun! Glad you decided to drop in. Hey, you wouldn't want to come out surfing with us tonight? It's a full moon, clear skies. Should be pretty sweet.

Ren: Yeah, actually.

Brawly: Most excellent!

Ren: Although, I don't really know how.

Brawly: It's cool, dude. I'll bring some of my tamer boards for you.

Ren: Thanks.

Brawly: No prob! So you here for your second badge?

Ren: That's right.

Brawly: Roxanne told me you totally killed your first. Let's see if you're ready for your next one. Who're you gonna use to throw down?

Ren: Māia.

[ Māia flits forward and issues a challenge. Brawly raises his eyebrows.]


[Brawly sends out a meditite.]

Brawly: Time to show us your moves, little birdie. Hua, feint!

Ren: Up and outta there, Māia!

[The meditite runs forward and Māia takes to the air, narrowly dodging the attack.]

Brawly: Let's put a lid on that fancy flying. Confusion!

[Māia comes swooping around towards the meditite prepping for an attack, but manages to roll just in time, once again dodging successfully.]
Ren: Yes! Now peck!

[ Māia instantly corrects her flight path. She drops onto the meditite’s head, lands a peck, and takes back off again in one fluid movement. The meditite staggers, but stays upright. ]

Ren: Wing attack!

[ Māia barrels into her turn and comes at the meditite like an arrow, wings glowing light blue. The meditite crosses its arms in a guard, but goes careening back as Māia’s strike hits home. Māia lands hard, dirt spraying as she skids to a stop in front of her trainer. She strikes a pose, not even bothering to turn around because she knows her opponent isn’t getting back up after a hit like that. Sure enough the meditite stays down. ]

Brawly: That’s a righteous taillow you got there! Let’s see if she can handle something a bit tougher. [ He sends out a machop. ] Kick it off with a karate chop, Motu!

Ren: Parry with a wing attack!

[ The machop jumps forward, open hand glowing and Māia spins to meet it with a glowing wing. The two limbs meet and the Pokemon slide back with the force of impact. ]

Ren: Get some momentum and use steel wing!

[ Māia springs into the air, quickly building speed as she swoops around the ring. ]

Brawly: Wait for it… [ Māia dives. ] Seismic toss!

[ The machop catches Māia by one glinting wing using her own momentum to sling her back into the air. Māia goes tumbling towards the rafters. ]

Ren: Tuck your wings! [ Māia does and spins faster for a moment. ] Open! [ Māia opens her wings and rights herself before she hits the rafters. ] Wing attack!

[ Māia dives, opening her wings just in time to level off a few feet from the floor. ]

Brawly: Karate chop!

[ The machop braces, hands at the ready, but Māia changes course at the last second. The machop’s strike misses and Māia catches it in the opposite shoulder. It goes sprawling. Māia uses her remaining momentum to vault back up. She flips in the air and touches back down in between Brawly and his fallen machop. He recalls his pokemon. ]

Brawly: Alright, but it’ll take more than that to beat Mauī.

[ Brawly sends out his makuhita. It flexes but we cannot see its considerable muscles under the thick layer of fat. Māia spreads her wings and lets out a challenging cry in response. ]

Brawly: Bulk up!

Ren: Wing attack!

[ Māia shoots forward as the makuhita breathes in, entire body glowing. Māia is aiming for its chest, but the makuhita stretches up and out and Māia hits its stomach instead. She bounces off and tumbles head over tail before landing on her back. She groans but rights herself. ]

Brawly: Arm thrust!
Before Māia gets a chance to breathe, the makuhita darts forward with shocking speed, mit-like fists glowing. Māia gets her wings up to shield herself in time but goes sliding back from the impact.

Ren: Parry with steel wing!

Māia meets the makuhita's next punch with a solid metal shoulder. The makuhita throws another punch with the opposite hand but is again met by solid metal. It shakes its fists, clearly worn down, but Māia is puffing too, wings drooping. Suddenly the makuhita surprises all by throwing one last punch. Māia is unprepared and goes flying back.

Brawly: That's it! One last knock-off ought to finish it.

Ren: Boomburst!

Māia rights herself, digs in and lets' loose. The makuhita is bowled over by the explosion of sound waves before it can make contact. It does not get up. Brawly withdraws it.


Ren whistles and Māia flies to her raised arm.

Ren: Awesome job! The undefeated streak continues.

Māia: Of course! As if I'd lose to a fighting-type.

Ren: [grinning] A little humility! They put up a good fight.

Māia: Yes, worthy opponents.

Brawly: [walking over to them] Whooey! That was something else! Congrats you two!

Ren: Thanks.

Ren and her pokemon start walking out.

Brawly: [calling after them] And don't forget to eat dinner early! There's no hurling on my boards!

Ren: Will do!
Scene 5: Ren and his pokemon walk down the beach towards a group of about a dozen people and their pokemon gathered around a little pit-fire. The moon is shining brightly, making everything glimmer and glow. Ren is wearing a two-piece bathing suit with a racerback top and skort bottoms. Māia is riding on her shoulder and Ikki is hitching a ride on Akahata. As Ren approaches the group, we can see that the majority (9) are women. They come up to greet her and crowd around to shake her hand and introduce themselves. One asks if Māia is the legendary taillow and when she confirms they all fall back and make a big show of bowing and groveling, arms outstretched. Māia puffs up, looking supremely pleased, and flexes her wings for them. Brawly presents Ren with a long board and they paddle out. She stays past the breaking waves and watches the others for a while. Many of the pokemon are also surfing. The smaller ones ride on their trainers boards while the larger have their own boards. Every time someone paddles back out they give Ren a tip. Brawly swaps boards and has her ride a wave in crouched instead of standing. All applaud when she doesn’t fall off. Next she rides on the front of Brawly’s longboard. Tāraki jumps up when they come in and wants to try. Two of the women take over coaching while Brawly takes Tāraki out for a spin. Soon Tāraki is given his own board and he and Ren try their luck side by side. They wipe-out but come up laughing and keep going. Tāraki gets the hang of it pretty quickly and crows when he makes his first successful run. He collects high-fives as he paddles back out and Ren laughs and laughs. One of the women points out how cute Akahata and Ikki are snuggled up on the beach together. Ren rides in and invites them out. Soon all of Ren’s pokemon are out on different people’s boards. Akahata and Ikki ride together on Brawly’s board. Everyone is laughing and having fun. Some do crazy tricks. There are plenty of wipe-outs. More and more people retire to the fire by the shore until there are only a few left out in the waves, including Tāraki who is working on some moves. Ren sits a little away and Brawly comes to sit by her.

Brawly: So, ya have fun?

Ren: Yeah! Thanks for inviting me. Tāraki’s not going to forget this anytime soon. I think you gave him a new hobby.

Brawly: Never seen a surfing grovyle before. Usually they can’t stand the salt water.

Ren: He’s from a small island in the south.

Brawly: Far out.

[ There is a beat of comfortable silence between them. ]

Ren: So I notice there are a lot of women in your gym.

Brawly: Yeah, we keep it pretty steady at three to one.

Ren: It’s very unusual.

Brawly: I know right, braw? Most fighting-type gyms are like total sausage fests. It so doesn’t have to be like that! It’s not like there aren’t tons of ladies out there who like fighting-types. It can just be way harsh to train in a fighting gym if you’re a woman. That’s why I try to keep it chill and welcoming here. Seems to work.

Ren: Are you sure it’s not cuz you’re, ya’know, super good looking?

Brawly: [ laughs ] Yeah, I guess some of the trainers that come in are crushing on me. But I don’t
think it matters why you start something. Like, as long as you work hard and have fun, what’s it really matter? We’re all here to train, so I try to keep the gymcest to a minimum, but I’ve got nothing against the people who just want to feel it out. The people who aren’t that passionate just leave on their own, but it doesn’t happen often. I’ve only had to kick out two or three assholes and they were all guys.

Ren: That’s… really cool dude. You run a great gym.

Brawly: Thank you, that means a lot.

[ Tāraki finally comes back in and plants his board in the sand. They congratulate him and join the rest of the group by the fire. Everyone is smiling and chatting as they pass snacks around. Akahata is a little ways away from the action, lying in a sand bed she dug with her tail curled around a sleeping Ikki. ]

---

**Scene 6:** [ At the dock in Slateport. Ren and her Pokemon disembark while Mr. Briney and Peeko remain on deck. ]

Briney: Are ya sure you don't want a ride back to Rustboro, lass? We wouldn't mind taking ye.

Ren: you've already been so kind. I don't mind getting off here. I've never been to Slateport, but I hear good things.

Briney: [ smiling warmly ] Alright, lass. Take care, now.

Ren: [ waving ] I will! Thank you so much.

[ The Slateport beach is huge and extends 2/3 of the way around the city. In the distance we can see a long pier with a big lighthouse at the end. The beach has tons of people and Pokemon on it, but isn't too crowded. ]

Ren: [ as they walk along ] Well team, I hear this is one of the best spots in Hoenn for battles. This article said that lots of trainers just hang out on the beach and there's supposed to be a trainer's bar called the Seashore House on the west end that holds little tournaments and stuff. You all feeling up to it?

[ They all agree although some less enthusiastically than others. ]

Ren: Great! Okay, Ikki, I want you to take the lead.

Ikki: What?

Ren: I want you to battle as many pokemon as you think you can. You can tag out for breaks or bad match-ups, but I want you to handle the brunt of the battles for a while if you're willing.

Ikki: O-okay, but why?

Ren: I feel like I've been neglecting your training lately. Sometimes it seems like you still don't think you're a battler. But if you give me a chance, I'll bet I can prove that you can be. What'd ya say, little bug? Want to give this a go?
Scene 7: [Lots of clips of Ikki battling on the beach. She is clearly struggling, but holds her own. Show everyone else battles a bit too cut in between the frames of Ikki’s battles. Ikki is battling a slugma. She gets knocked back by an ember attack and looks to be on the edge of losing. It comes towards her, but instead of cowering, she straightens up and opens her mouth. An intense stream of bubbles comes flying out and stops the slugma in its tracks. It droops into a pool on the sand and its magma skin begins to crust over.]

Ikki: [quiet and shocked] Oooh.

Ren: That was a bubble beam! Yes! You have a water move now! This is gonna change the game for you.

Ikki: Yeah?

Ren: Absolutely, little bug!

[Ikki smiles tentatively. The other trainer, who has been inspecting her slugma, gets up and withdraws it.]

Trainer: I’m gonna take Mote to the Pokemon Center, but thanks for the battle.

Ren: Sure thing! [She waves as the trainer leaves.] Well, I think we’ve all worked hard enough for one day. Let’s get some rest.

[All head for the boardwalk.]

Scene 8: [Later that night in their room in the Pokemon Center. Ren and Akahata are already asleep in one of the bunks. One or two people are still up reading or playing with their navs, but the main lights are out. The rest of Ren’s team is settled in on little beds. Ikki is clearly still awake thinking.]

Panahi: Hey, Ikki?

Ikki: [starting and looking a bit scared that Panahi is talking to her] Y-yes?

Panahi: Me and the others just wanted to say say you did a good job today and congratulations on learning your first water move.

Ikki: Really?

[All nod, even Putenga.]

Panahi: Of course. That was grueling and you did really well. We were all impressed.
Ikki: Wow, thank you. I-I mean that's very kind. I didn't think I was doing that great…

Māia: Don’t be ridiculous.

Tāraki: That last battle was killer!

Ikki: Really?

Māia nods sagely.

Putenga: I've got a question for you.

Ikki: What is it?

Putenga: Why do you hang out with the grumpy mutt so much?

Ikki: [ rising up off her cushion, clearly mad ] Aka is not grumpy! She's really nice!

Māia: Yeah, Akahata is super cool!

Putenga: Whoa! alright, okay. Clearly I've been missing out on something.

[ Panahi starts chuckling quietly and Putenga joins in. Soon all five are laughing together. Someone shushes them and they giggle more quietly. ]

---

**Scene 9:** [ The next day Ren and her pokemon walk into the Seashore House, Ikki in the front. There is a large bar at the back with a friendly-looking bartender, long tables in front, and a small arena to the side. It's packed with trainers and pokemon of varying toughness. Ikki gulps and Māia looks totally delighted. ]

MC: Hey, y'all! Listen up now! This is your Master of Ceremonies, your Officiator of Fun and your ultimate Judge of Battle Badassery, Kat Korra!

[ The regulars of the club roar their approval while the new initiates clap in confusion as they turn to see a girl who looks to be about twelve standing on a box, mic in one hand, the other thrust into the air. After an appropriate amount of adoration, she lowers her hand and all fall quiet. ]

MC: Let me lay out the rules for the new blood and all them that's just passing through. The first tournament is for newbies through two badges. Next is for three and four badges, so on and etc. You get the idea. Winner of each round gets as many free drinks as they can knock back! Remember, you can only lose once, but you can win again and again so step right up hopefuls, gather round spectators and prepare yourselves for the **beadown**!

[ Ren wades through the crowd and writes her name in the bracket behind the small MC. Ren and her pokemon step up to the ring along with a bunch of other trainers and their pokemon. They survey each other appraisingly. Ikki is shaking with nerves. As she watches the first pair face off. ]

Ren: I'm seeing a lot of grass, dark and fire-types. This is yours to win, Ikki!

[ Ikki gulps. Soon it is Ren's turn and she and Ikki step into the ring and face off against a poochyena and his trainer. Ikki defeats it quickly with a few jabs of fell stinger. Each battle conveyed in a single ]
frame going forward. Show Ikki defeating pokemon (seedot & shroomish, litleo & pansear, zorua, tangela & houndour, cacnea & numel, skiddo & litwick & scraggy) interspersed with other trainers battling each other. The crowd grows more and more raucous and excited as each successive tier of the bracket is filled in. Soon the final two are up: Ren and a guy with a mohawk and piercings. Ikki squares off against his boldore. It uses rock blast but Ikki manages to dodge and nail it with bubble beam. Ikki parries it’s smackdown with fell stinger and it reels backward. The crowd yells and cheers. It catches her with headbutt and the crowd gasps. Ikki flinches and it uses the opening to close the distance. It is about to stomp her with another smackdown when she hits it point blank in the face with bubble beam. It staggers, wobbles and collapses. The crowd goes absolutely wild. People and pokemon are jumping and screaming and cheering. Ikki is in shock and suddenly starts glowing. The crowd quiets for a moment, watching as she evolves. She emerges from the light looking unlike any masquerain anyone has ever seen. Her antennae are black and white and resemble accelgor eyes. Her head is covered by a golden helm like a ninjask but with a red plume coming from the top.

MC: What a tournament! What an upset! Looks like we have our winner! Give it up for Ren Kosugi and her MVP, Ikki the surskit! [ The crowd cheers. As soon as there is a lull ] Or should I say masquerain? Let’s congratulate her on that awesome evolution! [ More cheering. Ikki looks around, totally unbelieving of all the adoration directed at her. ] I think we can all agree we’ve never seen a bug quite like that folks! What a sweep! Be sure to get your reward, Ren!

[ Everyone is finally settling down. Ikki looks around, searching for Akahata. Their eyes lock and Akahata’s lips curve upward in a subtle smile. Ikki grins, eyes watering but finally looking happy about her accomplishments. Ren, not noticing, scoops her up and hugs her. ]

Ren: You look so cool, little bug! I’m so proud! I told you you could be a battler! Do you believe me yet?

[ Ikki looks a bit uncomfortable being squished in Ren’s arms, but also happy and hopeful. ]

Ikki: Yeah.

---

**Scene 10**: [ Ren is walking out of the Slateport market weighed down with bags. Panahi is riding on her shoulder wearing a necklace. Ren slumps and groans. ]

Ren: I hate shopping.

Panahi: Well I love it.

Ren: Happy you’re a trainer’s pokemon now?

Panahi: I can no longer deny it has its benefits.

Ren: I’m glad you’re so happy with your purchase. I hardly ever get stuff for myself.

Panahi: You think I got this for me? Please, honey, this is a service to humanity. Just look at me. I’m radiant!

[ She puffs out her chest to show off the delicate necklace of cerulean jewels. Ren laughs heartily, causing Panahi to flutter to keep her balance. ]
Ren: It does look good on you and it's very secure so you can wear it all the time.

Panahi: Good because you're never getting it off me.

[Panahi smirks, looking satisfied. She straightens up as she spies a huge crowd of people forming in front of a bright, gaudy building to the north of them.]

Panahi: Goodness, now that's a big flock of people.

Ren: [looking over] That must be a contest hall. Maybe a contest just let out.

Panahi: Is that where pokemon put on performances instead of battling?

Ren: Yeah. I don't really get it. We don't have them in Johto.

[They both stare at the crowd for a moment.]

Panahi: The curiosity is killing me. Can we go see what everyone is looking at?

Ren: Sure thing.

[They wade into the crowd, but Ren is too short to see over most people's' heads. She spots an empty stoop and climbs it to get a better view. At the front of the crowd, by the doors of the contest hall is a woman in a flashy costume and her altaria. She is being interviewed by reporters about her win.]

Ren: Whoa, look at her altaria. Do they all look like that?

Panahi: [she harrumphs] She's alright. Lucky though. That seems like some life… Can I go back in my ball for a bit? Send out Ikki or someone to keep you company.

Ren: [concerned] Okay.

[She withdraws Panahi and sends out Ikki.]

Ikki: [hovering in front of her trainer] What's up?

Ren: Uh, Panahi got a bit tired. Do you mind staying out for a bit?

Ikki: Oh, no! Love to!

---

**Scene 11:** [They disentangle themselves from the crowd and make their way towards one of the public squares. They sit down on a bench and Ren pulls out her vapor box. She sets it up and begins loading stuff from her bags into it. The items dematerialize as they make contact with the wooden plate. Ren pulls out a small package and opens it instead of putting it away.]

Ren: [offering it to Ikki with an open palm] Here, this is for you.

Ikki: You bought me something?

Ren: Yeah. I got gifts for everyone. Ahi helped me pick them out. These are mystic water gems.
They should boost the power of your water moves a little.

Ikki: That's amazing. And they are so pretty. Thank you, Ren.

Ren: Panahi got some too, but in a fancy necklace. We thought this might suit you better.

Ikki: What should I do with them?

Ren: I thought we could mount them on your helmet.

Ikki: I'd like that.

Ren: Good, we’ll go back to the vendor tomorrow. I got the holders and she said she could solder them on.

[ Ren tucks the gems away and looks up. A lot of people are gathering in the square. Ren finishes packing everything away and recycles her bags. Suddenly Ren spots a Magma hood in the growing crowd. She follows it suspiciously with her eyes. The figure turns and she recognizes Josh. Her face morphs from suspicion into rage. She stomps towards him, Ikki hovering worriedly near her head. Josh sees her coming and jumps, but doesn’t run. His posture is nervous as she approaches and almost turns to cowering. ]

Ren: Josh! [ he winces ] What are you doing here?

Josh: H-hey, Ren.

Ren: [ Her cheeks puff out as she bites back whatever she was planning to say. Her eyebrows furrow in concern. ] How do you know my name?

Josh: You were, uh, on the news.

Ren: Right. Shit. [ She falls quiet, completely derailed. ]

Josh: [ fidgeting uncomfortably in the silence ] So, um, how are you?

Ren: [ anger returning full force ] Whoa. Stop that right now! We are not friends, Josh. Remember?

Josh: [ sheepish ] Right, yes, yeah, of course, sorry.

Ren: Good. Now, what are you doing here?

Josh: Nothing! Nothing at all, certainly not making any trouble.

Ren: Somehow, I’m not convinced. Seriously, you can’t even lie properly?

Josh: No, really, I’m not doing anything. I promise. In fact [ pulling a small flat brown package from his hip bag ], I’m not even here.

[ He presses the package into her hands, smiling nervously, then turns and runs off. Ren is left holding the package, fuming. She glares down at it, then back in the direction Josh ran. He is already gone. She splutters, then growls. She takes a deep breath. ]

Ren: What the hell was that? He just—and I—[ She growls again ] I can’t believe he tricked me into taking this. I’m almost afraid to open it.

Ikki: Are you going to?
Ren: Yeah… [She peels off the paper and stares at it for a moment.] A smackdown TM? What kind of joke is this? Why that little—

Ikki: Maybe it’s not a joke.

Ren: What?

Ikki: Maybe it’s a gift. You did save his life after all. He even wrapped it.

Ren: Yeah, in brown paper. That doesn’t mean… [She trails off, staring down at it.] You know, you’re probably right. Huh… [She stuffs the TM in her bag.] Whatever, let’s just get out of here.

[As they exit we see Maxie in the crowd in the background.]

---

Scene 12: [The next evening in the Pokemon Center Ren and her entire team, including the two newbies are having a meeting. Everyone is wearing their new items. Tāraki has a miracle seed cuff, Akahata has dark mote collar, Ikki has the mystic water stones mounted to her helmet, Panahi is wearing her mystic water necklace, Māia has a sharp beak anklet, Putenga has a quick claw anklet, Mele has a silk scarf and Hauoro has a king’s rock earring.]

Ren: Alright team, so here is the deal. The route between Slateport and Mauville is supposed to be crawling with electric-types, so I don’t think it’s going to be a very good training ground for Panahi, Māia, and Ikki. And you’ll all have to sit out the next gym since it’s electric too. So I thought it might be a good time for you three to take a break and that way Mele and Hauoro can get a bit of training in. How does that sound?

Panahi: Nice, actually. We go hang out with your boyfriend’s dad, right hun?

Ren: [rolls her eyes] Sort of. I’m signed up with the reserve near Oldale but they work with Birch’s lab all the time, so you’ll probably see him.

Putenga: I like how she doesn’t even deny it anymore.

Ren: What’s the point if you are going to make fun of me anyway?

Māia: I still don’t understand what the joke is.

Akahata: There is no joke. Besides, if she’s attracted to anyone it’s that Steven guy.

Ren: Aka!

Tāraki: [very excited] What about Brawly? She called him “super good looking” right to his face!

Panahi: Oh great lord Arceus! How can you two have kept all this juicy gossip from me!

Ren: And why are you all so interested in my nonexistent love life? For one, it’s boring. Kai is my friend and both Brawly and Steven are too old for me, alright? Case closed. And anyway we are getting massively off-topic here. Māia and Ikki, thoughts on taking some time off?

Ikki: It sounds nice, I guess.
Ren: You definitely deserve it. You’ve been working harder than anyone lately.

Māia: It sounds alright, but I want to come back out as soon as the gym is over.

Panahi: And there is no shopping in Mauville without me.


---

**Scene 13:** [ In a small office in the Slateport, an aging ship captain is sitting at a desk pouring over sea charts. He sighs and sits back down in his chair, stroking his beard tiredly. There is a knock at the door. ]

Capt. Stern: Come in.

[ A museum docent opens the door. ]

Docent: Dr. Matsuda is here to see you.

Capt. Stern: Send him in.

[ The docent steps aside and Maxie walks in. Capt. Stern wordlessly gestures to a chair. ]

Maxie: [ taking a seat ] Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I know our recent encounters haven’t exactly been cordial.

Capt. Stern: I was certainly surprised to see you at the press conference today.

Maxie: I don't deny that I've said some harsh things about your pet project in the past, but I wanted to tell you that I have realized there is some potential in deep-sea exploration and to apologize for my narrow-mindedness.

Capt. Stern: What do you want, Maxie?

Maxie: Information. I'd like you to give me some technical readouts on the underwater caverns on Route 128.

Capt. Stern: And why should I do that?

Maxie: It would be an exchange. I would give you some locations that would be valuable for your team's research and you would tell me what you found at those locations.

Capt. Stern: Hmm. How about you can read about it in the newspapers like everyone else.

Maxie: We could work together like we did before, Morgan.

Capt. Stern: I don't know what kind of game you are playing, but I want no part of it. You made your bed, Maxie. Now you have to lie in it.

Maxie: I see you are just as stubborn as you ever were.
Capt. Stern: More so. I'm older now.

Maxie: [ standing ] Well in that case, I wish you good luck on your final preparations.

Capt. Stern: Goodbye Maxie.

______________________________

Scene 14: [ A women who at first appears to be an engineer is walking down a hallway in the Slateport shipyard with a whisnur at her heels. She turns and we can see that it is Azalea. She uses a key card to unlock a door and steps inside. The room is full of filing cabinets. She starts going through one while Aster listens at the door. ]

Aster: [ grumbling ] I don't like this.

Azalea: I know, Aster, but who's going to come in here at four in the afternoon? Workday is almost over. Besides, Maxie has Stern occupied.

[ She soon finds what she is after and pulls out some schematics. They go down the hall and copy them, then return them. Azalea drops the key card, which we can now plainly see is not hers, on the floor where someone will find it and walks casually out the front door. Next panel they are walking down the street. ]

Aster: [ sarcastically ] We’re learning so many useful skills.

Azalea: I know. I'll have to put them on my resume when I have to get a real job again.

______________________________

Chapter End Notes

Ikki is the real star of this chapter. In other news, the plot waves at Ren as it passes by. Don't worry, it'll come back for her. Josh sucks at lying and gratitude, but he tries his best.

______________________________

Character Chart:

HUMANS:
Ren Kosugi, our protagonist
Brawley Costa, the Dewford Gym leader, surfer dude and feminist
Mr. Briney, a retired sea captain with a Wingull named Peeko
Kat Korra, MC of the Seashore House
Josh Takamoana, a Magma grunt who Ren saved
Capt. Morgan Stern, ship Captain and head of the deep sea exploration program
Maxie Matsuda, head of Team Magma
Azalea, a Magma grunt who doesn't have time for your shit

TEAM REN:
Taraki the Grovyle
Akahata the Poochyena
Ikki the Masquerain
Panahi the Wingull
Maia the Taillow
Putenga the Shroomish
Mele the Skitty
Hauoro the Whismur

OTHER POKEMON:
Aster, Azalea's Whismur
Have You Seen A Lady Fairer?

Chapter Summary

In which there are a lot of electrikes and also Wally reappears.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Scene 1: [Ren and her Pokemon are out on Route 110. The route is basically a string of long, thin islands just offshore connected by foot bridges. In the distance we can see a highway is carved into the rocky shoreline for cars.]

Ren: Wow. This place is so cool. We don't have anything like it in Johto.

Putenga: Johto is starting to sound like a real hick region the way you talk about it.

[Ren looks annoyed and opens her mouth to contradict Putenga, but is interrupted by a distant yipping and howling. All freeze to listen. It quickly gets louder, closer and more insistent.]

Ren: Akahata, please tell me that isn't hunting.

Akahata: It's not, or not exactly. They sound excited but not hungry.

Ren: Is it mightyena?

Akahata: No, it's manectric and electrike. Lots of them. And they are coming this way.

Ren: Great. There are a bunch of electric wolves headed right for us... Should we run?

Akahata: No point. We could never outrun them.

[Ren and her Pokemon form a small protective circle. Akahata plants herself in front of Ren, tail held high and mane along her spine standing on end. Shiny green and blue bodies begin to emerge from the grass and shrubs all around them. The electrike and manectric continue to yip and whine and howl as they circle the group. Soon there are dozens of them.]

Ren: Got any info for us, Aka?

Akahata: It's difficult to catch much when they're all talking at once.

[Large and very glossy manectric makes its way to the front. It howls, tail held high, and the others start joining in. Soon they are all sitting sagent and howling in a loose ring around Ren and her team. The big one goes quiet and the rest follow suit. It calls out to Akahata.]

Akahata: She is the alpha and wants to talk to you.

Ren: Well, she certainly has my attention.
Akahata: She says that her pack has grown strong and numerous from battling with trainers and their
pokemon. She hopes that you will accept her challenge. She says because only two of us have
evolved, only the electrike will battle us. We can stop at any time. Neither party must attempt to
injure the other, only to subdue. Are these terms acceptable?

Ren: Wow, okay. Yeah, that sounds great actually. I accept.

The alpha dips her head and Ren bows back. The alpha howls instructions at her pack and they
begin to rearrange themselves, yipping softly and excitedly to one another. They form a ring with the
electrike towards the center and the few manectric at the back.}

Ren: Alright, who wants to go first?

Tāraki: Me, me! Bring it!

Ren nods and he bounds to the center while the rest take their places at the edge. The gathered
electrike look at one another to see who will go first for a moment before one with a particularly
spiky ruff struts into the ring. He squares off with Tāraki, posture erect and confident. Suddenly he
lunges, form blurring with the speed and the electricity rippling over his pelt. Tāraki only barely
manages to dodge, bolts of electricity lapping at his leg scales as rolls away. Ren yells instructions
as the electrike recovers and comes at Tāraki again. Most of its attacks are too fast for even Tāraki
to dodge, but they don't do much damage either. Tāraki grins as they spar back and forth until a
final fury cutter knocks it to the ground. Tāraki raises his fist, but it rolls over and shows it's belly.
The crowd barks it's approval. The first electrike walks off and another one takes it's place. Lots of
panels of Tāraki enjoying himself as he battles one electrike after another, pushing himself to match
their speed. Finally half a dozen young electrike challenge him together. Riding high on built up
confidence, he accepts. They dart all around him, launching thunder waves to paralyze him and
tackling him whenever there is an opening. Soon enough he goes down and they pile all over him,
yipping and howling until the alpha calls them off. Ren heals Tāraki a bit and he rests on the
sidelines while Putenga takes his place. She is much slower than her opponents, so she and Ren play
a long game with stun spore and leech seed. We can tell she is enjoying herself as she takes out one
after another. The quick claw helps Putenga move first and she headbutts and electrike out of the
ring. She starts to glow and all look on in awe as she evolves. She flexes her new arms and swings
her massive tail from side to side. No one steps forward. She makes fun of them for their cowardice
until a manectric steps into the ring. Ren and the alpha confirm that it's okay first. The manectric
rushes Putenga with blinding speed, but she swings around, her tail cracking like a whip before the
blowing club at the end knocks the manectric off it's feet. Howls from the crowd as it picks itself up
and they square off again. They trade blows, Putenga alternating between mega drain and mach
punch. It manages to paralyze her, but she catches it with one final kick and earns a narrow victory.
She retires victorious. Mele goes next and entertains everyone by winning a few rounds by putting
his opponents to sleep or charming them. However, he goes down after the first solid hit. He bows
as he exits the ring. Hauoro goes next and keeps his opponents at bay with bursts of concussive
sound that make them flinch thanks to his king’s rock. Finally it is Akahata’s turn. A particularly
glossy electrike steps forward to face her. Akahata readsies herself but is clearly unprepared for the
speed and power of the spark attack the electrike unleashes. Akahata responds with a thunder fang
and paralyzes it. Despite this, the electrike is still difficult to pin down. Eventually Akahata manages
to land a bite and defeat it, but Ren is very impressed by the electrike. Akahata is still panting from
her battle when she feels a great surge of energy. She begins to glow and all fall silent as she evolves
into a mightyena. Her defeated opponent howls her congratulations and soon the entire pack joins
in. The electrike paces up to touch noses with Akahata, eyes shining with wonder. Akahata hesitates
for a moment, but then bends down to complete the contact. Soon she practically buried in excited
electrike smiling and nuzzling and talking to her. She begins to look a little dismayed and Ren
wades through the admirers to congratulate Akahata herself and get her some space.}
Scene 2: [ After the battling is over and everyone is healed, Ren and Akahata go to speak with the alpha. ]

Ren: We wanted to thank you for that. It was very helpful to us.

[ The alpha looks pleased and dips her head. ]

Akahata: [ translating ] She thanks us too. She is pleased.

Ren: Is there anything else we can do for you? I feel like we owe you and your pack.

[ The alpha looks thoughtful for a moment before smiling and answering. ]

Akahata: If you want she has a small task for us. It’s not far. She’ll take us.

Ren: Cool. Come on, guys! We’re going to help them with something.

[ Ren’s pokemon disentangle themselves from the thronging electrike and gather around her. The alpha sets off and all follow. Soon they come to a huge old fruit tree that is heavily laden. ]

Akahata: She wants us to climb up and get the fruit down.

Ren: Okay.

[ Ren, Tāraki and Mele climb up and start tossing fruit down. The electrike and manectric run around underneath catching them in their mouths. Everyone smiles and laughs. ]

Scene 3: [ That night Ren, her pokemon and the pack are gathered around her lantern eating and socializing. The glossy electrike Akahata battled earlier approaches her to ask some questions and calls her sister. Akahata is confused by this and asks why. The electrike says it is because Akahata’s sire was a manectric. The others agree that Akahata should be addressed as sister. The electrike asks Akahata where she was born, where she traveled on her own, how she came to be Ren’s pokemon, and where she has traveled with Ren. She asks about Ren and the team and being a battler. Akahata answers all of her questions with patience, surprised and happy to be so readily accepted by the pack. We also see Mele entertaining another large section of the pack by singing for them. Hauoro starts dancing along, which pleases Mele. Putenga has another small group in thrall as she practices her moves, trying to get the hang of her new body. Ren, Tāraki and the alpha all sit together talking and watching the others. ]
Scene 4: The next day Ren, her pokemon and the pack are walking along Route 110 together, all comfortable and happy with each other. The glossy electrike sticks close to Akahata while Mele rides a manectric, a small gaggle of fans trotting along in their wake. An electrike near the front stops to listen and smell the breeze and soon most of the pack is following suit. One of them howls and soon they are all howling and yipping.

Akahata: Another trainer.

[The pack is already racing off and Ren grins as she and her pokemon run with them. Soon they come upon a very startled looking Kai and shroomish. Jay is glaring at the horde as if daring them to come any closer, crest raised and arms thrown out protectively.]

Ren: Kai!

Kai: Ren! Oh thank Arceus. I thought we were about to get eaten. What is going on?

Ren: [running up to give him a hug] We made some new friends!

Kai: I’ll say. I thought you were building a team, not an army.

[Ren laughs and Jay relaxes.]

Kai: Are these all wilds?

Ren: Yeah.

Kai: This is a huge pack. We’ve seen some others, but nothing like this.

Ren: The alpha here [gesturing to her] has started challenging trainers to battles. She asks how many badges you have and then she tries to match your level to her pack members. It’s so cool. Were were battling forever yesterday and we battled some this morning too.

Kai: What? I’ve never heard of something like that! I have to interview her!

[The humans chatter excitedly and then Ren introduces everyone. A few frames of Jay battling a manectric and winning. Kai’s shroomish (Dusty) is battling an electrike when he evolves. He gets excited and tries to use mach punch, but isn’t used to his new body and falls on his ass. He laughs and surrenders. Kai and Jay interview the alpha and some other pack members. In the evening part of the pack goes off hunting and comes back with various carcasses. At night everyone eats together and stays up socializing in the lantern light. Once again Mele entertains all with his singing only this time he has Hauoro providing accompaniment and Dusty doing interpretive dance.]

Scene 5: The next morning Ren and Kai are preparing to leave. Kai is chattering excitedly while Ren smiles and offers the occasional comment. The pokemon are all saying their goodbyes.

Kai: This is so totally incredible! I know I’ve been saying that—

Ren: [teasing] Over and over.

Kai: I can’t wait to tell my dad about all of this. He’s not going to believe it!
Ren: Good thing I took all of those pictures for you.

Kai: [ warm and heartfelt ] You are the best ever!

[ Ren giggles and Kai suddenly seems to realize what he said and blushes deeply. Ren punches him in the shoulder and opens her mouth to make some joke, but is interrupted by Akahata nudging her leg with her nose. Ren turns to see that Akahata’s electrike friend is with her. ]

Akahata: This electrike would like to join our team. We talked about it for a while and she wouldn’t mind not being out with us all of the time, she just really wants to get stronger.

[ The electrike looks nervous but hopeful. ]

Ren: Awwww! How could I say no to that face? I’ve always thought electric-types were cool. She can start training with us right away since we have a spot open.

[ Ren digs in her bag for a pokeball and offers it to the electrike. She wags her tail and presses the button with her snout. She turns into bright light and flows into the ball. ]

Kai: [ thoughtful ] Huh.

Ren: What?

Kai: She asked you? Wow, that’s just—that’s unusual.

Ren: [ shrugs ] Māia asked me too.

[ Ren sends the electrike back out and the alpha comes up to them. She confirms that the electrike will train with Ren now. The alpha steps forward and touches the electrike’s forehead with her snout. The electrike dips her head before turning back to join them. As they walk away the alpha howls. The rest of the pack joins in. The electrike holds her tail high and soon the howls fade. ]

Kai: [ awed and confused ] You’re so lucky—no, it’s not even that—it’s more like you’re a magnet, like things are just drawn to you. First you found Panahi, and then the shroomish glen and now this electrike pack…

Ren: I wish I could say it was all a bed of roses.

Kai: I know there’s the Magma stuff too.

Ren: [ a little worried ] I hadn’t really thought about it, but you’re right I guess. I’d like to think it’s because I’m just open to it, but I don’t know.

Kai: I know I tease you about taking on so many pokemon, but the truth is I’m just impressed. How do you even afford the upkeep?

Ren: [ face lighting up with happiness and surprise before falling into a confident smirk ] Well that part is simple: we win.

---

**Scene 6:** [ Kai and Ren’s pokemon are all doing exercises together on a bare hilltop overlooking the sea. Kai and Ren go around giving instructions before getting distracted talking to each other. ]
Putenga finishes a mach punch combo and turns to see that her trainer is no longer watching. She flexes her short arms, looking dissatisfied. She then approaches Tāraki who is practicing leaf blade.

Putenga: Hey, Tāraki, can I ask you for some help with training?

Tāraki: [ incredulous ] What?

Putenga: I want some advice from you. Is that okay?

Tāraki: Sure, I guess. What about?

Putenga: Back before you evolved, you used to do this overhead tail strike a lot. I was wondering if you could show me how to do it.

Tāraki: So let me get this straight: you want me to give you advice on how to execute a move?

Putenga: [ exasperated ] Yes! I feel like I’m talking to a wall here.

[ Tāraki can’t even talk he is so happy. Instead he lets out a strangled squeal of excitement. Putenga just sighs and rolls her eyes. Tāraki starts cackling. ]

Putenga: Are you going to help me or not?

Tāraki: I just can’t believe that you would ever want my help.

Putenga: Well, I’m a physical attacker now. You’ve always been good at it and it’s never been my strong suit. Plus I’m not really used to all of these new limbs yet and your body type is closest. I just thought you would have the most insight.

Tāraki: Okay, I’ll show you, but on one condition.

Putenga: Fine. Name it.

Tāraki: You have to tell me I’m awesome.

Putenga: Oh great Arceus, why? I already admitted you are better than me. That isn’t enough for you? I thought that’s what you wanted.

Tāraki: It was greatly appreciated, but it didn’t pain you as much as I had dreamed it would. I need to see you suffer just a little before I can forgive you.

Putenga: If that’s what it takes… Tāraki you are amazing and awesome. Would you please teach me your super rad moves?

Tāraki: Absolutely, friend!

[ Pan out as Tāraki crouches, demonstrating the preparation for the jump while Putenga copies him. We pan over to see Akahata and the electrike, Ao, practicing thunder fang side by side. Ao’s has more sparks, but Akahata’s clearly has more power behind it. Akahata glances over at her new practice partner. ]

Akahata: You’ve got plenty of electricity going, more than I can and that’s good, but you have to get more force into the bite. And landing the paralysis isn’t about building up the sparks; it’s more about directing them into your opponent’s muscles. [ Ao nods. ] Like this.
Akahata demonstrates the move again but slower while Ao watches. Pan out as Ao tries again more successfully. In the background we can see Dusty asking to join Putenga and Tāraki. In the foreground Mele is watching Akahata and Ao, pupils blown wide and whiskers quivering. Hauoro shuffles up to his side.

Hauoro: Whoa. I’m glad we’re on the same team. They’re scary.

Mele: [awed] She’s beautiful.

Hauoro: The electrike?

Mele: [sighing] Yeah.

Hauoro: I’ll have to take your word for it.

Mele: [He brushes Hauoro companionably with his tail, his eyes never leaving his teammates.] One day you’ll evolve and be able to see more than shadows.

[In the background, Jay has joined Tāraki and the brelooms and is showing them some kicks. Ren comes up behind Mele and Hauoro with Kai and his wailmer, Makō, bouncing along with them.]

Ren: Hey you two. Are you getting tired?

Hauoro: No, we just took a break.

Ren: Good. We were hoping you two could practice with Makō for a bit. I thought there might be some overlap between echoed voice, disarming voice and water pulse.

Hauoro: Sure.

[Mele has not been paying full attention and Ren bends down and taps him on the shoulder. His head snaps around to look at her.]

Ren: [winking] You’ll have plenty of time to watch the girls later, okay?

Mele: S-sure.

[The three start practicing under their trainer’s direction.]

---

**Scene 7:** [The two teams are saying their goodbyes on the outskirts of Mauville. Jay and Tāraki pound it while the brelooms shake hands. Makō flops down on the turf to farewell his practice buddies.]

Ren: I'm really glad we ran into you. This has been fun.

Kai: Yeah, me too. [eyes shining with excitement] Oh man, I have so much data to gather a week is going to go by like nothing.

Ren: [smiling] Just don't forget about me, alright? You promised me a battle.

Kai: I won't.
They shake hands and Kai and his pokemon head back south.

Kai: [waving over his shoulder] See ya!

Ren waves back, then crosses her arms and smiles fondly as she watches him go. Putenga steps up to her side and gives her an amused look.

Ren: [without turning around] So he's cute when he's excited about science, the nerd. Sue me.

Putenga: You realize I'm contractually obligated to report this to Panahi.

Ren: [She sighs, then looks confused. She finally turns to look at Putenga.] Wait, contractually obligated? What dirt does Ahi have on you?

Putenga: It's not dirt so much as a four times effective wing attack.

Ren: [nodding] That's fair.

---

Scene 8: Ren and Tāraki are in the center of Mauville, staring up at the light tower. Around them is a large park with a picnic area, sculpture garden and a battlefield. Surrounding the park on all sides is one enormous building.

Ren: This place is even crazier than I thought it would be.

Tāraki: Humans are crazy.

Wally: [calling out as he runs up to them] Ren!

Ren: [wheeling around in surprise] Wally? Wally! Hey, how've you been?

[He stops in front of her, panting, and grabs his inhaler. He takes one deep breath of the medication and his breathing steadies.]

Ren: You okay man?

Wally: [talking really fast] Yeah, I'm fine and I've been doing great. Thank you so so much for helping me get my starter. [He pauses to take a breath and glance nervously around.] Could you do me a favor and battle me?

Ren: Sure. Right now?

Wally: Yeah, the battlefield is open. Please Ren. My uncle is around here somewhere and he's trying to stop me, but I've gotten so much stronger and I just really need to prove it to him, please!

Ren: Whoa, whoa, okay. Let's do it, but calm down a bit before you hurt yourself.

Wally: Thank you!

[They walk over to the battleground and claim it. Wally looks around again for his uncle.]

Ren: Let's choose our pokemon and link navs but wait until we see your uncle to actually start.
Wally: Good idea.

[ He sends out Kihei who is now a kirlia and Ren gestures for Tāraki to enter the ring. They aren't waiting for long before Wally spots his uncle. The trainers lock eyes and nod. ]

Wally: Kihei, confusion!

Ren: Leaf blade, Tāraki!

[ Tāraki dives at Kihei, not even bothering to dodge and taking the full brunt of the confusion. This move gives Kihei no chance to retreat and he goes sliding back with the force of Tāraki's attack. Tāraki snorts with satisfaction but then shakes his head, clearly affected. Wally’s uncle has reached them by this point but does not intervene. Instead he waits on the sidelines. ]

Wally: We got him! Another confusion, Kihei!

Ren: Stay with me! One more hit and we got him.

[ Tāraki tries and fails to dodge but manages to catch himself. He shakes his head again before launching himself at Kihei again. It looks like he lands the hit but he tumbles through Kihei and hits the ground hard. We see the real Kihei is actually to his left. Wally’s uncle looks impressed. ]

Wally: Disarming voice!

[ Tāraki takes the hit but keeps his footing. We see him and Ren flinch in tandem, then take a deep breath and swing at Kihei. The kirlia is too close to get away and staggers under the hit. Tāraki catches him with a second hit and he falls over. ]

Wally: Kihei, return! Go Kana!

Ren: Okay, Tāraki, you've had enough. Go Mele!

[ Wally's skitty is much sleeker with faint rosettes in the pink parts of her fur. She eyes Mele critically. Then spots Wally's uncle watching. ]

Kana: See, now that's what a pet skitty looks like!

[ Wally's uncle can't understand her and doesn't realize the comment is directed at him. ]

Wally: [ looking embarrassed ] Kana…

Kana: [ unapologetic ] Well it’s true.

Mele: [ smiling flirtatiously ] I may look cuddly, but I'm a battler just like you.

Ren: Doesn’t mean you’re not handsome though. Let's open her eyes to your true beauty! Attract!

[ Mele blows her a kiss and she sways unsteadily for a moment, pupils dilating, before shaking it off with annoyance. ]

Kana: [ hair standing on end ] Oh! Two can play at that game!

Wally: Tackle!

[ Mele tries to get out of the way, but Kana is faster and they go tumbling. Kana comes out on top and slams him down. Mele struggles free but Kana caresses his neck with her tail as she springs off }
Mele: [as his own pupils dilate] Oh dear.

Wally & Ren: Disarming voice!

[The skitties blink owlishly at each other before they let loose. Mele's white waves meet Kana's pink in the air and both skitties flinch as they are hit. Mele's attack seems to do a bit more damage.]

Ren: Sing!

Wally: Tackle!

[The skitties blink owlishly at each other before they let loose. Mele's white waves meet Kana's pink in the air and both skitties flinch as they are hit. Mele's attack seems to do a bit more damage.]

Ren: You almost had her! Snap out of it Mele!

[Mele is too wrapped up in his performance to notice his trainer. Unfortunately, Kana does come to her senses with a shake of her head. Remembering that her trainer gave her a command, she tackles the still crooning Mele with her shoulder. He goes flying and tumbles over in a heap. Ren withdraws him. Kana shakes herself, now fully free of her infatuation.]

Ren: Go Oro!

[Wally sends out his budew. The tiny pokemon looks over her much larger opponent and hops forward with confidence.]

Wally: Disarming voice!

[The skitties blink owlishly at each other before they let loose. Mele's white waves meet Kana's pink in the air and both skitties flinch as they are hit. Mele's attack seems to do a bit more damage.]

Ren: Echoed voice!

[Kana moves first but the sound waves pass harmlessly through Hauoro. The opposite is true when he lets loose and Kana staggers and falls.]

Wally: Oh, soundproof, of course! [as he withdraws her] Sorry, Kana. Alright Aroha, this is it!

[Wally sends out his budew. The tiny pokemon looks over her much larger opponent and hops forward with confidence.]

Ren: Let's see how she handles an echoed voice!

Wally: Giga drain!

[The tiny pokemon digs in and takes the hit while charging her own attack. A moment later Hauoro droops as his energy is drained. Aroha perks back up, good as new. We can see the gears turn in Ren's head as Wally congratulates his pokemon.]
Wally: Great job, Aroha! Now a extrasensory!

Ren: Pound!

[Hauoro uses her charging time to close the distance. He body checks her just as her attack lands, sending both sliding back. Both get up and it is clear Hauoro's attack did a lot more damage than his first attempt.]

Wally: Synthesis and stay light on your feet, Aroha!

Ren: Keep pounding her, Oro!

[Aroha skips away as energy from the sun starts to flow into her. Hauoro swings at her but misses as she twirls to the side. Reinvigorated, she dances away as Hauoro continues to swing and miss. His ears strain to try and pin down her light footsteps and erratic movements. Her confidence builds as she continues to avoid him.]

Wally: Giga drain!

[She charges and lets out a battle cry as she launches the attack.]

Wally: Don't kiai!

[But it is too late. Hauoro powers through her attack and delivers a swift, accurate kick. She goes sailing and slides to a stop in front of her trainer. He scoops her up and tries to comfort her since she is on the verge of tears.]

Ren: [staring forward] I'm sorry! Is she okay? [clutching her right arm] I know Oro gets a bit intense. [looking down] I should have—

Wally: She's fine. She just gets like this sometimes. She's still really young. [to Aroha] You did great, little bud.

[She caresses him fondly with her fronds.]

Wally: Wow, you really beat us. I-I really thought we were ready.

Armin: [coming up and putting his hand on Wally's shoulder] You did your best, Wally. Now let's go home.

Ren: Wait a minute sir. Just because he lost to me doesn't mean he's not ready. I have two badges and I'm about to go for my third. He’s more than ready for his first badge and probably ready for his second. [Wally's face lights up.] It's great that you're trying to protect him, really it is, but do you really want to take this away from him?

Wally: [turning to face his uncle] I've worked so hard, uncle. I know we're strong enough. Doing this has made me stronger.

Armin: You must understand the position I'm in here, Wally. Your parents don't approve.

Ren: They need to understand that it's not their decision anymore. It's his.

Wally: Please, uncle.

Armin: [He sighs.] Alright, you can challenge the gym.
Wally: [ jumping in the air ] Yes! [ He puts Aroha down and sends out his other pokemon. ] We’re gonna do it guys! We did it!

[ Kihei jumps into his arms, Kana smirks, tail wagging happily, Aroha bounces around. She hops up and down with increasing anxiousness until Wally puts Kihei down and picks her up again. Wally starts babbling excitedly to his pokemon. Ren looks on happily. ]

Armin: [ to Ren ] Thank you, miss, for standing up for him. I didn’t know how happy this made him. I think you’re right. I think he needs this.

Ren: He’s my friend. I just try to help. Oh, I’m Ren Kosugi by the way. [ offering her hand ] Nice to meet you.

Armin: [ shaking her hand ] I’m Armin, Armin Scott. I’m glad Wally has a friend like you.

Wally: I have to take these guys to the Pokemon Center. Thank you so much for the battle, Ren.

Ren: Let’s go together. My pokemon could definitely use the attention.

[ They all head off to the Pokemon Center together. ]

---

**Scene 9:** [ Ren, Wally, and Armin are all at the gym. Wally and Ren register and Wally looks a bit nervous as they wait for trainers. Armin is up in the stands so he can watch. ]

Ren: So, how exactly did you manage to get another two pokemon when your parents didn't want you too?

Wally: Well, Kihei and I caught Kana out in the wild and I managed to convince everyone that she was another pet. My cousin gave me Aroha. She breeds roselia and she knows I want to be a trainer… Hey, Ren, do you really think I can do this?

Ren: Of course, dude. You've totally got this. You could earn your second badge today, easy.

Wally: Thanks, Ren. And thank you for not holding back in that battle because of, well, you know. It meant a lot to me.

Ren: I wouldn't do that to you. Besides, I can't even afford to of I want to win. You're good.

Wally: [ His pale face starts to flush with color. ] Ren, do you—do you think we c-could be—c- could we b-be r-r-r—

Intercom: Walter Scott, your first opponent is ready arena one.

Wally: I should go.

Ren: See you soon. Knock 'em dead!

[ Wally rushes off. ]

Intercom: Ren Kosugi, your first opponent is ready in arena two.
Ren and her pokemon have no trouble plowing through the mostly electrike and magnemites and soon finish their battles. They make their way to the leader arena and sit down in the stands. Armin comes to sit by them when Wally finishes his trainer battles. Wally defeats Wattson, who uses a voltorb and a magnemite, with Kana and Kihei. Ren and his uncle cheer. Wattson shakes his hand and laughs heartily before handing him the badge. Wally is overwhelmed and excited. He and his pokemon climb into the stands as Ren and her team head down to face Wattson. They high-five as they pass each other.

Wattson: Ren! Lord Arceus just look at how you've grown! It's been years though. Perhaps you don't remember.

Ren: Vaguely. You certainly left an impression.

Wattson: I usually do! [He laughs some more.] Alright then, let's get started!

They both return to their own sides of the arena. Wattson sends out a magneton and Ren waves Putenga in.

Ren: Mach punch!

Wattson: Sonic boom!

Putenga crosses the distance in a blink. She socks the magneton with her tail club and it spins away through the air. It quickly steadies itself and uses sonic boom as Putenga comes in for another hit. She takes the blow and launches into an overhead tail strike.

Wattson: Volt switch!

The magneton slams into the ground but it launches a ball of electricity at Putenga as it bounces back up and shoots back into Wattson's waiting pokeball. Putenga shakes off the hit as he sends in his manectric.

Ren: Keep up the mach punches!

Wattson: Quick attack!

The combatants trade moves back and forth. Putenga's attacks do more damage, but the manectric is faster and manages to dodge a few hits.

Wattson: Thunder wave!

Putenga is hit and paralyzed. The manectric goes for another quick attack but Putenga rocks back on her tail and catches it with her legs. It lands heavily in front of Wattson and he withdraws it and sends out his magneton again.

Ren: Alright Putenga, take a break. Tåraki, you're up!

Tåraki high-fives Putenga as they trade places.

Wattson: Magnet bomb!

Ren: Leaf blade, Tåraki!

Tåraki is faster and strikes first, but his attack does a lot less damage. Undaunted, he keeps
Wattson: Volt switch!

[ Once again the magneton exits the arena and Wattson sends out a voltorb. ]

Ren: Quick attack!

Wattson: Thunder wave!

[ As Tāraki strikes the voltorb, sparks ripple through his arm. He lands awkwardly, shaking slightly from the paralysis. ]

Ren: Are you okay? [ Tāraki gives her the thumbs up. ] Hang in there! Leaf blade!

Wattson: Sonic boom!

[ The voltorb moves back as it prepares to attack, causing Tāraki's stiff attempt to miss. Tāraki forces himself to keep going as the sound burst strikes him and lands a powerful hit on the rather shocked voltorb. It tries to right itself but Tāraki catches it again and it falls to the floor with a loud clack. Wattson withdraws it and sends out his magneton once more. By this point Tāraki is hurting and the magneton has barely been damaged. We can see Ren’s concern as she weighs her options. Her only pokemon who could do normal damage to the magneton is out of commission, so her best bet is to keep using her heaviest hitter, accept that he isn't doing so hot either. But when their eyes lock, she sees how badly he wants to stay in, so Ren lets him try. ]

Wattson: Magnet bomb!

Ren: Leaf blade!

[ Tāraki takes the hit but manages to cut the magneton across one of its eyes. It rears away with an metallic alien screech somewhere between the whine of an iron gate closing and the various irritated sounds of a computer using dial-up internet. The moment it has some distance, its u-magnets begin to spin as it prepares another attack. Tāraki shudders, muscles unwilling to obey him. A ball of metal comes whizzing toward him and in a flash he rolls to the side, dodging the attack. The magneton spins in annoyance and charges magnet bomb again. Tāraki runs at it, zigzagging to avoid its attacks, and upper-cuts it with a leaf blade. It rotates in the air and launches itself at Tāraki, surface rippling with electricity. He jumps over it and smacks it into the ground with his tail leaves. He shudders as he lands heavily in the superhero pose. Both humans are quiet for a moment. Wattson withdraws his magneton as Ren runs out onto the field. ]

Ren: Holy shit, Tāraki! That was the coolest thing ever! Okay, well not quite as cool as when you evolved, but almost!

[ Tāraki just grins and hugs Ren, too tired to reply. ]

Wattson: That was some battle you two. You should be proud.

Ren: [ pulling away from Tāraki, but keeping one hand on his shoulder ] Thank you, sir, but I think all of the congratulations belong to Tāraki. I don't think I did much.

Wattson: Nonsense, my girl. He couldn't have fought through that paralysis without you. [ Ren looks confused. ] See for yourself. Your hand is shaking. [ Ren looks down and sees that he is right. ] You gave him your energy.
[Ren stares at her hand but sees herself moving in sync with Tāraki as he battled the magneton: swinging as he cut the magneton's eye, dancing from foot to foot as he zigzagged, punching upward as he uppercut, and pulling her fist in as he brought his tail leaves down. She blinks and looks back up at Wattson. Wally and his uncle are coming down from the stands.]

Wattson: It takes an incredible bond to do that. Not terribly uncommon, perhaps, but no less inspiring every time I see it. It's the same bond required for mega evolution. Your friend Wally has it too, with his kirlia. It's not a one way street either, as I'm sure you know. [he looks at Wally] Sometimes trainers draw strength from their pokemon too, or maybe it's helping their pokemon win battles that makes them stronger. I don't really know. What I do know is that it has a lot of potential to heal, but it comes with it's own set of risks. The strain can be dangerous. Only you can judge if you're strong enough, how much energy you can lend. [chuckling] But I guess that makes it like most parts of pokemon training. It's not a safe business, but it's very rewarding. Speaking of which, here's yours. [He hands Ren the Dynamo Badge. He pats both trainers on the shoulder.] You are both more than deserving of your badges. And sorry for pushing you so hard, Ren my dear. I had to make sure you weren't just riding your father's coattails. [He laughs again.] I should have known better. Now if you don't mind, I may go take a nap. That double header really wore me out!

Wally: Thanks for everything, sir!

Ren: Thanks Wattson!

[He waves over his shoulder as he leaves. Wally congratulates Ren and they all head off to the Pokemon Center again.]

---

**Scene 10:** [Wally leaves with his uncle and Ren stays to explore the city with her pokemon. Frame of her and Panahi shopping and getting massages. Frame of Ren fitting Ao for a collar with a magnet. Frame of Ren, Tāraki, Putenga and Māia battling in the food court. Frame of Ren watching a purring Mele get groomed. Frame of Ren, Ikki and Akahata on the roof garden looking out at the view. Ren and Hauoro are dancing in a nightclub, looking like they are having a great time. A guy comes up to dance with Ren and she turns him down. He gets in her personal space and she pushes him away. He starts coming back at her but gets knocked on his ass by a burst of concussive sound from Hauoro. He slinks off and Ren reaches down so she can high-five Hauoro's ear. A young woman next to Ren high-fives her too. The three of them grin as they dance together.]

---

**Scene 11:** [Ren and her Pokemon are all hanging out in the pal park. Ren is sprawled out on a bench next to a tree which Ikki and the two birds are perched in. The rest are lying around relaxing.]

Ren: This has been fun and all, but I'll be happy to get back out on the road.

Panahi: Ugh. What do you like so much about being dirty and uncomfortable anyway?

Ren: What's your problem with roughing it? You used to be a wild.
Panahi: *Used* to be, honey. Hear the past tense in there?

Ren: Right… Do you want to take some more time off?

Panahi: I was just giving you a hard time, honey. I don’t mind pulling my weight on this team.

Ren: You do pull your weight, Ahi. But you haven’t exactly been jazzed about battling lately. I just thought maybe you wanted to relax a bit more… [Panahi doesn’t answer.] The newbie could really use some more time out with us, but we’ll probably do the Lavaridge gym next and I’ll need you for that, so it wouldn’t be for too long.

Panahi: Oh, alright, you’ve convinced me.

Ren: That’s my girl: always taking one for the team!

Panahi: Hush.

Chapter End Notes

This one had a lot of pokemon culture in it which was a lot of fun for me. If you enjoyed the electrike stuff, there is more where that came from, believe you me. Also I love Wally?? Like, I didn't have a plan for him going in and he just turned into this really fun character all by himself. He'll be back in chapter 9 and then a bunch in chapter 10. As always, thanks for reading!

**Character Chart:**

**HUMANS:**
- Ren Kosugi, our protagonist
- Kai Birch, Ren's friend who likes science
- Wally Scott, Ren's other friend who likes the internet
- Armin Scott, Wally's uncle who he is currently living with
- Wattson Tolbert, the Mauville Gym Leader and everyone's grandpa

**TEAM REN:**
- **Taraki** the Grovyle
- **Akahata** the Mightyena
- **Ikki** the Masquerain
- **Panahi** the Wingull
- **Maia** the Taillow
- **Putenga** the Breloom
- **Mele** the Skitty
- **Hauoro** the Whismur
- **Ao** the Electrike

**TEAM KAI:**
- Jay, the Combusken
- Dusty, the Breloom
- Makō, the Wailmer
TEAM WALLY:
Kihei, the shiny Kirlia
Kana, the Skitty
Aroha, the Budew
Call Me The Tumblin' Dice

Chapter Summary

In which there is exploring and new recruits and crushes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Scene 1: [ Ren and her Pokemon are out on Route 112 waiting for Kai. Soon he and his team appear. Ren waits for him to get close before she bounds up and hugs him. He goes rigid with shock. ]

Kai: H-hi Ren. Is everything alright?

Ren: [hugging him tighter and lifting him slightly off the ground] Yep, peachy keen!

Kai: [goes very red and stutters] N-no—I mean—yes? Well, I-I was busy and—n-not that I wouldn’t—I d-didn’t think—um, uh—

Ren: [laughing] I'm just giving you a hard time. You're so easy to fluster. But for future reference there is a right answer to that question; it's yes.

Kai: R-right, okay.

Ren: So let’s get this battle started. I’m hungry for lunch already.

Kai: Three-on-three?

Ren: Yep.

[They both punch the info into their navs.]

Ren: Alright, Ao, are you ready for your first trainer battle?

[The electrike nods and steps forward.]

Kai: Go Makō!

[The wailmer bounces lazily forward.]

Ren: Thunder Fang!

Kai: Whirlpool!

[Ao darts forward in a blur. She jumps up and sinks her teeth into Makō’s fin, sending a jolt of electricity through him. He flinches, but the moment she lands, Ao is surrounded by vortex of water.]
She manages to keep her feet and it abates somewhat, still rippling around her legs and feet hampering her maneuverability.

Kai: Great job, Makō! Now rollout!

Ren: Another thunder fang! He can’t take too many.

[ Makō crusts over with rock and starts rolling towards Ao. She only barely manages to dodge his first pass and catch him with another thunder fang. His second pass is quicker and Ao can’t get away thanks to whirlpool. She tumbles and struggles to get back up as Makō makes another turn. The next pass, she holds her ground until the last second, before jumping up and landing another thunder fang. She is thrown by his momentum and doesn’t have time to recover before he comes around again. She goes down hard this time. ]

Ren: Alright, good job, Ao. We almost had him. Tenga, you’re up.

[ Putenga steps forward as Makō shakes the rocks and dirt off himself before letting a little water out of his blowhole to re-dampen his skin. ]

Kai: Water pulse!

Ren: Mega drain!

[ Makō charges but it falls apart with a splash as his energy drains. He blerfs onto the ground. Kai recalls him and Dusty steps forward. ]

Ren & Kai: Headbutt!

[ The two brelooms lower their heads and run at each other. Putenga’s form is better, her spine aligning in one straight column from skull to tail tip. Their heads connect with a crack and both stumble back but Dusty stumbles further. ]

Ren: Mach punch!

[ Putenga recovers first and uses the opening to deliver a lightning fast strike with her tail. ]

Kai: Block with headbutt!

[ Putenga comes in for another hit, and it’s too fast for Dusty to block, but he does manage to steady himself. When Putenga comes in for her third hit, Dusty blocks and shoves her in the chest. Putenga staggers. ]

Kai: Got her! Mach punch!

[ Dusty delivers a swift kick that keeps Putenga stumbling. ]

Kai: Headbutt!

Ren: Catch him!

[ Dusty lines up his headbutt and Putenga uses the pause to plant her feet. She catches his head with her arms and goes sliding back, but keeps her feet. As soon as they come to a stop, she rocks back on her tail and plants both feet square in his chest, shoving him back. Dusty is wide open and Putenga charges in with a final headbutt. Dusty teeters on his toes for a moment before he loses balance and tumbles over. He groans as he picks himself up. ]
Dusty: Maybe I should take up ballet instead.

Kai: Aww, you did well, buddy. Come on back now. Ready, Jay?

[Jay bounds forward as Dusty shuffles off to the side. Putenga looks worn out.]

Ren: Tenga, you too. Aright, Máia, Jay is all yours just like I promised.

Máia: YES.

[ Máia swoops forward and lands on the ground in front of Jay. Jay gives her a quizzical look, then tenses into a fighting stance. Máia spreads her wings, ready to take off.]

Kai: Flame charge!

Ren: Boomburst!

[Jay starts running at Máia, body cloaked in flames. Máia doesn’t even try to dodge. Instead she digs in and releases her signature concussive blast. It hits Jay like a sledgehammer, but remarkably she powers through it and plows into a shocked Máia. She tumbles backward, tail over hubris as Jay falls to one knee. Máia rights herself and Jay shakes her head to clear it.]

Kai: Double kick!

Ren: Wing attack!

[ Máia launches into the air and Jay stands, limbs glowing dully. Máia goes for her shoulder but Jay parries it expertly with a kick. Máia comes around for another pass but Jay parries her with an arm. The continue like this for a while with Jay on the defensive until Jay parries with a kick and punts Máia from below with a swift fist. Máia rockets upwards, completely out of control. We see Ren tense as she stares up at her pokemon. She pulls her arms in as Máia pulls her wings in. Ren slashes the air with her arms as Máia opens her wings and rights herself. Máia swoops and then dives, gaining speed before she levels out to face Jay head on. Jay readies an attack. Máia and Ren dodge to the side as Jay’s fist strikes out to meet them. Máia executes a fantastically tight loop-de-loop as Jay whirls around and catches her across the back. Jay is knocked to her knees and Máia slides to a stop in the dirt in front of her. Jay makes a move to get up but slumps.]

Kai: [disbelieving] Holy shit.

Ren: [jumping up, fist raised in victory] Yes! Awesome battle! How are you such badass?

Máia: It comes natural.

[ Máia shudders and begins to glow. Everyone looks on with excitement but Máia stumbles, wings flaring and cries in alarm.]

Ren: Hey, it’s okay. You’re evolving.

Máia: [panicked] I don’t want to evolve!

Ren: Wha—

[ Máia cries out again, clearly in pain. Her body is transforming slowly and awkwardly as she tries to resist, bones cracking and muscles stretching. Ren’s jaw goes slack with horror.]

Máia: [shrieking] REN! HELP ME!
Ren snaps out of it and dives forward, hugging the struggling Māia in her arms. Ren hugs her tighter as her body parts continue to pop back and forth from one form to the other at random, light pouring out of her.

Ren: Hold it together, Māia! Remember who you are! You’re the strongest taillow in the world. You can fight this! You can fight anything!

Ren squeezes her even tighter and the snapping and popping slows. Māia shrinks again as Ren wraps her whole body around her and the light slowly dims. Soon Ren uncurls a bit to reveal Māia is herself again. The two of them are panting and sobbing. Ren has tears streaming down her face.

Kai: [quietly] Holy shit. Ren, are you okay?

She is still too overcome to answer. He kneels down and puts his hand on her shoulder as she continues to sob with Māia sniffling in her arms. He doesn’t know quite how to comfort her, so he starts rubbing circles in her back. Her pokemon gather around them.

Kai: [after a pause] I’d heard you could stop an evolution, I just never thought I’d see it.

Ren draws in her first deep breath and lets it out, shuddering.

Ren: Me neither.

Māia: T-thank you.

Ren: No, dear. I’m so sorry this happened. I didn’t know you didn’t want to evolve.

Māia: Are-are y-you going to get r-rid of me?

Ren: W-what? No! No, of course not. You’re the strongest taillow ever, remember? You don’t have to evolve if you don’t want to. I’m sorry. You must have been too scared to tell me. I’ll never let that happen to you again, I promise.

Kai: She’ll need an everstone if she’s going to keep battling.

Ren: Any idea where I can get one?

Kai: Your best bet would be Slateport or Lilycove. You might be able to get one in Mauville too, but it would probably be more expensive there.

Ren: Okay. [She takes a deep breath and gets up, still holding Māia.] Well, looks like I’m headed back south. Thanks for the battle. Sorry about the drama.

Kai: H-hey, I could come with you.

Ren: [surprised] Thanks, dude! But I don’t want to totally screw up your schedule and stuff, especially since I don’t even know how far I’m going. We’ll be fine. Maybe we’ll see you in Fallarbor Town?

Kai: Sure, yeah. [Ren smiles tiredly and turns around.] W-wait! You should at least have lunch first or maybe sit down. You don’t look so good.

Ren: Wow, I totally forgot how hungry I was. Arceus, I’m tired. I might just take a nap right now.

Ren sits down and then flops onto her back. She keeps on hand on Māia who is perched on her chest and shields her eyes from the sun with the other. Show her and Māia napping while Kai tends
to the pokemon and makes some food for them. He wakes her up and she is a bit embarrassed that
she actually dozed off. They all eat and talk together.]

Scene 2: [Ren is in a stone shop in Mauville with Māia riding on her shoulder.]

Clerk: I’m afraid we’re all out at the moment. [pointing to Māia] Is she a pet?

Ren: She’s a battler.

Clerk: Hmm. Never had someone try to buy an everstone for a battler before.

Ren: Yeah. [to Māia] Looks like we’re going to Slateport.

[ A bell rings as another customer enters the shop. Ren turns to see Steven looking around. He is in
a black suit this time which he somehow manages to make look casual. Perhaps it’s because of how
comfortable and natural he looks in it. Maybe it’s that the jacket is unbuttoned so that she can see
the fitted purple vest underneath. She notices he is wearing a fair amount of jewelry. He has several
rings, metal cuffs on both wrists, a small earring in his right ear and his keystone pinned to his left
lapel. Her eyes wander back up to his face and she notices with some alarm that he has spotted her.]

Steven: [smiling warmly as he walks over] Hello, Ren! How’s Akahata doing?

Ren: [concentrating very hard on slowing her heart rate as she shakes his offered hand] She’s
great, actually. She just evolved last week.

Steven: Excellent! Amazing how fast they bounce back, no?

Ren: Yeah…

Steven: So what brings you to this fine establishment?

Ren: I was looking for an everstone because my taillow doesn’t want to evolve, but they’re out so I
guess I have to try Slateport.

Steven: Hmm, hang on.

[He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small vapor box. The clerk makes room so he can place
it on the counter. He then pulls out his nav and starts looking through his vapor box files, face
scrunched adorably. A small round stone materializes on top of the vapor box. Steven picks it up and
holds it out to Ren. She is about to take it, then stops.]

Ren: Wait, you don’t have to give me this.

Steven: [pushing the everstone into her hand with a winning smile] Of course I don’t.

Ren: I can’t—

[She stops because he is looking intently at his nav again. In a moment another stone appears on
the vapor box. This one is purplish and looks like it’s glowing.]
Steven: [picking it up] This is eviolite. [handing it to Ren] I hope she doesn’t mind wearing two cuffs. Everstone isn’t a battle item so she’s allowed to wear both at the same time.

Ren: Both? But—

Māia: [interrupting] What is that?

Ren: [to Māia] It makes pokemon who can evolve but haven’t stronger.

Māia: And he’s giving us both of them?

Ren: Yes, but I can’t possibly accept them. This is too much, Steven.

Steven: Please don’t feel like you owe me anything. I like giving away parts of my collection. Rocks are lovely in cases, but really so much lovelier when put to good use.

Ren: Let me pay you something for them at least.

Steven: Call me selfish, but I would really rather you didn’t. [Ren’s face begins to fall] But since I’m making you uncomfortable, I’ll cut you a deal. You’ll no doubt be running all over Hoenn, so if you see a cool rock, just save it for me. You can give it to me next time we meet. And besides, the fact that you were willing to pay so much so that one of your battlers doesn’t have to evolve shows me that you are an exemplary trainer. I am quite certain I’ve found the best possible home for those stones.

Ren: [blushing furiously] I—Okay. Thank you so much, Steven.

Steven: [warmly] You are welcome. I wish I could do this much good every day!

[They smile at each other. Ren stares until Māia bounces on her shoulder asking to see the stones. Ren, Steven and the clerk chuckle at Māia’s enthusiasm. Ren holds the stones up to Māia and a little tremor of delight runs through her as she grasps the eviolite.]

---

**Scene 3:** [Ren and her pokemon are all walking along route 112 towards Mt. Chimney, which can be seen rising in the distance. Māia flits above them, then circles back and alights on Ren’s shoulder. She fluffs out her feathers and settles in.]

Ren: How are you feeling, my birb?

Māia: Great! Just a bit tired.

Ren: Good to hear… Hey, if you don’t mind me asking, why don’t you want to evolve?

[ Māia is quiet for a moment.]

Ren: You don’t have to answer.

Māia: I don’t want to change. Sometimes, when a pokemon evolves, they change.

Ren: I’ve heard that can happen.
Māia: I guess it doesn't happen that often. Nobody on this team has, not really.

Ren: It's okay to still not want to. I told you before: we're partners no matter what.

Māia: Thanks.

Putenga: I've seen it happen to slakoths back home. Even the chummiest ones go kind of berserk when they evolve. Is that what you mean?

Māia: Sort of. Do you all want to hear the story?

Ren: I'm curious.

Tāraki: Story, story, story!

[ The rest nod. ]

Māia: Okay… It was my best friend growing up. We were the two strongest taillow in our flock. [ She eyes Putenga, but for once the breloom declines to make a snide comment. We see the story as she tells it. ] We both wanted to get stronger so we wouldn't have to be afraid of everything. We used to battle all the time, really push each other. I usually won because of boomburst, but she would get me sometimes. I think maybe I pushed her too hard. That because I was stronger, it made her feel weak. But I don’t know. She wanted to evolve really badly. And one day she did. At first I was happy for her, but she was never the same after that. She stopped roosting with the flock. You see, taillows eat bugs mostly, but swallows are like raptors. She started picking us off one by one. She never came after me. I'll never know if it was because she remembered that we had been friends, or that she knew I was strong enough to put up a fight. Anyway, I felt like I had to do something, because I was strong and because we had been friends. I went to talk to her. I asked her to move away. I told her that she didn't have to eat the taillows she grew up with, that she shouldn't. That we hadn't worked so hard just to visit the same fear on each other that we had grown up to fight. She didn't understand. She said that evolving was the only way to become strong and turn the tables, that it felt good and right. Maybe it wasn't what she had expected, but she was still proud of what she had become. She refused to leave. In that moment, I almost believed her, but I knew even if she was right, I didn't want to become what she was. My gut still told me she was wrong, but there was only one way to find out. I challenged her to a battle. I won and she left. I never saw her again.

[ Fade back to everyone’s stunned faces. ]

Ren: K-kuso. You really were born a badass.

Putenga: Damn.

Tāraki: Then what happened?

Māia: I was the hero of the flock for a while. I was the strongest. But I knew that it was all because of my boomburst, and that if I truly wanted to be strong, I had to get a trainer. [ a little sad ] It wasn't easy. Trainers who were strong enough to defeat me were too strong to be interested in a taillow. [ smug confidence returning ] And the trainers who couldn't beat me weren't strong enough for me to be interested in them.

[ All chuckle. ]

Ren: I'm sorry about your friend. That must have been rough. I understand why you don’t want to evolve.
Māia: Well, I don't know. I'm actually a little annoyed I can't get over my fear. But it's just as well. Somehow… it would just feel like cheating.

Putenga: [pretend outrage] The shade of it all!

Māia: I didn’t mean it like that. I'm not against evolving on principal. But it’s different for me. It's hard to explain.

Ren: You don't have to. You already gave way more of an explanation than you owed anyone. Thanks for indulging us. That was a majorly cool story, even if it was a little dark.

Putenga: A lot dark.

Māia: [gesturing grandly with a wing] You are all very welcome. I’m sorry it was such a downer though. If it makes you feel any better, it was cool to see all of you evolve. It’s was like you turned into the awesome badasses you were always meant to be.

Ikki: [flitting down to rest on Akahata’s back] I like the sound of that. I’m sure it was true for you, Aka. I’m sorry I missed it.

Ao: [starstruck and genuine] It was incredible.

Ikki: [stroking Akahata’s fur with her wings] You look so strong and intimidating now. It suits you.

Ao: Yeah, it does. [looking down] And mine suits me. I’m just pretty fur.

Aka: [flatly] That’s not true.

Ao: I’ll never be as good at thunder fang as you.

Aka: Well, maybe that is true, but you’re not supposed to be. Most manectric are special attackers. Just wait until you get a special move. It makes all the difference to be in your element. Isn’t that right, Ikki?

Ikki: [nodding sagely] It really does. Besides, Aka and I are never going to be the heavy hitters. You’ll blow right past us.

Ao: You really think so?

[Akahata nods.]

Ikki: We know so.

---

**Scene 4:** [Ren and her pokemon have reached the gondola station at the base of Mt. Chimney but it is closed. A sign in the window says: “Mt. Chimney Peak is closed until further notice while the gondola is repaired. The Fiery Path and lower half of Jagged Pass are still open to visitors.”]

Ren: Aw man, I was getting really pumped to see lava! And before there are any more disparaging comments about Johto, we have a volcano too.

Putenga: Well, you do live here now. I'm sure you'll get to see it eventually.
Ren: Right. How does the Fiery Path sound to everyone?

Ao: Neat.

Māia: Cool.

Tāraki: Hot!

Ren: Alright, let's hit it.

[ The entrance isn't very far from the gondola station. The Fiery Path turns out to be a tunnel. The main route is lit by strings of lights much like Granite Cave. The wall are rough and black. ]

Ren: [ looking around ] Whoa. I've never been in a lava tube before.

Ikki: L-lava tube?

Ren: This was formed by magma pushing through the soil. The walls are the outside crust that formed as it cooled, but the inside stayed hot enough to keep flowing. Don't worry. There's no actual lava now.

Putenga: Jeez, how do you know all this stuff?

Ren: Well, I may not be a rock nerd extraordinaire like Steven, but I enjoyed earth science in school.

Akahata: Does anyone else hear something?

[ All stop to listen. They are all about to say no when the lights suddenly grow blindingly bright before flickering out completely. A voice thunders through the tunnel. ]

Mysterious voice: WHO DARES DISTURB MY SLUMBER?

[ Everyone except Akahata whips their heads around, trying to locate the speaker despite not being able to see anything. Akahata puts her nose to the ground and starts sniffing. ]

Ren: [ after a pause ] What was that?

Mysterious voice: IT IS I, GROUDON, LORD OF EARTH AND FIRE. WHO ARE YOU TO ENTER MY DOMAIN?

Ren: I-I'm just a trainer. Sorry to bother you. We didn't know. We can leave if you want.

Mysterious voice: NO. YOU MUST BE PUNISHED FOR YOUR INSOLENCE! PREPARE TO —

[ There is a squeal and the lights come back on. Everyone turns to see Akahata trotting back to them, carrying a spoink by the tail. It is a dull gray color except for its tail and stubby hind legs which are closer to charcoal. The large pearl on its head is such a dark purple as to be almost black. ]

Spoink: Didn't realize you had a dark type. Oops.

[ Akahata drops it in front of Ren. ]

Akahata: Is everyone alright? You look a little pale.
Ren: [frazzled] Yep. Fine. Just thought we were about to be smote by a primal horror. All good here.

The spoink gurgles with laughter and starts rolling around on the floor, convulsing with mirth.

Akahata: [confused] What?

Spoink: [while still snorting and giggling] You should see your faces!

Ren: You didn’t hear the big scary voice?

Akahata: No.

The spoink laughs even louder.

Ren: [realization dawning on her face] Oohhh. It’s a psychic-type. It was just talking in our heads. And you didn’t hear anything because you’re immune.

Spoink: And she gets it!

Ren: That is so weird how that works. It sounds like you’re just talking to me.

Spoink: Well, it is a little harder to do it this way. It takes more concentration. But I like it better. So many more opportunities for shenanigans.

Ren: I see.

Spoink: All good fun. No hard feelings, right?

Ikki still seems mildly traumatized, Putenga looks distinctly irritated and Akahata is glowering at the spoink with suspicion, but the rest of the bunch seem okay.

Ren: [resigned] Sure.

Spoink: [relieved] Oh, thank Arceus! I thought you were going to sick your mightyena on me.

Ren: Naw, but don’t do that again, please. None of us needed our heart rates that elevated.

Akahata growls low, teeth slightly bared.

Spoink: [looking appropriately intimidated] Noted.

Ren pulls out her pokedex and pulls up the spoink entry. The spoink does an odd jump that gets her balanced on her large coiled tail and begins to bounce.

Ren: [to the spoink] It says here that spoink prefer steep slopes, so what brings you to this cave?

Spoink: I'm from Jagged Pass, I just come down here sometimes to get mushrooms and mess with trainers.

Ren: Isn't that a little dangerous?

Spoink: Yeah, but it's fun!

Ren: Do you have a name?

Spoink: Of course not. I'm wild. We spoink usually talk in each other's heads, so we need names
even less than most.

Ren: That makes sense, I guess. Names are just such a big thing for humans that it's hard to imagine not using them.

Putenga: You are particularly obsessed with names. Everyone on this team has a name and at least one nickname.

[ Ren looks like she wants to argue but can't. She shrugs instead. ]

Ren: [ muttering ] It's cuz I like you gals.

Tāraki: Let's go already. This conversation is boring me to tears.

[ He heads off further down the tunnel and the others start to follow him. Ren is about to follow, but turns back to the spoink. ]

Ren: Don’t worry about him. He just can’t sit still. Hey, do you want to come with us for a while? I have some more questions I’d like to ask you for a friend of mine.

Spoink: [ hopping forward on her tail ] Okay!

---

**Scene 5:** [ Ren and her team, now with the spoink in tow, emerge onto a lush landscape full of trees and bushes and tall grass. The wind changes and ash begins to fall lightly over everything. Through the profusion of green, we can see piles of ash. They head down the last little bit of slope into the valley, but quickly lose the path among drifts of ash. They spread out as they head north looking here and there for Route 113. Ao stumbles across a patch of black earth which has been tilled into neat rows that have tiny shoots popping up out of them. She looks around in confusion, one paw sinking into the soft soil. Suddenly a dark gray sandshrew erupts from the ground, right behind her on the edge of the patch. He berates her for stepping in his garden and threatens her. She takes a step back in fear and another paw sinks into one of the rows. This makes the sandshrew even more annoyed. He bounds forward and behind her, then shoves her bodily out of the patch. The string of insults continues until he comes face to face with a rather angry looking Akahata. She emits a low, warning growl and he removes his paws from Ao's rear. He puffs up and warns Akahata not to trample his garden either. The rest of the gang arrive and he looks them over with surprise, but holds his ground. He waves his arms emphatically in a clear signal of “come no further”. ]

Ren: Cute garden. Who planted this thing in the middle of nowhere?

Ao: [ gesturing to the sandshrew with her snout ] I think it's his.

[ She apologizes for stepping in his garden. He snorts. ]

Ren: Where's his trainer?

Akahata: He doesn't have one. He's wild.

[ He nods, folding his arms in front of him. ]

Ren: He’s wild and he’s farming? By himself?
Ao turns and asks him about it. In the background we can see that Tāraki is getting bored again. He absently brushes up against a bush and ash puffs off it. His pupils dilate and he starts batting ash off all of the bushes around him.]

Ao: He says he likes helping things grow. He watched some human farmers and thought it was a good idea. He eats better this way too.

Ren: That is so so cool! Could you ask him if I could take some pictures and ask him a few questions? Kai would kill me if I didn’t.

[Ao confers with the sandshrew. He looks marginally less annoyed and maybe even a little pleased.

Ao: He says sure.

Ren: Great! Break time everyone! And be sure not to step in the garden!

---

Scene 6: [It is early evening and the sun is just starting to set. Ren and Ao are still sitting with the sandshrew. Akahata is lying down nearby. Ikki is splashing in the stream and Māia is roosting in a tree. Tāraki and Putenga are sparring off to the side and the spoink is watching them.]

Ren: Well, this is quite the impressive setup you have here. And I can’t believe all of those scars are from skarmory. It’s amazing you’re still alive.

[Ao relays Ren’s remarks and the sandshrew nods along until the last part. He looks right at Ren and thumps his paws against his chest.

Ao: He’s very tough. He says he’ll battle one of us to prove it.

Ren: I believe him, but that sounds cool anyway. How about it Aka?

[Akahata’s head pops up, revealing that she was not asleep. Akahata gets up and shakes herself off. She and the sandshrew square off a little ways away from the garden.

Ren: Alright Akahata, he’ll be immune to thunder fang, so you’ll just have to keep after him with bite.

[Akahata nods and lunges forward. She latches onto his arm, but instead of flinching as the dark energy pulses through him, he pulls back and hits her square in the muzzle. Akahata backpedals and he follows after her. She goes for another bite when he gets in her face, but he parries by slapping her jaw shut with his tail.

Ren: You’re still heavier! Bowl him over!

[Akahata dodges a swipe, then plows into the sandshrew. He is knocked onto his back and she pins him with a paw. When she goes for a bite, he throws a wad of ash in her face. She shakes it off and he uses the distraction to wriggle out from under her.

Ren: He’s a real brawler. Stay light on your feet and don’t close until you have to.

(The sandshrew comes after Akahata trying to stay in close combat. Akahata dances agilely from
paw to paw as she dodges a series of strikes that much more closely resemble fury swipes than his previous heavy swings. Akahata bounds away from him and he dives after her. Suddenly she whirls around and goes for his arm. Her aim is off and he thwacks the side of her muzzle with his tail. He goes for another combo, but she dances away. He pauses in his pursuit and slams both paws down on the ground. Akahata sinks a few inches into the suddenly unsteady earth beneath her. He charges her and this time she can't get away. She takes a one-two combo right to the face, but she lunges past his guard and grabs him by the tail. Before he can react, she whips him around and slams him into the ground.

Ren: Yes!

[ Akahata lets go, expecting the sandshrew to be finished, but he spins back to his feet, catching her leg with his tail before upper cutting her jaw. She recovers faster than he winds up and this time her aim is true. She catches the arm being flung at her and sends a jolt of dark energy through him. He flinches and she throws him onto his back. She holds him down with a paw and growls. This time he doesn't get up. Akahata steps off him and he rolls heavily to his feet. ]

Ren: [ walking up to them ] Great job Aka! Are you alright?

[ She snorts in response. ]

Ren: Let me heal you two up.

[ She has already pulled out a potion and she sprays Akahata first, then the sandshrew. The sandshrew dips his head to her. ]

Akahata: He says you're a good trainer and he wishes he could have trained with someone like you.

Ren: After that I'm a little shocked he doesn't have a trainer and that he hasn't evolved. I don't think we've ever had a battle that close with a wild.

Akahata: He says trainers go to the desert and not here if they want a sandshrew and that it can be very difficult for a wild to evolve on their own. Plus he's older now. He stopped trying to get a trainer a while ago.

Ren: Well, I'd take him on. He's already one hell of a battler. If he wants to evolve, I'd be happy to help.

[ Akahata relays the offer and the sandshrew looks deeply surprised. She offers her hand and he shakes it, looking happy and excited. She stands up. ]

Ren: Let's get something to eat. We can talk specifics after dinner.

[ Ren goes to round up the others and Ao joins Akahata and the sandshrew. ]

Ao: She's going to take on another one? She just picked up that spoink.

Akahata: [ shrugging ] Her father is a gym leader. They train a lot of pokemon too. I guess she figures she can handle it.

Ao: Has she always been like this?

Akahata: From what I gather, she was actually a bit reluctant to become a trainer in the first place. I don't even know if she's going to try and earn more than a few badges.
Ao hums as she ponders this.

Akahata: It's almost comforting though, that she doesn't have that particular ambition. I do worry that she'll burn herself out, but so far she's treated us a lot better than I ever hoped for. She's extremely dedicated.

Sandshrew: Then we'll just have to do our best to take care of her.

The other two look back at him, surprised by his sudden contribution. He hops into his garden and looks back at them over his shoulder.

Sandshrew: Well, come on then and help me dig up some tubers. I can take those with me at least.

He dives into the ground and starts digging up a row of plants. Akahata and Ao look at each other. Akahata shrugs and they join him. An hour later all are gathered around a fire sharing a meal which includes roasted tubers.

Scene 7: Ren and her pokemon are traveling along Route 113. When they come upon a rock formation that looks like pure obsidian jutting out of the ground. As they approach, they see two humans, a loudred and a magnemite sitting atop one of the lower shelves. The woman is dressed very professionally in a skirt and blouse and a jacket discarded at her side. The man is dressed very casually but is wearing a strange looking harness. A large video camera rests on the stone next to him. As Ren gets close, it becomes obvious that they are all signing to each other. The loudred's ears swivel and it turns to look at Ren and her team. She alerts the rest of her group to the intrusion with a low rumble.

Gabby: Hello there!

The man waves.

Ren: Hi!

The man gets up and hops down off the rock. The woman hands him the camera before sliding carefully down herself, grabbing her jacket. She slips her jacket on and straightens herself out as he mounts the camera to his harness.

Gabby: Good to meet you! I'm Gabby and this is Ty.

Ren: Nice to meet you too. I'm Ren. She signs her name to Ty.

Gabby: You sign?

Ren: Not so well, but I took a little in school.

Gabby: That's great! It was the same for me, but Ty's been teaching me. I'm pretty fluent now.

Ty signs "more or less" and Ren giggles. Gabby gives him an irritated look and signs "shut up" to him. He just grins and pretends not to notice. Clearly they banter like this all the time.

Gabby: We're co-hosts of the show Dual Pulse with
Channel 3. Maybe you've seen it?

Ren: [following Gabby’s example and continuing trying to sign as she talks] I'm not much of a tv person, but maybe I've seen it once or twice? You do look sort of familiar.

Gabby: You look a little familiar too. [Ty starts signing "K-O-S-U-" at her.] Oh! Ren Kosugi, right? You were on Mere's show a couple of weeks ago in that Devon story! You're gym leader Senri's daughter.

Ren: Yep, that's me.

Gabby: Excellent! Well, basically what we do is travel around Hoenn battling and interviewing trainers. So, would you be on the show?

[Ren looks a bit reticent and Ty signs “please” at her.]

Ren: Okay, sure.

Gabby: Great! You just made our day.

[Ty signs “we've been out here all morning.”]

Gabby: So typically we battle first and then do a little interview. Just a few questions. How about a double battle?

Ren: I've never done that before.

Gabby: Really?

Ren: Yeah, it's not very popular in Johto.

[Putenga snickers.]

Ren: [loudly and pointedly] I think it could be fun though. Ao, Aka, would you two like to try a double battle?

[Akahata nods.]

Ao: You mean we would battle together?

Ren: [no longer signing] Yeah!

Ao: Are you sure I should be Aka’s partner and not Ikki or someone else?

Ren: Of course. You two practice together all the time, even when I don’t ask you to. I’m sure you’ll do great.

[Ao looks at Akahata, who nods.]

Ao: [blushing] O-okay. Let’s do it!

Gabby: [holding out a small earpiece] Would you mind putting this earpiece in? It really helps with the sound.

Ren: [taking it] Sure.

[Ren puts in the earpiece and they do a sound check. Ren huddles up with her pokemon while Ty]
Ren: Okay, that magnemite is resistant to normal and electric, so our best shot it to just keep after it with bite. Aka, you have higher attack so I want you to focus on the magnemite. Ao, that means you have to keep the loudred off her back, alright?

[ They both nod, then turn around and stride out onto the field opposite the loudred and magnemite. The three trainers set their navs. ]

Ren: Ao, let’s see how good that thunder fang has gotten.

Gabby: Howl, Nell!

Ty: Mirror shot!

[ Ren is briefly surprised that Ty can talk, but snaps her attention back to the pokemon. Ren’s pair rush forward. Ao crosses the distance in a flash, sparks rippling from her pelt. The loudred doesn’t even attempt to dodge Ao, instead bracing as Ao catches her in the leg. Sparks leap over the loudred’s body from the point of contact and she shudders, clearly paralysed. Undaunted, the loudred raises her head and howls, glowing slightly from the rush of power. She fixes the retreating Ao with a satisfied stare. ]

Gabby: Great job, Nell! Now stomp her!

[ Meanwhile, the magnemite was also too slow to dodge Akahata and she nails it with a bite and tosses it to the ground. ]

Ty: Stay up! Magnet bomb!

[ The magnemite retreats out of reach and starts flinging metal projectiles at Akahata. She hops lightly to and fro, dodging all but one of the barrage. ]

Ren: Keep it up, Aka!

[ Meanwhile the lightning fast Ao isn’t having too much trouble keeping away from the struggling loudred, which is fortunate since the ground shakes with every misplaced stomp. ]

Gabby: Supersonic!

[ The loudred lets loose a torrent of sound waves too high for the humans present to hear. Ao trips and staggers, her vision swaying and blurring. ]

Gabby: Got her! Now stomp her, Nell!

Ren: Aka, thunder fang!

[ The loudred takes a moment to move, still struggling with the paralysis. Akahata catches her by the leg before she can land the hit and unbalances her, sending a jolt of electricity through her body. The loudred lands on her butt, momentarily immobilized. Akahata looks up to see the magnemite barreling towards her, radiating sparks. She braces for the hit but it never comes. In a flash of green, Ao puts her body between them. The blow sends her sliding back, but she manages to keep her feet. Bolts of electricity arc around the connected combatants as Ao begins to glow brighter and brighter. The magnemite reels back from the intensifying electricity and Akahata leaps over her teammate and delivers a final bite. The dark energy pulses through it and the magnemite slowly and unevenly sinks to the ground. The loudred gets up, preparing to punch Akahata as Ao transforms. ]
She howls and lightning arcs down from the sky and blasts her. Ao emerges as a manectric, completely unharmed. The loudred is not so lucky and falls forward. Ty and Gabby withdraw their pokemon and Gabby steps in front of the camera. In the background we can see Ren running up and hugging her pokemon. Her hair sticks out a bit from the residual charge.

Ren: Arceus that was so cool! Didn’t I say you two would be great?

Gabby: [ signing to the camera ] And that was some evolution, wasn’t it folks? I think we may have to keep our eyes on this trainer! But Ty and I will have to train pretty hard to get a second interview, am I right? Let’s just get a quick reaction!

[ Gabby turns around and tries to get Ren’s attention, but she is much too absorbed talking to her pokemon to notice. Gabby signs “cut” to Ty and he turns off the camera and unmounts it. Ren looks up to see Ty signing “we’ll just do it in post”. ]

Ren: I’m sorry, did I mess up your thing?

[ Ty signs “don’t worry about it, happens a lot”. ]

Ren: Wha? You—?

[ Ty signs “nope, still deaf. I’m good at reading lips though”. ]

Ren: [ remembering to sign this time ] Nice. You speak well.

Ty: Thank you. I work very hard at it.

Gabby: [ smiling ] Anyway, it’s really no big deal. I sort of prefer doing a more relaxed interview afterwards. You get to know people a little better. Or maybe that’s my old print journalist side showing.

Ren: You were a print journalist? My mother writes for Ashi News .

Gabby: It’s such a small world isn’t it?

---

**Scene 8:** [ Not long after everyone is healed up and relaxing. Ren, Gabby and Ty are sitting up on the stone. Gabby has her shoes and jacket off and Ty has taken off his harness. Gabby pulls a tablet out of her bag to take notes on. ]

Gabby: Okay, so we got your thoughts on the battle, now let’s learn a little about you. I noticed you having a huddle with your pokemon before we started. Is that a regular occurrence?

Ren: Fairly regular I guess, yeah. I like to have a strategy going in.

Gabby: Oh? Most trainers we run into just jump right in, even if they do have a strategy worked out. They just give commands as they go. You usually don’t see that level of autonomy given to the pokemon until much higher levels of competition.

Ren: I guess that’s true.

Gabby: So why do you choose to battle with your pokemon this way?
Ren: It never made much sense to me to do it the other way, I guess? Battling is about the pokemon in the end. That’s why we have battling in the first place. I may be the girl with the plan, but even greenhorns are more than just tools, you know? Some people battle as if they’re acting through their pokemon, but I don’t think—It’s not—I’m not the mind and they’re the body. It’s a partnership of minds. I plan, I lead, I give guidance, but it’s a puzzle we try to solve together. Besides, they’ll never be truly great battlers without being able to think on their feet. Also, I watched my father take on the Elite Four when I was young and I took a lot of cues from there.

[ Gabby nods along, typing rapidly and clearly pleased with how the interview is going. ]

Gabby: Here’s a little question I always like to ask: How did you catch the two pokemon you used today?

Ren: Oh, Akahata was my first “catch” actually. I met her while I was helping my friend with his field research. We interviewed her and then I asked her to be my pokemon because I wanted a training partner for my starter. She challenged us to a battle to make sure I was a decent trainer before she said yes.

Gabby: Wow, what a neat story! So you asked her and then she challenged you?

Ren: Yeah, she has a justified attitude about trainers.

Gabby: So I guess you must have been able to talk to your grovyle pretty well by that point?

Ren: Naw, the whole thing sort of had to go through my friend and his pokemon. Anyway I’ve asked all of my pokemon except for the ones that asked me.

Gabby: I don’t think we’ve ever interviewed a trainer who didn’t catch -catch at least some of their pokemon.

[ She glances back at Ty who signs “definitely not”. ]

Ren: [ shrugging ] Personal preference.

Gabby: So was your manectric one of the askers, or the askees?

Ren: Asker. We ran into this huge pack of electrike on Route 110.

Gabby: Sounds frightening.

Ren: It was a bit, but turned out they just wanted to battle and not eat us. Ao battled Aka and I guess she was impressed with us. Actually that’s when Aka evolved, which probably had more than a little to do with it. It was pretty inspiring.

Gabby: No wonder they battle so well together. So—

Ren: You guys battle really well together too.

Gabby: [ She seems surprised by the interruption but rolls with it. ] Thank you. We work hard at it. It was difficult at first. Communication is really important. I wasn’t so great at signing and we were both new trainers. But we’ve all gotten to know each other pretty well, you know? The four of us are all a team now. I think that’s important for double battling.

Ren: How long have you been doing this? The show, I mean.

Gabby: About a year now, I guess? Has it been that long?
Ren: [ to Ty ] If you don’t mind me asking, can the pokemon talk to you?

[ Ty signs “AC/DC and I have our own sign language. They use their arms and blinking and stuff. It’s a little simplified, but it works.” ]

Ren: That is so cool.

Gabby: Yeah, we are super excited for AC/DC to evolve so they have more to work with.

[ Ty signs “It’s gonna be awesome!”. His magnemite signs something to him and he chuckles. ]

Gabby: Nell uses subsonic waves. I swear she talks to Ty more than she talks to me. [ confidentially just to Ren ] They deny it of course but I’ve seen them. [ signing again ] It took them a while to work it out, but once they bonded enough it started coming naturally.

[ Ty signs “did she complain to you about me and Nell’s ‘private conversations’? Because she talks to AC/DC with her back to me all the time.” Ren laughs. ]

Gabby: Not on purpose!

[ Ty signs “sure” while rolling his eyes. Gabby thumps him in the knee. ]

Ren: You said you used to be a print journalist. How did you wind up doing this?

Gabby: Well, when BuzzNav rolled out, I was assigned to write an article about it since I was young and “hip to tech” or whatever. I interviewed a bunch of people at Mauville TV and I was sort of goofing around after lunch and they had me pretend to do a report and stuff. One of the program heads walked by and I guess he liked my presence. They hired me pretty soon after that. I did a few different things, but mostly I was a correspondent. Ty was my cameraman. Once we got to know each other a bit, he told me that he battled as a hobby, and I had always wanted to try, so we started doing that together on our days off. It was a lot of fun and Nell really took to it. A little while after that, the network asked for pitches for new BuzzNav shows and Ty and I came up with Dual Pulse so we could do both things we loved.

[ Ty signs “we got really lucky. There were a bunch of good pitches from more senior teams, but we got greenlighted. I guess they liked the idea of having a show focusing on double battling. It’s gotten pretty big since Tate & Lisa took over the Mossdeep Gym. And they never had a show geared towards the deaf before.” ]

Gabby: It was “trendy” and broadened their demographic at the same time. It was a great pitch… And we have gotten so far off topic. I’m sorry. I’m supposed to be interviewing you.

Ren: It’s not your fault. I don’t really like talking about myself all that much.

Gabby: That’s okay. We can stop it right there if you want. We have plenty of material.

[ Pan out as Gabby stows her tablet and they resume the conversation a bit more casually. A bit later they part ways. Ren shakes both of their hands and walks off towards Fallabor Town with her pokemon in tow. ]
Scene 9: [ Fallabor Town is fairly large but not nearly as bustling as Slateport or Mauville. There is a contest hall, observatory, and fossil vendor in addition to the standard amenities. The northeast corner of town is taken up by a small university campus. A few frames of Ren and her entire team hanging out in the pal park doing introductions and catching up. Mele’s jaw drops when he sees Ao’s evolution and he closes it in embarrassment when she sees him gawking. ]

Scene 10: [ The next day Ren and her Pokemon are out training on Route 114. Panels of Mele, Oro, Kōtai (sandshrew), Kata (spoink), and Panahi battling wilds. Panels of Kōtai and Putenga demonstrating techniques for the others. Panahi defeats a trainer’s lombre and evolves. She shuffles her wings, feeling them out and looking herself over appraisingly. ]

Panahi: Look at my beak, my feathers! I'm glorious!


Panahi: [spreading her wings] Look at my wingspan! The world better watch out! Now there's twice as much of me to go around!

Ren: Maybe three times. Dang, that's impressive.

Trainer: Oh, she's gorgeous! Congrats on your pelipper!

Ren: Thanks! [Panahi puffs up with pride.] She appreciates the compliment.

[The other trainer packs up and leaves. As soon as she is gone, a nuzleaf pops up out of some nearby grass. The nuzleaf has a tall, slim build, reddish wood, and waxy, unlobed leaves on her head. She calls out to Panahi who trills back, flapping her wings and turning her head from side to side for emphasis. The nuzleaf approaches them, looking them all over critically. Putenga snorts and mutters some snide comment which the nuzleaf ignores. She talks to Panahi again for a moment.]

Panahi: [to Ren] She wants to train with us. She saw the battle and how I evolved. She wants you to train her like that.

Ren: Um, okay. But could you explain to her about the box?

[They confer for a few minutes. Panahi seems confused and needs clarification on a few points. Eventually she turns back to Ren.]

Panahi: She knows about the box. She’s had a trainer before. That’s how she evolved.

Ren: [belief] Wait, she had a trainer before and they dumped her?

Panahi: Two trainers, and yes. She says she didn’t grow fast enough, they called her difficult. She says they’re wrong, that she’s a great battler and she’ll prove it.

Ren: [She takes a few moments to respond, face contorting with rage.] How could anyone—you can’t just—Ahrrrhg!! [She takes a deep breath.] Well fuck them! I’m going to train her and we are going to be unstoppable!

[She thrusts her open hand at the nuzleaf, eyes burning. The nuzleaf grins and shakes her hand.]
Scene 11: [ They spend the next few days training on Route 114 and stay the nights in Fallabor. One day Tāraki battles a whole pile of trainers and has a big winning streak. The others (Akahata, Ikki, Panahi, Māia, and Putenga) sort of mill about while he and Ren battle yet another opponent. As the battle is ending, Panahi takes off and alights on the branch next to Māia. ]

Panahi: Pardon the intrusion, but I’ve been meaning to ask for a while: what is that lovely shiny stone you are wearing?

Māia: It’s eviolite. Steven gave it to me when he gave me the everstone.

Panahi: [ turning around to talk to Ren who is tending to Tāraki ] Steven gave you two really rare and valuable stones? At the same time?

Ren: [ lowering her potion ] Uh, yes?

[Tāraki shakes himself and walks off, feigning disinterest. The whole thing is old news to him, after all. Panahi on the other hand grows even more intent. ]

Panahi: So are you two dating now?

Ren: No!

Panahi: What in Arceus’s name is wrong with you, girl? Wife him!

Ren: Ahi!

Panahi: Don’t Ahi me, missy. I thought I raised you better than to let a catch like that slip away!

Ren: Lord Arceus, this isn’t helping.

Panahi: No? I am trying to help you though, honey. Correct me if I’m wrong, but the giving of stones is an entreaty for marriage. And you accepted the stones so you accepted the proposal.

Ren: Well, yes, technically but also no? Not at all! Humans give rings—that usually have a stone set in them—but, uh…

Panahi: Well, in many bird cultures it’s stones. Take piplups for example: with a stone that nice you’re practically obligated to accept.

Ren: [ looks panicked ] Wait, really?

Panahi: [ shady side eye ] …Naw, I’m just messing with ya!

[ Panahi laughs as Ren groans. ]

Panahi: Come now, what exactly is the problem here? He’s hot, he’s smart and you like him! And besides that Mama needs some new bling!

Ren: [ red as a fire hydrant ] Y-you’re not my mom!

[ Ren stomps off and Panahi and Putenga start wheezing with laughter. Ren sits down facing away]
from them, very determined to act offended. Eventually the laughter dies down and Panahi flutters over to Ren’s side.

Panahi: I’m sorry, honey. I’ve had my fun now. What’s eatin ya?

Ren: Will you promise not to laugh?

Panahi: A tall order, but anything for my girl.

Ren: [ big sigh ] The problem is I do like him. And I—I’ve never had a crush before. I sort of thought I was immune.

Panahi: Oh, honey.

Ren: I know I’m eighteen and I should have had this crisis long ago and it’s stupid and not a big deal and whatever, but it’s really throwing me off.

Panahi: I’m sure it won’t be a big deal in the long run, but it’s not stupid, hun.

Ren: …I just have no idea what to do.

Panahi: Maybe go after him? Tell him how you feel?

Ren: But—there’s—it’s—it’s not so simple.

Panahi: I’m getting that this is new for you, but I’m still not exactly sure what the problem is.

Ren: He’s out of my league and older to boot.

Panahi: [ confused ] Your league?

Ren: It a human thing. This probably isn’t how things work with wingulls, but human society is stratified and he is way above me in the pecking order.

Panahi: You’re right, that doesn’t make any sense to me. I guess I’ll just have to take your word for it that there are obstacles. But listen, honey: you’re a smart cookie. One way or another, you’ll figure it out.

Ren: I know… Just why him, of all people. Why literally the most unattainable person on this entire continent? I go eighteen blessed years without a crush and then my first crush is a celebrity. What the actual fuck?

Panahi: [ shrugging ] You have good taste.

Ren: Yeah. Right. Impeccable taste.

Panahi: I’m sorry for teasing you, honey, and from now on I won’t. You shouldn’t be ashamed of this stuff at all, and I’m really sorry if that’s how I made you feel. I was just enjoying flustering you. It’s so hard to do, after all. I’ll just have to find a new purpose in life.

Ren: [ smiling a little ] Thanks, mom.
Scene 12: [Ren and her pokemon (Tāraki, Akahata, Panahi, Putenga, Ao and Wheta (nuzleaf)) are doing training exercises by the base of Meteor Falls. Ren is coaching Panahi while Akahata and Ao spar in the background. Putenga and Tāraki are training with Wheta, but she isn’t paying much attention and sits down. This annoys Putenga, who goes off at her, but Wheta fires back easily, uncaring. Putenga splits off to talk to Ren. Panahi and Ren notice her approaching, and stop what they are doing. ]

Ren: What’s up?

Putenga: I’m having trouble with the newbie again. She doesn’t want to do the exercises.

Ren: Okay, I’ll talk to her. But try to keep the commentary to a minimum this time, witty as it is.

Putenga: Roger.

[Wheta is talking to Tāraki as they approach and he nods in understanding to whatever she is saying. Ren smiles, but a moment later Tāraki starts looking irritated and huffs.]

Tāraki: Ugh, she’s as bad as Tenga. I thought we were getting somewhere.

Ren: So, Wheta, what’s the problem?

Putenga: [after a pause] She doesn’t like the exercises—as if that has anything to do with anything—

Ren: Commentary.

Putenga: Sorry. She doesn’t see the point. She wants to practice with real battles, not this stuff.

Ren: Well this stuff is important—

Putenga: As I have explained.

Ren: [directly to Wheta] These drills may seem silly and frustrating, but they really are helpful. They will make you stronger and more important: they make the battles safer.

Putenga: She doesn’t care about being safe and she doesn’t see how one could possibly get stronger without battling.

Ren: It works a lot more gradually, but it really ends up making a big difference. Putenga is my most consistent battler because of how much she practices and Akahata has gotten better since Ao started asking her for help all the time. Battling is a craft and it takes time and patience and repetition to get good at, as well as natural skill. [She pauses for Putenga to translate.] I know the exercises are nowhere near as satisfying as the real thing, but you have friends here to help you. Tenga here may be the drill queen but almost everyone else has had their struggles with it, Tāraki in particular. So don’t blow him off next time, okay? These are your teammates now. You are in this together.

[Wheta looks rather doubtful and defensive as this is relayed to her, but doesn’t object again.]

Ren: I’m not asking you to change, just consider what I said. If you decide the drills really aren’t for you, I’m not going to force you. We are partners now and I can adjust my strategy for you. If we need to battle more, that’s fine. We both want the same thing in the end. Just work with me, okay?

[Wheta nods and gets up. She asks Tāraki a question and he demonstrates one of his leaf blade techniques which she tries to copy with razor leaf. Ren is looking proud and happy until she spots...]


Kai and Jay running towards them.

Kai: [panicked] Ren! Ren, I need your help! It’s Magma!

[Kai almost runs into her but is caught by Jay.]

Ren: Whoa, whoa. Take a breath. What happened?

Kai: I’ve been staying with Professor Cosmo—he’s my dad’s friend—and we were out at Meteor Falls doing research when a bunch of Team Magma people showed up. And then they were threatening him. They think he has a meteorite or something. Jay got me out and we called the police but it’s gonna take them a while to get here. We’re too far out. I’ve gotta help him! I don’t know what’s going on! I don’t know what they’re going to do to him!

Ren: Okay, we’re gonna go get him. We should at least be able to hold out until the police get here. Come on.

[Her other pokemon nod but Wheta looks confused.]

Ren: It means you’re gonna get your chance to battle now.

[Wheta looks absolutely thrilled.]

Chapter End Notes

And low the plot appears in the distance. Sorry not sorry about the cliff-hanger. Anyway, the next chapter is a lot more action heavy, I swear. This one was a lot of fun to write though. Plenty of world-building and fleshing out the cast. I hope you like the newbies as much as I do. I told you Steven would come back. He's going to pop up a lot actually. I'm excited. I'm having a lot of fun with him. He is such a weirdo in the games and my interpretation wound up being very different. As always, thanks for reading!

Character Chart:
HUMANS:
Ren Kosugi, our protagonist
Kai Birch, Ren's friend who likes science
Steven Stone, the Hoenn League Champion who is low-key flirty all the time
Gabby, host of the BuzzNav show Dual Pulse
Ty, deaf cameraman for the BuzzNav show Dual Pulse

TEAM REN:
Taraki the Grovyle
Akahata the Mightyena
Ikki the Masquerain
Panahi the Pelipper
Maia the Taillow
Putenga the Breloom
Mele the Skitty
Hauoro the Whismur
Ao the Manectric
Kata the Spoink
Kōtai the Sandshrew
Wheta the Nuzleaf

TEAM KAI:
Jay, the Combusken
Dusty, the Breloom
Makō, the Wailmer

OTHER POKEMON:
Nell, Gabby’s Loudred
AC/DC, Ty’s Magnemite
You Can’t Always Get What You Want

Chapter Summary

In which the plot comes for Ren, we learn some more about our antagonists, and the silver-haired dreamboat returns.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Scene 1: [ Pan across the landscape of Meteor Falls. It is a valley surrounded on all sides by low mountains. It is also a geyser basin with a small river running through it. It is highest at the north end and slopes unevenly down towards the south. The entire landscape is covered in limestone deposits of predominantly cream color but containing a rainbow of color accents scattered throughout. Fumaroles, geysers, hot springs and mudpots litter the nearly vegetation-less landscape with an enormous series of travertine terraces dominating the southern half. All over the rock is pitted by impact craters that have since been glossed over by limestone. On one of the many cliffs, Tabitha and a bunch of Team Magma grunts (Hartmann, Brenton, Terra, Whenua and Gloria) have surrounded Professor Cosmo. Cosmo is on the ground with Tabitha's hulking spotted mightyena looming over him, teeth bared. ]

Cosmo: I-I told you. I don't have it with me. Why would I?

Tabitha: Just because I’m not a scientist such as yourself, doesn’t make me an idiot. Do you really think that if it was at your house or the lab or the museum or the space center we would be here talking to you? You knew perfectly well none of those places were safe, so you keep it on your person at all times.

Cosmo: That is ridiculous. It weighs sixty pounds!

Tabitha: Which is why you keep it in your personal vapor box.

[ Down below, Ren and Kai arrive on the scene. ]

Kai: Up there!

Ren: Hey! Let him go!

Tabitha: Brenton, Hartmann, take care of them.

[ The two grunts split off and head down to confront Kai and Ren. ]

Ren: Shit. We’re not gonna get near him. Panahi, see if you can distract Tabitha while we take care of these guys. Stay out of range.

[ Panahi shoots off firing bursts of water at Tabitha and her mightyena. Tabitha and her pokemon look up and growl as they are soaked. Tabitha sends out a golbat. ]

Tabitha: Get after that pelipper, Stalac!
Panahi veers away as the golbat launches itself into the air after her. Below, Kai and Ren are battling Hartmann and Brenton's golbat and mightyena with Dusty and Ao. Tabitha wipes her face.

Cosmo: You can't make me give it to you.

Tabitha: I'm not so sure about that. What do you think, Hyaen?

The mightyena puts a paw on Cosmo's chest and snarls, bared fangs dripping and red eyes burning.

Cosmo: Y-you wouldn't sick your pokemon on me.

Tabitha: No, maybe not.

The mightyena steps off him and Tabitha kneels down to look him in the eyes. She opens her mouth and gets nailed by another shot from Panahi as she swoops past, the golbat still hot on her tail. Panahi has one moment of smug satisfaction before the golbat catches her, its claws sinking into her back. She cries out in pain and rolls in the air but is unable to dislodge the golbat. Below Dusty and Ao have won and are making sure the losers stay put while Kai and Ren charge further up the hill. Ren looks up when he hears Panahi cry out.

Ren: Your beak, Ahi!

Panahi whips her head around and knocks the golbat off with her massive beak. It tumbles down for a moment before righting itself and going back after Panahi.

Ren: Go help her, Aka!

Akahata races off as the next two grunts, Terra and Whenua send out their pokemon, a numel and a sandslash. Kai and Ren start battling them with Wheta and Makō. Tabitha, no longer amused, picks up Cosmo by the front of his jacket and easily lifts him off his feet.

Tabitha: Now, I know that meteorite must mean a lot to you, but ask yourself: is it really worth your life?

Cosmo gasps and frantically grabs at Tabitha's arms as she dangles him over the edge of the cliff.

Tabitha: Well, smart guy, what'll it be?

Cosmo: F-fine. I'll do it.

Tabitha: Funny how you think you know so much about what I would and wouldn’t do. Let’s be frank, here. You don’t know me at all, while I on the other hand, know you pretty well. I know, for instance, that you are afraid of heights. She loosens her hold and lets him drop just a little and he whimpers, squeezing his eyes shut. Almost poetic how a man obsessed with outer space is afraid of being just a few hundred feet off the ground. But if you want to be scientific and leave emotions out if it, there are the logistics to consider. Technically speaking you are correct: I cannot physically force you to open your vapor box. However, I am fairly confident that one of our people can hack your box and take whatever we want. The only reason I’m asking you to open it is because that could take a while and I'm not particularly patient. So, with all of that in mind, are you still so sure I wouldn’t drop you? You are getting a bit heavy after all.

Cosmo: [sweating and hanging his head] F-fine. I’ll do it.
Tabitha takes two steps back and drops Cosmo on the ground. He collapses and shakes for a few moments before fumbling for his vapor box. As the meteorite begins to materialize, we cut back to Panahi. She swoops down towards the ground with the golbat right on top of her. At the last moment she levels out and rolls to the side as Akahata leaps up. Panahi clears safely but Akahata catches the golbat by the leg sending electricity pulsing through it before flinging it to the ground. Tabitha frowns as she sees this and sends out her magcargo near Akahata.

Tabitha: Rock slide, Pāhoe!

Ren looks up from her battle to see Akahata, Panahi and the golbat scatter as rocks rain down towards them.

Ren: Tenga, help them with that magcargo! Dart in with mach punch and then duck back out of range. Tell Aka to use rock smash and Panahi to use water pulse!

Putenga runs off to help her teammates. Moments later Wheta and Makō have flattened their respective opponents and keep the grunts back as Ren and Kai make the final push up the hill.

Tabitha: as she hefts the meteorite onto her vapor box Arceus, you weren’t kidding about the weight. It starts to melt into the wood when the remaining grunt (Gloria) get’s Tabitha’s attention. 

Tabitha: as she hefts the meteorite onto her vapor box Persistent bastards. Let’s take care of them and get the hell out of here.

Ren: You got what you wanted, just let the professor go.

Tabitha: So reasonable all of the sudden. And here I thought you were one of those crusader types. Well, since all you want is him and all I want is to leave, it doesn’t seem like we have a problem. Just step aside and that will be that.

Ren: Glad we had this talk.

Tabitha: [ Tabitha takes a few steps forward before stopping, peering hard at Ren ] Wait, you’re that same kid from before, aren’t you? [ Ren doesn’t answer. ] That changes things. I think you might be in need of a little lesson on why you should butt out next time.

Tabitha sends out a magmortar and Gloria sends out a weezing. Jay and Tāraki step forward to face them. Ren, Kai, Jay and Tāraki fight really well together, but they are clearly outclassed. Both Jay and Tāraki take serious damage, but keep fighting. Gloria turns away from the battle to see a group of Team Aqua members, lead by Archie.

Gloria: to Tabitha We’ve got company.

Tabitha: Shit. I’ve got to get this thing to Maxie. A little cover if you please.

Gloria: Weeezy, use smog!

Smoke pours out of her weezing as Tabitha withdraws her pokemon. She turns to leave and Cosmo tackles her. She stumbles but doesn’t fall and shoves him away towards the edge. He slips and teeters as Kai makes a dive for him. Kai catches his wrist with both hands as he falls. They cling desperately to each other, neither strong enough to pull Cosmo up. Ren is by Kai’s side in a moment and reaches down to help. Jay and Tāraki grab their trainers and pull and soon all are safe on the cliff again. Ren glances around to see that Team Magma is gone and all of her pokemon are safe. They barely have time to catch their breath before Team Aqua arrives.

Archie: Where’s Tabitha?
Ren: Gone. High-tailed it the moment she saw you all coming.

Archie: And she took the meteorite?

Ren: [ looking a little annoyed ] Yep.

Archie: [ under his breath ] That fucking shemale. [ to Ren ] Hey kid, that was some battle. I’m surprised you managed to hold your own. [ Ren doesn’t respond, so he continues. ] I want to thank you for trying to help, even if they did get away. [ Ren gets up and pulls Kai to his feet. ] But I also have to say it was pretty dumb of you to get involved. This is between Aqua and Magma.

Ren: It really isn’t.

Archie: Think what you want kid, but I think you can see this isn’t a game. I’d rather nobody get hurt. So would Maxie, for all his radicalism. Take my advice and just steer clear. [ He marches off, the rest of his contingent following suit. ]

Ren: [ watching him walk away as she and Kai help Cosmo up ] Don’t have to tell me twice. Fuck that guy. Did you hear what he called Tabitha? I mean, I’m not saying she’s not a fucking monster, but that’s because she dangled you off a cliff, not cuz she’s trans! What the heck?

Kai: He always came off as a bit brusk on the news and stuff, but I had no idea he was such an asshole. He didn’t even offer to help us.

Ren: Good to know both sides of this thing are dicks. I think I may just take his advice though.

Kai: Please do! Tabitha was ready to flatten us when she recognized you. I don’t want to think about what would happen if you ran into them again.

Cosmo: Yes, it is well past time for law enforcement to step in. Speaking of which, here they come.

[ Sure enough a police squad is making their way across the bizarre landscape towards them. Pan out as Ren’s pokemon gather around her and the police start to question Ren, Kai and Cosmo. ]

---

Scene 2: [ The police escort them back to Prof. Cosmo’s house where they are greeted by his worried husband. He makes them tea while Kai and Ren tend to their pokemon. After tea, Kai excuses himself to video call his parents and Ren calls her mother. Her father joins in later when he gets home from work. They all have dinner together, including Kai and Ren’s pokemon, Cosmo’s lunatone and his husband’s minior. Cosmo’s husband (Keanu) tries to lighten the mood by telling funny stories and gets everyone laughing. ]

---

Scene 3: [ Later everyone is settling in for the night. Cosmo and his partner have retired to their bedroom while Kai, Ren and their pokemon make themselves comfortable in the living room. Kai and Ren are next to each other on the floor in their sleeping bags while Jay and Tāraki share the couch. Everyone else seems to be sleeping, but we can see Tāraki’s gold eyes shining in the }
Jay: You’ve been awfully quiet. What’s the matter?

Tāraki: Nothing. I’m just tired.

Jay: That’s not it. You forget how long we’ve known each other. Usually you’d keep me up half the night regaling me with tales of your adventures.

Tāraki: I’ve just been thinking about that battle.

Jay: What about it? Because we lost?

Tāraki: No, I’ve lost my fair share of matches… It just—it wasn’t fun.

Jay: No kidding. It was scary enough for me. You were at a type disadvantage to both of them.

Tāraki: …Yeah, I was hardly any use out there at all.

Jay: Don’t be ridiculous. We both fought really well. We were just out of our depth there. Don’t tell Dusty this, but there is no one I’d rather have by my side in a situation like that.

Tāraki: [smiling for a moment] Thanks.

Jay: …On second thought, you can tell Dusty. He’s a chill guy. He’d understand.

[They are both quiet for a moment and Tāraki sighs into the pause.]

Tāraki: I guess I’ve just never had anyone try to kill me before.

Jay: That was new for me too… You know, if you don’t want her to use you like that again, you should just talk to her. She’s a decent person. I’m sure she would understand.

Tāraki: It’s not like that… I love her, Jay. I want to be there for her if she needs me. Maybe they wouldn’t have killed them. Maybe they would have stopped at killing us to teach our trainers a lesson. I don’t know. But I could never risk that. Never.

Jay: I understand.

Tāraki: [He stews for another moment before continuing.] Ren was so worried about getting involved with Magma in the beginning, but I just thought she was being paranoid. I was so sure we could handle it.

Jay: That’s just you being overconfident as usual. You’re a really great battler, but it’s important to know your limits.

Tāraki: Right.

Jay: And who knows, we may never even have to fight like that again.

Tāraki: That’s true.

[They fall to silence again. They readjust themselves on the couch, preparing to sleep.]

Jay: Hey, Tāraki.

Tāraki: Yeah?
Jay: I’m glad our trainers are friends. I would have really missed you otherwise, Scales.

Tāraki: [ smiling ] Same here, Feathers.

---

**Scene 4:** [ Late that night, Kai starts tossing and turning in his sleeping bag. What we can see of his exposed skin is glossy with sweat. ]

Kai: [ muttering in his sleep ] N-no, not Jay. Don’t hurt her. No! Nooooo.

[ His thrashing becomes more violent and he wakes up Ren. She rolls over and sees him kicking and twitching. He starts moaning again and she sits up, wriggling partially free of her sleeping bag. She puts her hand on his shoulder and shakes it gently. ]

Ren: Kai. Kai, wake up! It’s a dream. You’re okay.

[ He snaps awake, panting slightly and eyes searching blindly in the dark. They skim over his pokemon before fixing on Ren. ]

Ren: Are you alright?

Kai: Yeah—yeah, totally fine. [ He is still breathing heavy and clearly not fine. ]

Ren: That must have been some nightmare. I’m sorry. Can I get you anything?

Kai: No, that’s okay. I’m good. [ He settles back down in his sleeping bag. ]

Ren: Well don’t go right back to sleep. Just stay up for a few minutes and calm down. Trust me, I used to get them a lot.

Kai: Okay.

[ The silence drags on. ]

Ren: …You know you can talk to me, dude. Was it about Magma?

Kai: Yeah, but it’s no big deal. Don’t worry about it.

Ren: It’s okay to be scared, you know. I was.

Kai: Y-yeah?

Ren: Of course.

Kai: [ almost whispering ] You didn’t seem scared.

Ren: I know I come off as cool, but it’s really just my hot-headedness getting the better of me.

Kai: You think you’re hot-headed?

Ren: I know I am. Otherwise I wouldn’t keep getting into these situations in the first place. I mean, you’ve gotta admit charging in there wasn’t exactly the best idea. [ glancing away in guilt ] Things could have gone very badly. We were lucky…
Kai: I’m glad we did though.

Ren: Yeah. I was sort of waffling on it until I saw the look on his husband’s face.

Kai: You saved his life. That’s something to be proud of.

Ren: You saved his life, remember? I just helped get you there. Besides, we can’t be sure that Tabitha would have dropped him if we had never shown up, but I do know he would have gone over that cliff if you hadn’t caught him.

Kai: [Ren can’t see it in the dark, but he is blushing.] I-I’m glad you were there though, to give me the nerve. That was really scary.

Ren: Agreed. Let’s try not to do that again.

Kai: Yeah.

Ren: …Feeling any better?

Kai: Yeah, definitely. Thanks for everything, Ren.

Ren: No problem. I’ll always have your back, dude. We’re friends.

Kai: Friends, right.

Ren: [settling back into her sleeping bag] Sleep well.

Kai: Goodnight.

---

### Scene 5

[Ren wakes late the next day. She stretches and pops up to look around. It is still very dark in the room, the only light a faint glow coming from the kitchen around the corner. Kai and his things are gone and only Panahi is there, perching with her head tucked under her wing on the arm of the couch. Ren can hear quiet sounds from the kitchen though, so she wriggles out of her sleeping bag and puts on some socks. She shuffles into the kitchen to find Cosmo’s husband (Keanu) sitting at the table reading a newspaper by the sunlight pouring in the one uncovered window. Akahata and Ao are under the kitchen table while Putenga, Tāraki and Wheta toss Keanu’s unshielded minior back and forth. Keanu notices Ren in the doorway and looks up over his newspaper.]

Keanu: Good morning.

Ren: [yawning] Good morning. What time is it? I feel like I slept forever.

Keanu: [consulting his watch] Just after eleven so still in the safely in the AM.

[He gestures to one of the other chairs and Ren takes a seat.]

Ren: Where’s Kai?

Keanu: [folding his newspaper] He got up early and headed out to Meteor Falls. He didn’t want to wake you. Frankly I have to agree. I think you needed the rest.
Ren: I haven’t slept that well in ages to be honest.

Keanu: Blackout shades and a decent bed pad will do that.

Ren: Thank you for that, by the way. I was surprised you had so many.

Keanu: Yes, we both had students or lab techs crashing here so often, we thought it would be a good investment.

Ren: So how come you’re not off somewhere?

Keanu: It’s my day off.

Ren: Oh, it’s the \textit{weekend} isn’t it. I totally lost track.

Keanu: I guess you trainers don’t really have weekends anyway. Takao would normally be off too, but after yesterday he had to have a meeting at the lab.

\begin{quote}
[ \textit{He gets up and pours her a cup of tea as Ren relaxes into her seat. He passes it to her and she takes it gratefully, blowing and sipping it appreciatively.} ]
\end{quote}

Ren: Thank you… So any idea when they might be back?

Keanu: Kai promised to come back for lunch.

Ren: [ \textit{sighing} ] Hmmm, we’ll see about that.

Keanu: Preaching to the choir, cousin. I \textit{married} a workaholic. [ \textit{She gives him a puzzled look.} ] Oh, force of habit. I’m from Alola. We call everyone cousin.

Ren: Oohhh.

Keanu: Can I get you something to eat?

Ren: You don’t have to.

Keanu: It’s no trouble. We have some leftover fruit from this morning in the fridge.

Ren: That sounds great actually. Thank you.

Keanu: Sure thing.

\begin{quote}
[ \textit{He gets up and takes a bowl of cut fruit out of the fridge and fishes a fork out of a drawer for her to eat with. She accepts it and digs in.} ]
\end{quote}

Ren: Are you sure there’s nothing I can help you with? You’ve been such a good host. You made us that big dinner last night and everything.

Keanu: [ \textit{chuckling} ] It’s no trouble. Especially not after what you’ve done. I like to cook. But if you want to do something you can help me with lunch.

Ren: Yeah, I’d like that.
Scene 6: [ Ren finishes her fruit, takes a shower and changes clothes while Keanu, his long hair now tied back in a ponytail, opens up the shades and starts tidying. Ren rejoins Keanu somewhat more awake and she borrows a hair tie before they get to work. They chat as they pack up the living room and make lunch in the kitchen. Cosmo’s lunatone helps by levitating things for them while the rest of the pokemon play outside. Cosmo arrives first and Kai is surprisingly not too far behind. They eat and talk for a while before Kai and Ren excuse themselves. Kai heads back out to Meteor Falls while Ren heads for the Pokemon Center. Soon she has her entire team in the pal park for a meeting. ]

Ren: [ businesslike ] So I just wanted to get you all up to speed on what’s happening and plan our next move. Team Magma was threatening a scientist and stole a meteorite from him. Kai and I tried to rescue him and we did, but it didn’t exactly go smoothly. It turns out their admin, Tabitha is a good bit stronger than me and is pretty pissed that I keep getting involved. The only reason no one got seriously hurt is that Team Aqua showed up and chased her off… I know we’ve talked about this before, at least most of us, and we agreed that you were all okay with those kind of risks, but the situation has changed a bit. I am now definitely on Magma’s enemies list and Tabitha at least seemed more than willing to kill one of you to get to me… [ professional facade faltering ] I’m really sorry that this happened. I won’t lie and tell you that I regret what I did, but I do regret putting you all in danger like this. I didn’t think it through.

Putenga: [ dryly ] One of your weak points to be sure. [ Ren looks down and Putenga continues a little more gently. ] But personally, I’m not too upset by it. You seem to forget all of us here were wilds once. Mortal danger is something we’re familiar with.

Panahi: Even with those people pissed at us, this is still a lot better of a deal than trying to fend for ourselves, honey. We don’t have to be hungry, we’re more or less comfortable, we don’t have to worry about things trying to eat us all the time…

Māia: Besides, some of us have goals other than just survival, things we couldn’t do by ourselves.

[ Putenga, Kōtai, Kata and Wheta nod along in agreement. ]

Ren: I know, I just want to do the best for you all that I can. I guess this probably is safer than the wild, but it’s still not as safe as it could be.

Akahata: I think we all know you have a bit of a hero complex.

Putenga: Amen.

Akahata: And that we could leave if we wanted. We don’t want to.

[ Ren looks around at all of them, finally settling on Tāraki, who has been oddly quiet. Their eyes lock but there is no look of smug confidence this time. ]

Tāraki: We’re with you, Ren.

Ren: Thanks gals. But if you don’t all mind too much, I think we may make this a more regular thing. We’re all growing and learning and there is some weird shit going on out there. Things could change and I don’t want to take you for granted. Just let me know if you change your minds. [ Everyone nods. ] That being said, I’m not planning on ever running afoul of Magma again if I can help it. I do want to take on another gym, but I’m not sure which one. I wanted to do the Lavaridge Gym, but since they closed the paths on Mt. Chimney, there’s no good way to get there from here.

Kata: I could take you. We could just cut southeast from here.
Ren: What? Really?

Kata: Of course! That mountain is my home turf, remember. I know it like I know my tail. And you wanted to see the lava, right?

Ren: True. You know that doesn’t seem like a bad idea. Let me pull up a map so we can plan this properly.

---

Scene 7: [Ren and Kai are back at Cosmo and Keanu’s house for dinner. They eat and laugh and stay up talking for a while before Cosmo and Keanu finally go to sleep. Kai and Ren unroll their mattresses and get out their sleeping bags as their pokemon make themselves comfortable all over the room.]

Kai: So, got any plans?

Ren: Yeah, actually. I talked to the whole gang today and my spoink, Kata, offered to take us over Mt. Chimney. I meant to go up there before I came this way, but the gondola was closed.

Kai: I really wanted to go up there too, but Meteor Falls has turned out to be pretty cool.

Ren: …You could come with us, you know. It’s a bit of a trek and we’ll be roughing it for a while cuz there’s no route that way, but Kata knows the mountain really well. I’m excited.

Kai: [not looking at her] I should stay here and work a little more, but thanks for the offer. That does sound cool… You should message me every once in awhile so I know you’re not dead.

Ren: Har har, I will. But you should message me too dude.

Kai: I mean to, there’s just not that much going on. I’m busy with research all the time

Ren: I like hearing about your nerd stuff. It’s really interesting. I hardly knew anything about variants before I moved here and I really like learning about it.

Kai: Y-yeah?

Ren: Yeah. I’m nice but I’m not that nice. If it didn’t interest me and you were annoying me, I would just tell you. I ain’t shy.

Kai: Oh.

Ren: It’s cool what you do, and I know you’re proud of it. You don’t have to bottle it up around me. Sometimes you don’t and it’s the best. I would like it if that was a little more often.

Kai: O-okay.

Ren: Anyway, I’m not going to be ready to leave by tomorrow. I have to finish stocking up on supplies and stuff. Maybe I could go with you to Meteor Falls and we could hang out for a bit? I promise not to get in the way.

Kai: Of course. That would be fun.
Ren: [sliding into her sleeping bag] Alright. Wake me up in the morning.

Kai: Goodnight.

---

**Scene 8:** [The team is taking a rest in the forest between Fallarbor and Mt. Chimney. The trees are lush and green and form a thick canopy above them. The undergrowth is full of ferns and other shade loving plants and there are tons of wild animals and Pokémon everywhere. Ren is laying on her sleeping pad with Kata and Wheta laying near her. Tāraki is napping draped over the branch of a tree like a cat while Ikki perches nearby on the edge of a clearing. Below her Ao and Akahata are practicing thunder fang. Their jaws open, charge and snap shut in sync. After a few rounds Ao suddenly stops and sits down. Akahata pauses and looks at her.]

Ao: [visibly drooping] I just—I thought I'd be stronger. I evolved and everything. I practice all the time, but I still struggle in matches. Sometimes it feels like I haven't changed at all. What if I'm just weak? Maybe my “stats” are bad and there's nothing I can do about it. What if I'm never able to pull my weight on this team?

Akahata: You do pull your weight, Ao. You win plenty of matches.

Ao: Only when I have a type advantage. You could win those battles just as easy. You all don't need me.

Akahata: [cooking her head] Why does that matter? I thought you came with us to get stronger and evolve. You've done that.

Ao: [quiet and sad] M-my pack didn't need me either. There were plenty of stronger electrike to hunt and fight. I never had to do anything. They just liked me and kept me around because I'm pretty.

Ikki: [angry and sarcastic] Well that must have been terrible.

Akahata: Ikki—

Ikki: [false eyes up and leaning down towards them on her branch] No, I want to hear more about how miserable your life was because everyone loved and looked after you. The other surskit on my pond wouldn’t even talk to me! They avoided looking at me. And I avoided looking at them too. You know why? Because I could see how ugly I was in their faces, in how fast they would look away. So you're beautiful and they didn't take you seriously? [shouting] I'M A FREAK! [still loud but getting steadily quieter] No one will ever love me. No one would ever chose me. I'll never have surskit of my own.

[She tears up and flutters away to land on the ground. Her back is to them, but they can see her shaking as she weeps quietly. They both follow and sit down on either side of her.]

Ao: You have to know that we don't think you're ugly. I always thought you were really cool from the moment I met you; just like Aka.

Akahata: And Ren thinks so too. She chose you. She loves you.

Ikki: I know. [She takes a deep breath and lets it out in another rattling sob.] And it helps, really it
does, but you must understand that it's not the same.

Ao: I know. I'm sorry.

Akahata: [ She pauses for a moment to collect her thoughts. ] I don't think you should give up, Ikki. Any masquerain who would turn down someone as strong as you are is an idiot. But in the meantime, we are your family and we'll do whatever we can to help.

Ikki: [ sniffing ] Th-thank you!

[ Akahata wraps her tail around Ikki consolingly and Ikki leans into her side, sobs quieting as she dries her tears on Akahata's fur. After a few moments she looks back up at Ao who is watching them with a compassionate look on her face. ]

Ikki: I'm sorry I yelled at you, Ao. I shouldn't have said those things. That wasn't fair.

Ao: Thank you. I'm sorry too. I didn't know I was hurting your feelings.

[ Ao lays down beside her and Akahata follows suit. They settle down almost nose to nose with Ikki sandwiched comfortably between them. A little ways away, Kata whistles long, low and quiet. ]

Kata: Wow. Those three have some baaaaaggage.

Wheta: [ defensively ] Well so do I. What's that got to do with anything?

Kata: I didn't mean it as a criticism.

Ren: Good, because if you had made a joke about it, I would have had to kick your ass and tell you to leave my precious children alone.

Kata: No, no. It just makes me feel lucky. Sure I used to have a bunch of things trying to eat me all the time, but most of the trouble I got in was my own fault. I'm not saying it's always been easy, but I've had a pretty happy life.

Ren: Hmm. Quick question, Kata. You're speaking not using telepathy, right?

Kata: I'm doing both. I'm projecting my thoughts into the surrounding area, but also saying them out loud because I can't touch Wheta's mind.

Ren: I hope I'm not annoying you by asking all the time. It's just kind of strange and I'm having trouble getting used to it.

Kata: No problem, friend. It doesn't bother me.

[ Ren sighs lazily and stretches out on her mat. Everyone settles in more comfortably for a nap. Zoom up and out through the canopy and away to the northwest. ]

---

**Scene 9:** [ Azalea and Aster are on the outskirts of Fallarbor. Aster is busy digging up a tuber while Azalea talks to someone on her nav, an irritated expression on her face. ]

Azalea: No, I mean she literally dropped off the map. She's not in Fallarbor, she's not on any of the
surrounding routes. She’s just gone. My guess would be that she took off into the bush, which was probably smart… It’s not “impossible”. I’ve done it a few times myself… Yes me and my whismur. What, you don’t think we can handle ourselves? …Whatever. You already know I don’t think we should be wasting time on this in the first place. If she’s really after us she’ll show up again sooner or later and you can kick her ass then… Not to get too technical, but you did ask for my opinion. I’m a consultant. You pay me for my opinion which includes when I think you’re wasting my fucking time! …Oh, yeah, he’s just hanging around Meteor Falls doing sciency stuff. His name is Kai Birch, son of Prof. Alan Birch. He’s a hobby trainer… You dragged him into it by grabbing his father’s friend in broad daylight. He’s not interested in what we’re doing, I guarantee it… Yep, sure thing. Later. [Azalea hangs up her nav and sighs.] You know, Aster, I’m really starting to hate that woman.

Aster: Finally coming around, are you?

Azalea: Yeah, yeah. You’re right about everything as usual.

[She takes the tuber Aster dug up and shoves it in her backpack. She shoulders her bag and they take off towards Fallarbor.]

---

**Scene 10:** [Lots of frames of Ren and her team walking through the woods. Sometimes she is accompanied only by Ao, who seems to like hiking. Sometimes it is Ao and Akahata. Ren, Akahata, Ikki and Ao are walking when Ren calls a break and sends out Tāraki, Kata and Wheta. She pairs everyone off for training exercises. Ikki practices her bubble beam by firing shots at Tāraki and Akahata so they can work on their speed and dodging. Kata uses telekinesis to launch sticks, pebbles and pinecones for Wheta to practice razor leaf on. Ren pulls Ao aside to talk to her.]

Ren: So, I wanted to wait until we were too far out to go back to tell you this, but I got you a TM. It will teach you a move called charge beam.

Ao: Aren’t those really expensive? Last time we went to the mart, you wanted to buy Kōtai one and it was too much money.

Ren: They are expensive and I may have had to ration the supplies a little, but I think it will be worth it. And we’ve been making pretty good money lately, so as long as we battle every once in awhile we should be set. In any case, I don’t want you to worry about that stuff. That’s my job.

Ao: [looking down and mumbling] O-okay.

Ren: I got this for you because I know you’ve been having some confidence issues, and I want to show you that you have nothing to worry about. I know we’ve talked about this before and that Aka and Ikki have been encouraging you too, but it seems clear to me now this is something you have to prove to yourself.

[ Ao looks a bit guilty and not very convinced, but she nods anyway.]

Ren: I’ve done some research and I am pretty sure you will learn a move called discharge soon. It’s a signature of the manectric line. First you build up electricity in your fur and then release it around you, which means you can damage multiple opponents at once.
Ao: I'm familiar with the technique. My alpha used it.

Ren: Good. Now, charge beam helps you build up electricity, so when they are used in combination, the effect should be pretty devastating. What I want you to do is practice this move, so that when you get discharge, you'll be ready. Whaddaya say?

Ao: Okay. That sounds… great actually. Thank you, Ren.

Ren: My pleasure.

[ She pulls out Ao's pokeball and withdraws her. She takes out the TM, which is a small disc in a case and the TM machine, which is a small flat box with a disc reader and pokeball interface. She puts the TM and then Ao's pokeball in and turns it on. It hums and the light on the pokeball and the machine glow for a few seconds before it turns back off. Ren stows it and sends out Ao. ]

Ren: Well, feel any different?

Ao: Yes, actually. I'm not sure how to describe it. It was weird, but also kind of nice.

Ren: Cool. Want to try it out?

Ao: Yeah!

Ren: Alright, let's practice on trees first, at least until you get the hang of it.

[ Ao turns around and stretches up, back arching and tail erect. Little bolts of electricity begin to arc over her body, increasing the longer she holds the pose. She twitches, flicking her head forward and a bolt shoots out and hits a tree while two smaller stray ones hit the ground around her. She remains glowing slightly, sparks jumping through her fur. ]

Ren: Nice. You just have to focus on getting one beam and you're golden.

[ Ao tries the move again, and strikes a different tree. It leaves a bigger mark this time both because she is already storing more electricity and because she only had one bolt go to ground instead of two. The third beam is even stronger and Ren whoops in satisfaction. Nearby Wheta is fighting off a grinning Kata's projectiles. Kata taps her first on one shoulder and then the other with a pebble and Wheta jerks from side to side trying to figure out what is poking her. Kata starts cackling as Wheta becomes more frantic and frustrated until she spins like a top, arms glowing green. All of the small missiles in her vicinity are sliced in half and fall to the ground. Kata is speechless for moment she starts clapping and cheering while she bounces around on her tail. This ruckus gets Ren's attention and she leaves Ao to see what's going on. Wheta narrows her eyes at the spoink before crossing her arms in front of her with an irritated huff. By this time Kata has dissolved into mirth and Ren places a hand on her shoulder to get her attention. ]

Kata: [ still giggling ] Yes, trainer?

Ren: Would you mind maybe laying off her a little? She hates doing these exercises as it is. Besides, you've been pranking her constantly since you met.

[ We flash back to all of Kata's previous pranks. 1: The team is eating lunch. Wheta is about to take a bite out of a berry when it floats out of her hand. She snatches at it but it dances away. Kata cackles as Wheta makes another few swipes at it. She sends the berry high into the air laughing harder. Wheta takes on last look at it before she marches straight up to the distracted Kata. Her hand is surrounded by darkness as she winds up and socks Kata right in the gut. Kata is flattened and the berry zips into Wheta's waiting palm. 2: They are hiking through the woods when Kata pops... ]
out from behind a tree in front of Wheta and squeals as she makes a silly face. Wheta frowns and shoves her aside. 3: Kata is levitating water over Wheta's head and drops it when she looks up. Wheta grimaces and shakes it off.

Kata: It’s all good fun.

[ Wheta rolls her eyes. ]

Kata: It’s just that having a dark-type teammate got me thinking that I’ve been overly reliant on my telepathy for pranks. I’ve really got to hone my craft and she’s the perfect subject because she’s immune.

Ren: What about Aka? She’s a dark-type too.

Kata: [ leaning in conspiratorially even though she is talking in Ren’s head ] Don’t tell anyone, but I’m a little afraid of her.

Ren: [ chuckling ] Okay, but why don’t you just make sure you’re not bothering Wheta too much? I mean, all that harassment could be getting on her nerves and the last thing I want is for you two to be fighting.

Kata: Well, that is against my nature, but I suppose—

Wheta: [ shouting right behind Kata ] BOO!

[Kata springs up high with a squeal and bounces a few times on her tail as she settles back down. Wheta laughs and laughs and soon Kata is laughing too. Ren just smiles and rolls her eyes. Suddenly there is a loud crack and a tree topples over away from them. Ren whirls around to see Ao looking shocked and a little sheepish. Everyone takes a look at the charred trunk and starts to cheer. Zoom out as everyone crowds around to congratulate her. ]

---

Scene 11: [ Ren and her team are at the base of Mt. Chimney still well below the treeline. The wind is howling all around, making the trees sway and their leaves and branches whip around. Everyone is squinting against the wind looking for some cover. Ikki is grasping Akahata's back for dear life. Ren looks at her pokemon and recalls all but Akahata and Kata. Kata bounces ahead of them, leading them in the general direction of a cave. Akahata follows with her nose to the ground. It starts to rain and soon it is blowing across them in sheets. Kata pauses, hopping here and there, assuring them it is somewhere nearby. With the rain a sudden darkness, Ren can hardly see anything. The sky lights up for a moment with lightning before being plunged back into darkness with a boom. As soon as her ears recover, she hears Akahata calling them. Ren and Kata rush over to her and hop into the cave. The entrance is a little cramped, requiring Ren to duck but it opens up after a few feet. Akahata follows them in and yips into the darkness. The echo indicates that the cave is fairly spacious and goes back a ways into the rock. Akahata trots off to make sure it is unoccupied. Ren fumbles in her bag for her TM case and machine. She withdraws Kata and teaches her a move before sending her back out. Kata's pearl begins to glow and the two of them look around. The cave
is fairly large, about 15 feet at the widest point and about 7 feet high. They can just barely make out
Akahata snuffling along the back wall about 50 feet away. She trots back to them.

Akahata: Nothing in here.

Ren: Good cuz it looks like we live here now.

[Ren sends everyone else out and changes into some dry clothes. Next she retrieves some food
from the vapor box and passes it around. All talk and eat together. The next morning she wakes to
find the storm still raging outside and a herd of numel sleeping by the entrance. They get up and
look wary but don’t flee when Ren and her pokemon begin to stir. The storm continues to rage the
total day and they are all stuck in the cave together. Tāraki gets extremely bored and rolls around
on the floor groaning. They all take turns suggesting ways for him to pass the time: practicing
various moves, handstands, cartwheels, tag, looking for cool rocks, etc. By the next morning there
are a few spoink and a zigzagoon in addition to the numel herd. Ren teaches her team to play cards
and mafia. After two days, Ren wakes to find all of their guests have gone. Akahata pokes her head
out of the entrance and looks around. Soon everyone is filing out of the cave and stretching. They
pack up and continue on their way.]

**Scene 12:** [Ao and Ren scramble up the mountainside and stop on an overlook. They have finally
made it past the treeline and with the sky so clear they can see a good chunk of northern Hoenn. Ren
sends the rest of the gang out to take in the view while she sits down to take stock of their supplies.
She groans audibly before sighing and preparing to deliver the bad news.]

Ren: I don’t mean to alarm anyone, but we are running out of food. I’m sorry. This is all my fault.
This is taking way longer than I thought it would. I’m not even sure what we should do. We are
literally in the middle of nowhere.

Akahata: [shrugging and clearly unconcerned] We’ll hunt.

Kata: And gather. I know the good spots.

Ren: Oh! O-okay. That’s a great idea. Thank you gals.

Kata: It’s no problem. You just try to relax for a bit.

[**Kata starts hopping off.**]

Ren: Wait! Go in groups. Safety first!

Kata: [waving her off] You worry too much.

[But Wheta joins her and she seems fine with it. Akahata nods at Ao and she jumps up to follow her.
Ikki and Tāraki stay behind with Ren. They do some drills and explore the area a bit, but all wind up
napping in a pile by the overlook. Kata and Wheta return first with some berries and roots. The
other two arrive a little while later carrying a dead numel between them. They drop it in front of a
rather horrified Ren. She glances around but no one else seems in the least perturbed by this turn of
events.]

Ren: I-it’s a pokemon.
Ao: We almost got a rabbit, but it went to ground. Is something the matter?

Ren: I didn’t think you were going to bring back a pokemon!

Akahata: Why wouldn’t we?

Ren: B-because! I mean—that is—you’re pokemon.

Akahata: [ confused ] But we’re not numel.

Kata: Humans are weird about food. Just bounce with it.

Wheta: My first trainer didn’t eat meat at all, even though they’re omnivores.

Kata: Like I said: they’re picky.

Ren: Eating animals is different than eating pokemon!

Akahata: In what way?

Ren: They talk for starters.

Kata: Animals talk. Just because you can’t understand them doesn’t mean they don’t. Besides, it’s not like you understand wild pokemon either, just us.

Ren: I—It’s—

[ She goes quiet, unsure of how to make her point. She thinks back to Team Rocket in Kanto and Johto and how a big part of their revenue came from selling pokemon parts. She shudders just thinking about it. ]

Kata: Well, no one is going to make you eat it. I’ll have your share if you don’t want it.

Ren: You’re such a hog.

Kata: [ rubs her belly ] I’m a growing girl.

---

**Scene 13:** [ Ren and her team are nearing the peak. She grins as she looks up at how close they are. ]

Ren: Well, gang, we made it and we’re not dead. But more importantly, I think we all learned a little something about ourselves.

Kata: Oh yeah?

Ren: Aka and Ikki learned that family comes in all shapes and sizes.

[ Ikki blushes from her perch atop Akahata who remains (at least outwardly) unaffected. ]

Ren: Ao learned that she is, in fact, a badass.

Ao: [ blushing ] Well, I’m not sure if I’d say that…
Ren: Tāraki learned to be a little more patient.

[ Tāraki just shudders. ]

Ren: Wheta learned to lighten up a little.

Wheta: Hey!

Ren: And Kata learned to be a bit more considerate.

Kata: [ patting her belly ] Fat chance!

Wheta: [ to Ren ] And what did you learn?

Ren: That numel meat isn’t half bad. Not that I plan on eating it again after this trip.

Kata: As long as it’s not spoink.

Ren: Oh, so just because I have you means I’m not allowed to eat them? That hardly seems fair. You were all aboard the numel train.

Kata: Exactly! If they catch spoink what am I supposed to eat?

[ Ren is laughing as she finally crests the top, but goes quiet as she takes in the absolute chaos below her. Team Aqua and Team Magma are having some kind of huge battle all around the rim of the lava filled crater. Maxie and Tabitha are defending some kind of machine from Archie and one of his admins(Matt) right by the edge of the crater. The rest of their forces are scattered all over. Aqua is doing alright for the moment, but they are considerably outnumbered. Some of the pokemon battles have devolved into fist fights between their trainers. Ren and her pokemon crouch by the crest in shocked silence for several minutes. ]

Ren: CHIKUSHO! There is no way, there is just no fucking way my luck is that bad! It’s like they’re after me! Nanda! Just what the hell! …You know what, no. Just no. I am not getting involved this time. Aqua is already here and if they’re not complete wackos, the police are on their way. They haven't seen us yet so let's all just skirt around this mess and pretend we were never here. It shouldn't take us nearly as long to get down as did to climb up here. [ She moves to get up. ] Hot shower here I come.

Tāraki: Look over there.

[ She follows where he is pointing and sees a group of park rangers tied together guarded by two magma grunts (Terra and Whenua). There does not appear to be anyone attempting to rescue them. ]

Ren: [ moment of prolonged silence ] Giratina damn them. [ She sighs. ] Would you guys...

Tāraki: Whatever you need, Ren.

[ She looks around at the others and they all nod solemnly, except for Wheta who looks worryingly excited. ]

Kata: [ grinning ] Shall I fetch your cape?

Ren: [ rolling her eyes so hard they almost fall out ] Fuck it! Let's do this.

[ She jumps up and bolts down into the crater followed swiftly by her team. ]
Ren: [as she runs] Watch each other's backs! We are getting in, freeing those hostages and getting all of us the hell out of here. No unnecessary battling!

They come across their first magma grunt. He opens his mouth to yell and gets nailed in the face by Ikki's bubble beam. Akahata runs forward and knocks the feet out from under him while he sputters.

Ren: Nice job you two!

They dodge around an Aqua and Magma grunt battling and Ren pauses to get her bearings. She spies an unengaged Aqua grunt between her and the hostages checking on her sharpedo. She sprays a potion on the ball of water surrounding it and it twitches its fins, looking refreshed.

Ren: Hey, you! Help me free those hostages!

She whips around and looks Ren up and down.

Moana: Those aren't my orders. And just who the hell do you think you are?

Her stance is defiant and her expression unimpressed. Her hair is short and she has a fair number of tattoos and piercings which really helps her pull off the whole pirate look.

Ren: No friend of Magma. And think about it: no hostages, no leverage.

Moana: [She and her sharpedo exchange a thoughtful look and grin.] I like the way you think, stranger. What's your name?

Ren: Ren.

Moana: [offering her hand] Moana. [They shake.] We're gonna do this.

They run at the two Magma guards (Terra and Whenua), who realize a little belatedly that they are in trouble. Their pokemon (a sandslash and a numel) rush to their defense.

Moana: Aqua jet that numel, Ēhe!

Ren: Razor leaf, Wheta!

The numel goes down immediately while the sandslash barrels through Wheta's leaf barrage and they trade blows for a while. Moana jumps the distracted Terra and bears her to the ground. They struggle for a moment before Moana pins Terra's arms above her head.

Moana: I've got her! Ēhe cut the ropes!

Moana: Her sharpedo darts forward and slices the ropes with a swift cut, letting its fin dip outside the water so as not to drench the rangers. Wheta deals a final blow to the sandslash and it collapses. Whenua takes one look at her predicament, withdraws her sandslash and flees. Ren glances over at Terra and Moana who are probably a little redder in the face than the scuffle justifies. Terra's numel attempts to stagger to it's feet and she withdraws it. Ren decides to ignore this and check on the park rangers.

Ren: Everyone alright?

Lead Ranger: Yes.

Ren: Good. We've got to get out of here.
Ranger 1: But—

Ranger 2: They're coming back!

[ Ren whips around to see five grunts with mightyena headed for them. ]

Ren: Hate to interrupt, Moana, but we've got company.

Moana: [ catching sight of them ] Shit.

[ She scrambles off Terra and comes to Ren's side as the quintuplets close in. Terra blinks owlishly and shuffles back behind the quintuplets. ]

Ren: [ to Moana ] Fancy a five-on-two battle?

Moana: It's not my first choice.

Ren: Mine either. Kata, use flash and make a really loud noise in their heads at the same time. Then get behind us and protect the rangers. We'll attack while they're disoriented. Ikki, try to keep them that way. Ready?

[ All nod. ]

Ren: Three, two, one, go!

Quintuplets: Bite!

[ Everyone closes their eyes for a moment while Kata releases a blinding flash. The mightyena trip while their trainers real backward as if struck. Moana’s sharpedo and Ren's pokemon rush forward each targeting their own mightyena except Ikki who bubble beams their trainers. ]

[ Meanwhile Maxie(mega camerupt) and Tabitha(golbat) are battling Archie(walrein) and Matt(huntail). Tabitha looks over and sees Ren and Moana battling the quintuplets. ]

Tabitha: It's that girl again. I'm gonna kill Azalea.

Maxie: You will do no such thing. She has been extremely useful thus far, even if she doesn't have your superb instincts.

Tabitha: Yes, sir. But that girl is not getting out of here unscathed this time.

Maxie: Do what you must. Mata, lava plume.

[ Archie’s walrein goes down under the blaze just as it takes out Tabitha’s golbat with an ice attack. Archie sends out his sharpedo and it expands the sphere of water around itself in preparation. Maxie grabs the anchor around his neck and mega evolves it. Tabitha withdraws her golbat and sends out her mightyena. ]


Tabitha: Hyaen, play rough.

Archie: [ wailing as the mightyena tears into his sharpedo ] How the fuck does it know a fairy move?!

[ On the other side of the battlefield, Ren’s strategy is working great until… ]
Quintuplets: Retreat!
[ Ren and her pokemon let them pull back and take the opportunity to regroup. ]

Quintuplets: Howl!
[ The mightyena howl in unison glowing even more brightly than normal from the combined power surge. ]

Ren & Moana: **Fuck.**

Quintuplets: Bite!
[ The gang brace themselves as the mightyena rush forward, but the impact never comes. A huge shiny metagross drops down in front of them. ]

Steven: [ jumping down off his skarmory behind them ] Iron defense!
[ The metagross (Bessemer) projects a semi transparent silver shield around them. The mightyena smash into it, limbs akimbo at the unexpected collision, and it shatters. ]

Steven: [ stepping in front of Ren and Moana ] Earthquake!
[ All of the mightyena tumble backwards as the earth rolls beneath them. Ren and Moana just stare at Steven for a moment in awe. ]

Moana: [ muttering appreciatively under her breath ] **Damn**.

Steven: [ Steven turns around to face Ren, a big smile on his face. ] Hi there!

Ren: [ still in shock ] Hey, Steven.

Bessemer: [ in Steven’s head ] Incoming.

Steven: [ His head snaps around and his eyes widen. ] Duck!
[ He grabs Ren’s arm and pulls her down. A pelipper and swellow hurdle just over their heads. They both watch the birds streak away and then turn back to look out over the general chaos. ]

Steven: [ He whistles and his skarmory (Damascus) clucks in agreement. Steven smiles again as he turns back to Ren. ] We have got to stop meeting like this.
[ His head whips around again as Bessemer lets out a metallic groan, several mightyena latched onto him. ]

Ren: Ikki, silver wind!
[ Ikki zips out over the mightyena and they reel back under the sparkling blast of air. Ikki completes her run and zips back to Ren’s side. ]

Steven: That is a beautiful masquerain you have there. I’ve never seen one with a helm like that.

Ren: Yeah, she’s unique.
[ More Magma grunts and their pokemon run up and Bessemer engages several but a golbat and swellow slip past. ]
Steven: Damascus, steel wing!

[ The skarmory launches forward and knocks the golbat out of the air. While Steven is watching his skarmory, Bessemer has their hands full with the rest of the group. As Damascus takes care of the swellow, Bessemer stumbles back, shying away from a numel trying melt them. ]

Ren: Ikki! Täraki!

[ Ikki puts out the fire while Täraki vaults over Bessemer and slashes the numel with a leaf blade. ]

Steven & Bessemer: Thanks for the save!

Ren: [ slightly weirded out ] N-no problem.

Steven: We have to get these rangers out of here. Damascus can take them, but only one at a time, so it looks like we’ll have to keep this up for a bit.

Ranger 1: We can’t leave! They took our pokemon!

Ranger 1: [ pointing across the battlefield ] Over there.

Steven: [ looking where they are pointing ] Alright, I’ll go get them. Ren, I’ll leave Bessemer in your capable hands. Damascus, let’s clear a path.

[ The skarmory rushes forward, spiraling through the air, wings gleaming as foes are knocked aside by his steel wing attack. Steven is right behind him, sprinting to keep up. ]

Ren: He sure knows how to make an entrance.

Bessemer: [ in Ren’s head ] Those two always did have a flare for the dramatic.

Ren: [ She smirks. ] But not you?

Bessemer: [ as they use earthquake again ] It has always been my job to keep Steven grounded.

[ Ren snorts with laughter. ]

Bessemer: [ as they use iron defense ] And defend him from the repercussions of his more reckless decisions.

Ren: [ giggling ] What’s with all the puns?

Bessemer: Oh, you know, a bit of levity whilst we fight for our lives.

Kata: I like your style!

Ikki: Uh, Ren, Tabitha’s coming over here.

[ Tabitha is storming towards them, Josh and Gloria in tow. ]

Ren: Kuso! Regroup everyone! This is gonna be rough!

[ Across the field Steven and Damascus have reached the locked chest of stolen pokemon. Steven sends out his steelix and has him wrap all of the Magma guards as his skarmory slices the chest open. ]
Meanwhile Ren and company prepare to face off with Tabitha. The rangers pull closer together behind them while Ren’s pokemon return to her side. Moana and her sharpedo regroup on the other side of Bessemer, Moana applying a potion while Ėhe expands her depleted water sphere. Josh looks exceedingly nervous as he pointedly takes Moana’s side of the field. Tabitha sends out her camerupt, Gloria sends out her growlithe and Josh sends out Fang, now a mightyena.

Ren: Akahata, you’re up.

[ Akahata is already stepping forward. ]

Tabitha: Lava plume!

Gloria: Fire fang!

Josh: Strength!

Ren: Thunder fang!

Moana: Aqua jet!

[ Ėhe plows through the lava plume to land a solid hit on Fang, but the rest are not as lucky. The growlithe takes a little damage to jump through the flames and attack the flinching Akahata. Bessemer cries out and staggers. Even with the two iron defenses up, they have already taken a lot of damage. ]

Tabitha: Now her, Bell.

[ The camerupt aims a column of fire right at Ren, but Tāraki jumps in front of her, taking the hit. He lands in a crouch. ]

Ren: [ screaming ] Tāraki!

Tāraki: [ looking up at the camerupt, eyes burning ] Don’t you dare touch my trainer!

[ He starts to glow and he gets taller as he straightens up. Now a sceptile, he releases a guttural roar and launches a mega drain at the camerupt. He glows faintly as he absorbs its energy. ]

Ren: H-hang in there! Just keep using mega drain unless you can get close!

Tabitha: Flame burst!

[ Tāraki dodges most of the fireballs that come spewing out of the camerupt’s back, zig-zagging in close and catching her across the face with leaf blade before dashing away again to use mega drain. Meanwhile Akahata is still trading blows with the growlithe, neither able to get the upper hand. Moana’s sharpedo finally defeats Fang and comes to Tāraki’s aid, but she is weakened from all of the battling and her ball of water is barely covering her. The camerupt is powering up another lava plume that could end them when Steven’s steelix comes plowing into her from the side. Steven drops down off of his skarmory next to Ren, a Magma jacket full of pokeballs in one hand. The rangers rush forward and he hands off the balls. ]

Ren: I’m sorry! Bessemer—

Bessemer: I’ll be fine. I’ve been in hotter battles than this one.

Steven: [ grabbing Ren’s shoulder ] You’ve done beautifully.
Ren smiles weakly and looks down, expecting to be dismissed.

Steven: Come on now, let’s give Tabitha a taste of her own medicine.

Ren: [eyes lighting up and grinning] Alright!

Steven’s steelix has defeated Tabitha’s camerupt by this point and she sends out her magmortar. Akahata has finally bested Gloria’s growlithe, but looks drained. Gloria sends out her weezing.

Ren: Tap out for a minute Aka, Ao will take this.

Akahata trots back to Ren’s side and Ao brushes her with her tail as they trade places.

Gloria: Sludge bomb!

Ren: Charge beam! Try and stay behind it, Ao!

The weezing tries to hit Ao with sludge bomb while she darts around it, zapping it from a distance with charge beam. Tabitha’s magmortar nails Steven’s steelix with fire punch and she recoils.

Steven: Stone edge, Tungsten!

The steelix smacks the magmortar right off its feet and Ao downs the weezing in almost the same moment. Gloria and Tabitha share a glance before Tabitha sends out her weezing and it uses smog. By the time the smog has cleared, they are gone.

Steven: [coughing] Typical. [turning to face the others] Do we know what Magma is trying to do here?

Moana: We think that machine is supposed to make the volcano erupt, but we don’t know why. In any case, you can see the lava has gotten higher since we got here.

They look over at the crater to find that the lava is now only a few feet below the ground that they are all standing on.

Ren: Nanda.

Ranger 3: One of them mentioned Groudon, when they were questioning us.

Steven: Well this plot of theirs just keeps getting more interesting. I wonder if they think Groudon is down there.

Moana: That would make sense, given the legends.

Ren: Wait, we think they are trying to awaken a primal climate god? To do what exactly?

Moana: We don’t know.

Steven: It doesn’t matter what they think they’re going to do with it, they’d never be able to control it. But of more immediate concern is this volcano. Whether or not Groudon is here, an eruption could destroy Lavaridge and a lot more besides. We need to shut down that machine. Damascus, start ferrying the rangers down to the gondola base. The police are coming from that way.

Lead Ranger: I’m staying. It’s our job to protect this place.

Ranger 4: Yeah! We want to help.
Steven: Proud to have you on board.

[ He withdraws his steelix and sends out an aggron. ]

Lead Ranger: What do we say in the face of danger?

All Rangers: HA HA HA!

Steven: Gilchrist and I will plow the road. Everyone stay close and keep the fire-types off us if you can. [ His aggron crouches and he climbs aboard. He turns in his seat and holds his hand out to Ren. ] Coming?

[ She stares at him in surprise and wonder for a moment, her face betraying her with a blush. She pulls it together and grabs his hand. Once she is situated on the plate behind him, he places a hand over the keystone on his breast while holding on to the divot on Gilchrist’s helm. Ren follows Steven’s example and grabs onto the two divots on the plate in front of her. Steven mega evolves Gilchrist in a rush of air and blinding light. The aggron bellows and charges towards the machine and the lava just beyond it. Ikki hovers near his horn bubble beaming any fire-types that get close while the rest of Ren’s pokemon and the rangers flank him. Most of the trainers and pokemon jump out of the way and Gilchrist easily knocks the rest aside. Ren scans around and spots Josh a ways off prying an Aqua grunt off a Magma grunt. She checks that all of her pokemon are accounted for. Akahata and Tāraki are guarding the rear while Ao takes the right flank and Wheta and Kata take the left. Wheta looks almost gleeful as she fires razor leaf at any Magma pokemon that come near. A weezing and two koffings try to smokescreen the group, but Kata hops aboard the aggron and fires psybeams at them. They tumble away and the remaining Magma grunts guarding the machine scatter. Ren and Steven hop down and run up to the machine. The emergency shutoff switch is large and obvious. Steven slams it and the machine shuts down. Almost immediately the lava begins to slowly retreat. Steven wipes his brow, a relieved smile on his face and Ren's as they share a glance. He straightens up and turns around to face the rangers. ]

Steven: Crisis averted!

[ The rangers cheer and Ren's pokemon gather around her. She grins at them, flushed with relief. Steven pats his aggron who devolves to his normal form. ]

Steven: [ looking at Ren with one hand still resting on Gilchrist ] Well at least one good thing happened today.

Ren: [ sighing ] Does it really count if it’s just a bad thing not happening?

Steven: [ warm smile broadening ] No, I meant getting to see you battle, and that evolution. You are extremely talented. It was a privilege to witness.

[ Ren goes from flushed to crimson and is totally unable to muster any other response. Suddenly Damascus caws and Steven whips around. Most of the Magma grunts have fled or are fleeing at this point. Not far off, Maxie is climbing aboard his crobat. ]

Steven: Shit. I should really go after him. Are you—?

Ren: I'll be fine. We'll be fine. They're finished. Do what you have to.

Steven: [ taking her hand and smiling proudly ] It's been an honor.

[ He lets go and turns away. He jumps aboard his waiting skarmory and takes off after Maxie. Ren and Moana watch him go. ]
Moana: *Dang*. I don't normally go for his type, but if I had to pick a dude…

[Ren just nods, still staring after his disappearing silhouette as the rangers investigate the machine behind her. Tāraki puts a hand on her shoulder and she turns to hug him tightly. He hugs her back and leans his head down to rest on her shoulder.]

Ren: Are you okay, tiger?

Tāraki: [with his usual bravado] Better than okay, I evolved!

[He is covered in minor burns and scratches and soot. She hugs him tighter.]

Ren: That was the coolest evolution on record. Competition over. Everyone can go home.

[He thrums happily.]

Ren: …Never do anything like that again. That was so scary.

Tāraki: I make no promises.

[She growls and gives him one final squeeze before she let's go of him. She turns to the rest of her pokemon.]

Ren: You all were so incredible. I'm the proudest trainer ever.

[They are all in pretty rough shape too, but look pleased with the praise.]

Kata: Yeah, we're pretty great.

Ren: Why don’t you all take a rest in your balls now? I’ll let you out when we get to a Pokemon Center.

[They all nod and Ren withdraws them except for Tāraki. She sighs deeply before turning to look out over the scene. Most of Team Magma is gone, but Aqua has captured a few of them. As she watches several Aqua grunts march a struggling Magma grunt up to Archie and his admins. Ren recognizes Josh.]

Ren: That can’t be good.

[She takes off towards them at a brisk walk, Tāraki at her side. The Aqua grunts push Josh to his knees in front of Archie. His hands are tied behind his back. Archie says something that Ren can’t hear and Josh turns away from him. Archie jerks his head towards the lava and Matt lifts Josh up easily by his jacket and walks him to the edge of the crater.]

Matt: [dangling Josh over the edge of the crater and the still very near lava below] Alright, pee-on, you are going to spill everything you know right now or I will drop you.

Josh: I-I don’t really know anything! Not anything that you don’t know already! I’m just a base level grunt, bottom of the heap. Th-they don’t really tell me anything!

Matt: You must want me to drop you.

Archie: Just because you have a little Magma outfit on doesn’t make you immune to the real thing.

[Matt laughs. Shelly just stands there looking bored by the proceedings.]
Josh: sweating profusely from the heat and stress | I-I-I d-don’t— [ as Matt jerks him ] Aaahhh!

Ren: That’s enough Archie.

Archie: You again?

Ren: He’s right, you know. He is just a peon. And he’s screwed up big-time twice already. I doubt they’d tell him anything important.

Archie: [ to Josh ] So you’re of no use to me, huh? Any last words?

[ Matt grins and holds Josh out a little further. ]

Ren: Listen to yourself! For Arceus’s sake, you’re talking about burning a kid alive! [ Archie just ignores this, so she changes tack. ] You do realize this is exactly what Tabitha did to Prof. Cosmo, right? Now you’re just stooping to her level. [ That makes Matt and Archie pause. ] Think about it for a moment: he’s no good to you, there is a whole platoon of park rangers right over there to witness it and the police will be here any minute. Wouldn’t you like them to be on your side when they get here? You could come out of this looking like the hero, but not if you murder someone. Just let him go.

[ Archie thinks for a moment, eyes narrowing. ]

Shelly: Like, she’s got a point, boss.

[ Archie’s eyes flick to her, then he nods to Matt. Matt backs away from the edge and drops Josh on the ground. Josh wobbles on his knees and lowers his head to the ground, shuddering. ]

Archie: Fine, but I’m not going to let him go. The police can arrest him when they get here.

[ Josh sits up and their eyes meet for a moment. She looks back at Archie. ]

Ren: Please just let him go. You have plenty of others to hand over.

Shelly: Why let this one go then?

Ren: It’s a long and boring story, so let’s just say you’d be doing me a favor and leave it at that.

Archie: And why should I do you a favor?

Ren: The way I see it, I’ve already helped you out twice now. I think you owe me. Besides, we’re on the same side of this thing.

Archie: Not good enough.

Ren: Fine. If you let him go, I’ll let you know any time I run into Magma and what they might be doing. I’ve already caught them in the act four—no—five times now. That’s a pretty solid streak.

Archie: Humph. I don’t like making deals on maybes, but since he is pretty worthless, I’ll take it.

[ He offers his hand and Ren shakes it. Archie nods at Shelly who bends down and unties Josh. Josh rubs his wrists and looks up gratefully at Ren. He opens his mouth but she shakes her head just a bit. He closes his mouth and stands up. ]

Archie: [ barking at Josh ] Get lost!
He complies, shooting one last glance at Ren before jogging off.

Ren: [ holding out her nav to Archie ] Here, give me your number.

Archie takes her nav and enters his info. The police arrive about a minute later, dragging a few more captured grunts with them. They question everyone while the medical team documents and tends injuries. Ren is happy to let Archie do most of the talking. As time drags on, Ren goes from exhausted to sleepy. She leans against Tāraki. Fade out.

Chapter End Notes

The last scene in this chapter... I love it so much. It is so long but it took me no time at all to write because I was having so much fun. Ren and Steven and Moana are all so great?? I hope you enjoyed this half as much as I did. Thanks for reading!

Character Chart:

HUMANS:
Ren Kosugi, our protagonist
Kai Birch, Ren's friend who likes science
Prof. Takao Cosmo, studies meteorites and has a pet Lunatone
Prof. Keanu Pukui, studies meteors and meteor showers and has a pet Minior
Tabitha Turia, a trans woman and the smarter of the two Magma admins
Gloria, a Magma grunt who usually accompanies Tabitha
Josh Takamoana, a Magma grunt who Ren saved
Terra, a Magma grunt who is partnered with Whenua
Whenua, a Magma grunt who is partnered with Terra
Hartmann, a Magma grunt who is partnered/best buds with Brenton
Brenton, a Magma grunt who is partnered/best buds with Hartmann
Quintuplets, identical Magma grunts all have Mightyenas
Capt. Archer “Archie” Seaborn, the rather unpleasant leader of Team Aqua
Matthew “Matt” Seaborn, an Aqua admin and Archie’s younger brother
Shelly Strand, an Aqua admin and the only one Archie seems to listen to
Moana, an Aqua grunt who helps Ren out

TEAM REN:
Taraki the Sceptile
Akahata the Mightyena
Ikki the Masquerain
Panahi the Pelipper
Maia the Taillow
Putenga the Breloom
Mele the Skitty
Hauoro the Whismur
Ao the Manectric
Kata the Spoink
Kōtai the Sandshrew
Wheta the Nuzleaf
TEAM KAI:
Jay, the Combusken
Dusty, the Breloom
Makō, the Wailmer

TEAM STEVEN:
Bessemer, the shiny Metagross
Damascus, the Skarmory
Gilchrist, the Aggron
Tungsten, the Steelix
Escutcheon, the Armaldo
Ptilometra, the Cradily

OTHER POKEMON:
Fang, Josh's Mightyena
Êhe, Moana's Shappedo
Got Me Rockin'

Chapter Summary

In which there are gym battles, big mistakes and backstory.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Scene 1: [ A news anchor is sitting at a desk giving a report. ]

Anchor: In a stunning turn of events, wild rumors that the humanitarian group, Team Magma, is involved in criminal activity may turn out to be true. [ Pan out to show that Kai is watching the news program on his nav. ] Yesterday at around 1PM, a battle broke out on the summit of Mt. Chimney between Team Magma and Team Aqua. Team Magma was allegedly using a machine to try and induce an eruption of the volcano when Team Aqua members arrived on the scene. Police report that Magma members had captured ten park rangers and were allegedly holding them and their pokemon hostage. Due to recent park closings, only one civilian, a trainer named Ren Kosugi was involved. [ Kai grips his nav tighter. ] League Champion Steven Stone arrived on the scene in response to police calls for back-up. At that point, police report that Steven Stone, Ms. Kosugi and members of Team Aqua worked together to free the hostages and disable the machine. By the time Mauville police officers arrived, most of Team Magma had fled, including Leader Maxie Matsuda and lead administrator Tabitha Turia who were both present at the scene. Several arrests were made, but police remain unsure of Matsuda, Turia and lead administrator Courtney Kagari’s whereabouts. Early this morning, Lilycove police raided Team Magma’s headquarters only to find them deserted. Just a few hours ago, the prime minister held a press conference, reassuring citizens that every possible precaution was being taken and urging anyone who may have information about Magma and it's members to come forward. The central government has also declared Dr. Matsuda, Ms. Turia and Dr. Kagari wanted by the state and posted a reward for any information leading to their arrest. The chiefs of all seven police departments are meeting today to discuss the incident and coordinate a search for the escaped Magma members. So far the public reaction has been one of disbelief and concern. A truly troubling turn of events. For more on this story we go to—

[ Kai switches off the news and opens his messenger app and checks his conversation with Ren. There are no new messages. ]

Kai: Do you think she's in Lavaridge?

Jay: Very likely. Let's go.

Scene 2: [ Ren is sitting up to her neck, but presumably naked in nicely landscaped natural hot spring. Her entire team is in the water with her except for Kōtai who is sitting in a wooden tub on the sand beside the pool carefully rubbing ash all over himself. Even Mele is sitting in the warm water, only his fluffy head remaining dry above the surface. Ren closes her eyes and lets out an
Ren: Great Lord Arceus. This is the best bath I have ever had in my entire life.

Putenga: You said the exact same thing about free shower at the Pokemon Center.

Ren: Tenga my dear, you are one snide comment away from being thrown out of this spa day.

Panahi: Hear hear! She's finally had a good idea. Just lay off for once and enjoy yourself, you insufferable workaholic.

Kata: [bouncing up and down in the shallow end] I've always wanted try a hot spring. There is one near Jagged Pass, but the grumpigs control it and won't let anyone else use it.

Ren: Ooh. You'll have to tell me more about it later so I can send the location to Kai. [taking a long deep breath] And someone please remind me to call my mother again tonight. I need to get her to come up here sometime. She'd love it and she could review it for her readers.

Panahi: Will do, honey.

Wheta: So what's the plan for after this?

Ren: Well, I know we are more than ready for the next gym. The only real puzzle is which of you to bring. Obviously Panahi and Kōtai have a type advantage, so I'd love for you two to participate.

Panahi: I go where I am needed.

Kōtai: I'd be honored to kick some ass for you, luv.

Ren: Great! Anyone else really want to participate?

Māia: Me! I've been out of the ring far too long.

Ren: Fair enough.

Ikki: I'd like to do it.

[Everyone looks at her in unison, surprise evident on their faces.]

Ren: Really? Are you sure?

Ikki: Yes. I haven't battled in a gym yet. I want to try.

Ren: O-okay. It would be great to have you. That bubble beam of yours will help a lot… Tāraki I know you always want to do the gym battles, but I really want you to sit this one out and rest a bit.

Tāraki: Okay. It's never gonna be as awesome as Mt. Chimney anyway.

Ren: My point exactly, tiger. Anyone else have strong feelings either way? [No response.] Okay, in that case, Ao, I'd really like you to come. I think it's exactly the kind of challenge you need. Of course you don’t have to if you’re still worn out from the Magma thing. I would understand.

Ao: No, I’ll do it.

Ren: Great! Aka, I'd like you to run back-up.

[Akahata nods.]
Ren: Good. I’m glad we got that sorted out. Now we can spend the rest of the day relaxing.

Māia: I know you all told us what happened, but what was it like?

Kata: It was fun!

Hauoro: Fun? How could that possibly have been fun? It sounded horrible.

Kata: Well, I got to try all kinds of things I never thought I would. Like at first I was doing all these distraction tactics, really testing how far my pranking skills have come, you know? And of course at the end I got to shoot all of those koffing right out of the sky while riding a mega aggron. Highlight of my life thus far.

Wheta: It was awesome! I've never battled so many pokemon in a row before. I could really feel myself getting stronger.

Ikki: And there wasn't even time to be scared. I knew that if I stopped fighting I or someone else would get killed.

Ao: She was totally amazing. She kept us all safe.

Ikki: [a little down] I'm just lucky Tāraki was there.

Tāraki: Yeah, we did some sick combos! We should battle together more often.

Ikki: I meant when you took that hit for Ren. I wasn't fast enough.

Tāraki: And deprive me of the most badass moment of my existence? How dare you!

[That makes her laugh.]

Māia: What about Steven's pokemon? Were they strong?

Ren: They're only the strongest pokemon in the region. It was insane how strong they were. They completely outclassed everything on the field. Especially his metagross.

Tāraki: It was so cool to fight with them.

Panahi: [trying very hard to stifle herself] Wow, that must have been something for you, Ren.

Ren: No kidding. That was easily the coolest thing I've ever done. And not just cuz of... you know. I got to battle side by side with the League Champion! It was so incredible. And then he had the audacity to compliment me on my battling!

[She covers her face and blushes, sinking even deeper into the water.]

Panahi: He must have really meant it too. I'm sure you weren't exactly the picture of beauty and charm after two weeks in the woods.

Ren: [slowly letting her hands drop from her face] Oh no ... [looking more and more mortified by the second] Oh Lord Arceus, why? You're right, Ahi, I was like a smelly hobo! I must have reeked! I'm surprised he could stand next to me. How the hell did he even recognize me? I had two weeks worth of dirt and sweat and grime plastered all over me.

Tāraki: That's not exactly true. You sponged yourself off in that one spring we found.
Ren: You didn't see me in the shower! The water running off me was brown! **Brown**, Tāraki! [ *By this point she is sitting bolt upright, breathing heavy, pulling at her wet hair.* ] And the soot and ash and ooooohhhhh… [ *She sinks back below the water. Several moments pass while only bubbles emerge.* ]

Kōtai: [ *looking up from his ash bath* ] Is… she okay down there?

[ *Panahi ducks her head underwater to look. A second later they both pop back up. Ren takes a breath and then blows bubbles into the pool. Putenga starts chuckling and Ren sits up again, glowering at her.* ]

Ren: It’s not funny, Tenga.

Putenga: It’s a little funny.

Panahi: [ *giving her a warning look* ] Tenga.

Putenga: [ *taking the hint and wading over to Ren* ] What I mean is, you’re overreacting. Just think about it for a moment. It’s not like this is his first impression of you. You two have seen each other a couple of times now. He knows you don’t always look like you rolled out of a dumpster. [ *Ren and Panahi give her a harsh look.* ] Sorry! Sorry! I’m sure it wasn’t that bad. Besides, he complimented you right? The important thing is he respects you. [ *This does seem to comfort her somewhat.* ]

Panahi: Exactly, honey. It doesn’t matter if you were a little dirty, I’m sure you looked as majestic as Victini on the field of battle.

Ren: Thanks gals… Ugh. [ *She relaxes back into her seat and closes her eyes for a moment before they snap open again.* ] I didn’t even get to give him the rocks I collected! [ *She sighs.* ] Hmm, maybe that’s for the best. This way I can find out if they are anything cool before I show them to him.

Putenga: Good plan.

---

**Scene 3:** [ *Show Ren's whole team being groomed and pampered. Mele is a magnificent floof. Ao's coat is extra sleek and shiny which brings out the faint stripes. Panahi enjoys the hell out of it. Tāraki gets a massage. Ren gets her hair trimmed and styled. Ren and Tāraki are walking down the main street in the evening. Ren has put on a nice summer dress and they both look happy and refreshed. Suddenly they spot Kai and Jay running towards them.* ]

Ren: Hey, Kai! What are you doing here?

Kai: I saw the news and you didn't answer my texts so I was worried and—

Ren: [ *mortified* ] Oh Arceus, I'm sorry! We went to the hot springs this morning and I turned off my nav. I totally forgot to call you. I'm so so sorry you had to find out like that. And you came all the way here and everything. I'm such a jerk.

Kai: No, it's okay. They would have said if you were injured on the news. I just overreacted. I guess it was kind of weird to just come running over here…
Ren: No dude! Well, okay, maybe a little. But it's so sweet of you. Really.

Kai: So you are okay, right?

Ren: Yeah, I'm fine. It was scary, but I'm alright.

Kai: [He tries to chuckle but doesn't quite manage it.] Good. Yeah. Just wanted to make sure. I guess that was obvious. I mean, you look fine, well better than fine. You look really great actually.

Ren: A spa day will do that. You should try it sometime or at least the hot springs. They have one at the Pokemon Center. It's public but it's free.

Kai: Sure. Sounds nice. I'll definitely check it out. [fidgeting nervously] Uh, I should probably check into the Pokemon Center actually, before it gets too late. Well, uh, you probably have somewhere to be. I don't want to get in your way. So, I'll see you around?

Ren: Yes! Definitely. Wait, do you want to get dinner together?

Kai: Like at a restaurant?

Ren: Yeah, I have a reservation. [to Tāraki] You don't mind not going, do you, tiger?

[Tāraki is distracted by Jay who is frantically trying to signal him without getting Ren's attention.]

Ren: Tāraki?

Tāraki: Hm? [glancing back at Jay] Oh, um, no? [Jay gives him the thumbs up.] No. This whole day of just relaxing has really worn me out. [Jay facepalms.] I'd rather just nap in my pokeball if you don't need me.

Ren: [looking confused] Thanks. [to Kai] So, you want to go?

Kai: Are you sure that's okay? I mean, you look so nice and I'm just in a t-shirt and could probably use a shower.

Ren: I'm sure it's fine, but we can go back to the Pokemon Center first if you want. We can afford to be a little late. [sees that Kai is still looking uncomfortable] But, um, you don't have to come if you don't want to.

Kai: No, no! I'd love to. I'll just check in and get changed first.

Ren: Great! Let's go!

---

**Scene 4:** [They walk back to the Pokemon Center, which is not very far. They ask the clerk, but there are no more bunks available in the room Ren is staying in so they move to a different one. Ren calls top bunk and vaults up onto it while Kai gets his things together and goes to take a shower. When he gets back, Ren is lying on her stomach reading something on her nav, her legs swinging absently in the air behind her, while Jay is walking around Tāraki inspecting his new form. Kai has fixed his hair and put on a nice button down shirt and pants. His signature beanie is absent for once. Ren hops down off her bunk with a smile and recalls Tāraki to his pokeball. Jay winks at Kai as she flows into her ball and he blushes but Ren doesn't notice. They walk down the street to the...]**
Kai: So, do you have any plans or are you just gonna take it easy for a bit?

Ren: I’m gonna go for my fourth badge tomorrow.

Kai: You only have three badges?

Ren: I know, a bit overdue right? I planned to do it a while ago, but I got sidetracked. If there was a gym up in Fallabor I would have challenged it.

Kai: I have four badges and Jay’s still a combusken. Tāraki’s a sceptile.

Ren: Haha, yeah. I’m not gonna use him though. He needs a break after what happened.

Kai: …Only three badges. Wow. Okay. You know I was actually thinking of getting my fifth badge soon.

Ren: Oh yeah? Which gym are you gonna challenge?

Kai: Your dad’s actually. I thought it was about time to head home for a bit and go over some of the data I’ve collected.

Ren: That sounds great.

[ By this point they have reached the restaurant. Ren gives her name to the hostess and they are seated. A waitress brings them water and menus. ]

Ren: [ perusing the drink menu ] Do you want anything to drink?

Kai: Oh, um…

Ren: I'm sort of a plum wine girl myself, but I'm curious about the cocktails they serve here. Any recommendations?

Kai: Oh, uh, no. I don't really know anything about alcohol.

Ren: You don't drink?

Kai: Not really, but not cuz I have anything against it. I just haven't had much opportunity.

Ren: How so?

Kai: Well, I never really had any friends to go out with, my parents don't really drink that much, and it was kind of weird to go out with the lab techs.

Ren: That makes a lot of sense actually. Want me to order you something?

Kai: Sure.

Ren: [ to the waitress who has just returned ] I'll have the cameruption and he'll have a solrock sunrise.

Waitress: Excellent choices. Coming right up.

Ren: See? I got you.
Ren looks over her menu and Kai just kind of stares at her, blushing lightly and fidgeting in his seat.

Ren: Want to get the fruit platter as an appetizer? She looks over the top of her menu at him.

Kai: snatching up his menu and looking pointedly at it instead of her What?

Ren: I know it's super touristy, but I've really been craving some fresh produce after hanging out in the woods for two weeks.

Kai: still buried in his menu Yeah, sure. I like fruit.

The waitress comes back with their drinks and takes their order. Kai's drink is in a tall cylindrical glass and yellow at the top fading gradually to red at the bottom with a chilled stone shaped like a solrock sitting in it. Ren's consists of a volcano shaped stein partially full of what appears to be chocolate milk seated on a tray and a small shot glass full of some bright red alcohol. Kai admires his for a moment, then looks up to see Ren cackling wickedly as she drops the shot in the bigger glass and watches it froth over. Kai can't help smiling a bit.

Kai: Isn't that in poor taste after what almost happened?

Ren: cheshire grin on her face Yeessss.

Kai laughs quietly.

Ren: Here, look! taking a huge slurp of her drink Crisis averted! That gets a real chuckle out of Kai. Mmh, this is good! Go me.

Ren looks up and bounces in her seat as the waitress comes back with the fruit platter.

Ren: eyes like saucers You are a goddess! Thank you!

Waitress: I do what I can. Enjoy, you two.

Ren: reaching for her fork Itadakimasu!

Kai: I still can't believe that Team Magma tried to cause an eruption.

Ren: You're telling me. I was there and I'm still having hard time wrapping my head around it. She spear a piece of fruit and sticks it in her mouth. Mmmhh! I don't know what that was but I like it!

Kai: It was a guava. They're not native, but they are good.

Ren: I don't know what any of this is! Wait, no, those are plums and that looks like a loquat. Nope. That's it. I got nothing.

Kai: Well, if you liked the guava, you should try a feijoa. Also not native, but we grow a ton of them here.

[ He gestures to it and she picks one up and eats it.]

Ren: I love it. Good call.

Kai: Oh, and try a kiwifruit. They’re a big Hoenn staple.

Ren: She eats a slice and her eyes go wide. Maybe it's the deprivation talking, but that is probably
the best thing I have ever eaten.

[ Ren digs into the rest of it, looking totally blissful. Kai tries very hard to eat, but he is mostly too busy watching Ren, a blush slowly creeping up his neck. Ren looks up at him and he swallows hard, blush successfully taking over the rest of his face. He looks away and her eyes narrow. This is a new level of nervous awkwardness even for him. Usually she has him talking by now. Then realization slowly dawns on her face. We see a series of images in her mind's eye (Kai stuttering while she hugs him, her mother saying "I think he likes you a lot", Kai going extremely red in the face when she asks if he wants to get dinner, Kai watching her with that awed look on his face, Kai dressed up, the waitress saying "enjoy, you two") that all point to one very obvious fact: Kai has a crush on her and she asked him out on the date they are currently sharing. Her face goes from realization to disbelief to pissed. ]

Ren: Lord Arceus, I'm such a tonma.

Kai: What?

Ren: Oh, um, I just remembered I forgot to call my parents. I feel bad cuz they're paying for this.

Kai: What? Oh geez. If I had known that I would have got something less expensive.

Ren: That's why I didn't mention it. [ Her face twitches, remembering that she should probably be toning down the charm. ] They felt bad that they couldn't come up and see me, so they insisted on treating me to dinner. I tried to talk them out of it, but honestly I'm really glad I couldn't.

[ Kai is blushing again and Ren's face gives another violent twitch. She shoves a large piece of fruit into her mouth to stop her slapping herself in the face. ]

Kai: I'll have to thank them later. Are you sure this is okay?

Ren: Yeah, of course! It's no big deal. I'll text them now and vid call them tomorrow.

[ She pulls out her nav and buries herself in it. Her mother texts back right away. Ren stares at the response for a moment, blush slowly creeping onto her face, then slams her nav shut. Kai looks at her in concern. ]

Ren: They're actually really glad I have someone to go with, haha.

[ Kai is sipping his drink and nearly spits it out all over the table. Fortunately he manages to keep it down and coughs a little before taking another swig to steady himself. They both grab one of the remaining fruits and shove it in their mouths. Ren looks supremely uncomfortable. They are just sitting there, mouths full, chewing like cows, trying not to look at each other. Ren's face slides into panic for a moment before setting in determination. She swallows her food in one big gulp and takes a very large swig of her drink. ]

Ren: SO, did you ever find any bagons in Meteor Falls? You said you were looking for them, but that they're super rare.

Kai: I did finally, but not on my own. I was searching high and low and coming up with nothing, when it occurred to me that the Draconids would probably know where to find them. One of Prof. Cosmo's students is a Draconid and she has been working with their Lorekeeper and the elders on her project, so I asked her and she introduced me to some of the elders. Of course they did know where the bagons were and they showed me, but I had to sign a waiver and personally promise them not to make the location public because bagon are rare and protected. The Draconids don't want trainers pouring in there all the time and taking them. It's actually illegal for a non Draconid person to
catch and train a bagon without a signed consent form from one of the custodians. I wish other
pokemon could be that well protected. Or maybe I should say other areas. Since the Draconids
restrict access to the bagons, the whole cave system they live in is protected.

Ren: That is super cool actually. So you saw the caves, right? Were they cool?

Kai: [too loud] YES! [actually running his fingers through his hair because he doesn’t know how
to express his excitement in that moment] It—it was so—it was the coolest place I’ve ever been! I
wish you could have seen it! First of all, the landscape was so beautiful. It was like one giant
cathedral. There were stalagmites and stalactites and columns everywhere. There was water running
through it so there were all of these pools and rivers and everything was like so colorful and
shimmering… I don’t even know how to describe it. And then the pokemon! Meteor Falls has plenty
of endemic variants, but this cave has even more. I’m pretty sure I found some that no one had
documented before!

Ren: Congrads, dude! That is so awesome!

Kai: Thanks.

Ren: [big smile] This is so great, I’m excited for you.

Kai: It’s so crazy I keep thinking I dreamed it… [joking] or like it was a big mistake and I peaked
right at the beginning of my career.

Ren: [chuckling] Don't be ridiculous! You are an amazing scientist and I'm sure you'll make tons of
great discoveries. [raising her drink] To your future in science!

[They clink their glasses together and Ren finishes her drink.]

Kai: T-thanks. Still, it's going to be hard to top. It's definitely the coolest thing I've done so far. I
mean, I'm sure you're right, but right now it's hard to imagine doing something cooler… [his face
falls rapidly from cloud nine] What am I saying? You just stopped a volcano from erupting and here
I am babbling on about how cool seeing a cave was. [looking down] I must sound like an idiot.

Ren: No, no, not at all dude. I asked about it.

Kai: But why would you want to hear about my silly research project after what you just went
through?

Ren: Because it's cool, dude! Also I care about you. I want to know what's going on with you. [Her
face falls from a warm smile to a grimace as she realizes once again that all of this sincerity
probably isn't helping her current predicament. She powers through. ] Please promise me that we
are not going to start comparing your intelligent, important research to my stupid, reckless stunts.
Then I'll really feel like an asshole.

Kai: [very concerned] You're not an asshole. You're the best person I know. Why would you even
think that?

Ren: [looking panicked] I-I just feel bad about—for putting my pokemon in danger like that. You
were there last time. They tried to kill Tāraki. This was even more intense. I promised you and my
parents I'd stay away from Magma then broke it right away. And I really didn't have to get involved.
They hadn't seen me yet and I could have easily snuck around. I almost did, but then I saw those
park rangers and…

[She sighs and shrugs her shoulders, looking down. We see Kai hesitate, but ultimately the alcohol]
in his system gives him the courage to reach across the table and touch her hand. She almost winces but doesn't pull away.

Kai: You helped save a lot of people, Ren.

Ren: I know and I don't regret that. I just… nevermind. The point is you shouldn't feel bad cuz you didn't do something like that. She squeezes his hand then lets go. Besides, it's not like I did it on my own.

Kai: I almost forgot! The news said Steven Stone was there! So you actually met the Hoenn Champion?

Ren: Uh, yeah, but this was actually the third time we’ve run into each other.

Kai: [ loud ] WHAT?

Ren: [ sheepish ] Remember how I returned those stolen parts to Devon? Kai nods and Ren looks away in discomfort. Well, um, Mr. Stone asked me to take them to his son in Granite Cave, so that's actually when I met him the first time. And then I ran into him in Mauville when I was looking for an everstone and he gave one to me…

[ She stops talking because she glances back at Kai and sees that his mouth is hanging open. She raises an eyebrow and he tries unsuccessfully to compose himself with a little cough. Fortunately the waitress comes to his rescue with their dinner. Ren takes the opportunity to order them another round. ]

Kai: [ after the waitress has gone again ] I hesitate to say you're lucky after all the Magma stuff, but holy hell, that is so fricken awesome! What I wouldn't give to meet Steven Stone in person! I have so many questions! What's he like?

Ren: Ummm, well, pretty much every bit as cool as he seems on TV and stuff. He’s ultra scholarly and kind of philosophical. He’s, intense, you know? But also really kind, which I didn’t expect… [ She blushes a little, but Kai doesn’t really notice because he is too excited. His legs are actually swinging back and forth under the table. She takes a moment to think before she continues. ] And he wasn’t scared at all. It was almost like he was enjoying himself even—Not the shitty situation obviously, but the challenge I guess? Like, I want to call him cocky, but his confidence is completely justified. I mean, I know he's famous for being the strongest trainer in the region, but it's something else to actually see him and his pokemon in action.

Kai: [ gripping the edge of the table ] I'm so jealous right now. Did he use his shiny metagross?

Ren: Yeah, we actually battled together for a while. It kept making puns.

Kai: [ amused but incredulous ] Whaaat?

Ren: It was insanely powerful, but also kind of a dork. So a lot like him. And they were so in sync they actually said the same thing at the same time.

Kai: Whoa. I guess that kind of makes sense though. It's psychic and also his starter, right?

Ren: Uh, I'm not sure. It didn't come up. But probably, yeah.

Kai: It is.

Ren: [ raising an eyebrow ] I didn't know you were this into the battling world.
Kai: [ scratching bashfully at the back of his head ] Haha, yeah. He's kind of my idol.

Ren: Really? I would have guessed a scientist, like Prof. Oak or someone.

Kai: Well, Steven does science too, although not full-time obviously. He's published a couple of papers, mostly on keystones and mega stones. He worked with Prof. Sycamore in Kalos for a while.

Ren: [ kind of awed ] Wow, I had no idea… [ smirking ] Maybe I should be asking you about him. [ Kai grins sheepishly through his food. ] Although I suppose firsthand experience counts for something.

Kai: It counts for a lot. Did he use any of his other pokemon?

Ren: Sure! He flew in on his skarmory and we battled with his steelix for a bit. Oh, and I got to ride his aggron when he mega evolved it. [ Kai's mouth is hanging open again. ] Uh, maybe I should start from the beginning? [ Kai nods vigorously, wiping his dribbling lip with a napkin. Ren takes a few seconds to think. ] Well, first off it was probably for the best that you didn't come with me because things didn't exactly go smoothly…

[ She tells him about the storm and running out of food and her pokemon having to hunt and gather. Next she relates most of what happened at the summit, except that she skips over the part where she saved Josh, opting instead to end with the police arriving and getting a ride back to Lavaridge on a skarmory. Kai remains rapt throughout, despite the fact that Ren is not a very good storyteller. He asks a question here and there to keep her on track or hear more about Steven. By the time she is finished, they have both eaten most of their food and Ren has polished off her second drink. Kai insists that he is too full for desert when the waitress asks, but Ren orders a dessert that is supposed to be for two for herself. Predictably, Ren steers the conversation away from herself again. It takes a little coaxing, but finally Kai starts telling her more about his own adventures. In contrast to Ren, Kai seems to have inherited his father’s gift for storytelling. He acts out parts and even does voices. By the time Ren is halfway through her volcano themed chocolate lava cake, he has her in stitches describing how Dusty managed to get his tail stuck between his toes and everyone’s botched attempts to help. The waitress finds them cute, but they get more censuring looks from the other patrons as they continue to make noise. Against all odds Ren finishes her food and they leave the other guests in peace. Ren is stumbling a bit as they make their way back to the Pokemon Center and leans against a blushing but obliging Kai. They both go to the washroom to change and brush their teeth, then Ren hauls herself onto the top bunk while Kai settles in below her. ]

Ren: [ She groans. ] I shouldn’t have had that second drink. Who am I kidding. I regret nothing!

Kai: Do you need some water?

Ren: Naw, I had plenty. I should be fine. You good?

Kai: Yeah. That was fun. Thanks for taking me.


Kai: Goodnight.

[ Ren doesn’t have time to think about things because she is asleep the moment her head hits the pillow. Kai, on the other hand, stays awake for a while, practically glowing as he stares at the plywood above him. ]
Scene 5: The next day Ren and her team are at the gym with Kai and his team in tow to cheer them on. The gym has several battle courts all separated by channels of heated water, making the general atmosphere of the building quite steamy. As usual, Ren signs up to battle all of the available trainers at her badge level. She sends out Ikki first against a trainer with a numel. Ikki opens with quiver dance, wings vibrating to the point of disappearing as tiny lights spring from her body. The numel launches a flame burst at her, but Ikki dodges with some impressive acrobatics and hits the numel at close range with bubble beam. The numel collapses and the trainer sends out a kecleon. Ikki hits it with silver wind, changing it to bug-type, and it counters with ancient power. Once again Ikki avoids the projectiles and darts in, this time nailing her opponent with an air cutter. Because the kecleon is bug-type, her attack is super-effective and the kecleon falls over. Ren hi-fives Ikki as she returns and sends out Ao to face the next trainer. Ao uses her speed to avoid the slugma’s ponderous attacks and it falls after a few charge beams. The trainer’s koffing goes down in much the same pattern. Ren sends out Panahi next to battle a slugma and she takes it out with brine before it can even launch an attack. Ren and Panahi face off against the trainer’s meditite with confidence. Panahi climbs upward to get some momentum before diving at the meditite with glowing wings. Before she can hit, the meditite uses confusion. It is not enough to stop Panahi from landing the wind attack, but she almost hits the floor and is clearly disoriented. She swoops around and comes in for another hit, but her vision is blurred and she misses her target. The meditite does not and slams her wing with force palm. Panahi goes crashing to the floor.

Ren: running out onto the court] Panahi! Are you okay?

Panahi: flopping to her feet, injured wing spread uselessly beside her] I’ll live, but I think my wing is dislocated.

Ren: Okay, I think that’s it for you today then. Are you in pain? Should I—

Panahi: Just put me up in the stands with Kai. I’ll be fine.

Ren: Alright.

[The other trainer waits patiently as Ren hands off Panahi to Kai then sends out Kōtai to finish the battle. He makes very short work of the weakened meditite, beating it with a single slash. Ren leaves Kōtai out for the next trainer who has a slugma. Kōtai uses sand tomb to trap the slugma then bounds forward to attack. Just before he lands a hit, the slugma let's loose a flamethrower at point blank range. Kōtai staggers under the heat of it, but miraculously isn't burned. As soon as the slugma let's up to recharge, Kōtai delivers a series of fury swipes, but it is not quite enough. The slugma uses flamethrower again and Kōtai leaps to the side this time and rolls away, managing to dodge before coming back in for his final strike. The slugma slumps and the trainer withdraws it.]

Ren: You okay, Kōtai?

Kōtai: 'Course, luv. It'll take more than a little heat to take me out.

[The trainer sends out a koffing.]

Ren: Maybe you should come back for a bit.

Kōtai: Nonsense, let me handle this poison-type chump.

Ren: Alright then. It has levitate so give it the smackdown sand tomb combo.

[ Kōtai runs forward and the koffing hits him with sludge but he shakes it off like nothing and keeps]
coming. He leaps up and flips, striking down with a rocky tail. The koffing slams into the ground and is engulfed in sand the moment Kōtai hits the ground. Kōtai rushes in to finish it off and it belches poison gas in his face. Kōtai smacks it anyway and it rolls over in defeat. Kōtai shudders.

Ren: Oh, geez. I think you are poisoned, buddy. [He nods stiffly.] Good battle though. Come here.

[He shuffles up to her and she applies a potion and antidote before heaving him up into the stands with Kai and Panahi. The other trainer retreats and Flannery steps out onto the court.]

Flannery: Oh, Ren, you made it! It’s great to finally meet you!

Ren: Good to meet you too, Flannery.

[They shake hands.]

Flannery: Gran—I MEAN ASUNA—is off today so I’m the gym leader. Are you sure you want to challenge me with only four of your pokemon still able to battle?

Ren: Yes.

Flannery: Excellent! I suppose a little confidence is justified after what you did on Mt. Chimney, but just know I won’t go easy on you. I always battle to win no matter the badge level. Let’s see if you can TAKE THE HEAT!

[Flannery sends out her slugma and paces back to her square. Ren walks back to hers as well and signals Ikki to enter the ring.]

Flannery: Squish that bug, Meg! Rock throw!

Ren: Quiver dance!

[Iikki dances back and forth as she powers up, successfully dodging the barrage.]

Flannery: Flame burst!

Ren: Bubble beam!

[Motes of molten fire spew out of the slugma in every direction. With her increased speed, Ikki manages to dodge the brunt of it, but is still hit by two of them. Unflinching, she darts in and lets loose a torrent of bubbles at the slugma. It holds fast, but is ultimately not hot enough to withstand the boosted attack. It crusts over and Flannery withdraws it.]

Ren: Great job, Ikki!

Flannery: Well done, but it will take more than that to COOL US OFF! Go Cauldron!

[She sends out her torkoal and Ren's eyes widen. The Moore's are famous for their torkoals. They all have overheat, which Ikki's defenses are not strong enough to withstand. She glances up at Panahi and Kōtai in the stands who she had planned to tag team the torkoal.]

Ren: Come on back, Ikki. Aka, looks like it's time for plan B.

[Akahata nods and steps into the ring.]

Flannery: Overheat!
The torkoal stores up energy, glowing like a furnace about to blow. Akahata is faster and she slices into the earth with tawny paws. She disappears, dirt flying just as most of the arena is engulfed in flames. Ren has to shield her face from the heat and light. The minute the inferno dies down, Akahata bursts out of the ground beneath the torkoal, slashing at it with glowing elongated claws. The torkoal staggers to the side.

Flannery: Body slam!

The torkoal steadies itself and slams down. Akahata’s quick feet save her and she only takes a glancing blow before plunging back below the surface.

Flannery: Sunny day, then overheat!

The torkoal lets out a long breath and glows faintly as sunlight shines from it. Akahata resurfaces behind it and slashes as it glows brighter. Both Akahata and Ren hope that the strike will be enough but the torkoal absorbs the hit and sets loose a second overheat attack. Akahata has no time to get away and takes the full brunt of the attack. Her body is thrown into the air and she tumbles on the landing, putting out the remaining flames.

Ren: [starting forward] Aka!

Akahata’s ears twitch and she lifts her head a little, opening her eyes. Ren composes herself and steps back into her box. She grabs Akahata’s ball to withdraw her, but Akahata staggers to her feet and limps back to Ren’s side. Ren looks over her team, unsure of what to do for a moment before locking eyes with Ao.

Ren: Are you ready?

Ao nods, face hard with determination as she steps into the ring.

Ren: Just get in as many charge beams as you can before it powers up overheat again.

Flannery: Body slam!

Ao darts away, keeping just ahead of the charging torkoal. As soon as she can she fires off a charge beam. The torkoal takes the hit in stride and continues to lunge at Ao, who only barely manages to dodge. She zig-zags across the ring, flickering with pent up electrical charge as the torkoal continues to barrel after her. At last the torkoal stops and begins to glow again, preparing for overheat. Ao hits it with one more charge beam, but it doesn’t stop. Ao braces and takes the hit, electricity arcing over her pelt from the charge beams. To the surprise of all, Ao emerges from the blast still standing. She lifts her head and howls as her accumulated electricity discharges into the torkoal with a blinding flash. The torkoal collapses with a hollow thud. Flannery withdraws it, blinking at the panting Ao. Ren howls her approval. Ao turns to look at the rest of her team and they cheer. Kai and his pokemon join in.

Ren: You did it! You used discharge!

Ao smiles shyly.

Flannery: Well, that was something, but I’m afraid it hasn’t won you the match yet.

Ren glances around and realizes that Flannery is right. She has already used up plan C and still has one formidable opponent (a numel) to defeat.

Flannery: So, got any more hot moves left?
Māia: I’ve got this one.

Ren: Okay. Ao, come on back.

[ Māia flits out onto the field and Flannery smiles, quite confident the battle is hers. ]

Flannery: Lava plume!

Ren: Boomburst!

[ Māia plants herself, chest swelling to maximum capacity before letting loose. The numel doesn’t even have time to launch its attack before it is knocked over by the concussive sound wave. The entire gym shakes and a nearby tile cracks. Fortunately none of the windows have glass in them. For a moment, no one can hear anything and they all just stare at the fallen numel. It heaves out a sigh and Flannery withdraws it. ]

Flannery: Holy shit.

Ren: Way to go Māia! You totally saved our asses!

[ She flutters to Ren’s shoulder, looking satisfied while Kai and the rest cheer. ]

Flannery: Holy shit. Ah, um… Oh. R-right. Congratulations trainer! [ She fishes around awkwardly in her back pocket and finally pulls out a badge. ] You’ve earned the heat badge! [ She places it in Ren’s hand and then fumbles again. ] I, uh, crap… I'm sorry. I'm messing this up. I've actually never given out a badge before.

Ren: Really? Haven't you been taking challengers for a month now?

Flannery: Yeah, but none of them beat me… Dammit, Gran—Asuna—always has something cool and helpful to say but all I really got is “wow”. I just… You tamped us down with a crippled team. Taking on a fire gym without your sandshrew and pelipper can't have been your first choice. That was some really smart improv. You've got a real fire inside you. Keep it kindled.

Ren: Thank you. And that was a pretty good speech by the way.

Flannery: [ blushing ] Yeah?

Ren: Definitely. Don’t stress so much about it. Everyone's got their own style. You don’t have to be as scary—I mean intimidating—as Asuna.

Flannery: Oh! you've met Gran?

Ren: About a year ago, I guess? When my father became a gym leader. She was, uh, intense.

Flannery: Haha, sounds like her. Thanks for the advise. I'll never forget that battle.

Ren: No problem. This badge will always be special because it was the first you gave out. I'll take good care of it.

Flannery: Aww, thank you! I hope we meet again sometime.

[ They shake hands and Ren goes to meet Kai who is coming out of the stands carrying Panahi. Ren recalls her pokemon except Māia and Kai recalls his except for Jay. ]

Kai: Congratulations, Ren. That was awesome!
Ren: [Jay trills what Ren assumes to be some similar sentiment.]

Ren: Thanks. It sure was a lot closer than I thought it would be.

Kai: [as they exit the gym] It must be kind of strange to have all the gym leaders know who you are.

Ren: Kinda, yeah. I guess otosan talks about me.

Kai: Well, he is your dad.

Ren: True.

Kai: Hey, I’ve been thinking… would you like to go home with me? I’m sure your parents would like to see you. You can challenge your dad’s gym with me—or not, obviously. Heh.

Ren: That sounds like a good idea actually. I have to have a little team meeting right now though. But I’ll let you know after. Cuz I’ll run it by them and stuff. Anyway, thanks for coming to the gym and cheering me on. Yes, right, um, so, I’ll just go now. Seeyoulaterbye!

[Ren waves as she runs off towards the Pokemon Center, Māia swooping after her. Kai and Jay share a puzzled look.]

---

Scene 6: [Not long after, Ren has all of her pokemon out in the pal park. Kōtai is looking a little the worse for wear and Panahi’s wing is in a sling.]

Ren: So first off, I want to apologize for how that gym battle went. You all did so well, but I was kind of distracted, especially during the trainer battles. That’s why you two got hurt.

Kōtai: I’m fine, luv.

Ren: You two didn’t even get to battle Flannery like we planned. You were easily strong enough to take down those trainers. I wasn’t supporting you the way I should. Your wing, Ahi…

Panahi: I mean, I’m not happy, but I don’t think this was exactly your fault, honey.

Putenga: What the hell happened?

Ren: Well, Ahi was fighting this meditite and—

Putenga: No, I mean before that, to you.

Ren: Wha? But Ahi—

Putenga: Normally I’d be one hundred percent with her and assume you were overreacting, but her wing is in a sling! I’ve never seen you unfocused in a battle. You may get distracted during practice or drills every once in awhile, but never in a real fight. And we’ve been through some pretty crazy shit. What is going on?

Ren: [burying her face in her hands] Oh Arceus, I’m a piece of shit.

Putenga: Whoa there, I didn’t mean to make you feel worse. I’m just concerned. This isn’t normal for
you.

Ren: No, you’re totally right. It’s just when you put it in perspective like that I can see how stupid it is. I’m so sorry gals. There is no excuse for my performance today. Argh! I’m such an idiot!

Putenga: [ ducking down to try and look at Ren’s face ] Hey, calm down will you? You’re starting to scare me.

Mele: [ gently rubbing against her leg ] Just tell us what’s wrong.

Ren: It doesn’t matter.

Putenga: Obviously it does. I don’t care whether or not you think it’s important. Just talk it out.

Ao: Maybe we can help.

Ren: [ taking a deep breath and resting her hands on her knees ] Okay. Please try not to laugh, but I won’t blame you if you do… I accidentally went on a date with Kai last night.

Māia: What’s that?

Panahi: It’s a human courtship thing and shhhh!

Mele: Accidentally?

Ren: Even just saying it out loud makes it sound so much stupider! [ She groans. ] Yes, I didn’t mean to. I thought we were friends and we could get dinner together and it would be fine, but then partway through I realized he had a crush on me and… [ Her face sinks into her hands again. ]

Akahata: Did he finally say something to you?

Ren: No. He was just being even shyer than usual and suddenly it all sort of clicked. [ head popping back up out of her hands ] Wait, you knew?—Of course you knew! It was so freaking obvious right from the beginning! I can’t believe it took me this long.

Panahi: To be fair, he’s kind of oblivious too. I doubt he realized he was attracted to you right away.

Ren: Really?

Akahata: Honestly, I would bet on sometime between when Māia almost evolved and when we saw him next in Meteor Falls. He was acting a bit different in Fallabor.

[ All are quiet for a moment. ]

Mele: So the problem is that he wants to be your mate, but you don’t want to be his?

Ren: Part of it.

Ao: And he might think that you do because of the accidental courtship thing?

Ren: I don’t know what he thinks. I tried to keep it causal, but the whole setup was so romantic and I kept making it worse. It was like everything I said came out the wrong way. And I was nervous so I drank too much and I was leaning on him on the way back and—[ she groans again. ]

Panahi: Well, I may not understand the intricacies of human interaction, but this seems fairly straightforward. I’ve turned down my fair share of suitors. It’s never fun, but it’s not so bad. Any
halfway reasonable person will accept your decision and anyone who wouldn’t is unworthy by definition.

Ren: That’s all very well for relative strangers, but Kai is my friend.

Panahi: So you care about his feelings and you don’t want to hurt him. That makes sense. Hmm, I can’t say I’ve ever been in that position… [ She takes a moment to think. She looks around at the others, but they are similarly at a loss for insight. ] Well, have you ever been in this situation before? You humans are very social, and from what I’ve observed you are pretty charming by human standards.

Ren: Yeah, I guess I have. Twice actually.

Panahi: And what did you do those times?

Ren: They asked me out and I turned them down. We stopped hanging out after that.

Panahi: So nothing all that bad happened?

Ren: Well, no. I guess not. One of them got mad and you’re right: I was happy to be rid of him. The other one was just kind of sad. It did sort of suck for a bit, but I wasn’t all that attached to either of them, you know? I had plenty of other friends. It’s—It’s not like that with Kai. He’s just not some guy I hang out with, he’s my friend, my only friend. Well, I guess there’s Wally but I hardly see him and— kuso I should call him. He’s probably worried. [ She sighs. ] And I have you gals—

Kata: Glad you remembered. I was starting to get offended.

Ren: Sorry!

Kata: Just joshing ya. He’s human. It’s a little different. We get that.

Ren: Thanks… I should just do it. Just tell him. Like ripping off a bandage. Then whatever is going to happen can just be over with… I don’t know if I can though. I—I just really don’t want to lose him. But it's not fair to him: clinging onto him cuz I don't have anyone else. I don’t want to screw this up. I—Arceus, I'm such a selfish asshole.

Kōtai: Well that's just not true, luv. It's because you care about his feelings that this is so tough for you… Listen, there's no easy solution here, but I think in the end you have to be honest with him. What other options have you got?

Ren: Avoid it. Pretend like I might be interested so he'll stick around for awhile? That would just hurt both of us more in the end. You're right. I got nothing. [ She slumps over in defeat. ]

Kōtai: You know, he may not leave.

Ren: I don't know, Kōtai. I don't want to get my hopes up. That's a tough situation for anyone to be in. And I don't want to pressure him into being just friends if he doesn't want to be. He's kind of a pushover, you know?

Kōtai: I think what you’re really afraid of is that he’s just been spending time with ya cuz he thinks you’re attractive, but that may not be so. It’s obvious you care a great deal about your friendship with him, all I’m saying is he may also. Infatuation can be a powerful thing, but there are stronger forces that bind us.

Ren: [ looking up at him ] Thanks Kōtai. That actually helps a lot. And Panahi, thank you so much.
for listening and trying to help. You gals didn’t have to do that after what happened.

Kōtai: Nonsense.

Panahi: We’ll always be here for you, hun. Everyone makes mistakes, we all just try to learn from them.

Ren: [ She sighs. ] Well, we decided I have to be honest with him, so I guess the only left is how.

Putenga: What do you mean by that?

Ren: He hasn’t actually told me that he likes me, so should I put him on the spot or wait until he gets up the nerve before I turn him down?

Mele: Oh, I guess neither of those sounds very nice.

Ren: [ whining ] I know.

Ao: Well, if Aka and Ahi are right and he hasn’t actually known for that long, maybe it would be good to give him a little time.

Putenga: But I wouldn’t wait too long. It just opens you up for more drama.

Ikki: As long as it’s not going to make you crazy to hold it in, maybe it’s worth waiting for a moment that comes a little more naturally. And try not to worry so much about screwing up. I know you’ll be kind. You always are.

Kata: Just try not to flirt with him in the meantime.

Panahi: [ glaring at Kata ] Yes, signals are important. I know you can be a little affectionate, but I’m sure you’ll do fine.

Ren: Thank you all. You gals are the best. I don’t know what I’d do without you.

Kata: Lead a super boring life.

Putenga: Never confront your problems.

[ They high-five. ]

Panahi: The moment my wing gets better, the two of you are finished.

---

**Scene 7:** [ Crisis over, Ren’s pokemon start to mill about and catch up on their own business. Ren pulls out her nav and texts Wally. ]

Ren: Hey Wally, you probably heard already, but I got involved trying to stop Team Magma on Mt. Chimney. I just wanted to let you know that I’m okay and so is my team.

[ She does not have to wait long for a response. ]

Wally: Thanks for letting me know! ✓( •ᴗ• ) I did see it on the news. I really wanted to text you
but I wasn’t sure if that would be cool. (ง ̀_́ ง)

Ren: You can text me whenever, dude! That’s why I gave you my number. I’m not always super good about texting back cuz I get distracted, but I like hearing from you.

Wally: Okay! Glad you and your pokemon are safe. (*/ω\*)

Ren: Thanks!

Wally: It looked really scary ，＂(％_％)，｀｀｀， I probably would have run. =口=-口(ˋД′)/

Ren: Haha, no shame. I probably should have. It was super scary, but also cool because I got to battle with Steven Stone.

Wally: ０△０

Ren: Lol. I’ll give you the blow by blow next time we meet up.

Wally: (■컷(fname)

Ren: OMG your emoticons are so on point.

Wally: ( ^=^ )/

Ren: How do you even make them? I don’t think my keyboard has all this stuff.

Wally: \_\(∩aturas)ノ/

Ren: No fair!

Wally: JK. The internet taught me. (◆ω◆) I’ll send you a link if you want. －(－～－)ξ

Ren: Please do. These are great.

Wally: I’m actually a little surprised you’re not familiar. (・_・；) These are mostly from Johto and Kanto.

Ren: Never been a huge internet person. I’m sorry to say you’ve made friends with a ludite.

Wally: (△*△)*.

Ren: I take it you’ve spent some time there.

Wally: On the internet no one knows you are waifu (・_・)； These are mostly from Johto and Kanto.

Ren: I know what that means. Stop.

Wally: つ 丿´w´丿 γ

Ren: Whatever. You do you, kid.

Wally: (웃´ „ `웃) So, what have you been up to? Or are you just taking it easy after all that excitement?

Ren: Well, we did take a spa day.

Wally: Nice nice (ゝ０lw・)ﾉ
Ren: But I got my 4th badge today at the Lavaridge Gym.

Wally: °•°ères°•°

Ren: Thanks. And actually I think I’ll be visiting home soon.

Wally: d=(´▽`)=b

Ren: I’m gonna stop through Petalburg. Will you be around?

Wally: Yes actually! My birthday’s coming up so I’m visiting my parents.

Ren: Great! We can meet up then.

Wally: o( 〃^▽^〃)o

Ren: I’ll treat you since it’s your birthday. Where do you want to go?

Wally: There is this awesome brunch place by my house…

Ren: Done.

Wally: ( ˘▽˘)っ

[Ren pauses for a moment before taking the plunge.]

Ren: Can I ask you for some advice?

Wally: Anytime ( 。•̀ᴗ•́)✧ I’ll do my best!

Ren: So recently I found out that this guy likes me and I don’t know how to turn him down.

Wally: *•°†•°•°•°•°•°•°•°•°•°•°•°

Ren: Focus, Wally. Remember I’m asking you how to turn him down.

Wally: This is so exciting though!

Ren: That's one way to put it.

Wally: Sorry, sorry. I can't help it. (((o(⁎°▽°*)o)))

Ren: You know, you are a lot less shy over text.

Wally: Heh. ┐(¬ `´)┌ I'm more used to it. Comes with the territory. Of being a shut in that is. l_ •)

Ren: Well I'm glad I texted you.

Wally: Aww! _userid:9_ I haven't even helped you yet! I am going to need the deets though, in order to help. Totally not because the curiosity is killing me. (�行 말았따~★

Ren: Fine…

[Pan out as Ren continues to type on her nav.]
Scene 8: [While Ren is texting Wally, Mele approaches Ao.]

Mele: Hey, Ao, can I talk to you?

Ao: Sure.

Mele: That talk with Ren got me thinking that it might be better not to leave things hanging in the air so I just wanted you to know that I really like you. [Ao looks rather confused.] I know you may not believe me because I'm a huge flirt, but I promise you that in this moment, I am being totally sincere.

Ao: [surprised] Oh. [glancing at Akahata] Ummm…

Mele: I know you probably don't feel the same way about me. I mean, you are amazing and beautiful and powerful and brave and I'm just a stray pet that never had a home. I may have a nice voice, but that and a little charm is all I really have going for me.

Ao: I don't think that's true.

Mele: That's kind of you. Either way I think you have better prospects. I'm not telling you this because I expect anything from you. I just want to be honest. And to be clear, I don't want things to change between us unless you want them to. We are still teammates no matter what and I want to be there for you no matter how you feel about me, okay?

Ao: O-okay.

[Mele gives her a smile and dips his head respectfully before turning to leave.]

Ao: And thank you, Mele. [He turns back to her.] What—what you said meant a lot to me.


Scene 9: [Kai and Ren take a bus to Mauville and another bus to Slateport and stay the night at the Pokemon Center before heading out onto Route 103 the next morning. They are having lunch on the eastern side of Route 103. The pokemon (Jay, Dusty, Makō, Tāraki, Akahata, Ikki, Māia, Putenga, & Wheta) have finished their food already and are entertaining themselves while Kai and Ren talk.]

Kai: So, uh, you never said whether you were going to challenge your dad's gym.

Ren: I actually still haven't decided yet. Part of me wants to save it for my last badge, but…

Kai: That makes a ton of sense. You should do that. Don't feel like you have to do it with me. I would be super psyched if you just came to watch.

Ren: That's not it. I'm just trying to figure out if this is my last badge.

Kai: What do you mean?

Ren: Maybe I'm only gonna earn five badges. I don't want to not get otosan's badge just cuz I'm saving it for last.
Kai: You can't seriously think you're only good enough for five badges. [He chuckles and she gives him a censuring look.] I'm sorry. I don't mean to laugh. It's just that you're usually so confident.

Ren: It's not that I don't think I could, but maybe it's about time I stopped.

Kai: [very confused] What? But why? Don't you like being a trainer?

Ren: I... don't think I'm cut out for it.

Kai: That is crazy, Ren. You are so insanely talented!

Ren: I know I'm good at it, but there are other factors at play here.

Kai: Like what?

Ren: [defensive] Like maybe I just don't want to, okay?

Kai: But you love it!

Ren: [coldly] You don't know what you're talking about. You haven't known me that long.

Kai: I know you well enough! And I know you love training pokemon. You can't fake that!

Ren: [angry yell] It's not that simple, okay!

[Her anger shocks Kai into silence for a moment. She looks away and wipes her nose on the back of her hand.]

Kai: ...I get it if you don't want to tell me, but you don't have to lie to me.

Ren: I didn't mean to, I just— I have my reasons, okay? I just don't want to talk about it.

[She looks away, face set in anger. Kai looks down at his hands as the uncomfortable silence drags on. He looks back up after a while and something catches his eye.]

Kai: Um, Ren.

Ren: [irritated] What?

[Kai points over her shoulder. She turns around to see all of her pokemon have stopped what they are doing and are staring at her, looking confused. Her eyes are immediately drawn to Tāraki. His face is crumpled in pain and his eyes are brimming with tears. She stands up, her own face falling.]

Ren: Oh, tiger, I'm so sorry. I was going to talk to you about this first.

[She walks over to him and reaches a hand up to his face. He sniffs and squeezes his eyes shut as the tears start to flow.]

Tāraki: I-I know I can be difficult, b-but I could—I could change—

Ren: [voice breaking] No, tiger. You didn’t do anything. This was all me. I did this. We’ve traveled together for so long now and I never even told you why I—oh, tiger... [He starts to sob and she hugs him tight. She tears up and he clutches her desperately, claws digging into her back.] I'm so so sorry. Please don’t cry. It's nothing you did and I don’t want to leave you, it's just—fuck ... [She starts crying also.] I’m so sorry. I told you when we started this thing that I couldn't do it forever.
Tāraki: I know. I-I just hoped t-that after all we went through, all we've d-done, maybe you had changed your mind.

Ren: O-oh tiger. [ Ren takes a shaky breath. ] Chikusho! I was trying to think how to tell you and then I went and fucked it royally. Oh Arceus, what have I done? Please don’t blame yourself. It wasn’t you. I-it’s something that happened a long time ago. [ She sighs and sniffs very loudly. ] I owe you an explanation, huh? [ She hugs him tighter before letting him go. Tāraki wipes at his face. ] I’m so so sorry, Tāraki. [ She takes a shaky breath before turning around. ] And I’m sorry, Kai. I shouldn’t have lashed out like that. That was totally uncalled for.

Kai: It's okay. I stepped over a line.

Ren: [ wiping at her face ] No, this is just me avoiding my own shit again. I don’t want to talk about it, but I probably need to. I don’t know. [ She sighs deeply. ]

Kai: Jay and I can step out for a bit if you want.

Ren: That’s okay, it’s not that I mind you hearing. It’s just that telling other people is like living it all over again. If I’m gonna do this I’d much rather do it as few times as possible and get it over with. Tāraki, do you think you could tell the rest of the team when we see them again?

[ Tāraki nods and follows Ren as she goes to sit back down again. Tāraki sits down next to her and the rest of her team gathers around her. ]

Ren: Where do I even start? I should really try to put the whole thing in context I suppose. Let’s see… [ We start to see the story as she tells it. ] Okay, when I was little, otosan was away a lot training with his pokemon. [ We see Ren at five years old looking out the window as she waits by the phone. ] I missed him a lot but I also really admired him [ The phone rings and she snatches it up in excitement, a jubilant look on her face as she practically screams “HI OTOSAN!” into the receiver. ] and I lived for the times he would come home and I could hang out with him and his pokemon while okasan worked. [ Ren is riding around the yard on a tauros’s back as her father yells encouragement from the porch and his ursaring, blissey, kangaskhan, snorlax, and ambipom look on. ] I was there when he beat the Elite Four and it was the coolest thing I’d ever seen. [ A slightly older Ren in the stands of a huge stadium cheering as her father’s snorlax fells Will’s slowbro. ] It didn’t even matter that he never became the champion. [ Senri’s ursaring falls to the Champion’s typhlosion. ] He was my idol. [ Senri smiling softly as he carries an ecstatic Ren out of the stadium. ] I wanted to be a trainer just like him. [ Ren and her friend pretending to battle with pokedolls in her room. Ren holds her furret doll aloft in victory. ] Otosan got hired as a teacher there and it was like all my dreams had come true at once. I got to see him all the time and we got super close because I could finally share the one thing he was really passionate about. [ Ren almost bouncing in her seat as her father talks to the class. Ren and her father high fiving after she wins a battle. Ren and her father talking animatedly over dinner as her mother smiles and shakes her head. Abruptly we cut back to the present as Ren’s face turns to a grimace. ] But, um… [ clutching her right arm ] One day there was an incident. [ We cut back to Ren’s memories. ] I was battling this kid I really didn’t like. [ Ren facing off against a pale, black-haired boy her age. ] He used to say mean stuff about me and otosan because we’re mixed race. [ Ren punching the kid in the face in a hallway. ] Anyway, he was using a chikorita and I had a totodile, so I was at a disadvantage. [ Cut back to the battle and the boy’s chikorita’s is draining her totodile’s energy with absorb. ] I did pretty well, but he was going to beat us in another hit. [ Both pokemon panting as they wait for a command. ] We were beat. I should have called it there. [ The totodile wobbles. ] I—I just wanted to win so badly. [ A close up frame of Ren’s pained face in the present. ] So I had my totodile use rage… and it worked. [ Ren pointing at the chikorita in the classic trainer pose as she orders her... ]
The totodile’s eyes glow red and she launches herself at the chikorita. She floored the chikorita, but she didn’t stop. The totodile sends the chikorita rolling over in a heap. The chikorita lifts its head, then looks down in a clear signal that it has lost the fight. The totodile watches it for a second, eyes glowing, mouth wide open and panting. Usually rage wears off when the battle ends, but sometimes it doesn’t. She kept attacking and the chikorita couldn’t get away and the blood… The totodile jumps forward again and lands on the chikorita. It bites down on one of the chikorita’s legs and it cries out in fear and surprise. The totodile thrashes back and forth and blood flows from the chikorita’s torn leg. It tries to kick the totodile off, but it slashes up the chikorita’s side with its claws. I was yelling at my totodile to stop but it was like she couldn’t hear me. Ren is on the sidelines screaming at her totodile to stop while the boy has fallen over in his attempts to back away from the carnage. So I ran in and pulled her off the chikorita and she turned on me. The boys shuffles back to the wall, tears falling from his eyes as he squeezes them shut and looks away. Ren charges into the ring and grabs her totodile around the middle, heaving it off the struggling chikorita. It withers in her arms and Ren falls backward, dropping the totodile. She didn’t recognize me. The totodile whips around to face her and their eyes meet. Ren tries to calm it but there is no recognition in its glowing eyes. She grabbed my shirt and I kicked her off so she went for my arm. The totodile goes for her chest but only catches her shirt. It whips its head back and forth in a frenzy and Ren manages to get a leg between it and her as her shirt rips. She kicks it off and it staggers back only to lunge again. Ren scrambles back in the same moment, turning and shielding herself with her arm. One of its teeth slashes the length of her arm. Back in the present She left this point to the scar on her arm and she would have done worse if it weren’t for Kenta, otosan’s ursaring. He saved me. The totodile goes for her again, blood dripping from its open mouth, but it is abruptly knocked aside by the massive paw of a charging ursaring. The totodile goes flying and slams into the nearest wall, the sound of its impact is drowned out by the ursaring’s bellowing. But he hurt the totodile pretty bad Ren stares at the totodile’s limp form as the ursaring turns to make sure she is okay. and the—the chikorita didn’t make it. He bled out… Her father is on the scene a moment later. He crouches and is trying to say something to her, but she is staring past him at the bloodied chikorita as its breathing becomes erratic. I didn’t go to trainer school much after that. Ren sitting in a corner looking at her feet as other kids battle. In the present Everyone thought it was because I was afraid of pokemon. I mean, it makes sense. Most people are after something like that. Maybe I was for a little while. Ren in a room at the Pokemon Center, the totodile on a bed in front of her, hooked up to a monitoring machine. Her father stands just behind her as she steps forward and places a hand on the sleeping pokemon. Its eye snaps open and she jumps back. It looks sad and guilty and she turns around to cry into her father’s jacket. It was sort of hard for me to visit the totodile in the hospital, but that wasn’t why I stopped going… She takes a deep breath to steady herself and Tāraki put a comforting hand on her shoulder. Anyway, otosan sort of expected me to get over my fear and come back to training.

Ren: Well, I mean, that scar on his face is from his vigoroth so it’s not like he doesn’t know what it’s like on some level… He knew I loved pokemon so he thought I would bounce back just like he did. And it just confused him that I would be fine with his pokemon at home and then start shaking the moment I picked up a pokeball. But what happened to me wasn’t the same as what happened to him. I was responsible for what happened. Two pokemon got hurt because of me. That’s what got to me. So eventually I stopped trying to go back. I still loved pokemon, but I made myself find other things to be interested in. And like, I sort of wanted to test otosan to see if he would still care about me the same way if I decided to do something else with my life. But of course as soon as I stopped going to trainer school, I hardly saw him anymore. We didn’t have anything to talk about and we just drifted apart. Really the whole thing just shattered the illusion for me. I put otosan on this huge pedestal, so of course he wound up disappointing me. And as I got closer to my mother, I started to see how hard him being absent all the time was on her. And I didn’t want to be like that. I didn’t want to be like
him anymore. So I just doubled down and told him I wasn’t interested in being a trainer anymore. I
got a new set of friends who weren’t so into battling. Me and okasan stayed in Johto when he
became a Hoenn gym leader so I could finish up high school… I don’t mean to make it sound like I
hate otosan or whatever. We get along fine mostly, just not as well as we used to…

[ Ren finally trails off completely, exhausted of further explanations. She stares uncomfortably at the
ground, not yet ready to turn and see her pokemon’s reactions. ]

Kai: I’m so sorry.

Ren: For what?

Kai: I’m just so sorry that happened to you. Like holy hell, that’s a lot to deal with. I’m even more
impressed how you keep it together all the time.

Ren: Thanks? It’s not like I think about it all the time. It was a long time ago, you know? But I’m not
so sure I’ll ever be rid of it either. It’s just something I have to carry.

Kai: So what are you going to do?

Ren: I don’t know. I do love my pokemon, and I wish that was enough, but there’s all this other shit
tangled up with it that I can’t seem to shake. I just wish I knew what I wanted.

[ Ren buries her head in her hands but doesn’t cry. Kai shares a worried look with Jay before getting
up and going to sit down next to Ren. Kai rifles through his backpack and pulls out his vapor box. A
minute later a rectangle wrapped in foil materializes out of it. ]

Kai: [ handing it to Ren ] Uh, here.

Ren: [ She looks up at him and takes it. ] A chocolate bar?

Kai: [ scratching the back of his head ] Yeah, it’s kind of stupid, I guess, but it always makes me feel
a little better.

[ She looks down at the chocolate bar in her hands and then back up to his face, eyes welling with
tears. ]

Kai: Oh, uh—

[ Ren grabs him and hugs him tightly. He hugs her gently back, face full of concern. She sniffs
quietly into his shoulder for a bit. ]

Ren: I’m sorry for that stuff I said. You’re a great friend and I’m really lucky to have you. I—I’ve
never actually told a friend that stuff before.

Kai: Really?

Ren: Yeah. I mean, I had a therapist back in Johto, but yeah… You have to be at least a level-five
friend to unlock my tragic backstory.

[ That makes both of them giggle. They let go of each other and straighten up. Ren starts wiping at
her face and Kai hands her a tissue. She gives him a little grateful smile. Once she has cleaned
herself up a bit, she turns to her pokemon. ]

Ren: I’m so sorry. I should have told all of you way sooner… I—I love you gals. I really do. I’m
going to figure this out, but in the meantime I can promise that I’m not going to abandon you. I made
a commitment to all of you, whether we ever really talked about it or not. I may not be able to do
everything you wanted. But I'll do whatever I can.

[ They all look at her, unsure of what to say. Ikki flits forward and hovers in front of her. ]

Ikki: You've done so much for all of us already. Please don't feel bad. Even—even if you released
all of us back into the wild right now, we'd still be better off than when you found us. That's what
you should be thinking about. Dwelling on what-ifs only causes pain. It won't help anything.

Putenga: She's absolutely right. I evolved. I'm so much stronger now than I ever could have become
on my own. I owe you for that, not the other way around.

Akahata: I never assumed I would make it this far, regardless of what you decided. I don't—I don't
expect anything else from you.

Ren: I expected more from myself.

Akahata: You've been far better and far kinder than I ever hoped for. And I believe you when you
say you won't abandon us.

Māia: You didn't make me evolve, you got me these stones, and you made me so much stronger than
I was when we met. You are a great trainer.

[ Ren looks at Wheta, but she remains quiet. Ren takes a deep breath. ]

Ren: Wheta, I know you can't be taking this too well, not after what you've been through. [ Wheta
makes no attempt to respond. She just looks on with a face as hard and inscrutable as a tree. ] You
haven't even been training with us that long and now I pull this on you. I don't know what you must
think of me… [ Wheta looks down. ] I stupidly thought I was over all of this when you joined the
team. I just want you to know that no matter how rash that decision was, I plan to honor the promise
I made you. If I have to train you every morning, night and weekend while I work some nine-to-five
job, I'll do it. I'll take the nightmares and phantom pains and whatever other taurosshit this thing can
throw at me for as long as I need to. I refuse to be like those assholes that abandoned you. I couldn't
live with myself. [ Wheta nods and Ren turns to look at her starter. ] Tāraki, you are my best friend
and I owe you so much. No matter what happens, I am really glad you roped me into this. My only
regret in all of it is how I handled this, I promise, I love you, tiger, and I want to do whatever is best
for you, whether that means keeping you, or finding you a better trainer who can take you where you
want to go.

[ Tāraki tears up again and hugs Ren tightly. She manages to hold it together this time, stroking him
comfortingly as he sniffs into her hair. He calms down again after a few minutes and Ren wipes his
eyes. ]

Putenga: Maybe it's time all of us put some thought into what we want. Then we can all figure out
what to do together. In the meantime, I do have one request, if you're willing.

Ren: S-sure.

Putenga: I want to challenge your father's gym.

Ren: Really? Why?

Putenga: I want to see how well I can handle a slaking, among other things…

Ren: Other things?
Putenga: Trust me, the way we are trusting you.


Scene 10: [ Narration by Ren over frames of the rest of her and Kai's journey along Route 103. ]

Ren: Otosan’s gym is set up a bit differently than the ones we've challenged so far. [ Kai and Jay battling another trainer. ] Instead of battling as many trainers as you want, there are seven rooms each designed to test a particular battle skill. [ Wheta battling a series of wild pokemon. ] The seven skills are: speed [ Tāraki blurring as he darts around, dodging and parrying Jay's blows ], accuracy [ Wheta trying to pop a balloon tied to Akahata's back with razor leaf ], evasion [ Akahata springs away, staying light on her feet ], attack [ Putenga and Dusty headbutting each other ], defense [ Māia shielding herself with steel wing as Putenga and Dusty hit her with mach punch ], special attack [ Ikki using air slash on Makō ] and special defense [ Makō raises a fin to block it ]. The trainer in each room will have a strategy based around that skill and we'll have to win using the appropriate counter-skill. [ Jay kicking Tāraki in the gut, Wheta popping the balloon, the brelooms bracing as Māia uses steel wing on them, Makō using water pulse on Ikki. ] So, in order to beat the Petalburg Gym, we'll need to make sure we're up to snuff on all of them. [ Zoom out to show everyone practicing at once. ] Well, okay, not exactly. [ Makō is near the east bank of a wide estuary in the late afternoon. Kai steps carefully aboard before holding out his hand and helping Ren board. ] We only each have to defeat as many trainers as we have badges before we can battle otosan. [ There is not a ton of room on Makō's back, so they sit close together as they cross the estuary. ] And we can pick whichever rooms we want, so we can each take the skills we are most comfortable with. [ Ren takes off her shoes and trails her feet in the water as the sun starts to set. ] Now, we both have fighting-types, so we are at an advantage, but it's important not to get overconfident. [ They are near the pond where they first met on Route 103 and Jay and Tāraki want to battle each other. ] Otosan has spent his entire life training normal-types so believe me, he knows how to deal with fighting-types. [ Jay opens with a double kick and Tāraki blocks with leaf blade. ] He beat Bruno of the Indigo League. [ Jay stumbles back as Tāraki hits her with dual chop. ] For a fifth badge battle, he's likely to use one of his mid-level slakings, a vigoroth and a linoone or spinda. [ Jay drops down and uses low sweep. ] Slakings use cryptic movement, which basically means they conserve energy by moving very very slowly. [ Tāraki falls to his knees. ] Most pokemon can get in two hits to every one they deal back. [ This time Jay’s double kick hits home, once in the shoulder and the other in the face. ] A really fast pokemon could probably get in three. [ Jay goes for a third but Tāraki catches her, face red and grinning. ] But of course they are tanks and can easily take that kind of a beating or they never would have evolved such a strategy. [ Tāraki throws Jay off and she goes tumbling. ] When they do attack, they rarely miss and they are brutally strong. [ Jay bounces right back to her feet and uses flame charge. ] Otosan also likes to use counter, reversal and retaliate, which is easily a one-hit KO if we're not careful. [ Tāraki dodges and slams her with his tail as she goes by. ] His linoone has play rough and his spinda is pretty hard to pin down. [ Tāraki parries with leaf blade as Jay tries to kick him again. ] And we can't afford to get cocky with the vigoroth either. [ Tāraki grins as he lands yet another blow on Jay. ] It's fast, strong, and aggressive. [ Jay tenses, face hardening as Tāraki barrels toward her to deliver the final blow. ] So basically, my advice is keep it cool and play it smart no matter how things look. [ Jay ducks under his swing and plows into his gut with flame charge. Tāraki falls back and Jay stands there, beak open and panting. ] If we can do that, we'll both win our fifth badge. [ The battle won, Jay evolves into a blaziken. Tāraki picks himself up slowly and Ren checks to make sure he is okay. He waves her off and they congratulate Jay. Everyone gives Jay a high-five before Kai jumps in and hugs her. They laugh and apply potions. ]
before continuing west.

[ It is night when they check into the Pokemon Center in Petalburg. ]

Ren: [ Ren, who is on a top bunk again, sends her mother a text before she goes to sleep. ] Hey okasan, almost home. I’m gonna surprise dad tomorrow at the gym. Want to come to watch me get my fifth badge?

Asuka: Oooh! Good call! I’ll be there. And don’t worry, my lips are sealed!

Ren: You’re the best okasan! Goodnight!

---

**Scene 11:** [ The next day Kai, Ren, Jay and Tāraki are in front of the Petalburg Gym. They pause in front of the doors and Ren takes a deep breath. ]

Kai: How are you feeling?

Ren: We're ready.

Kai: [ glancing worriedly at her ] Okay.

[ They walk through the doors and down a hallway lined with doors, each marked with a plac. The docent looks up as they reach the counter at the end. ]

Barry: Ren? And Kai Birch, right? [ cheerful ] I had no idea you were coming. Let me just buzz your father—

Ren: I wanted to surprise him actually.

Barry: [ taking his finger off the intercom ] Alright then. Do you want to head back or...

Ren: We're here to get our fifth badges.

Barry: Oh! Already! Well that is just wonderful! [ peering around them at their pokemon ] My, is that your treecko? And you had a torchic right? [ They nod. ] Well, time sure does fly. Let me just scan your trainer cards and I'll get you started. [ They both hand over their cards and he scans Ren’s. ] Great. You can pick your rooms, Ren.

[ He gestures at a screen facing them on the desk. It displays all of the rooms and says "choose four" at the bottom. ]

Ren: Actually, Barry, do you think I could challenge all of the rooms?

Barry: [ He blinks in surprise. ] I don't see why not. Let me just, hmm.

[ The screen goes back to resting status for a moment as he fiddles with his computer before going back to displaying the rooms only this time it says "choose your order" at the bottom. ]

Barry: There you go! [ Ren taps the rooms. ] Now, Mr. Birch, you can pick whichever four you want, just not in the same order. [ Kai taps the screen. ] Alright, your rooms should be ready in a few minutes.
Ren: You should finish first. I'll come watch you as soon as I'm done. You won't be able to see me because of how the leader arena is set up, but I'll be there.

[ Kai nods. A moment later one of the many doors slides open. Instead of a human, an ursaring steps out. It shuts the door behind it before dropping back to all fours. ]

Ren: Kenta!

[ The ursaring groans happily as he pads over to them. He rears up again to give Ren a bear hug. ]

Ren: [ hugging him back ] Aww, I missed you too.

[ The ursaring releases her and looks Tāraki up and down. He holds his forearm up and Tāraki pushes against it with his own. After a moment they break apart and the ursaring nods approvingly. He gives Jay a little gesture of approval as well. He sniffs and ruffles Kai's hair before sitting next to Ren. The defense door slides open and a trainer pokes her head out. ]

Kai: That's me. Good luck, Ren.

Ren: You too, Kai.

[ Kai disappears into the defense room and the speed door opens. ]

Trainer: [ catching sight of her ] Ren?

[ The ursaring gives her an encouraging nudge. She strokes his head. ]

Ren: Hey, Lei.

[ She and Tāraki walk into the room. ]

Lei: I can't believe you are on your fifth badge already. You two must train like crazy.

Ren: Heh, yeah.

[ They take opposite sides of the arena and Lei sends out a persian. Ren notes there is a quick claw on it's collar. Both pokemon tense up, ready to begin. ]

Lei: Fake out, Bao!

Ren: Leaf blade, Tāraki!

[ The persian strikes first, ducking right under Tāraki's swing. Tāraki flinches as the persian springs away. ]

Lei: Great! Again! Then slash his back!

[ Once again it is just a bit too fast for Tāraki and gets him in the leg. It darts around him while he flinches. ]

Ren: Slam!

[ This time Tāraki is faster and swats the persian with his tail as it leaps at him. The blow connects powerfully and the persian goes flying. It twists in the air and lands on it's feet before springing back at him. ]
Ren: Leaf blade!

[ The persian staggers under the blow and Tāraki whips around and slams it with his tail again. The persian tumbles over and groans, admitting defeat. ]

Ren: Nice job, tiger. Must have been something new to fight a pokemon as fast as you. Are you warmed up now?

[ Tāraki just shrugs as Lei recalls her persian. The two trainers shake hands and Ren withdraws Tāraki. She heads into the next room and sends out Putenga. The other trainer sends out a linoone. It's eyes flash an odd color, revealing that it is wearing lenses. Putenga darts in with mach punch, which makes the linoone go flying. It takes advantage of the distance to use hone claws. It parries Putenga's force palm with uncanny accuracy and slashes her across the flank. Putenga backs away and then charges with headbutt. The linoone tries to evade, but Putenga catches it in the side. Her tail club lashes out with blinding speed and catches it in the other side. The linoone goes down and the trainer withdraws it. In the next room, Wheta faces off against a spinda. It uses teeter dance and it's erratic movements give Wheta some trouble landing a hit as she chases after it, fists glowing darkly. It smacks her in the jaw with a dizzy punch, but Wheta uses the proximity to finally land a hit. The spinda backs off and uses double team so that there are half a dozen spindas tottering erratically around instead of one. Wheta looks lost until Ren gives her a command. Wheta sends a hail of sharp leaves slicing at all the targets. Soon there is just one again Wheta dives for it, dropping to sweep it off it's feet. Her first attempt misses, but she spins into a dragon's tail kick and this time it connects. The spinda hits the ground heavily and surrenders. In the next room, a slakoth uses bulk up but Māia takes it out with a single boomburst. Next a zangoose faces off against Akahata. It has a silk scarf equipped and opens with hone claws. Akahata responds with howl. It lunges, slicing at her with its huge claws. Akahata dodges, staying light on her feet as the zangoose continues to swing at her. Soon it's grows frustrated and overcompensates by swinging wide. Akahata dodges again and uses thunder fang. Paralyzed, it is easier for Akahata to stay away from its blows. She waits until it seizes up and gets in a bite. It slashes her across the face and she grabs its arm with bite and throws it to the ground. In the next room, Ikki uses quiver dance while her stantler opponent uses calm mind. Ikki strikes first with air slash and the stantler retaliates with round. Ikki shakes it off and uses bubblebeam, followed swiftly by silver wind. The stantler manages tackle before Ikki fells it with a final air slash. In the final room, Māia strikes a delcatty with wing attack, but it keeps its concentration and uses calm mind. It knocks Māia around in the air with echoed voice until she dives it with steel wing and finishes it with aerial ace. ]

Scene 12: [ A few minutes later, Ren, Tāraki and Putenga walk into the stands of the leader arena. They are narrower than usual and dimly lit. It has a glass front that spectators can look out, but competitors can't look in. Kai has already begun his badge battle in the arena. Dusty is facing off against a linoone. Ren hears someone stand up and takes her eyes off the battle to see that her mother and the Birches are already there. Asuka steps forward and hugs her daughter tightly. ]

Ren: Thanks for coming out, okasan.

Asuka: Of course! [ She holds her daughter at arm's length to get a better look. ] It's so good to see you! I know I technically saw you when you called but… [ She touches her daughter's arms and shoulder and face. ]

Ren: I'm fine, okasan. I just got a few little scrapes and stuff. Some of my pokemon were injured, but
they're all fine now too.

Asuka: Thank you, Tāraki.

[ *She lets go of Ren and hugs him. Tāraki is surprised, but hugs her back.* ]

Ren: [ *to the Birches* ] It's good to see you too.

Prof. Birch: I can hardly believe that used to be my treecko. How are you, bud?

[ *Tāraki burls.* ]

Prof. Birch: You've done a wonderful job training him.

Ren: Just wait until you see us battle.

[ *The group settles into their seats to watch the match. In the arena, Dusty has beaten the linoone and Jay has started battling Senri's final slacking. Ren and her mother make small talk until Jay defeats the slaking with a double kick/blaze kick combo. Ren and company cheer, but it is very muffled by the glass. Kai looks up and waves. Senri hands over a badge and Ren and her pokemon head into the arena. She grabs Kai's hand and claps him on the shoulder as they pass in the doorway.* ]

Ren: Awesome battle, dude!

Kai: Thanks!

[ *Tāraki, Jay and the brelooms give each other daps as they pass.* ]

Senri: Ren! This is too many great surprises in one day! [ *He walks over to meet his daughter in the middle of the ring. He smiles and claps her on the shoulder.* ] Good to see you, kiddo. And look at the little yokai now! Not so little anymore!

[ *Tāraki nods. The door opens behind Ren and Senri’s ursaring shuffles through.* ]

Senri: I was wondering where you had go to. Look who’s here!

Kenta: I smelled her when she walked in here, bee-brain.

[ *Senri laughs but Ren does not understand what was said.* ]

Ren: [ *as Kenta rubs up against her* ] He already said hi.

[ *Kenta chuffs and goes to sit in Senri's square so he can watch the battle.* ]

Senri: So, you finally ready to face your old man?

Ren: That's right, so prepare to lose, pops!

Senri: [ *smiling broadly* ] Now there's that Kosugi confidence! Let's see if you can back it up.

[ *They both go back to their squares and Putenga steps into the ring. Senri sends out a vigoroth.* ]

Putenga: [ *to the vigoroth* ] Boy, this isn't your lucky day. I've got a point to prove and you're in my way.

Vigoroth: [ *mockingly* ] Bring it on, breloom.
Senri: Fury swipes!

Ren: Parry with mach punch!

[ *Putenga lets the vigoroth come to her, then spins, whipping her tail around at the last moment with a crack. Her glowing club connects with both of the vigoroth's outstretched claws. Its long arms are knocked aside and it goes into a clumsy forward roll. The graceless move is nevertheless effective as it pops back up and catches Putenga in the leg.* ]

Ren: Headbutt!

[ *Putenga lowers her head and smacks the vigoroth off of her. It doesn't do much damage at this range, but her helmet serves as good protection. The vigoroth bounces one or two swipes off of it with little effect before grabbing it with one paw and trying to reach the other around.* ]

Ren: Shake him!

[ *Putenga shakes her head as the vigoroth tries to slash at her. It hits her shoulder, but is also dusted with yellow powder. Its muscles begin to seize up and Putenga throws it off.* ]

Putenga: [ *smug* ] Let's see how well you can fight paralyzed.

Senri: Facade!

[ *The vigoroth glows as strength flows into it and it grins maniacally.* ]

Putenga: Well shit.

Ren: Use force palm to get some distance!

[ *Putenga slams the vigoroth with her tail as it comes at her. He goes tumbling away but bounces right back up, almost beaten but more powerful than ever.* ]

Senri: Slash!

Ren: Jump over it!

[ *The vigoroth charges and Putenga leaps into the air, somersaults, and brings her tail club down on the vigoroth's head. It hits the ground face first and twitches. Putenga lands gracefully on her feet just behind it. She glances over her shoulder at Tāraki and gives him a little nod. He whoops, looking pleased as punch. Senri withdraws his vigoroth.* ]

Senri: Nicely done you two. We usually beat brelooms with that tactic.

Putenga: What's he saying?

Ren: That they win against most brelooms that way.

Putenga: Well you can tell him that I'm not most brelooms!

Ren: Tenga!

Putenga: Go on, tell him!

Ren: I think he knows, Tenga. That was a compliment.
Putenga: [pacing back to her side of the arena] Whatever. I'm ready for the next one.

[Senri sends out a slaking.]

Putenga: Perfect! You're going down, throw rug! [The slaking just yawns.] Oh it's on! [Putenga rushes forward.]

Senri: Retaliate!

[The slaking lashes out with shocking speed. Its fist hits her like a battering ram and she goes flying. She lands heavily near Ren on the edge of the arena.]

Ren: Putenga! [There is no response. Ren runs to her.] Tenga! [Ren shakes her, eyes welling up.] Otosan! I think she's hurt bad! Call the—[Putenga shifts beneath her hands and her eyes snap open.]

Putenga: [scrambling up] I'm fine!

Ren: Tenga, sit down!

[A medic opens the door.]

Putenga: Really, I'm alright. That just hurt like hell.

Ren: Let the doctor look at you.

Putenga: After I finish this fight.

Ren: Tenga!

Putenga: This isn’t your fault, Ren, okay? It’s mine. I didn’t listen to you. I need to win this battle and I know I can, but I need your help.

Ren: But—

Putenga: Trust me, Ren.

[They stare into each other’s eyes for a moment.]

Ren: [relenting] Okay.

Senri: Everything alright?

Ren: Yes, she wants to continue the fight.

Senri: I like her spirit.

Ren: Okay, don’t charge it straight on again and give it momentum. Mach punch and get behind it this time!

Senri: Chip away!

[Putenga runs close enough to get the slacking to lash out at her, but uses the speed boost from mach punch to shift the attack by a hair’s breath and hits him in the jaw with her tail club as she goes by.]
Ren: Power-up punch! As many as you can!

[ Putenga punches it twice across the back, glowing with gathering energy, before it wheels around to strike her. She is ready and it hits only a glancing blow as Putenga springs away. ]

Ren: Force palm!

[ Putenga kicks the slaking square in the chest. Usually force palm is enough to send almost any opponent sprawling, especially with a power boost, but the slaking is like a brick wall. Putenga looks on in terror as it grabs her leg. ]

Ren: Your tail! Mach punch!

[ Fortunately it has to take a moment before it can move again and Putenga’s face settles into determination as she hits it across the jaw with her tail club. ]

Ren: Force palm!

[ The slaking’s grip on her leg loosens and she yanks it free and strikes the other side of its face. It staggers as she backs away. Finally it falls. ]

Ren: Great job, Putenga. Now come on back.

[ Putenga snorts, staring right at Senri before returning to Ren’s side. This time she sits and lets the medic tend her. Senri withdraws his slaking and Tāraki steps forward. Senri sends out another slaking. ]

Ren: Dual chop!

Senri: Chip away!

[ Tāraki darts in and punches the slaking in the face and it punches him in the chest. Tāraki takes the hit and punches its other cheek. ]

Ren: Slam!

[ Tāraki whirls, tail glowing, and slams the slaking across the chest. ]

Senri: Counter!

[ The slaking grabs Tāraki’s tail and flings him away. Tāraki rolls and pops back up, panting. ]

Ren: Leaf blade!

[ Tāraki darts in and slashes it in the knee. I wobbles but stays upright. Tāraki follows up with another blow to its head and hits it right in the temple. Its injured knee gives out and it collapses. ]

Ren: That was so awesome, tiger! I can't believe you took him down so fast!

Senri: I can't believe my own daughter beat me. I didn't think the little yokai would be such a strong physical attacker.

Ren: Yeah, I thought that was gonna take a few more hits. They must have been critical.

Senri: I think you're right. Two in a row is very impressive. You've done a wonderful job training him. [ handing her the badge ] I've never been quite so happy to lose a battle.
Ren: [smiling] Thanks otosan.

[The door opens behind her and her mother and the Birches poor in.]

Senri: I should have known you'd all be in on this.

Prof. Birch: We were instructed not to ruin the surprise.

Kai: That was such an awesome battle, Ren!

[He hugs her. She is a little surprised but hugs him back, resting her chin on his shoulder and smiling. Then she notices all of the parents looking a bit too amused and lets go of him. He lets go of her, face flushed, but for once he doesn't look embarrassed, just happy and excited. Her mother steps forward and gives her a hug.]

Asuka: [proudly, eyes glassy] That's my girl, tougher than anything.

Ren: Aww, okasan.

[They all begin to chat and laugh. Senri looks happy, but also a little sad. Kenta gives him a comforting nudge and he puts his hand on the ursaring's head. Pan out. Dusty is cracking a joke while Putenga gripes about the medical attention. Jay and Tāraki compliment each other on their respective triumphs. The humans are gathered in a loose circle talking. All seems well.]

---

Scene 13: [That night Ren is alone in her room. She is laying on her bed and looking at her nav, her face tight. There is a knock at the door and she jumps. She put down her nav and wipes her eyes, trying for a neutral expression.]

Ren: Come in!

[The door opens and an ursaring looks in.]

Ren: Kenta? [She sits up and swings her legs over the side of her bed, forcing her face from surprise to a smile.] What’s up?

[Kenta walks in the room and closes the door. He paces over to her on all fours and sits down in front of her. He looks around the room and makes a questioning noise.]

Ren: They’re all sleeping in their balls. It got kind of crowded now that they’ve all evolved.

[He looks steadily up into her face, not the least bit fooled. She holds her half smile for another few seconds before it breaks. She looks down, trying not to cry.]

Ren: I know I should be happy. I usually am. And we did so much better than I even thought we would. Putenga’s fine, just a cracked rib. Everything worked out. I’ve got nothing to be upset about.

[Kenta lays his head down in her lap, rumbling deep in his chest. She rests a hand on his head, trying to steady herself.]

Ren: I thought I would feel better, but I just feel worse. I—I don’t know what to do, Kenta. I thought it would go away. I thought I wanted it to, but I’m not even sure of that anymore. It felt so right,
starting over, like I was wiping the slate clean. But of course it wasn’t. I don’t even know why I tried to fool myself. Whether or not I want to get over it doesn’t even matter. I know now that I can’t. But now I’m trapped. It was bad enough that I was always going to disappoint myself no matter what I did, but now I’ve set myself up to disappoint everyone…

[A tear finally breaks free followed quickly by another and another. She sobs and swallows the lump in her throat.] Y-you must b-be so disappointed t-too…

[The sobs overcome her ability to speak, no matter how hard she tries to hold them back. One of her tears falls on Kenta’s nose. He picks his head up out of her lap and stands up straight and tall above her. Her crying stops as she looks up at him in surprise, not sure what to expect. He scoops her up and hugs her tightly. It is clear from her face that that is not at all what she was expecting. She opens her mouth but doesn’t get a chance to say anything.]

Kenta: No, I am so proud of you, little cub.

[She lets out a little gasp, for a moment unsure if she really heard him speak. A watery but genuine smile breaks over her face before she buries it in his fur and hugs him tight.]

Chapter End Notes

The gym battles in this chapter are very accurate to what actually happened in-game. For some reason I didn’t think to bring my pelliper or sandshrew so I had to find a way to write them out. When my strategy for the torkoal didn’t pan out, I realized I was up shit’s creek because Taraki and Putenga could easily be one-hit-KO’s and there was no way Ikki or Akahata could take another hit. Fortunately Ao had just learned discharge and I was like: “maybe this thing has shitty special defense.” Of course the torkoal used overheat right away but Ao dodged it like a total badass and then took it out. I waffled on what to do for numel, but I went with my birb. And of course Maia one-hit-KOed it with boomburst because she the best. Also, Taraki’s double crits actually happened in-game and ended that gym battle pretty quickly. I was such a proud parent.

Really a lot had to get done in this chapter. I think it wins the prize so far for emotional roller coaster. Some of it was really fun to write and other parts were very difficult. I’ll leave it to you to guess which is which. Kai is actually around for the entire chapter which is crazy. Steven is missing but here in spirit because Ren keeps talking about him. Wally reveals another side of his personality which I am excited for. His memelord face is all over chapter 10 so get hype. Thanks again for reading! I love you all, whoever you are.

Character Chart:

HUMANS:
Ren Kosugi, our protagonist
Kai Birch, Ren’s friend who likes science
Wally Scott, Ren’s other friend who likes the internet
Steven Stone, the Hoenn League Champion who is low-key flirty all the time
Flannery Moore, Co-leader of the Lavaridge gym. The youngest Gym Leader and very gay.
Asuna Moore, Co-leader of the Lavaridge gym. The oldest Gym Leader and very very intense.
Senri Kosugi, Ren's father and the Petalburg Gym Leader
Asuka Kosugi, Ren's mother and writer for Ashi News
Prof. Alan Birch, Kai's father and head of Littleroot Labs
Nikau Birch, Kai's mother

TEAM REN:
Taraki the Sceptile
Akahata the Mightyena
Ikki the Masquerain
Panahi the Pelipper
Maia the Taillow
Putenga the Breloom
Mele the Skitty
Hauoro the Whismur
Ao the Manectric
Kata the Spoink
Kōtai the Sandshrew
Wheta the Nuzleaf

TEAM KAI:
Jay, the Blaziken
Dusty, the Breloom
Makō, the Wailmer

OTHER POKEMON:
Kenta, Senri's Ursaring and starter pokemon
Mixed Emotions

Chapter Summary

In which Ren hangs out with Wally and tries to figure out what comes next.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Scene 1: [ Ren and her mother are sitting on a bench at the reserve visiting all of her pokemon. Putenga has a big medical patch on her side, but seems fine. We can see Panahi talking to Asuka with Ren translating while the others mill about. Eventually the pokemon move off to have their own meeting, leaving Ren and her mother to talk alone. ]

Asuka: They’re all so wonderful. I’m so happy for you.

Ren: Oh, they're just pretending because you’re here. Some of them are little shits.

Asuka: [ laughing ] I don’t believe that for a minute.

Ren: It’s true. So anyway, are you going to check out that spa in Lavaridge?

Asuka: Yes, this weekend. I even convinced your father to come along.

Ren: Ooh, that should be fun. Let me know how it goes.

Asuka: Will do. How have things been going for you lately?

Ren: Pretty good. Not much happened since the last time we talked.

Asuka: [ not fooled in the least ] Oh, and how are things going with Kai?

Ren: [ groaning ] Okasan .

Asuka: What, I’m not allowed to ask?

Ren: Not in that tone.

Asuka: [ “innocent” smile ] What tone?

Ren: We are not dating, okay?

Asuka: No???

Ren: No. We are just friends.


Ren: I’m serious.

Asuka: I believe you, Ren-chan.
Ren: [irritated huff] Doesn’t sound like it. [She sighs.] Listen, okasan, if I ever start dating anyone, I’ll tell you about it, alright?

Asuka: How very generous of you. You are still dodging the question, though.

Ren: …Things have been a little tense lately, to be honest. I haven’t been in the best mindspace since the Mt. Chimney thing.

Asuka: I’m sorry to hear that. Do you want to talk about it?

Ren: Not right now. Maybe another time.

Asuka: Alright. I’m here anytime you need me.

Ren: Thanks, okasan… [Ren sighs and her voice gets tight.] I thought we were making progress, but now I’m just scared I’ll screw things up.

Asuka: At the risk of sounding cliche: a little caution is healthy, but you can’t let fear make your choices. You can only protect yourself and the ones you love from so much pain. After that, the more you try to avoid it, the more you miss out on. Humans are social animals. We need each other. You musn’t be afraid of forging bonds because they may eventually break. I think it’s important to trust your gut and do what feels right. As long as you’re not hurting anyone, I think it’s worth the risk.

Ren: What if do end up hurting someone?

Asuka: No matter how hard we try not to, and we must try, we will always end up hurting someone now and again. It’s another one of those risks that people will tell you is optional when really it isn’t. [Ren starts watching her pokemon as her mother talks. It is obvious that Putenga is telling the rest of them what happened.] We all make mistakes and sometimes we don’t even have to make a mistake for bad things to happen. Life is not a game with an optimal strategy. As long as you try your best not to do harm and mend it when you do, you’re doing very well. And as long as you are honest, you can let other people make their own choices and take their own risks. You tend to be very protective and not just of people you care about. It’s important to learn when people need that protection and when they don’t.

Ren: [her attention snaps back to her mother] Um, what are we talking about?

Asuka: Well, we were talking about you and Kai—

Ren: Oh.

Asuka: But I sensed that the subject may have changed, so I tried to keep my comments general. Regardless, it is good romantic advice—

Ren: [groaning and covering her face] Okasan!

Asuka: Or not! Just general wisdom to live by.

Ren: [running her hands over her face] Yeah, I guess so. [Deep sigh.] Thank you, okasan. You’re the best.

Asuka: I certainly hope so. [getting up] I should be heading home now. I’ve got some writing to do. I’ll see you at dinner, Ren-chan. [She heads for the gate.]
Ren: [waving] Bye, okasan!

[Ren gets up off the bench and meanders slowly over to where her pokemon are gathered. They fall quiet as she approaches and rearrange themselves into a semi-circle to face her, waiting for her to speak. She looks over all of their faces. Most of them look concerned or anxious.]

Ren: So, Putenga told you all what happened? [They nod.] I’m so sorry. I feel like I’ve failed you all—

Mele: No—

Ren: Just let me finish. Maybe that’s not true. But either way I’m sorry. [She takes a deep breath, trying to organize her thoughts.]

Kōtai: Thank you, Ren.

[She sees the genuine gratitude in his expression and almost loses it, but puts it away behind a strained smile.]

Ren: So, just to be clear, I’m not going to give up being a trainer just yet. There’s still a lot of places I want to see and I want to help you all get stronger while I can. I may not challenge another gym, but that doesn’t mean I’m giving up on all of you. But this isn’t a permanent gig either. Putenga said it best: what we all need to do for now, is think about what we want. Once we know that, we can all work on getting there. How does that sound?

Panahi: That sounds good, honey.

[Ren looks around the circle to see everyone nodding.]

Ren: Thanks, you gals are the best.

[Most of her team dip their heads in deference but Kata and Putenga take the praise as their due.]

Ren: Putenga and Tāraki, could I talk to you for a minute?

[They follow her a few steps away from the others while the rest go about their business.]

Ren: I wanted to thank you for what you did in the gym. You really didn’t have to do that after the shit I just pulled.

Putenga: Who said I did that for you? Maybe I had my own reasons.

Ren: [giving Putenga a “bitch please” look] I’ve never seen you fight angry before. Come on, your hidden type is probably ice.

Putenga: So maybe I was just a little ticked at your dad.

Ren: Tenga, I’m the one who screwed up here.

Putenga: Nope!

Ren: What happened wasn’t his fault.

Putenga: Listen, I may not understand all of the subtleties of human behavior and whatever, but he hurt you, Ren.
Ren: But—

Tāraki: She’s right, Ren.

Ren: No. He—

Putenga: You can deal or not deal with it as you choose, Ren. I’m not going to tell you how to feel about your dad. So how about you don’t either?

Ren: I, uh, guess that’s fair…

Putenga: You’re welcome for the gym thing… We love you, Ren.

[ Ren hugs Putenga, careful not to squeeze the injury on her side. Putenga hugs her back, although her short arms don’t reach very far. ]

---

**Scene 2:** [ The next morning Ren and Wally are seated by a waitress in a nice Kalos themed restaurant. Wally is wearing one of his nicer buttondown/cardigan combos with mini-cord jeans. Ren is wearing a plain summer dress and has her hair in a braid. The waitress hands them the menus and leaves. ]

Ren: Are you sure your parents don’t mind that I’m taking you out on your birthday?

Wally: They’re taking me out to dinner so it’s fine.

Ren: Milking it are we?

Wally: Just a little.

Ren: [ looking at the menu ] No shame.

Wally: What are you going to get?

Ren: I think I’ll get the Kalos toast. Is that any good here?

Wally: Yeah! That’s one of my favorites! I’m gonna get eggs Benedict though.

Ren: Never heard of it.

[ The waitress comes and takes their orders. Wally seems like he is getting a bit shy, so Ren picks up the slack. ]

Ren: Thanks for talking to me about my dumb drama. I feel a little bad for just venting at you via text. I didn’t even ask how your team is doing.

Wally: They're doing great! I caught a swablu recently and he's fitting in pretty well so far. He's a bit impish and Kana pretends to hate him but they actually love each other. Speaking of Kana, I got a moonstone and evolved her. She is super happy about it and won't stop strutting around. Aroha is growing super fast but she's still a budew. I almost don't want her to evolve because she's my little baby, but she is psyched for it so…
Ren: [ slyly ] What about Kihei?

Wally: He's so much stronger now. He's about ready to evolve too.

Ren: That's so good to hear. How have you been feeling?

Wally: Really good, actually. The air in Verdanturf is a lot better but I think the training has really been helping a lot too. It's so great to have friends that don't— My pokemon, they help take care of me, but they don't act like I'm weak. And when we win battles I can kind of believe it too… [ He trails off, blushing a little. ]

Ren: That is so great. It makes me really glad you stood up to your parents.

Wally: Thank you so much for helping me. I really owe you—

Ren: Now, now. None of that on your birthday. You owe yourself too. It takes a lot of courage to do what you've done.

[Wally squirms in his seat, blushing furiously under the compliment. Ren chuckles and the waitress comes back with their food. They both dig in happily and after a few bites Ren looks up from hers at Wally's food. ]

Ren: That looks great.

Wally: You should try some! [ shoving his plate across the table ] Here. Try to get all of the components in one bite.

Ren: [ Ren takes a slice and put it in her mouth. Her face morphs exaggeratedly in is surprise and delight. ] Great Lord Arceus, this is the best thing I've ever eaten!

Wally: Wanna swap?

Ren: It's your birthday! I couldn't do that to you.

Wally: No, I really like Kalos toast too. I just got the eggs Benedict so we wouldn't be ordering the same thing. You should eat it. [ He starts sliding her plate towards himself. ]

Ren: Well, if you insist …

[ Ren smiles a bit sheepishly as they both arrange their new plates in front of themselves. Wally takes a long sip of his large bowl of coffee as Ren tucks into his meal. ]

Ren: This food is so awesome I can hardly believe it. What the heck is in this sauce?

Wally: Butter, egg yolks and lemon, I think.

Ren: That's it? [ Wally nods. ] Sorcery!

Wally: [ He giggles, then starts as he remembers something. ] Speaking of awesome, I saw you on Dual Pulse the other day!

Ren: Oh yeah, I forgot all about that.

Wally: I am so jealous! Dual Pulse is like my favorite show. It got me to learn sign language. I want to battle them so badly! What were they like in person?
Ren: Pretty cool. They bicker in sign a lot. It's cute.

Wally: Was Ty cute? We hardly ever get to see him on the show since he does all the camera work.

Ren: He is cute, I suppose. He was very expressive. I guess you’d sort of have to be.

Wally: [He sighs dreamily, then catches himself and takes another very long sip of coffee.] So, where are you planning on going next?

Ren: I was thinking about Fortree. It's supposed to be something else.

Wally: Oooh, I've always wanted to see it. It's kind of sad that I've spent my whole life in the region and never been there.

Ren: Want to go together? It'd be fun.

Wally: [looking ready to explode with excitement] Yes! That'd be so cool! That would probably make my parents feel better too.

Ren: Really?

Wally: Of course, my parents don't like me doing anything alone.

Ren: I just thought maybe I wouldn't be their favorite person, you know?

Wally: [delicately] They may not exactly know everything.

Ren: You lied to them?

Wally: Nooo, Uncle and I just didn't tell them everything you said. And like my dad is already friends with your dad, so they know who you are and were already inclined to like you. I thought: why change their minds?

Ren: Sly. Let's do it then. I'm gonna stick around for a few days, then we can go, unless you need more time?

Wally: Nope! Oh, I'm already excited!

[He bounces a little in his seat. By this time they have finished their food and a bus boy comes and clears their plates away. Ren grins and pulls a small package out of her dress pocket.]

Ren: Alright, time for your present.

Wally: But you're already getting me brunch and—

Ren: Before you get all worked up about it, I didn't buy it. I found it. [She shoves it across the table to him.] I don't need it, but I think you could use it.

Wally: [taking it] Thank you. [opening it] Holy shit, Ren. [turning it in the light] Is this…?

Ren: A dawn stone, or at least I'm ninety percent sure it is. I didn't know if Kihei wanted to evolve into a gardevoir or gallade but I figured maybe you’d like it anyway.

Wally: Oh Arceus, thank you, Ren! I can't wait to show Kihei!

Ren: Alright then. [to the waitress] Check please!
Ren pays and they head outside. Wally sends out his kirlia and Ren sends out Tāraki. Wally shows Kihei the dawn stone and he takes it. He holds it to his chest and it melts into him as he evolves in a flash of warm light. He flexes his new arms experimentally and slashes the air. Wally is beside himself with excitement and Kihei hugs him, picking him up slightly, to calm him down. Ren and Tāraki congratulate them and the pokemon shake hands now that they are close to the same size again. Pan out.

Scene 3: Wally is waiting by the bus station in Petalburg when he sees Ren and Kai walking towards him down the street. They are talking quietly to each other. Ren spots Wally and waves.

Ren: [once they are close] Hey Wally! This is my friend, Kai. Kai, this is Wally.

Wally: Nice to meet you.

Kai: Yeah. [They shake hands.] Well, I should probably get going.

Ren: Sure thing. Thanks for seeing me off, dude.

Kai: Sure—Oh, I almost forgot. [He rifles through his bag and pulls out a set of tinted goggles.] Here, a sort of parting gift. [He holds them out to her.] We had some extras so I thought just in case you ever wanted to visit the desert or I guess they're good for flying and surfing too…

Ren: [taking them] Thanks Kai. I'm sure they'll come in handy. Come here. [She pulls him in for a hug and this time he relaxes into it easily.] I'll miss you, dude. Thanks again for everything.

Kai: Hey, what are level-five friends for?

[They break apart with a chuckle.]

Ren: Keep in touch, okay? I want to hear every nerdy detail.

Kai: Okay… Have fun you two. [He turns to go.]

Ren & Wally: Bye!

[They watch him go.]

Wally: [once Kai is out of earshot] Sooo, was that him?

Ren: Yeah.

Wally: Did you tell him orrrrr?

Ren: No. I wanted to. We're not gonna see each other for a while, so I didn't want to leave it hanging but I couldn't make myself say it.

Wally: [he twiddles his thumbs, a slight blush forming] …He’s pretty cute.

Ren: Wally!

Wally: No shade, no pressure! Just a… strictly factual observation.
Ren: [She sighs and gives him a sidelong look.] You want his number or something?

Wally: [blush deepening] Well, I wouldn’t say no…

Ren: Alright, but I’d wait a while before you call. I hear he’s hung up on someone.

[ Wally giggles and after a second or two Ren joins in. ]

---

Scene 4: [Ren and Wally are sitting on the grass in Mauville’s rooftop park watching the sunset with their pokemon while Ren tells Wally about the Mt. Chimney incident.]

Ren: Not much interesting happened after Steven left. The police showed up a few minutes later. Oh, and Archie is an asshole and Magma was using the meteorite to power the machine.

Wally: Whoa. That is really crazy. I am so jealous… Well, maybe not. I’d really like to meet the Champion, but I’d give the rest a pass.

Ren: You and me both, buddy.

[They stare out at the view in silence for a while. The sun is getting very low. Ren glances over and sees Wally clutching his pendant, looking peaceful.]

Ren: Hey Wally.

Wally: Yeah?

Ren: I always meant to ask about your necklace. It’s really nice. Where did you get it?

Wally: I made it. [We can see what he is talking about as he tells the story.] One time my parents bought me this really beautiful wooden box and it got me thinking… I just wanted to make something like that. I got all of these carving tools and my cousin sent me some nice pieces of wood. [holding the pendant.] This is the first thing I made. It took a long time, but I loved it. When I was finished I thought I’d make some beads to go with it, but I never got very far. Even wearing the mask while I worked… it just made my room too dusty. I had a bad attack and my parents asked me to stop, so I did.

Ren: Arceus, man, that’s rough. I’m so sorry.

Wally: It’s okay. It did… really suck at the time, but they were right… I know it must seem strange to you that I wear it after that. It probably should make me sad but, I don’t know, it comforts me. It makes me think that even if something happens and I die young, I can still make something worthwhile. It does remind me of my limitations, but also sort of gives me hope that I might still be able do what I love, if only for a short time.

Ren: [Ren stares at him, a big smile forming.] Have I ever told you that you are really cool?

Wally: [He starts in surprise at her reaction.] N-no! [squirming and blushing under her warm gaze] …I mean, I guess not.

Ren: [matter-o-factly] Well you are. [She scooches her knees up and wraps her arms around them.] …And I think you will get to do what you love for a while, just like everyone else.
Scene 5: [ Ren and Wally are out on Route 118 right outside of Mauville. Tāraki and Kihei are out of their balls. The group walk down the grassy slope and the boardwalk over the dunes. The beach is small and dotted with fishermen. Ren takes off her shoes to go wade in the surf and the rest join her. They look out across the delta at the far shore. Ren glances back towards Mauville and spies Ty and Gabby walking over the dunes. She turns to face them, smiling. ]

Ren: [ gently elbowing Wally ] Hey Wally, look who it is.

[ Wally turns and gasps, too excited to say anything. Gabby catches sight of them. ]

Gabby: [ coming over ] Ren Kosugi! So good to run into you. This must be our lucky day. I saw you made it onto Mere's show again.

Ren: [ walking back out of the water to meet them ] Heh, yeah. I'm not the best at staying out of trouble. [ She notices Wally squirming behind her. ] Oh, uh, this is my friend Wally Scott. He's a trainer too.

Gabby: Nice to meet you, Wally. [ They shake hands ] So is that your gallade?

Wally: Y-yeah.

Gabby: Wait, aren't they usually green on—oh my goodness, it's a shiny, isn't it?

Wally: Yeah.

Gabby: Wow! Do you know in all of our time filming Dual Pulse, this is our first time meeting a trainer with a shiny pokemon?

Wally: Yeah, I'm a really big fan of the show.

Gabby: [ huge smile ] Oh! This really is our lucky day!

[ She elbows Ty, who has been staring at Kihei, to get his attention. Ty smiles at Wally and signs "your gallade is bragging about you". ]

Wally: [ blushing deeply ] Kihei!

[ Kihei says something in Wally's head that makes him blush even harder. He quickly signs "I'm sorry" to Ty before turning his attention back to his pokemon. We can tell from his face that he is probably yelling at Kihei with his mind. Kihei just puts a hand on his trainer's shoulder, looking unaffected. ]

Gabby: Hey, you two wouldn't be interested in a double interview now would you?

[ Wally stifles a squeal. ]

Ren: We'd love to.

Gabby: Excellent! Just give us a moment to set up.

[ Gabby pulls two earpieces out of her pocket and hands them to Ren and Wally. Once everything is
Gabby: Hey there double battle fans! It’s your Dual Pulse host, Gabby! Today Ty and I are out on Route 118 ready to have a rematch with Ren Kosugi. Last time she beat us pretty soundly with her mightyena and manectric. This time she has her trainer friend Wally Scott to help. I'm excited to see who we're up against!

[ Ty pans over to Wally & Ren. ]

Ren: Ready Tāraki?

[ Tāraki nods and steps forward. Kihei joins him on the field. ]

Gabby: A sceptile and a gallade: what a combo and our first ever shiny opponent! I don't know about Ty, but I've got goosebumps. [ Ty gives a thumbs up. ] We've been training hard, but I think Ren and her partner have too. We'll just have to give it our all! [ She steps aside to stand next to Ty and throws her pokeball. ] Go Nell!

[ Ty sends out AC/DC who is now a magneton. Ren signs "They evolved! So cool!" to Ty who signs back "It's awesome!" ]

Ren: Alright Tāraki, try and keep that magneton away from Kihei so he can focus on the loudred.

Tāraki: Roger!

Ty: Spark!

Gabby: Uproar, Nell!

Wally: Brick break!

[ The magneton heads right for Kihei but Tāraki rushes between them in a blur and catches the magneton. His toe claws dig in as he slides back from the combined sound and electric attacks. Kihei crouches behind Tāraki until the sound stops, then leaps over his new partner and brings a rusty glowing arm down on the loudred, which staggers back. ]

Ren: Dual chop!

[ Tāraki lets go of the magneton and delivers a brutal two hit combo with his arms. The magneton reals away. ]

Ty: Flash cannon!

[ The magneton charges while the loudred lets loose another uproar attack. Kihei diverts it away from Tāraki by striking the loudred across the face, taking the brunt of the damage himself. We can see Wally moving in sync with Kihei in the background. Tāraki moves in sync with Ren as he ducks under the bright beam of silver light and closes the distance. He uppercuts the magneton but only lands a glancing blow as it retreats. Kihei lands a final blow on the loudred that makes it fall to its knees. The magneton fires off another flash cannon and this time Tāraki cannot get away. He takes the hit, looking drained. Meanwhile Kihei has taken the opportunity to get behind the magneton. ]

Wally: Psycho cut!

[ Kihei jumps up and slashes at the magneton. AC/DC manages to dodge but is driven in range of Tāraki, who swings around and hits it back towards Kihei with his tail. Kihei punches it into the
sand. Ty and Gabby just stare for a moment.

[quickly composing herself] Wow, folks! I can't remember the last time we were that thoroughly pummeled!

[Kihei and Tāraki high five. Nell limps over to AC/DC and pries him out of the sand. Ty and Gabby comfort their pokemon before withdrawing them.]

Gabby: [stepping into the side of the frame as Ty focuses on Wally and Ren] So, what did you think of that battle?

Ren: [signing along] It was tough. You four have gotten a lot stronger.

Gabby: Always gratifying to hear!

Ty: Thank you.

Wally: [trying to sign] Your opening combo was great. We were lucky Tāraki is such a tank.

Gabby: Well I loved that finishing combo! Brutal and effective! I'm sorry Nell and I were already out for the count. Poor AC/DC! So, have you two double battled before?

Ren: Well, you guys were my first.

Gabby: Oh, true!

Ren: But I've had a little more experience since then. I've doubled battled with a partner and even had a three-on-three triple battle on Mt. Chimney. Lots of growing and learning.

Gabby: Wow! A triple battle! I've heard they're popular in Kalos. Sounds like a lot to handle. How about you, Wally?

Wally: I've double battled before, but never with a partner.

Gabby: So you two have never double battled together? Now I'm doubly impressed! You worked really well together.

Wally: [blushing a little] Thank you.

Ren: [glancing at Wally with a smug smile on her face] Yeah, we were awesome.

[Wally blushes very hard. Ren looks pleased with herself.]

[Ren leans back on Tāraki who puts his claws on her shoulders and rests his head on hers. She talks fondly about how they became partners before Gabby switches focus to Wally and Kihei. Wally is a bit shy and flustered, but manages to tell them about how he got Kihei. Gabby loves the story and asks if Ren can send out Akahata. They wind up reenacting the battle and Wally gets a bit more comfortable as they go. Afterwards, Ty takes off the camera and they all heal up their pokemon and talk for a while. Finally they part ways and Ty and Gabby head back towards Mauville. Gabby signs "I think the kid likes me" to Ty who responds "no way! he was definitely making those doe eyes at me!". They continue to jokingly argue over which of them Wally has a crush on while said person watches them leave, unaware of what they are saying.]

[Ren leans back on Tāraki who puts his claws on her shoulders and rests his head on hers. She talks fondly about how they became partners before Gabby switches focus to Wally and Kihei. Wally is a bit shy and flustered, but manages to tell them about how he got Kihei. Gabby loves the story and asks if Ren can send out Akahata. They wind up reenacting the battle and Wally gets a bit more comfortable as they go. Afterwards, Ty takes off the camera and they all heal up their pokemon and talk for a while. Finally they part ways and Ty and Gabby head back towards Mauville. Gabby signs "I think the kid likes me" to Ty who responds "no way! he was definitely making those doe eyes at me!". They continue to jokingly argue over which of them Wally has a crush on while said person watches them leave, unaware of what they are saying.]

Gabby: Now, Ren, this sceptile was your starter pokemon, is that correct?

Wally: [happy sigh] I can't believe I met my OTP in person. I ship them even harder now.
Ren looks over at Tāraki and Kihei. She surmises that they must be talking with telepathy given how they are looking at each other and how Tāraki's head bobs excitedly along.

Ren: [a little absently] Oh? I thought you had a little thing for Ty.

Wally: It's my OTP, Ren. It's more important than a little crush.

Ren: [chuckling] I see. Well, was that everything you hoped and dreamed?

Wally: YES! It was better even. I could die happy right now... [big contented sigh] But I won't. I've got other dreams to chase.

---

**Scene 6:** [The next day Ren walks out of the stone shop in Mauville City.

Ren: [calling behind her before the door closes] Thanks again!

[She looks forward and sees someone familiar walking out of the food court. She squints at him for a moment because she almost doesn’t recognise him out of uniform.

Ren: Josh! What are you doing here?

[He whips around and his hackles rise as he recognizes her.

Josh: [Rudely] Nothing. What do you want?

Ren: [She cocks her head and narrows her eyes in disbelief and annoyance.] Excuse me?

Josh: What? I'm supposed to pretend we're best friends now that you are an Aqua informant?

Ren: I've saved your neck twice now, asshole. I think the least you could do is be civil.

Josh: [His face tightens and he looks down.] Right. Sorry.

Ren: Better. [She rolls her eyes.] Anyway, you can relax. I'm not really interested in wringing Magma’s secrets out of you at the moment. I just wanted to ask if Tabitha or someone else is going to come after me.

Josh: We don't have anyone tailing you. Maxie thinks it's a waste of resources… Of course, you are pretty high on the enemies list, so if you did run into another Magma member, you'd be in trouble.


Josh: [fidgeting] I didn't tell them about the Archie thing. It's for the other stuff.

Ren: So you're telling me I'm screwed even though they don't think I'm working with Team Aqua. Good to know.

[Josh fidgets some more in the awkward silence as Ren considers if she needs to ask him anything else.

Josh: [trying to be intimidating and failing spectacularly by stuttering right out the gate] J-just stay
away from Magma!

Ren: [knitting her eyebrows in confusion] Excuse me?

Josh: [much more earnest] Please stay away from Magma. You're strong, but Maxie and the admins have years on you. You can't beat them and if you run into them again, they are not going to hold back. [quietly] You and your pokemon could get badly hurt.

Ren: [teasing grin] Josh, do I detect a hint of concern?

Josh: [He crosses his arms, looking away. Gruffy] Take it however you want. [He sighs and glances back at her.] Just stay out of this, okay?

Ren: Believe me, I'm trying. Later.

[She starts to walk away, smiling a little but suddenly her face wrinkles into a disbelieving, disgusted grimace. She stops and turns back to him for a moment.]

Ren: Nice civilian disguise by the way. You look like every dipstick jock I ever knew in high school. Didn’t your mother ever teach you how to dress yourself?

Josh: [His face darkens.] No.

Ren: Do me a favor and pick up a fashion magazine.

[Ren stalks off and Josh rolls his eyes and goes on his way. Ren walks into the food court and almost runs into Wally.]

Ren: Whoops, sorry.

Wally: Who was that?

Ren: Just an acquaintance. Let’s get some food, I’m starving.

---

**Scene 7:** [The next day Panahi, Ren and Wally are on the beach again. The humans are both in swimsuits and we can tell from Wally's posture that he is feeling a little self-conscious. Ren is sitting on the sand finishing inflating a big wartimer inner tube. Once she is finished they both wade out to their waists and Wally gets in the inner tube. Ren and Panahi push him further out until he can no longer touch the bottom. He seems very nervous at first but begins to relax after a while. Ren shows him some strokes and Panahi keeps diving down and coming up with shells and things for them to look at or occasionally fish for herself. They are all having a good time when Wally yelps.]

Ren: What's the matter?

Wally: Something touched me. Ahhhhh! There it is again!

Panahi: [She dips her head under for a moment and pops back up.] It's just a carvanha. But it acting a bit strange. [She ducks under for longer this time.]

Ren: It's okay. Just a fish.
Wally: But why does it—eep!—keep touching me?

Panahi: [surfacing again] There’s a big school of them down there and they seem really agitated. My guess is they’re being hunted. I don’t think anything would come after you two, but we probably don’t want to be caught in the middle of it either.

Ren: Panahi says we should head back in for a bit.

Wally: [still nervous] O-okay.

They all start swimming for shore. Just behind them the water starts boiling with carvansha. A sharpedo shoots out of the water, catching a carvansha in its mouth and crashes back down. Suddenly Wally’s inner tube starts rocketing towards shore as Wally hangs on for dear life. Ren swims as fast as she can but is quickly left behind. Panahi takes off and skims over the water to keep up with him. As Wally nears the shore, his inner tube deflates. He thrashes around for a moment but finds his footing and stands up in the knee-high surf. He grasps the deflated float and starts hauling it out of the water. A carvansha falls out of it and plops back into the water as Ren comes charging up.

Ren: Are you okay?!

Wally: [He pulls his inhaler out of a plastic bag in his pocket and takes a deep breath.] Y-yeah. Poor thing was just trying to get away from—

The carvansha swims behind his legs as a dark shape charges towards them. Panahi swoops past and catches the sharpedo across the face with steel wing. It turns aside and heads back out for deeper water. Ren grabs the frightened carvansha as they retreat onto the dry sand. It takes a few gasping breaths but does not try to get away. Panahi fills her throat pouch with water and flutters over to them. Ren crouches so that she can pour it over carvansha. The frightened pokemon manages to hold the water around itself, gradually forming a small sphere. Ren slowly lets go and it is able to stay floating a few inches off the sand. It dips its head to Panahi before turning to face Wally and Ren who have collapsed on the sand.

Panahi: She’s sorry about the float.

Ren: She says sorry about popping your float.

Wally: [taking another deep breath from his inhaler] It’s okay.

Panahi: Can she rest with us for a bit?

Ren: Sure.

The carvansha talks to Panahi as Ren digs up her backpack and things that she buried on the beach in a plastic bag. She fishes out her canteen and takes a swig before passing it to Wally.

Ren: Sorry about that.

Wally: Don’t be. It was mostly fun. I’m okay.

Panahi: Hey Ren, this carvansha wants to be your pokemon.

Ren: What? I don’t think—

Panahi: I told her about you not being a trainer forever. That’s why she’s interested. She says being a
full time battler sounds like too much work, but part time would suit her fine. She'd like to see a little bit of the world. And if she evolves she wouldn't mind carrying you across the water.

Ren: …Well that is sort of tempting. There is a ton of water in this region… [ Ren pulls out a pokeball, clearly wavering. ] I guess as long as she's okay with it not being permanent…

[ The carvanha darts forward and hits the button. She flows into the ball and Ren stares at it. ]

Wally: Hey, did you just catch that carvanha?

Ren: Chikusho! Fucking shit! Why did I do that?

Wally: Uh, are you okay?

Ren: [ eyes wild ] Hm? Yeah. I'm fine.

Wally: Let me rephrase that: you are clearly not okay. What's wrong?

Ren: It's just—I'll be fine—I—[ She groans, burying her head in her hands. ] It—it's a lot to explain.

Wally: If you want to talk, I'll listen, but you don't have to tell me.

Ren: Thank you…

Wally: Whatever it is, I'm sure you'll figure it out.

Ren: I hope so.

---

Scene 8: [ Wally, Ren and their pokemon are all assembled in the Mauville pal park. The carvanha is floating lazily in her water ball next to Ren while everyone gathers around. Ren looks uncomfortable but composes herself. She notices that Ao and Mele are sitting next to each other, which is unusual although Akahata and Hauoro are on either side of them as always. ]

Ren: Okay, so everyone, this is Roma. She's going to be traveling and training with us for a while. She's not a big battler, just sort of along for the ride, but she promised to help with a few things.

Hauoro: [ turning his huge ears towards the carvanha ] What am I looking at?

Mele: It's a fish-like pokemon. It's floating in a ball of water.

Hauoro: Oooh, that explains the distortion. I thought I was losing it.

Roma: [ She flicks her fins lazily at the assembled crowd in greeting. ] Hmm, land creatures sure are strange.

Putenga: Says the thing that looks like a ball with a bunch of spikes coming out of it.

[ Ren notices the water around Roma distorting in the direction of Kata who is grinning, brow knit in concentration. ]

Ren: [ pointedly at Kata ] And she's not very good at aquakinesis yet, so please be careful.
[ The spoink stops tugging at the water sphere, affecting innocence. Wheta gives her a shove. ]

Ren: Oh, and for those of you that don't know, this is my friend Wally and his pokemon: Kihei, Kana, Aroha and Atiru.

[ The pokemon all start greeting each other. Ren heaves a big sigh and settles down in the grass. She rifles through her bag and pulls out the goggles Kai gave her, turning them over in her hands. Wally sits down cross legged a little ways away from her and Aroha climbs into his lap. Hauoro comes up to them. ]

Hauoro: I'm sorry I was a little rough on you in our last battle.

Aroha: That's okay. A battle's a battle.

Hauoro: Well, you could probably beat me now. I'm out of practice these days.

Aroha: [ grinning ] I'm sure I could! I've gotten a lot stronger!

[ Kihei smiles at this, then goes over and taps Tāraki on the shoulder. He asks him some question about battling evidently because Tāraki looks excited and hops out of the group so that he has more room. He starts demonstrating leaf blade techniques that Kihei copies with psycho cut. Meanwhile, Kana, who is now a delcatty, stretches pointedly in front of Mele, showing off her new form. The skitty looks down, but then Ao stands up next to him. She stretches lazily, first in downward dog, moving into cobra and finally arching her back. She edges up to her full height, glossy fur shimmering in the sun. She then bows her head and gives Mele a big, wet lick up the side of his face and ear. Kana raises her eyebrows, face going from smug to genuinely and thoroughly impressed. Mele blushes deeply. Akahata pretends not to notice this interaction, but we can see her watching out of the corner of her eye. Her lip curves upward in the ghost of a smile. On her back, Ikki giggles. Close by, Atiru lands next to Māia. ]

Atiru: So I've heard through the jade vine that you know a move so powerful that it can fell any opponent in one hit. Is that true?

Māia: Almost any opponent.

[ Atiru clucks doubtfully, but Māia does not react. The swablu seems to view this as a sign that the taillow is bluffing.]

Atiru: [ face turning sly ] Would you mind showing me this move?

Māia: [ slight annoyance ] Sure.

[ Much to Atiru's surprise and consternation, Māia flits away from the group and plants herself on the ground. Atiru follows, not knowing what to think. Māia prepares herself, wrists pointed forward like arrows, claws digging into the turf and chest swelling to full capacity. She opens her beak wide and lets loose. The space in front of her glimmers in concentric rings as the deafening double boom shakes the air. A rock a few feet in front of her cracks. Atiru gapes as Māia shuffles her wings, smoothing herself back out. At the edge of the crowd, Kōtai rubs his ears. He paces over to Panahi, who is shaking the ringing out of her own ears. ]

Kōtai: How's our girl?

Panahi: [ sighing ] Not too good, I'm afraid. She's really torn up about the whole thing and not coping too well.
Kōtai: Hhmmm.

[ Pan out as they continue talking. Wally picks up Aroha and puts her down in front of him before getting up. She squares off with Hauoro, pressing her buds against his ears to see who is stronger. Wally plops down next to Ren, who hasn't stopped staring at the goggles. ]

Wally: I assume you haven't told your parents, but does Kai know what's going on with you?

Ren: [ a little absently ] Yeah, why?

Wally: [ delicately ] Well, if I was going through a tough time, I'd want to be around someone who knew what I was going through. Maybe they could help. [ Ren considers this quietly for a moment. ] So you wanna go up to the desert instead?

Ren: [ surprise ] Eeh?

Wally: You've been staring at those goggles for a while now.

Ren: But you can't go to the desert.

Wally: That's okay.

Ren: No it's not. I'm not gonna ditch you.

Wally: This has already been a really awesome weekend trip to Mauville. I even got to battle Ty and Gabby. I don't mind leaving it there.

Ren: But—

Wally: I know we had other plans, but we can go to Fortree some other time. Listen: I agreed to the trip cuz I was super excited, but the truth is I should probably go back to my aunt and uncle's for a while and get a little stronger. Fortree is a lot of stairs and humidity for me. Besides, now that Kihei is a gallade I should really think about taking on your dad's gym.

Ren: Are you sure? Because if you still want to—

Wally: I'm sure. And you should take care of yourself, Ren. Okay?


[ She gives him a side hug, which he is a bit too shy to return. She stows her goggles and gets up. ]

Ren: [ calling out to her pokemon ] Mele, Hauoro, Kata, Kōtai, Wheta! [ once she has their attention ] I feel like I've been neglecting your training. I want you five to come out with me for a while. We'll bring Roma along too.

Kōtai: We headed north, luv?

Ren: Yeah.

Panahi: [ quietly to Kōtai ] You take care of my girl now.

Kōtai: [ quietly back ] Aye, ma’am.
Scene 9: [ Two days later Ren and Kōtai are exploring the desert, walking along the crest of a dune. It looks to be late morning, but it is a bit hard to tell with the sand blowing around. Ren has goggles and a mask on to protect her from the elements. Kōtai doesn’t need such protection, but he doesn’t look happy. ]

Ren: Hey, buddy, you doing alright?

Kōtai: Fine, fine. I just don’t like sand.

Ren: [ amused and disbelieving ] What?

Kōtai: Yeah, yeah. I’m a sandshrew who doesn’t like sand. Go ahead and yuck it up.

Ren: [ giggling ] How can that be?

Kōtai: Tons of reasons, but mostly cuz it’s nothing like home. Volcanic soil is soft and rich and good for something. This stuff? [ He picks some up and lets it slip through his claws with a disgusted grunt. ]

Ren: [ still giggling ] I’m sorry. That’s rough, buddy. [ She snorts at her own joke and he rolls his eyes. She composes herself. ] It’s not my favorite either, to be honest.

[ They make their way down the side of the dune into a valley and the wind starts to die. By the time they reach the bottom, the air has cleared. Ren puts her goggles on top of her head and pulls her mask off. She pats the sand off her clothes and Kōtai shakes himself out. Ren pulls out her nav and consults it. ]

Kōtai: We near the ruins yet?

Ren: Getting pretty close, yeah.

Kōtai: You think he’ll be there?

Ren: Should be, or somewhere nearby at least. He was there in his last text. If we don’t find him before lunch, I’ll just text him and spoil the surprise.

[ They continue to walk down the valley when a rather large baltoy suddenly appears in front of them. Ren has no idea what it is so she pulls out her pokedex and looks it up. ]


Kōtai: Always am, luv.

[ He asks it for a battle and it spins nervously. He nods back at Ren. ]

Ren: Alright, I think this is the perfect opportunity to try out your new move. Shadow claw!

[ Kōtai runs forward, jumps up and swipes at the baltoy with a glowing lavender paw. The baltoy reels back from the attack, emitting a horrible shriek. ]

Ren: Let’s not kill it. Fury swipes should do.

[ Kōtai takes a pace forward but stops, cocking his head as the baltoy starts to glow. ]
Ren: [ to herself ] What’s it doing?

[ The baltoy gets brighter and brighter and true fear spreads across Kōtai’s face. He whips around and runs at the still puzzled Ren. ]

Kōtai: Ren get down!

[ She has no time to process his command before he is leaping for her chest. As he sails through the air, he also starts to glow and a split second later the baltoy explodes with a deafening boom. Kōtai, now a sandslash, slams into Ren with the added force of the blast, sending them both careening back. Fire and hot sand and burning bits of rock and clay shower them, burning and slicing up the pair. Ren’s chest is protected by Kōtai, but the rest of them takes a lashing. They slam into the ground so hard that they bounce and skid. Dust and sand engulf the scene and plume upward into the air. After a while, the dust settles. The charred shell of the baltoy rests half buried in the sand, seemingly lifeless. Ren’s right cheek is resting against the sand. The other half of her face is red with burns and scratches. Her hair and several spots on her clothes are smoldering. Kōtai lies limply on her chest, his back scales similarly scored, burnt and smouldering. It is difficult to make out the full extent of the damage because of the sand and debris covering them. Our pair does not get up. Zoom out as Kai and Jay, masked and goggled, crest the rise and take in the scene. ]

Kai: Holy shit!

[ They scramble down the dune to the prone figures of Ren and Kōtai. ]

Kai: [ as he approaches ] Hey! Are you okay?

[ There is no response and Kai pulls off his mask and goggles as he runs the last few feet to them. ]

Kai: Ren!? Holyshit, Ren are you okay?! Talk to me!

[ Jay pulls off her own mask and goggles and looks them over. ]

Jay: They’re breathing.

Kai: Ren, can you hear me? [ No response. There is blood trickling out of one ear. He carefully touches her face, which is covered in cuts and burns. ] You have to wake up, Ren. You have to stay conscious. Jay, lift her sandslash off.

[ Jay gently and cautiously lifts Kōtai and lowers him to the ground next to Ren. The weight having been removed, Ren’s chest begins to heave. ]

Kai: [ grabbing her arm and shaking it ] Ren! You have to wake up Ren! [ shaking harder ] Come on! Wake up!

[ Ren’s eyes blink open. ]

Kai: Hey! There she is! Can you hear me?

Ren: [ croaking ] Kai?

Kai: [ tearing up a little with relief ] Yeah. Hey. What are you doing out here?

[ Ren’s eyes grow wider as he continues to talk. She stares at his lips moving, distress mounting. She can’t hear anything he is saying. Suddenly cold panic grips her features. ]

Ren: [ hands scrambling over her chest ] Kōtai? [ snapping upwards, sand and debris flying off her,
voice shrill with panic | Kōtai!

Kai: [ hands flying to push her shoulders back down ] Whoa!

[ She screams in pain as he makes contact and he pulls his hand away from the wound but hovers over her waving his hands. ]

Kai: D-don't! You have to stay down! You're hurt!

[ She is nearly hyperventilating, eyes blown wide. Her arms scramble around and she looks like she is preparing to lurch up again. ]

Ren: Kōtai! Where is he?!

Kai: He's here! He's okay! He's right here! [ He puts her hand on Kōtai's claws. She grasps at them desperately. ] Don't move! He's okay! Just stay still.

[ She continues to panic until Kōtai moves. He heaves himself forward and pushes his head into her hand. Kōtai groans and exhales against her palm. She keeps her hand there, feeling his breathing, and hers starts to calm. ]

Kai: That’s it. Just hold still, both of you. I’m going to get you some help. [ He pulls out his nav and dials the emergency number. There is a slight pause as the operator talks. ] There was an explosion and my friend and her sandslash were hurt… On Route 111, in the desert about a mile south of the ruins… Thank you… She’s conscious but barely… I’ve tried but I don’t think she can hear me… Okay… A lot of burns and lacerations… No, I don’t want to move her. I don’t know how hard she fell… Yeah, we both have pokemon. We should be safe… Okay, yeah. [ Ren closes her eyes. Kai moves around to her other side and grabs her hand. Her eyes flutter open again. ] You have to stay with me, Ren. Just stay with me. They’re coming. They’ll be here soon. [ Her eyes start to drift shut again. ] You can’t sleep, Ren! [ He clutches her hand tighter in his and brushes the burnt hair away from her face with the other. Her eyes open slowly and she blinks owlishly, unable to focus. ] I know you’re tired, but you have to stay awake. [ cupping her face. ] Look at me. [ Her eyes shift to him. ] There. You are so tough, you know that? Just keep looking at me, okay? Stay with me.

[ Pan out as two flygon wearing medical harnesses arrive on the scene. The paramedics and their pokemon hop off just as the flygons touch down. They quickly assess Ren and Kōtai’s condition. An abra lifts Ren and then Kōtai with telekinesis onto special stretchers. The stretchers are re-affixed to the flygons and the paramedics climb back aboard. Kai recalls Jay and is pulled aboard Kōtai’s flygon as Ren’s takes off. They both fly south towards Mauville. ]

---

**Scene 10:** [ Ren wakes in a small, dim and sparsely decorated room. There is a large window on one side, but the curtains are drawn. She realizes that she cannot see out of her left eye and lifts a hand up to her face, finding the left side covered in bandages. She realizes she is in the hospital and bits and pieces of what happened come back to her: the explosion in the desert, Kōtai slamming into her chest, Kai's face hovering over her, air rushing over her burning skin, doctors and nurses talking to her and about her, an IV being put in her arm, glimpses of her parents and her pokemon. But there is no sound to go along with these images, just the boom ringing over and over and then the quiet. Ren sits up a little, whole body aching. She opens her mouth and wets her lips. She hesitates, afraid that she won't hear anything. ]
Ren: [ *croaking* ] Kōtai?

[ *There is a rustling to her right and a dark shape moves on the small cot. There is a low groan as it repositions itself.* ]

Kōtai: Here, luv.

[ *She lets out a big sigh of relief and flops back against her backrest. She just breathe quietly for a minute and then reaches for Kōtai. Their beds are pushed up against each other so he is able to place his claws in her hand.* ]

Ren: [ *voice still very rough and shaky* ] Are you okay?

Kōtai: Mhmm. Mine's a tough species. My scales took a lashing, but I'll be fine. Guess I didn't have to worry about my scars going away when I evolved.

Ren: Y-you evolved to protect me.

Kōtai: Aye. Now Tāraki's got to share the glory with me.

Ren: You haven't even been my pokemon that long. Thank you.

Kōtai: No, luv, thank you. You gave me a second chance long after anyone else would, after even I had given up. And I evolved, so you already held up your end of the bargain.

Ren: But I didn't do that. You did and you did it for me.

Kōtai: I did it with you, luv. You think if I could've pulled off a snap evolution like that on my own I would still have been a sandshrew? No, I felt your energy flow into me. We protected each other. [ *She raises no objection, but he can tell that she wants to.* ] Don't you even think about blaming yourself now. The wild's a dangerous place. Besides, I'm old enough to know what's worth the risk. The important thing is we're both alive.

[ *She squeezes his claws and they both just lay quiet for a moment. A nurse comes in and switches on the light.* ]

Nurse: Hello there, Ren. You're awake.

Ren: Yes ma'am.

[ *The nurse grabs a rolling stool from the corner and wheels it to the end of Ren's bed before plopping down.* ]

Nurse: How are you feeling?

Ren: Okay, I guess. A little strange. I can't feel much actually.

Nurse: That's good. Or better than the alternative anyway. You seem more conscious and you can hear me, which is great.

Ren: M-my—

Nurse: Your sandslash is doing fine. His scales are damaged, but he sustained no major injuries. All he needs is some bedrest. You, on the other hand, need a little more work. I'm here to change your bandages. I'll start with your legs and work my way up, alright?
Ren: Sure.

[ *Ren can hear the nurse prepping and feel when she starts to work, but can't see much of what's happening.* ]

Nurse: I want you to bend your knee a bit now. Okay, great. I'm glad you're awake. Makes my job so much easier!

Ren: Hmm. Were my parents here or…?

Nurse: Yes, there were here. They went out to lunch just a little while ago. They'll be back soon. Now straighten out. That's good. [ *She gently lays Ren's leg back out and finishes affixing the bandage.* ] And your friend that brought you in was here. At first he wouldn't leave until your parents got here and even then we had to kick him out. [ *She moves on to the other leg, rotating Kōtai's bed away enough to give herself room.* ] All of your pokemon visited too I'll have you know. And you have so many! It was a regular zoo in here. You must really work hard to care for them all so well.

Ren: I try. I don't know how well I manage.

Nurse: Well I do! They all look very healthy and care about you a lot. You must be a wonderful trainer. Bend your knee a bit. Thank you.

[ *The nurse continues to make small talk as she works, trying to distract Ren from the uncomfortable process. She finishes with Ren's arms and shoulders before carefully peeling the bandage off of her face.* ]

Ren: How's it look?

Nurse: Better. The swelling has gone down a bit. Try opening your eye for me. [ *Ren opens her burnt eyelid slowly.* ] There. Can you see alright?

Ren: [ *Her vision is blurry for a moment, but clears as she blinks.* ] Yeah, I think so.

Nurse: Good. I'll make the new one so it doesn't cover your eye.

[ *Just then the door opens and Ren's parents, Tāraki and Kenta enter.* ]

Asuka: Oh, there's my girl!

[ *She comes over to Ren's side. Ren can see that her face is pained under the smile and concludes that the burns on her face must be pretty bad.* ]

Nurse: Yep, she's pretty alert now.

Asuka: How are you?

Ren: Tired, but okay, I guess. Whatever drugs they have me on are great.

[ *Senri chuckles and walks over to stand by his wife while the two pokemon stop at the end of the bed.* ]

Senri: So you couldn't let your old man have the coolest scar, huh?

Asuka: Senri!
Ren: That's right. I thought, why just the arm when I could mark up everything that isn't my torso.

Asuka: You two are terrible.

Ren: Join us, okasan. [ Asuka groans. ] You could get a super tasteful one, like on your calf maybe.

Asuka: [ to the nurse ] You see what I have to deal with?

[ The nurse laughs. Ren smirks at her father and he grins back, but she sees his expression falter for a moment. Her own face begins to fall. ]

Kenta: Hey there, little cub. You took quite a beating.

Ren: [ smiling brightly ] Hi, Kenta! Yeah, you know me: always picking the wrong fight.

Senri: [ dramatic ] Oh, no! I forgot you can understand him now.

Ren: Why “oh no”? You don’t think it’s cool?

Senri: No, it’s just that he knows all of my secrets .

Ren: Ooooh! I never even thought of that! Hey Kenta, how awkward and scrawny was otasan as a teenager?

Kenta: Welllll, he looked just like a bellsprout. He had this big head on top of this talllll gangly body. And he would trip all the time, sometimes over nothing at all. But what he was most embarrassed about was his—

Senri: [ snapping Kenta’s mouth shut with his hands ] Okay! That’s quite enough from you.

[ Ren giggles a little but soon stops from the discomfort. The nurse finishes putting a new bandage over Ren’s face. ]

Nurse: There you are. How’s that feel.

Ren: Pretty good. Thank you.

Nurse: No problem. I have to go see my next patient now, but if you need anything at all, just press the call button. Seriously, if you need me to kick out your parents so you can sleep, I got you.

[ She gets up off her stool and clears her supplies away before taking off her gloves. She smiles and waves as she walks to the door. Everyone waves back. She smiles warmly, then narrows her eyes at Ren’s visitors and makes an “I’m watching you” gesture before slipping off down the hall. ]

Ren: I like her. [ She can’t help but yawn, though it hurts her face. ]

Asuka: Maybe we should leave you to rest, Ren-chan.

Senri: We’ll see you when you wake up, kiddo.

Ren: Okay.

[ Ren reaches out for Kōtai and her mother retreats to the end of the bed as she pushes Kōtai’s cot back up against Ren’s. Ren closes her eyes and immediately starts to drift off. Her parents watch her for a while and Senri’s eyes begin to tear up. He sniffs quietly. ]
Asuka: [ quietly ] Oh Senri… [ He sniffs louder, tears spilling over. ] Come on now. You’ll wake her.

Asuka puts an arm around her husband and guides him out of the room. Kenta follows them out and closes the door. Outside in the hall, Asuka hugs her crying husband as she starts to tear up herself. Kenta wraps his big bear arms around them. Inside Ren’s room, Tāraki drags a cushion out of the corner over to Ren’s bed, then turns off the light. He settles down next to Ren. Her eyes open and he places his head on the bed next to her.

Ren: Hey, tiger.

Tāraki: Hey, Ren.

Ren: Tāraki, did he— was otosan crying just now?

Tāraki: Yeah. [ Ren stares up at the ceiling. ] It’s been tough on all of us, seeing you so hurt.

[ Ren puts her hand on Tāraki’s head and he nuzzles her. Kōtai is already snoring softly on the other side of her. She closes her eyes again and falls asleep. ]

---

**Scene 11:** [ Ren has lots of visitors over the next few days. Her mother stays in Mauville while her father works in the mornings and visits in the evenings. Tāraki and Kōtai stay with her all of the time while the rest of her pokemon visit in pairs. Akahata naps on the end of the bed while Ikki flits around talking to them or making bubbles for their entertainment. Panahi and Māia perch on the end of the bed and talk to her, although Panahi dominates the conversation with gossip etc. Ao struggles not to short circuit everything electrical in the room while Putenga shows off a move she’s been working on. Mele and Hauoro perform a little routine they put together. Wheta babysits Kata and Roma who show Ren the aquakinesis they have been practicing. Kai stops in frequently, assuring Ren that he has plenty of research to do nearby. Wally even visits for a while and he gives her some hospital tips. Doctors and nurses perform vision and hearing tests. Her vision is fine. The hearing in her right ear is not as good as it used to be but not bad. The left ear needs an implant because it was completely shot, but with the implant she can hear perfectly. Ren sees the scars on her limbs whenever they are redressed, but not her face. Ren asks the nurse about letting her look at her own face and is simply told she will see it in due time. One night, after everyone has gone and her pokemon are sound asleep, Ren gets up and pads silently over to the bathroom. She closes the door as quietly as she can and flips on the light. She examines the uncovered right side of her face, which bears only the faint remnants of a few scrapes and scratches, already barely visible. She stares at her left eye, around which she can see the beginnings of angry pink flesh. She feels around the top of the bandage and finds the end of the tape binding it in place with her fingers. She unwraps it slowly and carefully, winding the tape around her right palm to make sure it doesn’t bunch. Once that is done, she peels the loose top edge of the gel pad down until her entire face is exposed. She flinches at what she sees and looks away for a moment. She takes a deep breath, eyes screwed shut before straightening back up and looking into the mirror once more. The burned half of her face is red and pink and even orangey in some places. The skin, if it can still be called that, is wrinkled and puckered. She reaches up towards the glass, as if to try and touch her reflection before remembering that the face in the mirror is indeed her own. She trails her fingers lightly over the scarred skin, wincing slightly. She removes her hand and turns her face this way and that to see it all clearly. The scaring goes from around her eye to her ear and down her neck where they connect to the one on her shoulder. The doctors have shaved part of her head to treat the injuries that tunneled into her
hairline. Tears well in her eyes and she takes a long shaky breath, pushing them back. She touches the marks one last time as if to confirm that they are real before composing herself and starting to unwind the tape from her hand. She re-affixes the bandage before turning out the light.

Scene 12: [ A week later, Ren is sitting up in her bed talking to Kai, who is sitting in a chair by the right side of her bed. Kōtai’s bed is gone but there are two bean bags in the corner for Tāraki and Kōtai to sleep on. Most of Ren’s bandages have been removed, including the ones on her face and neck, leaving the burns exposed. A thin white sheet covers her lower half while her upper half is only covered by a tank top. Her left arm is more thoroughly burned than her right and her childhood scar is still plainly visible. Most of the left side of her head has been shaved while the rest of her long hair has been brushed to the right. The red burns stand out especially bright against her pale scalp. To his credit, Kai does not avoid looking at her or stare at the burns, keeping his focus fairly neutral although he favors the "good" side of her face as they talk. ]

Ren: [ into the lull ] Thank you again for visiting so much.

Kai: Hey, it's the least I could do.

Ren: What is that supposed to mean? You can't possibly feel, I don't know, guilty about this? It was just one of those freak things.

Kai: No, I know. I guess I just feel like I haven't been the best friend to you.

Ren: You just saved my life, dude. I'm pretty sure that gets you infinite friendship points.

Kai: Okay, but you are always doing really nice things for me and you've been there for me no matter what crazy or boring stuff was going on. I haven't really done the same for you. I could have went to Fortree with you guys. I just… [ He looks down, hands fidgeting. ]

Ren: You have nothing to feel bad about, dude. Seriously. You've been a really good friend and you have been there for me almost every time I really needed help. You were really great about the whole tragic backstory thing, even though I was a total jerk to you.

Kai: [ looking back up at her ] You weren't a total jerk.

Ren: No, I pretty much was and not just to you either.

Kai: Alright, but hear me out. I've been really awkward and bad about keeping in touch and even been avoiding you sometimes. [ He looks away again ] And it's not really a personality thing and it's not that I don't like you, just the opposite… [ bushing ] I've had a crush on you, for a long while now, and I didn't say anything because I didn't know how to deal with my feelings. Especially since I was pretty sure you didn't have a crush on me and I was scared to lose you…

Ren: [ She giggles just a little, unable to help it, then quickly stifles herself with a hand. ] I'm sorry, [ removing her hand ] it's just, I knew and I could have said something too, but I didn't because I was afraid it would drive you away. We're such a pair.

Kai: [ glancing back at her ] Y-yeah… I guess I was pretty obvious then, huh?

Ren: Wellll … yes. But to be fair, I was super oblivious. I didn't notice until that dinner in Lavaridge
and then my first instinct was to get drunk to avoid the awkwardness. Total amateur hour.

Kai: Oh, I guess I just figured maybe you liked getting drunk? I don’t know. [looking down at his hands again] I was too nervous to really analyze it.

Ren: I like drinking, just not that much. That went well past tipsy and right into stupid. [She chuckles, then clears her throat, going a little pink herself.] But anyway, so yeah, I don’t, um, like you that way. [He nods.] but if it’s any consolation it's got everything to do with me and not you. I’ve only had one crush ever and it's pretty embarrassing. Seriously, you are really cute and sweet and smart and you can totally do better than this idiot [jerking both thumbs at herself].

Kai: [He blushes deeply, giving a strained chuckle.] That does make me feel a teensy bit better, yeah.

Ren: Good, good.

[They both sit there in silence for a few tense moments, blushing and not looking at one another.]

Kai: …So, do you think… we could still be friends? I mean, if it doesn’t bother you too much?

Ren: [too loud] Yes! [clamping her hand over her mouth] Oh, geez. [She clears her throat.] Absolutely, dude. I just didn’t want to say anything first cause I didn’t want to pressure you into something that might just make you miserable. Are you sure you’ll be okay?

Kai: [his blush is calming down a bit] Yeah, I think so. No offense, but I don’t think I’ll spend the rest of my life pining over you [She laughs.] Or waiting in the vain hope that there will suddenly be something there that isn’t. [blushing very hard again] Since we’re being super honest, I won’t spare you and say that I don’t have it pretty bad at the moment… But I like being friends with you, really a lot. I haven’t had too many friends and I don’t want to screw it up, so I’ll try and get over you.

Ren: [She cracks a huge if lopsided smile since the left half of her face is still stiff.] You really are the sweetest ever, dude! And take it from someone who has had a lot of friends, you’re doing a really good job so far. [He blushes even harder and squirms a little in his seat.] …Can I get a hug, that is, if—

Kai: [getting up] Of course, but won’t that hurt?

Ren: Come here.

[They hug, though a bit gingerly on his part. She grins through the discomfort, still giddy with relief. Kai’s furious blush begins to calm a bit. The hug lingers a little long before Ren is finally ready to let go. Kai sits back down in his chair.]

Ren: [breaking the silence] Good talk.

Kai: Yeah, good talk.

Ren: Go us.

Kai: [He clears his throat.] Now that that’s out of the way, how are you doing? I notice they took you off the drip.

Ren: They switched me to topical painkillers. It’s not comfortable, but it’s not too bad either. I could always feel it, even with the morphine or whatever it was. I guess it was more like the drugs made me not care? I don’t know. Now I care but it doesn’t hurt too bad so it’s not all that hard to ignore.
Kai: I think maybe you are just super tough.

Ren: I’ll take that as a compliment.

Kai: You should. How are you feeling about it though?

Ren: Well, I’m glad I’m not more vain, but on the other hand there goes my modeling contract.

Kai: …I still think you’re beautiful.

Ren: Awwww, dude! [She giggles as his face gets redder again.]

Kai: [He coughs into his hand to collect himself.] I’m sorry. I probably shouldn’t say stuff like that, huh?

Ren: No, it’s okay. [Kai fidgets a bit.] Listen, I’ll cut you a deal. You can make a pass at me every once in awhile if I get to be affectionate sometimes.

Kai: [He ponders this for a moment.] Sounds fair.

Ren: Great! cuz that was gonna be super difficult for me. I’m a little on the touchy-feely side.

Kai: I noticed.

Ren: [playful] What’s that supposed to mean?

Kai: It means you were already hugging me and stuff after we’d known each other for like a week.

Ren: Whelp, I can’t deny that.

Kai: At first I thought maybe that was just normal where you’re from.

Ren: Nope. Just the opposite. It’s definitely a me thing. My friends back in Johto used to tease me about it. Anyway, I think that this will be okay, and if it ever isn’t, we’ll just talk about it cuz we can talk about things. I mean, look at all the awkward things we just talked about.

Kai: True, true.

Ren: Look at us being mature adults… Maybe I should stop patting myself on the back.

Kai: Maybe.

[They both chuckle.]

Kai: But about the scars, I think it makes you look really unique actually. Besides, if you beat the league, they’ll slap your face on everything no matter what.

Ren: Too true. I’ll have to consider it.

Kai: [laughing] I can see the headlines now: Ren Kosugi becomes Hoenn League Champion to kickstart modeling career!

[They both laugh themselves hoarse. Ren a little less hard because of her injuries.]

Ren: Well, it did work for Diantha.

Kai: Wasn’t she a moviestar first?
Ren: Yeah, I think you’re right. Anyway, I see you sneakily trying to get me to stay in the training business.

Kai: Is it working?

Ren: Maybe. I’ll have to get back to you on that one.

Chapter End Notes

The explosion in this chapter was inspired by actual in-game events and is the reason I ended up using my sandslash. After the Petalburg Gym I realized the game had sort of made me skip the desert and some other stuff and I decided to take some of my unused babies and go for a little jaunt to fill in the gaps in my adventure. I put my sandshrew in front because he only needed one level to evolve and waltzed into the desert full of confidence. My first encounter was a lv.33 baltoy. Kotai was a little under leveled but he had shadow claw, so I went for it. It used self-destruct immediately and amazingly Kotai survived and evolved right then and there. I still can't believe it. It was crazy. It was too good not to use and I think I found a good way to integrate it. I promise all of this is not just to make Ren suffer. It's gonna be important.

Character Chart:

HUMANS:
Ren Kosugi, our protagonist
Kai Birch, Ren's friend who likes science
Wally Scott, Ren's other friend who likes the internet
Asuka Kosugi, Ren's mother and a writer
Senri Kosugi, Ren's father and leader of the Petalburg Gym
Gabby, host of the BuzzNav show *Dual Pulse*
Ty, deaf cameraman for the BuzzNav show *Dual Pulse*

TEAM REN:
Tāraki the Sceptile
Akahata the Mightyena
Ikki the Masquerain
Panahi the Pelipper
Maia the Taillow
Putenga the Breloom
Mele the Skitty
Hauoro the Whismur
Ao the Manectric
Kata the Spoink
Kōtai the Sandslash
Wheta the Nuzleaf
Roma the Carvanha

TEAM KAI:
Jay, the Blaziken
Dusty, the Breloom
Makō, the Wailmer

TEAM WALLY:
Kihei, the shiny Gallade
Kana, the Delcatty
Aroha, the Budew
Atiru, the Swablu

OTHER POKEMON:
Nell, Gabby's Loudred
AC/DC, Ty's Magneton
Kenta, Senri's Ursaring and starter pokemon
Paint It Black

Chapter Summary

In which Ren tries to piece her life back together.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Scene 1:** [A week later Ren has been released from the hospital. She and Kai are in the Mauville food court getting lunch. Ren is eating like a horse because she can finally get whatever she wants, namely takoyaki, chicken curry and a huge bowl of ramen. Kai is tucking into his own bowl of ramen in solidarity.]

Kai: [coming up for air] So I've been thinking that we should travel together, at least for a little while.

Ren: [between slurps] I like it. Let's do it.

Kai: Okay, great. And I also think you should pick the destination. Seriously, anywhere you want to go is fine.

Ren: [looking up] Are you sure? I don't want to screw up your research.

[Ren continues eating her various dishes as he talks, pausing only to answer.]

Kai: Absolutely. I had a whole schedule worked out, but I keep having to change it because of my own detours and it doesn't really matter all that much anyway. My dad is not gonna pull my funding just because I didn't strictly adhere to my proposal. He knows I've been getting tons of good data and I'm sure I could work wherever we go. That's the beauty of my project.

Ren: [She takes a swig of her drink and puts it down.] Okay then, I want to go back to the desert.

Kai: What?

Ren: [She puts her hand over her mouth because she is chewing some curry] You know, the desert. [She swallows.] I didn't get to see that much of it before this [gesturing vaguely at her scarred left side] happened and I want to see the ruins and stuff.

Kai: Okay, wow—I just—that's the very last place in Hoenn I thought you'd pick.

Ren: I live for that shock factor. It sustains me. [She takes another huge slurp of her ramen and swallows it down.] Also noodles.

Kai: You seriously aren't scared to go back out there after what happened? And that's not a criticism of you. I'd be terrified of the place. I'd never be able to look sand in the eye again.

Ren: [She sits up straight and lays down her chopsticks.] To be honest, I think it does scare me a little and it will probably be worse when we actually get out there. But that's why I want to do it.
Kai: …You don't have to prove anything to anyone, you know.

Ren: This isn't about that. I've actually thought about it a lot and I even talked to Kōtai about it. The last time something traumatic happened to me, I ran away from it. I was in denial for a while, but as far as I can tell that strategy has gone very poorly for me. It's done nothing but make me feel empty and miserable and hurt other people.

Kai: Maybe this is going to the other extreme. It's okay to give yourself a little space.

Ren: I know, but I think I'll be alright. We'll probably run into baltoys because they're pretty common but I'll have my pokemon with me and you'll be there… The other thing didn't make me scared of totodiles or pokemon in general… it just… made me afraid of myself a little. And this one was less my fault. I gauged the situation poorly because I was out of my element, but there was no real way for me to know it would have explosion and be willing to use it. Maybe I don't feel guilty because I think I've already been punished appropriately? I don't know. Anyway, it's a different situation. And it's not like I can really pretend that nothing bad happened this time… I can't undo it, so I want to try and own it.

Kai: [ He studies her face for a moment, her eyes, her expression, how she has styled her hair to show off rather than conceal the scars. ] …Okay. Just let me know what I can do to help.

Ren: Absolutely, dude!

Kai: [ looking thoughtful ]Hmm, the desert… Well, I guess I did have a few more things I really wanted to check out there.

Ren: [ picking up her chopsticks again, her expression smug ] I knew it.

Kai: Hey, was that all just a ruse to get me to continue my research on schedule?

Ren: [ cheerfully tucking back into her noodles ] Every word!

---

**Scene 2:** [ Ren, Kai, Jay and Kōtai are exploring the desert together. Jay has a mask and goggles, but Kōtai needs no protection. Kai is masked and goggled with shorts and a t-shirt. Ren is fully covered this time. Her head and neck are protected by a light scarf, secured in place by the goggles. She wears the same boots and gloves as always but the loose, linen shirt and pants are new. The group crests a dune and makes their way down to the ruins below them. Kai and Jay show the other two around, pointing out interesting features and explaining what the structures are thought to be. Outside, Ren and Kōtai battle trapinch and sandshrews while Kai and Jay take notes. They head back out of the desert as the sun goes down Ren starts to go south, but Kai points west and she follows him. They arrive at a large intricately painted house with a sign out front which reads: "The Winstrates welcome trainers". Kai knocks and is greeted by a teenage girl. She welcomes them inside and Ren is introduced to the rest of the family: the girl's parents and her grandmother. Ren sends out her pokemon and they all eat dinner together. Mako and Roma seem to hit it off. The next morning Ren battles all of the Winstrates. She beats Victor's taillow with Mele and zigzagoon with Wheta. She defeats Victoria's roselia with Kata. She battles Vivi's goldeen with Roma, shroomish with Hauoro, and numel with Kōtai. Finally she beats Vicky's medicham with Kōtai. The Winstrates speculate on whether Ren could beat their son Vino, who is out on his own pokemon journey. They conclude probably not. The next day, Kai and Ren explore more of the desert. A baltoy pops out in
front of them and Ren jumps. She looks back at Kai and he nods in reassurance. Her hand shakes as she reaches for a pokeball. She sends out Roma and defeats it fairly easily. Later she trips over a rock and she Kötaí and Kai dig it up while Jay stands watch. It brakes in two as Ren and Kai lift it out of the sand. Ren's fragment has what appears to be the end of a large claw embedded in it. Kai's has a fossil as well, but it is less obvious what it is. They run into a hiker later that afternoon who is a hobby fossil hunter. They show him their finds and he takes Ren's first to examine it.

Hiker: [ looking over Ren's ] Well, this one's easy. It's an anorith claw. Nice specimen too. [ He hands it back to her and takes Kai's. ] Hmmm. [ He pulls out a magnifier and turns it this way and that. ] Lileep. It's a neat looking one. Maybe a coral variant. Always hard to tell from fragments.

Kai: Really? Wow. That's so neat. I wish I had the money to get it revived. Having a rock-type on the team would be really cool. Thanks so much.

Ren: Yes, thank you.

Hiker: You’re welcome. Have fun you two and keep your eyes peeled.

Ren: [ as they part ] Good hunting! [ She waits until the hiker is out of earshot. ] I could get it revived for you, you know.

Kai: What? There is no way you have that kind of money either. And even if you did you should use it on yours.

Ren: I don't have that kind of money, but someone at Devon owes me a favor.

[ They stay over with the Winstrates again. At dinner Vivi is finally brave enough to ask about Ren's scars. She tells them how it happened and takes off her shirt so they can see the full extent. Kötaí shows off his as well. Vivi loves it but Victor wonders if they should be letting Vivi train there. Vicky says everyone knows it's dangerous and to let Vivi do what she wants. The next morning Kai and Ren part ways again. They hug and wave goodbye. Ren heads north towards Route 113 while Kai heads west for Mt. Chimney, which has been reopened. ]

---

Scene 3: [ The next day Ren and Hauoro are battling a trainer and her linoone. The whismur tries to keep the linoone at a distance with echoed voice, but the linoone keeps darting in with fury swipes. Both pokemon are starting to look a little ragged, but neither is willing to concede defeat. The linoone darts in again but this time Hauoro catches it at point blank range with echoed voice and it staggers. Hauoro darts forward and slaps it across the face with his ears and it falls. It rolls over and bares its teeth, but he whirls and pounds it again with his powerful hind legs. It droops and doesn’t move, but Hauoro continues to kick it. ]

Ren: Oro, stop!

[ Hauoro stops kicking the poor, unmoving linoone and hops back to Ren’s side. ]

Ren: [ to the other trainer ] I am so so sorry! Is she okay?

Trainer: [ inspecting her linoone ] Yeah, I think so. I’m gonna take her to the Poke Center.

[ She withdraws her linoone. ]
Ren: Okay. Thank you for the battle. I’m sorry about Oro.

[The trainer jogs off and Ren rounds on her whismur.]

Ren: What the hell was that! You kept pummeling her after she was down. You can’t do that!

Hauoro: I thought she was going to eat me. She showed her teeth.

Ren: She’s a trainer pokemon like you. She wasn’t going to kill you!

Hauoro: How can you be so sure?

Ren: But—Argh—Those are the rules, Oro. Trainer matches aren’t to the death. The whole point of the rules is so that pokemon don’t kill each other.

Hauoro: [annoyed] I understand that, but accidents happen. I don’t want to be one of those accidents. Battling is dangerous. Pokemon get hurt. Even humans get hurt sometimes. You have to understand that, don’t you? After what happened to you and Kotai in the desert, after what happened to those pokemon at your school, how could you not?

Ren: I do understand. That’s why I’m upset. The system only works if we all follow the rules. That means you have to do your best not to hurt other pokemon as well as the other way around.

Hauoro: [a little contrite] I do try. Sometimes fear gets the better of me. I wish I could feel safe like the others, but I’m not going to pretend it’s a game. Kata especially: you would think she wasn’t wild the way she fools around in battles. It’s crazy to me. It’s not right. I don’t want to kill anyone, but battles are life and death. They shouldn’t be taken lightly.

Ren: Oro, if you really feel that way, why did you become a battler? I always sort of thought you came with us because you wanted to stick with Mele.

Hauoro: I became a battler to survive. When I was very young, things weren’t so hard in the mountain. We whismur could always count on the Mother’s teachings to guide us. But after the tunnel… Well, life became very hard. It was time to move on.

Ren: I’m sorry, Oro. I should have asked you about it. I didn’t know the tunnel project was such a problem for you all. I’m sorry we did this to you.

Hauoro: I didn’t want to say before. And you were not responsible for what happened. You don’t need to apologize. You’ve done nothing but shelter and care for me. I’m grateful for that. I’ll try and be a better battler and I’ll do my best not to hurt anyone. I know it is very hard on you when I snap.

Ren: Thank you, Oro. I think part of the problem is that I’ve neglected your training. You would have evolved by now if I was doing my job properly.

Hauoro: [patting her leg with his ear] Don’t be so hard on yourself. There are a lot of us. I understand.

Ren: [leaning down to pat him] Okay. But I thinks it’s time you and me really got to it, you know? You do want to evolve, right?

Hauoro: Very much. Mele is always talking up how nice eyes are.

Ren: Alright then, starting now, you are taking the brunt of the battles. And if you get scared you can always tap out, okay?
Hauoro: Okay.

Ren: And part of my job is to make sure you aren’t scared and that you know your own strength, so I’ll be better about that too.

Hauoro: [ leaning against her ] Thanks, Ren.

Scene 4: [ There are a ton of trainers to battle as Ren heads north and all of her pokemon take turns battling, although Hauoro takes the bulk of them. Most of the trainers don't pay much attention to Ren’s scars, which makes her feel better. In one battle, Hauoro defeats a roselia with echoed voice and evolves into loudred. He rotates his ears this way and that trying them out. He moves his arms and flexes his fingers before slowly opening his eyes. He blinks rapidly and staggers, overcome by the sudden sensory experience. He closes his eyes for a moment before opening them again. He looks around, wonder written all over his face. Ren smiles. ]

Hauoro: Mele! Mele! Mele!

[ Ren jumps and sends out Mele. ]

Hauoro: Mele look! I evolved!

Mele: That's wonderful. You're so big now.

Hauoro: Look at you! You're so beautiful! Those are colors right? You’re two colors? What are they?

Mele: [ gesturing to himself with a paw ] This is pink, and this is cream.

Hauoro: I love them! What am I?

Mele: Well, you are mostly gray, but your lips and stripes are yellow.

Hauoro: [ touching his face with his hands ] Oh, I can't see my face…

Ren: Hold on… I don't have a mirror… um… My nav! [ She grabs it off her belt and aims it at him looking at the screen. ] Oro put you hands down and look over here. [ He is pawing his face, but lowers his hands and looks at her instead. ] Okay, now smile… anmd there! Got it!

[ She puts the nav down and pulls the compact screen out of her bag. She pulls the ends apart and turns it on, quickly pulling up the photo she just took. She hands him the screen, making sure he holds it on both ends. He holds the screen up close, pouring over the picture. ]

Hauoro: Oh oh oh! I have pink too! [ delighted cackling ] Look Mele! [ pointing at his mouth ] We’re both pink! [ touching his lip ] Yellow is so… loud! Oh! You said I had yellow stripes. What are stripes? Where are they?

[ He turns the screen this way and that. ]

Mele: They're on your back.

[ He whips around, trying to look at his own back, which of course he can’t. He staggers, still a little unsteady on his new legs. ]
Ren: Wait, wait! Hold still.

[ She grabs her nav again and turns on the camera. She points it at Hauoro and starts walking around him. Hauoro peers closer at the screen in fascination as she pans carefully around him. ]

Hauoro: Oh! Are those stripes? [delighted] I'm so colorful! [He starts bouncing in place and drops the screen in excitement.] Oh no! I'm so sorry!

Ren: It's fine. This is why I got the durable model.

[She picks it up, collapses it and puts it away.]

Hauoro: Ren! You're so pretty!

Ren: Aw, thank you.

Mele: Look around, I'll tell you which colors are which. [gesturing with his paw] The trees and grass are green.

Ren: Almost all plants are green. They need to be to get energy from the sun.

Hauoro: What about those little yellow? things over there? What are those?

Mele: Those are flowers.

Hauoro: What about those?

Mele: Those are flowers too but they’re red.

Hauoro: Flowers are plants though, right? Why aren't they green? Why do they… stand out so much?

Ren: They are bright so that you'll see them. Plants use flowers to attract animals. Plants can’t move so they need animals to help them reproduce.

Hauoro: [a little overwhelmed] Wow. This is all so much.

Ren: Maybe we stick to the colors for now then.

Hauoro: Okay! What color is your hair?

Ren: It’s black, like your ear tips.

Hauoro: [touching his ear and smiling] Oooh.

Ren: And this dirt here is brown.

Mele: Look up, Oro. [Hauoro looks up and gasps.] That’s blue.

Hauoro: It’s so—it’s so beautiful. Everything is so beautiful! The world is so beautiful! Why didn’t you tell me?

[He starts laughing, a bit hysterically but so very happy. He staggers again and falls on his butt but just keeps laughing. Mele rubs up against him, purring gently. Ren laughs a little and smiles with tears in her eyes.]
Scene 5: [ Ren and her pokemon journey up Routes 111 and 113. Some shots of the landscape as it becomes covered in ash. They battle wild spinda, sandshrew, taillow and skarmory. Kōtai shows them his favorite spots and they camp out on the obsidian formation, which the pokemon are pretty fascinated by since it is new to them. They check out the glassblower and Ren gets a little flute. She tries playing while Mele sings and Hauoro dances. The rest smile and laugh when Hauoro inevitably loses his balance and falls over. He laughs with them loudly and heartily before he sits back up. He is talking to Kotai when he is suddenly hit over the head with a rock. He leaps to his feet and whirls around to find Kata bouncing behind him. ]

Hauoro: [ seething ] Are you trying to kill someone?

Kata: [ giggling ] Of course not. I was just gonna surprise you all a bit. I lost control. It was an accident. No harm done.

Hauoro: My head begs to differ. How about next time you pick an object you can handle.

Kata: Geez, you’re so funny and easygoing most of the time I forget you have a stick up your ass about some things. Just bounce it off, big guy.

Hauoro: You’re about to get a stick up your ass, spoink. Then we’ll see how well you can “bounce it off”.

Mele: Please, my adoring fans! Don’t fight amongst yourselves! [ preening ] I know you have at least one thing you agree on: how much you love me.

[ Kata laughs and Hauoro settles down a little. He sits by his friend and carefully strokes the skitty. ]

Wheta: You know, I don’t think bludgeoning someone in the head counts as a prank, Kata. Seems to me like you’re slipping.

Kata: For the last time: it was an accident. The actual prank was way better.

[ The nuzleaf suddenly grabs the spoink and pulls her into a headlock. Kata squeals as Wheta gives her a noogie. ]

Wheta: [ laughing ] You can dish but you can’t take, ay little piggy?

Kata: [ squirming ] Noogies aren’t a prank!

Wheta: [ keeping a tight grip on her victim ] They totally are and so are tickles.

Kata: Oh sh—

[ The spoink’s expletive is cut off by laughter as the nuzleaf begins to tickle her furiously. Eventually Kata gets short of breath and begs for reprieve, which Wheta obliges. The group goes back to talking and joking and laughing together. ]

Scene 6: [ Ren is walking through Fallarbor with Wheta. They are talking easily and both seem to be in a good mood. They pass the contest hall and fossil store on their way to the edge of town and the vegetable fields. They are nearing Cosmo’s when Ren spots Josh lurking around nearby. He is leaning against a wall reading a book entitled “Silverwing”. Once again he is wearing ill-fitting
Ren: Hey, Josh. Fancy meeting you here.

Josh: [He jumps and the zubat scrambles for purchase.] Ren! [snapping his book shut] I'm not—I wasn’t… [Whatever lame excuse he was about to make dies in his throat as he takes in her scars. Bald-faced concern and guilt] H-holy shit. What happened to you? D-did—?


Josh: [relieved] Oh… I'm sorry.

[The zubat peeks curiously over his head at her. It has no eyes, but focuses its ears on her. It is on the small side but has very large fangs.]

Ren: [shrugging] Shit happens.

Josh: Can they, um—that is, will it get any better or?

Ren: Yeah, they gave me some cream to put on it. It's already better than it was. The scars should fade a bit more over time. I'll never look like I used to, but it won't be this bad forever.

Josh: [looking past her rather than at her] Oh… that's, uh, good… I guess?

Ren: It is what it is… [She sighs and looks away.] Hey, um, I'm sorry for being a jerk before.

Josh: What?

Ren: [still not meeting his eyes] Last time I saw you I was… really frustrated about a lot of things and I took it out on you. So yeah, I'm sorry for what I said.

Josh: [shrugging] It's fine. You didn't know.

Ren: [looking at him again, confused] Didn't know what?

Josh: [He blinks, a bit taken aback. It takes him a moment to respond.] Nothing.

[She gives him a quizzical look, but doesn't pry. He obviously doesn't want to talk about whatever it is.]

Ren: Well, to get back to business, do you mind telling me what you're doing here?

Josh: Oh, um…

Ren: These people are my friends and I think Magma has given them enough grief… Please, Josh?

Josh: [He struggles for a moment before relenting.] Okay. We used the meteorite Tabitha took from Cosmo to power that machine on Mt. Chimney. The police confiscated it after the incident, but they don't seem to have it anymore. I'm supposed to be finding out if it's back with Cosmo.

Ren: Could you maybe tell them he doesn't have it?
Josh: I—I don't know, Ren…

Ren: How about this, just do your reconnaissance thing for another day or two and if he does have it, I'll make sure he doesn't anymore by the time you report back. That way you can't get caught in the lie if they decide to follow up on it.

[ Josh fidgets, clearly uncomfortable as he considers. He sighs and slumps a little. ]

Josh: Okay.

Ren: Thank you, Josh. This means a lot to me.

Josh: [ eyebrows knitting together ] I owe you.

Ren: I know, but… thank you.

[ Josh looks a little confused and nods to her before wandering off back towards town. ]

Wheta: You were nice to him.

Ren: Yeah, I'm not even really sure why. I know for a fact he's an asshole. Maybe because he hasn't done anything to me personally? I just felt bad about taking that potshot at him last time, like I was stooping to their level or something. [ She looks down at Wheta, not sure how to make herself understood. ]

Wheta: Don't look at me. I so don't get it. But it did get you what you wanted, so I'm all for it. It's just that the strategy kind of surprised me.

Ren: [ wry smile ] You really aren't the moral compass of this team, are you?

Wheta: I learned long ago that you can't rely on others. I take boons as they come, but I don't expect any.

Ren: Have you ever thought that maybe that approach might part of the problem?

Wheta: [ eyes narrowing ] I did everything my first trainer ever asked of me. For a while it was good, then it wasn't and then one day she dumped me. At first I blamed myself, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized that there wasn't anything I could have done to change it. I just wasn’t what she wanted. I’m not interested in trying to change for anyone else anymore. I couldn’t even if I wanted to and I don’t want to.

Ren: I think we may be talking at cross purposes here because I totally agree that there are no circumstances under which what happened to you is your fault. What I meant was that we can’t get anywhere without trust, otherwise we’re just treading water. [ Wheta does not look convinced. ] I completely understand if you don’t take my word for it. You just watched me put my trust in a felon I barely know, not to mention I haven’t been the steadiest ship on the ocean. I’ve given you no reason to think this will turn out any differently than the last two tries… but I think deep down you believe it will anyway. [ Wheta looks up at her, confused. ] You signed up for a third go, after all. I believe you’re not quite as cynical as you think you are.

[ Wheta huffs but Ren just smiles. ]
Scene 7: [ They are at Cosmo’s door now and Ren knocks. A moment later, the professor opens the door. ]

Cosmo: [ gesturing for them to come inside ] You made it, come in. Keanu’s still at work for the moment but he should be home soon. Have a seat. I’ll get us something to drink. Any preferences?

Ren: Any kind of fresh juice would be wonderful, thank you.

[ He goes to the kitchen and comes back with three glasses. He hands the first to Wheta who is surprised but accepts. ]

Cosmo: Thank you for visiting.

Ren: About that… I promise it was strictly a social visit when I called, but I just found out some news about Magma, so it looks like we have to talk business.

Cosmo: I’m no good at small talk anyway, not without Keanu here. Let’s talk business.

Ren: Magma is still after that meteorite. Do you have it?

Cosmo: [ He sighs heavily. ] I guess I should have known this was coming. I know you are trying to protect me, but—

Ren: [ cutting across him ] Please, Takao—

Cosmo: You don’t have to convince me. You are right, I can’t keep it.

Ren: [ shocked ] Oh… Good.

Cosmo: I know I made rather a show of risking my life for it before, but it's not just because it is a large portion of my life's work. I can't tell you why, but that meteorite is so much more important than anything some activist group gone rogue could ever hope to achieve. And much as it pains me as a scientist to admit, right now it may even be more important than what it can teach us about the universe. I’m telling you this because I want you to understand what I'm about to ask. Will you take it? Keep it safe for a while?

Ren: I-I don't know professor. I'm not sure I'm the right person for this.

Cosmo: I can't ask anyone who's worked on the project because we can't risk Magma getting to them. And I can't give it back to the police because they clearly have some sort of in there. [ Ren looks unsure and doesn't answer. ] I'm so sorry to do this after all you have already done for me… [ He takes a deep shaky breath. ] I need someone I can trust and I wouldn't ask if it wasn't so important… Please, Miss Kosugi.

Ren: I—I don't know professor. I'm not sure I'm the right person for this.

Cosmo: I can't ask anyone who's worked on the project because we can't risk Magma getting to them. And I can't give it back to the police because they clearly have some sort of in there. [ Ren looks unsure and doesn't answer. ] I'm so sorry to do this after all you have already done for me… [ He takes a deep shaky breath. ] I need someone I can trust and I wouldn't ask if it wasn't so important… Please, Miss Kosugi.

Ren: I—I don't know professor. I'm not sure I'm the right person for this.

Cosmo: Thank you.

[ He takes off his glasses and wipes at his eyes, trying to push back the tears that are forming there. ]

Ren: [ leaning in ] Hey, it'll be okay, professor.
Cosmo: [He sniffs, cleaning his glasses and putting them back on.] Yes, I'm sure you're right. I'm sorry.

Ren: That's okay. You can—

[The front door opens and Keanu comes in. They both stand up to greet him.]

Keanu: Ren! So good to see you again. [hugging her] I'm glad you made it.

Ren: Thanks for having me.

Keanu: Anytime, my dear.

[One look at Cosmo is enough to tell him that something is wrong but that they should discuss it later. He puts an arm around his husband and kisses his temple. Cosmo goes back into the kitchen to get Keanu a drink and maybe take another moment to compose himself.]

Keanu: So Ren, how are things? You know, besides almost getting blown up.

[Ever the competent social butterfly, Keanu manages to get everyone talking and ease the terrible tension in the house. Ren sends out the rest of her pokemon and they make themselves at home. Cosmo's lunatone floats out of whatever corner it has been napping in and Kata strikes up a conversation with it. Keanu makes poké for dinner which everyone, including the pokemon, enjoys. All settle down for the night. Alone in their bedroom, Keanu holds his quietly crying husband. Cosmo's face is strained with guilt and Keanu strokes his head, reassuring him that he did the right thing.]

Scene 8: [The next day Ren is walking through Meteor Falls with Kata and one of Cosmo's students. She points out this and that as they hike along. What Cosmo said about the meteorite is superimposed over the panels.]

Cosmo: If anything should happen and you can't hang on to the meteorite anymore, please get it to Steven Stone. It's the next safest place it can be. He'll know what it is and what to do. In the meantime though, I'm not going to tell anyone that you have it. The fewer people know the better. I really am very sorry to ask this of you, Ren. Hopefully nothing at all will come of this and I'll see you in few months to collect it once this whole Magma business blows over.

[They finally reach a small and very unique village. Cosmo's student starts introducing Ren to the elders. Not far off, Azalea walks out of a house, followed closely by Aster. She is dressed in casual clothes rather than her uniform. She says goodbye to someone still in the house before her attention is drawn to the newcomers.]

Azalea: Well I'll be damned. That’s her, isn’t it.

Aster: Are you going to report this to Tabitha?

Azalea: Of course not, Aster. You wound me. I haven’t the vaguest interest in helping her with her ridiculous vendetta.

Aster: I don’t know sometimes…

Azalea: I’m not like her, Aster.
Aster: I think your claim on the moral high ground is shaky at best. We’ve been doing a lot of things I never thought we’d do. Sometimes I wonder how far you’re willing to go.

Azalea: It scares me a little too. That’s why I have you.

Aster: [ She grunts. ] I think you’re wrong about Tabitha. I don’t think she sees it that way. She uses her anger, but I don’t think it controls her. I think she believes that whatever choice she is making is her best option for success, that she is justified.

[ Ren turns a little to shake hands with someone and Azalea gets a much better view of the scarred side of her face. She stiffens, eyes going wide. ]

Azalea: [ disbelieving ] No… she couldn’t have.

Aster: What is it?

Azalea: That—that trainer… She’s covered in burns, Aster. Do you think that Tabitha could have—

Aster: Relax. We would have heard about it if she had. It must have been an accident.

Azalea: [ calming ] Yes…

Student: [ approaching them and smiling ] Lorekeeper! It’s been a while.

Azalea: Yes, it has. Gran kept nagging me to visit.

Student: You sure are busy these days.

[ They talk for a little while and Azalea keeps glancing over the student’s shoulder at Ren who is busy talking to a small group of people. The student sees her and makes to introduce them, but Azalea excuses herself and moves off. ]

Azalea: [ once they are out of earshot ] Maybe you are right Aster… Hell, maybe Tabitha is right. But right now I’m not willing to accept it. I’m not going to help her get to that trainer. In fact, I think I’m going to make sure she doesn’t.

Aster: Hmm… Wasn’t that one of Cosmo’s students she was with and isn’t that Josh kid supposed to be tailing Cosmo? You know, because you turned down that assignment.

Azalea: Shit, you’re right… I think maybe we should check in on the fuck-up and see if he needs any help.

---

**Scene 9:** [ While Azalea leaves, Ren stays in the village to train with the Draconid dragon tamers. They all challenge her to a one-on-one battle one after another. Mele vs. bagon, Kata vs. shelgon, Hauro vs. noibat, Roma vs. vibrava, Kōtai vs. swablu, and Wheta vs. gabite. Hauro and Kōtai manage a narrow victory, but the rest get pretty soundly beaten. After everyone has rested a bit, the dragon tamers decide that they like Ren and show her some of their training exercises. They spend the rest of the day learning about dragon-types and traditional training methods. ]

---

**Scene 10:** [ Azalea and Aster are walking through the fields to Fallabor. Josh is leaning on a fence
near the main road with Fang at his side. Fang spots them coming and alerts him. ]

Azalea: There you are, Josh. Not slacking on the job I hope?

Josh: No ma’am. He got home about an hour ago. He hasn’t said anything about the meteorite.

Azalea: So anything else interesting?

Josh: No ma’am.

Azalea: So you didn’t happen to spot Ren Kosugi by any chance?

Josh: [ nervous ] Oh, uh, no. No sign of her.

Azalea: Josh, you are a terrible liar.

Josh: What? I’m not—

Azalea: Don’t waste my time. You saw her. Did you report it?

Josh: No and I haven’t seen her. I-I’ve been watching the main road in and out of town for a while now, so if she was around I’m pretty sure I would have seen her.

Azalea: I already said I could tell you were lying, why double down— Oh! Are you protecting her?

Josh: Um, I don’t—

Azalea: You are! That’s sweet of you, kid. [ clapping him on the shoulder ] Didn’t know you had it in you. This is great, makes things easier.

Josh: Oh, um, wha?

Azalea: I saw her too but neither of us is going to tell Tabitha or anyone else for that matter.

Josh: We’re not?

Azalea: Because we both know that she is no real threat to this organization or its plans and doesn’t deserve to be punished for doing what she has every reason to believe was the right thing.

Josh: Oh, well, yeah, I guess.

Azalea: Excellent. Good to be on the same page. [ She lets out a long relieved sigh. Cheerfully ] That went well. [ She makes to leave but then turns back for a moment. ] Oh, and you will give me a call if she pops up again so I can run interference. [ handing him a card ] My number. [ She turns and strides off. To Aster as they walk away ] Why am I always stuck doing damage control?

Josh: [ He stares after them for a good minute or so. ] Am I really that bad a liar, Fang?

Fang: Wellll, yes, pretty much. [ Josh sighs. ] But you’d have to be a really good liar to fool her.

Josh: What do you mean by that?

Fang: She’s smart and that whismur can hear your heartbeat. I watched them. It signals her.

Josh: Oh . [ low ] Do you think it can hear us now?

Fang: Probably, but I’m also pretty sure she doesn’t care.
Josh: Yeah, okay. [He reaches down and strokes her head fondly as we zoom out.]

---

**Scene 11:** [For the next week, Ren has one of her b-team switch places with one of her first-stingers each day and help the others train. Hauoro switches out for Tāraki, who shows them some acrobatics to help get around their opponents defenses. Roma switches for Akahata, who shows them how to keep light on their feet and change direction on a dime. Kōtai switches for Ikki, who shows them how to dodge. Mele swaps out for Panahi, who helps them with their accuracy. Kata switches with Māia, who shows them breathing techniques. Wheta switches with Putenga, who just makes everyone work really hard in general by showing them all up. This is interspersed with frames of Ren and her pokemon exploring Meteor Falls and battling trainers and wilds. On the Putenga day, Ren finds a moon stone. She presents it to Mele and he thanks her copiously before accepting it. He places a paw on it and closes his eyes. He glows brighter and brighter until he is engulfed in blinding light and wind. He emerges as a delcatty with fine, silky fur. Ren hugs him and the rest of the group congratulates him.]

---

**Scene 12:** [The next day, Ren and the team sans Roma are out on Route 113. Ren sends out Ao, who shakes herself out before looking over her teammates.]

Ao: Congrats on evolving, Oro. The others told me.

Hauoro: [He gives a little nod of acknowledgement, grinning to himself about what's about to happen.] Thank you, Ao. It's good to finally be able to look at you. Now I can see why Mele thinks so much of you.

Ao: Thank you. [catching sight of Mele] Oh Mele! You evolved too! You're so much bigger now. And I love your fur. What a beautiful color.

[Mele blushes furiously from all of the praise and embarrassment and cannot make any coherent response. Hauoro and Kata snicker.]

Ren: [She giggles then tries unsuccessfully to cover it with a cough.] Sooo I was in the pokemart today thinking about what Ao could teach everyone and it occurred to me that I already have a charge beam TM, why not teach it to Kata and have Ao tutor her? Then I saw a thunder wave TM and remembered that otosan's delcatty could learn it. So I thought you could use it and because your ability is normalize, it would still work on ground-types and even pokemon with the lightning rod ability. You won't be able to hit ghost pokemon, but you already can't so it won't make any difference. Not everything is effected by sing and attract so I thought this could give you an edge. And Ao's had thunder wave since before she joined the team so she'll be a great tutor. So you three, what do you think?

Ao: It sounds like fun. I'll do my best.

Kata: An electric move, huh? Sounds rad. I wonder if the power build up will transfer to my other moves…

Mele: Thanks so much for working so hard on strategies for me. It means a lot that you try even though I'm not much of a fighter.
Ren: Not everyone has to be a heavy hitter. There are tons of ways to win battles. You’ll do great.

[ Ao helps Kata out first. She doesn’t take all that long to get the hang of it since "spoink are naturally gifted at beam moves". Once she starts working on transitioning the gathered energy into he psybeam, Ao goes to help Mele. He is nervous and flustered at first, but settles down after a while and starts to enjoy himself. Ao and Mele practice side by side. She shoots yellow sparks and he shoots white. They grin at each other as they practice. ]

Scene 13: [ The next morning they go to rechallenge the dragon trainers. This time Mele manages to beat the bagon by basically incapacitating it and chipping away at it little by little. Kata also manages a narrow victory over shelgon by powering up with charge beam and then blasting it with psybeam and power gem. Hauroo beats noibat again, aided by his soundproof ability. Roma evolves during the fight with vibrava, but cannot quite overcome it. She is quite happy anyway. The swablu has evolved into altaria but Kōtai triumphs once more. Wheta fights hard but cannot beat gabite. The trainers congratulate her and her pokemon on their improvement. ]

Scene 14: [ The next day the team travels south through Meteor Falls towards Route 114 and Rustboro. They stop several times to battle other trainers. Wheta fights another nuzleaf, a solrock and a lunatone (all owned by different trainers) while the others watch. A fourth trainer sends out a zangoose and Wheta defeats it fairly easily with a feint attack/low sweep combo. Ren and Wheta smile at each other, confident and on a roll. ]

Trainer: [ sending out a meditite ] Go Tai!

Ren: [ She looks thoughtful for a moment, not liking the match-up, especially after all of the other battles. ] Hey, Wheta, you want to come back?

Wheta: No, I'm fine. Let me finish this.

Ren: Are you sure? You've been at it a while now.

Wheta: I'm fine, Ren. I can handle it.

Ren: But—

Wheta: [ looking Ren right in the eyes ] Just trust me.

Ren: [ She holds the eye contact for another few seconds. ] Okay, let's do this.

Trainer: Are you two ready?

Ren: Yep!

Trainer: Okay. Tai, open with force palm.

Ren: Thief! Get behind him!

[ The meditite swings and misses by a hair as Wheta moves her body to the side, back leg moving in a graceful semicircle to present a smaller target like Ren showed her. She punches the meditite in his
now exposed side. The meditite recoils but strikes out with his other hand and hits Wheta straight on. Wheta tumbles back but hops to her feet. }

Ren: Keep the distance! Razor leaf!

Trainer: Hidden power!

[ Some of Wheta’s leaves are blocked but not all of them. Wheta is stuck only glancingly by a ball of light that appears to be rock type from the color. The meditite dashes in closer. ]

Ren: Feint attack, then low sweep!

Trainer: Force palm again, Tai!

[ The meditite closes, but Wheta disappears only to reappear right behind him and strike him across the back. The meditite staggers forward a step and makes to turn before Wheta’s kick knocks his legs out from under him. The meditite twists in the air as he comes down, hand glowing. Wheta is still spinning low to the ground from her kick. The meditite’s palm connects powerfully with the center of Wheta’s chest, his full weight and gravity behind the attack. There is a flash and terrible crack and thud as he makes contact and Wheta’s body hits the ground. The force is enough to launch the meditite back into the air and he lands gracefully with a twirl. Wheta is still. Both trainers just look on for a moment. ]

Ren: Wheta?

[ There is no response. Reality begins to sink in. Ren rushes to her fallen pokemon and drops to her knees. Wheta’s chest is cracked and her eyes are open but unmoving. ]

Ren: Wheta!

[ Ren’s face is flushed and her eyes are overflowing with tears. She slams her hands to the ground next to Wheta only to lift the right a second later in confusion. It is covered in sap. She can barely see through the tears and she tries to blink them away to get a better look, but she knows what it is. She starts to sob. ]


[ The rest of her words are finally made incoherent by sobs. The meditite and his trainer just look over the scene in shock. Kata suddenly psybeams the meditite and he goes tumbling. We can see him take a shuddering breath before his trainer recalls him, hand shaking. Kata glows brightly and evolves. The expression on her new grumpig face is one we never saw on her spoink one. It is hard and pained. Tears well but do not break free. She walks over to her wailing trainer and dead teammate and places a comforting hand on her back. The others just look on, unsure how to greet death now that it has been so long since they last met. The other trainer begins to cry too, but quietly, trying hard to hold it in. Ren has given over completely, shaking violently as she wails and gasps and chokes on the grief. ]

Trainer: [ taking a step closer and stuttering ] O-oh Arceus. I-I’m s-s-so s-s-sorry!

[ She takes another few steps and reaches out as if to touch Ren. Kata glares and her and she takes a step or two back before falling on her ass. ]

Trainer: I-I-I… Shit!
She sniffs and pulls her knees up to her face. She curls into a ball and cries quietly. Mele gives the others a look before wandering over to Ren and curling around her. Kōtai is next to join and presses up to her other side. Hauro follows Kata’s example and places a hand on her back. Kata moves to stroking Ren’s hair as Roma floats over, unsure of what to do. She settles for patting Ren awkwardly with a fin that she pokes out of her water sphere. Eventually Ren begins to quiet a little, having spent herself.

Trainer: [ crying into her legs ] I-I d-didn’t mean t-to… [ angry with herself ] Like that matters! She’s dead! I k-killed her! I-it’s all m-my f-fault!

The other trainer begins to sob harder, face sinking further into her knees. Ren lifts her head up. We can see how blotchy and torn up her face is. She takes as deep and steadying a breath as she can manage being that she is still breathing in little gasps. She wipes her face and looks at the other trainer.

Ren: [ croaking ] H-hey.

Trainer: [ She pops her tearstained face up ] Wha? Oh! I—I’m so s-sorry. It was all my fault. I—

Ren: No.

Trainer: Huh?

Ren: It wasn’t your fault.

Trainer: B-b-but—

Ren: No, listen to me! This is important. It wasn’t your fault. Bad things just happen sometimes

Trainer: [ looking away ] I-I shouldn’t have—

Ren: [ leaning in to regain eye contact ] Bad things happen. You didn’t mean for this to happen. You didn’t know this would happen. It just did, okay? It was just a close battle. Us, our pokemon, we were just doing our best to win. We weren’t trying to hurt anyone. It was an accident.

The trainer looks at Ren, eyes brimming, then wipes her face.

Trainer: I-I just wish there was something I could do. I wish I could take it back. Could help. Something.

Ren: You can promise me something.

Trainer: O-okay.

Ren: [ standing up ] It won’t be easy, but maybe if it’s a promise, you can do it.

Trainer: [ following Ren’s example and standing up too ] A-anything.

Ren: Promise me you won’t blame yourself for this. [ The trainer’s eyes blow wide in shock. ] Your meditite probably won’t because pokemon understand. It’s harder for us. But you have to try. You have to be strong like him, okay? Strong like Wheta was.

The trainer grabs Ren and hugs her tightly, fresh tears running down her cheeks. Ren hugs her back. The trainer sniffs and nods into her shoulder.

Trainer: Okay.
They just hold each other for a while until the other trainer finally stops crying. They decide to bury Wheta together. Kōtai digs a grave and the humans place her gently inside. At Ren’s urging, the other trainer sends out her meditite and all of the pokemon cover Wheta together. They say a few words. They have a meal because it is long overdue, even though none of them eat very much. The other trainer gives Ren one last hug before she goes and thanks her. Ren waves to her as she leaves, putting on a brave face. As soon as she is gone, Ren sinks to the ground and starts to weep again.

Chapter End Notes

So that was rough. It could have been a little worse I guess. There was one draft of the story where I cut down the size of the cast and had one of the others die here. In the end I decided not to streamline it and stick closer to the actual events of the playthrough. This death hit me a lot harder than I thought it would. I was feeling very confident by this point and didn't really intend to use my nuzleaf in the long run. I just thought it would be fun to take her out for a spin since I have never used one before and it is the nuzlocke namesake. It turned out way more prophetic than intended and I felt so guilty about killing her for essentially no reason at all. I actually had to put the game down for a while, but I came back because of all the other friends who were still in there waiting for me. Poor Ren is going to have a much rougher time of it, but she has friends to help her through.

Character Chart:

HUMANS:
Ren Kosugi, our protagonist
Kai Birch, Ren's friend who likes science
Josh, a Magma grunt who Ren has saved twice
Azalea, another Magma grunt who has a whismur
Cosmo, an astronomer who Ren helped save from Magma
Keanu, Cosmo's husband and also an astronomer

TEAM REN:
Tāraki the Sceptile
Akahata the Mightyena
Ikki the Masquerain
Panahi the Pelipper
Maia the Taillow
Putenga the Breloom
Mele the Delcatty
Hauoro the Loudred
Ao the Manectric
Kata the Spoink
Kōtai the Sandslash
Wheta the Nuzleaf
Roma the Sharpedo

TEAM KAI:
Jay, the Blaziken
Dusty, the Breloom
Makō, the Wailmer

OTHER POKEMON:
Fang, Josh's Mightyena
Shade, Josh's Zubat
Aster, Azalea's Whismur
Emotional Rescue

Chapter Summary

In which Ren gets by with a little help from her friends.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Scene 1: [Ren is sitting cross-legged on the ground in Meteor Falls, face swollen, reddish and dirty from crying. She leans over her nav, staring at her contacts. Kōtai sits at her side while the others hang around nearby.]

Kōtai: Come on, luv.

Ren: Maybe I could just wait another day. I only just managed to stop crying for a few minutes together. I just know that if I do it now I am gonna break down and I don’t want to worry them and —

Kōtai: Another day won’t help that. It’s time.

[Ren sighs, then takes a deep breath and presses the video icon next to her mother’s contact info. Her mother answers after two rings. Her face appears with a familiar wall behind it. She must be at her desk.]

Asuka: Moshimoshi.

Ren: Hi, okasan. I—I have some bad news.

Asuka: [looking very concerned] Are you okay? Are your burns acting up? Did one of your cuts open?

Ren: No, okasan. It's nothing like that… One of my pokemon died. Wheta, my nuzleaf.

Asuka: Oh, Ren-chan. I’m so sorry.

Ren: Yeah, so am I… [She trails off, tears beginning to flow once more.]

Asuka: When did this happen?

Ren: [sniff] Yesterday. We already buried her.

Asuka: [looking pained] I wish you had called me sooner.

Ren: I know. I’m sorry. It was—

Asuka: No, you don’t have to apologize. You only have to talk when you’re ready. I am your mother. It’s my job to fret. I wish I was there.

Ren: [wiping at her eyes] No, that’s okay, really. I’m having a hard enough time doing this over the nav.
Asuka: Alright then, Ren-chan.

Ren: [She takes a deep breath and sighs. She sniffs and wipes her nose.] It—it’s so horrible, okasan. I keep seeing it happen all over again every time I close my eyes. [She takes a shuddering breath and drifts into Cantonese without noticing as the words start to pour out of her.] And I keep blaming myself. She was my Pokemon and I was responsible for her, but sometimes a part of me wants to think something else. It’s like I can’t be sure of anything, like I can’t tell what’s right or wrong anymore. And I—I just wish I could do something about it, anything about it. But it’s done. There is nothing anyone can do. I can’t take it back. I just keep getting so anxious it hurts, but all I can do is sit here.

[Ren breaks down into sobs, tears spilling freely down her face. Her mother repeats “my girl, my poor girl” and “I’m sorry” and other little reassurances soothingly until Ren finally calms.]

Asuka: I know it is hard not dwell on what just happened, but it is important to try not too, to make yourself think of other things. When bad things happen, especially when we feel guilty, we want to think about it and analyze it over and over. It tempting to think that we should, that it will help, that we deserve punishment. But none of that is true. It doesn’t help anyone or anything. [Ren looks away.] I know you know this. I want you to hold onto that truth, daughter. [Ren looks back up at her.] I want you to hold it as tight as you can because if you let go, you will never be able to make the next step. Knowing is good, but doing is always the hardest part. When the world shatters us, the best we can do is pick up the pieces and move on. And it’s not callous or cruel, just the opposite. Because it heals us. Because when we heal ourselves, we heal those we love as well. When we hurt ourselves, we hurt others too. We are all connected. None of us are alone.

[Ren wipes her eyes one at a time and then her nose and manages a weak smile.]

Ren: Thank you, okasan. You’re the best listener ever.

Asuka: [smiling] Only for you, Ren-chan.

[Asuka turns and opens a door.] A door can be heard opening in the background on Asuka’s side. She glances over her shoulder.

Asuka: That’s your father getting home.

Ren: Oh, that’s good. I should tell him too.

Asuka: [She stares at her daughter for a moment, making sure.] Okay. Let me go get him.

[Ren takes the opportunity to clean herself up a bit. Soon her parents come in. Senri drags a chair over and sits down next to his wife.]

Senri: Hey kiddo, what happened?

Ren: [She takes a deep breath.] My nuzleaf, she was battling a meditite and something went wrong. It hit her wrong. Her chest cracked. She died instantly… The battle was so close. I should have called her back. I wanted to, but she—s-she d-didn’t—

[Ren finally chokes on her own words, sobs rising up to glut her throat. She furiously tries to force them back down, making nothing but a soft strangled hiccup as she bows over in pain, eyes squeezing shut. Her parents look on in sympathy as her face falls out of the frame, replaced by the crown of her head and sky. Her parents wait patiently, listening to her shallow breathing and wishing there was something they could do. After a moment Ren manages to calm herself a little.]

Ren: [voice strained] I-I’m sorry. I didn't want to just call you up and cry.
Asuka: No, Ren-chan. It's okay. We're your parents. That's why we're here.

Senri: I would be more worried if you could keep it together. There is nothing wrong with being upset over something like this. And your mother is right, you don’t have to spare us. We’ll always be your parents, especially when things get tough.

Ren: [sniffling] Thank you.

They all fall into a rather strained silence. Senri looks over at his wife. She catches his meaning right away and stands up.

Asuka: I’m going to step out for a bit and let you two talk. Just call if you need me.

She exits and closes the door behind her. Ren can’t even look at her father, instead glancing around absently, waiting for him to say something.

Senri: I’m so sorry that this happened to you.

Ren: I’m so sorry. I—I don’t know what you must think of—

Senri: No, kiddo. Losing a pokemon doesn’t make you a monster or even a bad trainer. It just… happens sometimes. It’s something we trainers rarely talk about because we never want to imagine that it will happen to us. But it does happen. It’s just one of the risks of battling. [Ren stops sniffling and her face stiffens.] I think that all pokemon understand that, it’s us humans that have a harder time. Dealing with loss is a very real part of being a trainer. And it can be difficult sometimes to reconcile with what we love about battling… I’m not even sure I know how difficult this must be for you. You’ve always been very hard on yourself as a trainer. But for whatever it’s worth, I am on your side. Death of a friend can be extremely painful and I—I would understand if it might make you change your mind about training. And I trust that you’ll decide on what you know is right. Whatever that may be.

Ren: Thank you, otasan.

Scene 2: [Ren and her pokemon are still out in Meteor Falls somewhere. Ren is sitting hunched over with her arms wrapped around her knees. Her head rests on her knees and tears leak out of her eyes, but she doesn’t make a sound. Her nav lies on the ground a few feet away. Suddenly it pings, shattering the silence. She glances over at it and sees that there is a text from Kai. She looks away, almost ignoring it, but then clumsily lunges for it and drags it over to herself. She opens the text and reads it.]

Kai: Hey there! It’s been awhile. How goes dragon training?

She stares at it. It takes her a moment to remember what he is talking about.

Ren: [texting back] It was tough but super cool. I learned a lot. We battled them all again and won a few more this time. We’re headed south now.

Kai: That’s great! Jay and I are proud. [After a long pause in which Ren cannot think of anything to type.] How are things on the road? Any cool battles or wild pokemon? ;-}
Ren: [ She stares at the text for a minute, before finally typing out a response. ] Not so great actually.

Kai: Oh, no! What happened?

[ Ren wavers with her thumbs over the keyboard. It blurs in her vision as tears start to well up again. She grips her nav hard, trying to blink the tears away and think of something to type. She does not succeed and after another minute there is another message from Kai. ]

Kai: Ren?

[ She still can’t bring herself to type anything. This time less than a minute goes by before her nav rings. Kai is video calling her. ]

Ren: Kuso! [ She sniffs and hurriedly wipes her face before hesitantly pressing the accept button. ]

Kai: [ the moment the call picks up ] What’s wrong? Are you okay?!

Ren: Yeah, I’m okay.

Kai: Ren.

Ren: It’s fine. I just need to—

Kai: Ren, we’ve been over this. You—you don’t have to tell me, but don’t pretend that nothing’s wrong when clearly something is. If you’re not ready to talk, that’s okay. But if you’re trying to protect me, don’t. I want to help.

Ren: [ She looks away, rubbing her right arm. ] I think maybe it’s more I’m afraid of what you’ll think of me… My nuzleaf died in a battle.

Kai: I’m so sorry, Ren. And of course I don’t think less of you. Why would you even think that?

Ren: Because I do! I fucked up so badly and there’s nothing I can do to fix it.

Kai: It’s not your fault.

Ren: You weren’t even there!

Kai: But I know how careful you are, how deeply you care about all of your pokemon. Maybe you made a bad call. We all do sometimes. And it was a trainer battle, right? I’m sure they didn’t mean to kill her. Sometimes bad things happen and it’s no one’s fault.

Ren: Maybe you’re right. I don’t know. I just can’t see it. It’s like the totodile all over again except this time it’s my pokemon. Like I made the same mistake, only this time I should have known better. And it’s more than that too. Even if I could believe it wasn’t my fault, I don’t know if I can do this anymore. What if someone else dies? I don’t think I could handle it. This is pretty standard trainer stuff. Maybe I’m just not made for this… [ The tears start to flow and she wipes at them angrily ] It won’t stop playing over and over in my head. And it happened so fast. No goodbyes, she was just gone…

[ Kai watches helplessly for a moment as she breaks down. Suddenly his face sets in determination. ]

Kai: Where are you?

Ren: [ startled ] What?
Kai: Where are you?

Ren: [ She wipes her face and smiles. ] Oh no you don’t.

Kai: [ confused ] What?

Ren: Come riding in here on your shiny rapidash. I’ll be okay, Kai.

Kai: [ sheepish ] I know, but—

Ren: It’s okay. We’ll see each other in a week or two anyway and I’d kind of… I’d rather be alone right now, if that’s alright with you. Or at least, mostly alone.

[ She pans over with her nav camera so that he can see her dosing pokemon in the background. ]

Kai: Okay, but please call me if you need someone to talk to or anything. Anytime you need to. I won’t turn off my nav, I promise.

Ren: Okay.

Kai: No matter what you decide, we’ll still be friends, okay? Even if they all go, I’ll still be here. You’re not alone.

Ren: [ warm, watery smile ] I lo— Thanks, Kai.

Kai: Of course. You’d do the same for me.

Ren: I guess that’s true.

Kai: Remember: I’m new to this whole friendship thing, so don’t be surprised if I take it very seriously.

Ren: [ chuckling ] Alright then, consider me warned.

Kai: Good.

Ren: I’m gonna go now, but thank you for checking up on me. You really are the best.

Kai: Okay. Take care of yourself, Ren.

[ Ren flashes him one last smile and ends the call. She shuts her nav and lays it on the ground before flopping over into the dirt herself. Fade to black as she continues to lie there. ]

---

**Scene 3:** [ Pan over Meteor Falls. Ren and her pokemon are still near where they buried Wheta. There is a pool and a waterfall nearby. The alien landscape is beautiful but eerie and isolating. No one else has come through. Ren’s pokemon are scattered about in a loose circle, except for Roma who is swimming in the pool, looking listless and sad. Kata glances over at Ren who is sitting hunched over some distance away near the edge of the pool with her back to them. Her things are scattered carelessly around, including the uneaten remains of breakfast, and Ren definitely hasn’t washed or changed for a while now. We can hear her muffled sniffing. ]
Kata: [ getting to her feet, face set ] Alright, this is stupid. I’ve had enough. I’m going to go talk to her.

Hauoro: [ getting up and planting himself between her and Ren ] Oh no you won’t! Just give her a little space to grieve! This is no time for your damn impatience!

Kata: This is the perfect time for impatience! She’s been like this for days! I think she’s had enough space.

Hauoro: She cared about Wheta. She feels responsible. How can you expect her to just get over it?

Kata: I don’t! But this isn’t helping her! She is long past having her cry out or whatever. Now she’s just wallowing.

Mele: I think she has a point, Oro.

Hauoro: [ ignoring him ] Not everyone is like you, you know. What do you know about her feelings anyway? You think joking around is gonna solve this?

Kōtai: That’s enough, Oro.

Hauoro: [ ignoring everyone else and glaring at Kata ] Wheta is dead, dead, you idiot! Nothing can fix that. I don’t understand how you can sit there and act like it’s no big deal. I thought she was your friend!

Kata: [ stepping towards him, angry tears brimming ] She was my friend and she would hate this! You aren’t doing her a favor lying around here moping! None of us are. And you don’t get to tell me I’m not upset! Of course I’m upset! I’m just not ready to spend the rest of my life bleeding out because I lost a friend and I’m not gonna let my trainer do that either. We’re battlers, okay? Shit happens! That doesn’t mean we should just give up. You were a whismur for Arceus’s sake! I know you’ve seen friends die before. And guess what? You’re still here.

Mele: She seriously has a point, Oro. We can’t stay like this and Ren’s not getting better.

Kata: Just let me try and do something. If it doesn’t work, I won’t prank you anymore and I’ll even let you beat the shit out of me if you want. Deal?

Hauoro: [ suspicious ] What do I have to do if it does work?

Kata: Nothing! We get out of here! Everyone’s happy!

[ She doesn’t wait for him to respond and instead brushes past him, muttering exasperatedly under her breath. She makes her way over to where Ren is sitting, stopping to pick up her uneaten roll from that morning and breaks it in half. She gets down on Ren’s level, but Ren won’t look at her. ]

Kata: Hey, Ren.

Ren: H-h-hey.

Kata: [ She reaches out and cups Ren’s face with the halves of roll, guiding Ren’s face up to meet her eyes. ] Ren, look at me.

Ren: [ still looking away and sniffing loudly as fresh tears spill out ] I-I’m so s-sorry. S-she was y-your friend and I—
Kata: Stop it. It’s okay, Ren. Just look at me. [ Ren finally raises her eyes and Kata smiles. ] Now, what are you?

Ren: A b-bad trainer.

Kata: Nope. Wrong. You are a great trainer.

Ren: I s-should have s-stopped a long t-time ago. [ She looks away. ] Why didn’t I s-stop? Why did I even s-start in the first place?

Kata: You did it for us, Ren. You became a trainer to help Tāraki. You took all of us on and trained us because you wanted to help us, because that’s what we needed.

Ren: But I d-didn’t help W-Wheta. I got her killed. I knew it was only a m-matter of t-time before I got someone else killed.

Kata: You’re not listening to me. Please just listen to me for a moment. [ Ren looks into Kata’s eyes ] You did help her. She was getting better. We all saw it. And you would have called her out of that battle. She didn’t want you to. It wasn’t your fault. You did everything you could, the dark just caught up with her first… [ She sighs. ] And who knows. Maybe on another day she could have won that battle. You said it yourself: bad shit just happens sometimes. There’s no rhyme or reason for it. It just is.

[ Ren looks down and more tears start to leak out. ]

Kata: I still need you to answer my question though. It’s important. Can you do that for me? [ Ren nods. ] Good. Okay, what are you being right now? [ mushing Ren’s cheeks around with the bread ] Think really hard about it.

Ren: I don’t—[ her brow furrows ] What are you mushing into my face? Is that— Ohhhh… An idiot sandwich?

Kata: [ huge grin ] Bingo.

[ Ren can’t help it, the starts laughing and Kata laughs with her. ]

——

Scene 4: [ A day or two later, things are looking a little better. They are still by the waterfall, but Ren has washed and changed and combed her hair. Her things are in a neat pile. We can see that they have carved a small headstone for Wheta in the background. Ren, Kata, Kōtai and Hauoro are skipping rocks over the water while Mele grooms himself nearby. Unsurprisingly, Kata is kicking everyone’s ass and rubbing it in. Roma fetches the rocks back so that they don’t run out. Ren takes a rock from her sharpedo’s mouth and thanks her. She swings her arm back and forth in preparation before flicking the stone back out over the pool. It gets seven skips before sinking. Ren pumps her fist.

Kōtai: Nice one, luv.

Ren: Thanks!

[ A large shadow passes over them and Ren looks up, shielding her eyes with a hand. We can see
now that her face, while clean, is still a puffy blotchy mess from all of the crying. Her hair is combed over the left this time, covering some of the scars. The shadow circles down to them and everyone looks up to see Steven on his skarmory. They land and he dismounts gracefully from the saddle. Ren just gapes at him.

Steven: [ smiling pleasantly ] Ah, Ren, I thought it might be you. How are you doing these days?

She doesn’t respond. He looks her over before his eyes drift past her to the headstone and the smile drops off his face. He looks back at her and she is looking down and away. Her shoulders slump and she crosses her arms over herself, body quickly crumpling in on itself. He steps forward, hastily closing the distance between them.

Steven: [ gently laying a hand on her arm ] Ren.

Ren breaks down, tilting forward unsteadily as she starts to cry. Steven comes forward to meet her, wrapping his arms around her. She shakes against him, sobbing uncontrollably. She bows her head so that her crown is pressed into his shoulder rather than her streaming face. He rubs her back gently, but her whole body is tense as she strives in vain to fight the outburst.

Steven: [ quietly ] I’m so sorry, Ren.

She cries harder and he just lets her for a while, holding her gently. He waits patiently for her to quiet a little and she does, though the tension doesn’t leave her.

Steven: Believe it or not, I know how you feel. [ There is a questioning hiccup against him. ] I lost a pokemon too, my first year as a trainer. [ Ren goes quiet and relaxes just a hair. ] She was the first pokemon I ever caught. She died in a battle. It was close and we were cocky… It made me quit training for a while.

Ren: B-but you came back to it?

Steven: Yes. Couldn’t really help myself. Also Bes can be a terrible nag.

Ren manages a choked sort of warble and leans into him. He holds her a little tighter and she presses her face into his neck.

Steven: It really is the most terrible thing a trainer can go through. If you are anything like me, you’ll never really stop blaming yourself. It was years ago, but I still think about her all the time. [ Ren presses herself harder into him. ] But I can promise you that it will get better. Some days are worse than others. You may go through times when you think you are over it, only to have the memories rear back up like it was yesterday. But you have to try and forgive yourself. It will get better.

Ren: [ She sniffs loudly. ] O-okay.

Steven: You’d be surprised at how common it is too. You’re not alone.

Ren: Thank you, Steven.

Steven: Anytime.

She takes a deep breath and steps back. He lets go of her. She gives him a weak and watery smile before turning back to the pool. She crouches down and splashes her face. She dries it carefully on her tanktop and scooches back before sitting down. Steven sits down by her left side and sends out the rest of his pokemon (his aggron, steelix, cradily, armaldo and shiny metagross). They just sit quietly for a minute, staring at the waterfall. She glances over at Steven’s pokemon as they spread
Ren: So, how did you get into Pokemon training?

Steven: Oh, that. Good question. Obviously I didn’t do it for the money. The short version is that I went through a rebellious teenage phase.

[ She gives him a quizzical look. ]

Steven: Don’t believe me, hmm?

Ren: It’s not that I don’t believe you exactly. It’s just… kind of hard to picture.

Steven: I have proof. [ pointing to his earring ] That’s when I got this. And I have a tattoo.

Ren: [ disbelieving ] A tattoo?

Steven: A sizable one at that. I’ll have you know that Steven Stone does nothing by halves. Oh, and I dyed my hair. It was blue. Although, to be perfectly honest, that probably had more to do with the fact that I had just started going gray and was very insecure about it.

Ren: [ gesturing at his hair ] Wait, so this is your natural color?

Steven: Yep. It runs in the family. My father went gray when he was a teenager too.

Ren: Oh… So what is the long version then?

Steven: Well, my father got me Bessemer as a pet when I was a kid, and being a responsible parent, he enrolled us in trainer school so I could learn to take proper care of them. I guess I liked it a little too much. My father was trying to groom me to succeed him and I spent almost all of my free time battling. My father was fine with it as a hobby, but he expected me to go to college and then business school and the whole nine yards. I didn’t mind when I was younger. He has a pretty cool job after all and we were close… [ He trails off for a moment, looking out over the water. He glances back at Ren and clears his throat. ] So anyway, it started with the hair and tattoo and earring and then right after high school Bes and I ran away from home to become full-time battlers.

Ren: Wow. What did your father do?

Steven: It didn’t take him all that long to find me. It was a bit embarrassing. We had a long talk about it and in the end he let me try and be a trainer. He even got me better equipment et cetera. But after Hecate died, I gave up on it for a while and went to college. Then as soon as I graduated, I was right back in it.

Ren: If you don’t mind my asking, where was your mother for all of this?

Steven: Oh, sometimes I forget you are not from the region.

Ren: I’m sorry! It’s probably common knowledge, huh? I didn’t mean to—I’m sorry, just forget I asked.

Steven: [ waving off her concern ] No, don’t worry about it. It’s nothing bad. I just don’t have a mother exactly. My dad had me through a surrogate.

Ren: Ohhh.

Steven: It was sort of a big media deal at the time, but it blew over long ago. It’s just something
people usually know about me.

[ Ren nods. Both are quiet for a while, just looking at the scenery and thinking about things. Ren picks up a rock and skips it, rather proud of her new skill. Ren looks over at Steven and notices him glancing at her. She fidgets for a moment as he returns his attention to the water and the ripples slowly disappearing from her rock skipping. ]

Ren: It was a baltoy, in the desert.

Steven: [ turning his head to look at her again ] Hmm?

Ren: [ looking away ] My face, that’s why it’s like this. [ Combing her hair to the right with her fingers so that the scared side of her face is plainly visible ] My sandslash and I were battling it and it used explosion at close range.

Steven: Hmm. We often forget how dangerous pokemon can be, working side by side with them every day…

Ren: [ She sighs. ] It’s almost funny really. I was afraid something like this [ gesturing to her scars ] might happen because I tangled with Magma. But in the end it wasn’t my reckless decisions that got me, it was just some random accident.

Steven: I am sorry that it happened to you. It must be difficult.

Ren: Hey, at least I’m still alive.

Steven: Yes, I’m glad of it. [ She glances at him, blushing lightly, and tucks her hair behind her ear. He looks her over and smiles. ] I like what you’ve done with your hair. Although, you really are showing up everyone else who already has that hairstyle. No one else is going to be able to pull it off as well as you can.

Ren: [ blushing briefly ] Thank you. A girl does what she can.

Steven: You do it well.

Ren: [ her smile goes from flustered to cheeky ] It really is a shame though. I had such plans for this face.

Steven: [ picking up on her tone and quirking his eyebrow playfully ] Oh? Do tell.

Ren: I’ve been… building a harem. Or a reverse harem if you prefer. [ She pictures this “harem” in her mind’s eye: one boy that she just hardcore friend-zoned (Kai), a gay teenager (Wally), a criminal who she doesn’t even like (Josh), and finally an older guy who is completely out of her league (Steven). She laughs out loud, throwing her head back. Steven smiles as he watches her. She looks back over at him, calming. ] Ah well, what’s a girl to do?

Steven: [ leaning back with a grin and waving off her resignation ] Nonsense! You fold too soon. [ He readjusts his position to face her more directly. His face becomes a mask of mock seriousness. ] Think of it as… a challenge of sorts. You’ll just have to rely more on your charm to lure them in.

[ Ren looks down, trying to smile. Steven ghosts his hand over the scarred side of her face. She looks back up to find him smiling at her, warm and full. Their eyes lock and neither makes to remove his hand. She glances away shyly, going a little pink before meeting his eyes again. ]

Ren: S-shouldn’t be too hard.
Steven: My thoughts exactly.

[ Ren turns completely red at this and forgets to breathe for a moment. She sputters and he lets his hand fall slowly away to make it clear he is doing it for her sake and not because he wants to end the contact. She starts laughing at her own awkwardness, embarrassed but happy. He smiles back reassuringly, laughing a little too. ]

Steven: [ clears throat ] But in all seriousness, your personal strength continues to impress me. You really are taking it remarkably well.

Ren: Oh, I don’t know about that. I wish I could be a little less self-conscious about it. I know it doesn’t really matter all that much…

Steven: Please don’t say that. Personally, I am quite certain I’d go full Phantom of the Opera over far less.

Ren: [ giggling ] A little vain are we?

Steven: [ pretend outrage ] Moi? Heavens no! [ exaggeratedly flipping his hair ] Whatever gave you that impression?

[ That gets her laughing pretty hard and he laughs with her. We pan out to see their pokemon as well. Kata seems to be having a great time talking to Bessemer, gesturing animatedly and bouncing back on her tail. Mele has settled on the steelix’s head as he talks to her while Hauoro and Kotai chat up the aggron. Steven’s armaldo and cradily are playing in the water with Roma while Damascus naps off to the side. Ren and Steven lean in a little closer as they continue to laugh and joke with each other. We see Ren’s pokemon looking on with relieved smiles and Kata elbows Bessemer. ]

Scene 5: [ Ren and her remaining pokemon emerge from Meteor Falls and journey down Route 115. The trail runs down Hoenn’s western coast, which is quite striking. Green-topped cliffs overlook crashing waves dotted here and there by small secret beaches tucked into coves. Huge rock formations jut out of the water, many resting on pillars carved out by the surf. Moss and ferns grow everywhere out of the rocky crags and canyons. There are several fighting-type trainers hiking the route with their pokemon (primeape, machoke, hariyama). Kata defeats them all with ease. She flexes for everyone, showing off her new form. It’s a little hard to see her muscles under the thick layer of fat, but she is quite obviously proud of that too. She cocks an ample hip and smoothes a hoofed hand over it, winking at Hauoro. He rolls his eyes and Mele wolf-whistles. She blows a kiss at Ren who pretends to swoon and everyone laughs. ]

Scene 6: [ Ren walks into the Devon building and talks briefly to the woman at the front desk. A security guard comes over and takes her up in the elevator to the fossil revival department. He leaves her at Dr. Aarden’s office. He invites her in and she gets out her and Kai’s fossils and asks if he can revive them for her. He is happy to pay his debt and takes them. He gets back to work and ]
the security guard tours her around the department before escorting her out of the building. Ren walks to the park and sends out her pokemon.

Ren: Well gang, it looks like we’ll be in Rustboro for a little while. It takes a few days to revive fossils. Anybody have anything they want to do?

[ Her pokemon are quiet for a moment and look at each other. ]

Hauoro: Can we visit the Rusturf Tunnel?

Ren: Of course. I’ve sort of been wondering what happened with that.

---

**Scene 7:**[ They all arrive at the tunnel entrance about half an hour later and find there is quite a ruckus going on. There are a bunch of construction workers and normal people milling around outside the entrance who are being confronted by Team Aqua members. The Aqua members appear to be protesting the tunnel repairs. Some of the construction workers and others are arguing back and engaging the Aqua crowd. The rest are trying to ignore it. No one seems to be working. There are a few police officers on the scene who are trying to make peace. Ren recalls all but Hauoro as they approach. An Aqua grunt who has been arguing with a construction worker turns away in disgust and spots Ren and her loudred. She narrows her eyes for a moment before smiling and walking towards them. ]

Moana: Hey Ren! Long time no see. [ looking her over ] You look like hell. Are you okay?

Ren: [ glancing away ] Yeah, it’s just been a little rough lately.

Moana: Must be, you seem super tired. Gotta take care of yourself. [ Ren nods. ] Anyway, that scar is really cool. How’d ya get it?

Ren: [ taken aback ] Oh, uh, explosion attack at close range.

Moana: [ approvingly ] Sick . [ Ren looks confused ] I’m sorry. That’s probably insensitive. Couldn’t have been fun to live through.


Moana: But that aside, I am really digging your new look.

Ren: Yeah?

Moana: Of course. You may not like the scar so much, and that’s totally fine, but I think you look awesome. And like the hair and everything… Damn. And you own it. Top to bottom, it’s seriously killer.

Ren: [ blushing ] Thanks. You aren’t half bad yourself.

Moana: Ha! [ giving Ren a playful shove ] Flatterer .

Ren: How’s your sharpedo?

Moana: He’s good. Just taking a break in his ball. [ gesturing to Hauoro ] I don’t remember this guy
though.

Ren: Oh. I’ve had him for a while. He just wasn’t with me on Mt. Chimney.

Moana: Cool. So what brings you here?

Ren: Oro is from the mountain. He wanted to visit home and see what was going on.

Moana: Well, as you can see, they’re still trying to put that horrible tunnel back in. We’re doing our best to try and stop it, but they don’t care about pokemon at all.

Construction Worker (Kauri): That’s not true! Those whismur have the whole rest of the mountain!

Moana: What? You can’t be serious.

Kauri: And why the hell not? What’s so horrible about taking one little corner?

Moana: Look, it's not just that you destroyed some of their tunnels. The noise from the cars completely screws up their echolocation. They can't find food or navigate.

Kauri: You people don't care about people! Don't you know how many lives have been improved, families lifted out of poverty because of this tunnel? Don't you know how much good it will do for years to come? How can you stand there and say it's not worth it?

Moana: I'm not saying it doesn't have an upside, just that it's destroying this whismur habitat. You say you want to improve people’s lives but you’re ruining theirs! They could go extinct!

Kauri: What?! Are you out of your mind? This place is crawling with whismur! How the heck— Argh! We’re the ones in danger here! They keep attacking us and stampeding out of control! This is the second evacuation we’ve had to do today!

Moana: Well maybe you fucking blockheads should take that as a sign you shouldn’t be here! Whismur aren’t aggressive. If they are attacking, it because they’ve been provoked.

Kauri: Oh, get off your high mudsdale! They can shoot sound waves out of their mouths! They sure as hell don’t need your help or protection!

Moana: Why don’t you get off yours first! They pay you to work on this tunnel! You’re not some unbiased observer. You just want those poor whismur out of the picture so you can make your money and move on!

Kauri: [getting in her face] You don’t know shit about me! You’re just some preachy, eco-terrorist, misanthrope!

Moana: You want to go toe-to-toe with me, you brainless, blue-collar, hick!

Ren: [trying to edge between them] Whoa, let’s just—

Kauri: [stepping forward] Yeah! Let’s take this outside!

[Ren pushes back on him. She throws out her other hand to try and hold back Moana as she steps towards him.]

Moana: We’re already outside you stupid asshole!

Ren: [shoving them apart] Cut it out!
[ Hauoro growls at the construction worker for emphasis. ]

Kauri: [ straining against her ] You and your loudred stay out of this!

Moana: [ taking an infuriated swipe at him as Ren struggles furiously to keep them apart ] Don’t talk to her like that!

Terra: STOP!

[ All three of them pause to look up at another construction worker (Terra out of uniform) who is somehow towering over them despite being rather short. Ren and Moana don’t appear to recognize her. She steps forward and puts a hand on Kauri’s shoulder and pushes him gently back. ]

Terra: This isn’t going to help her, Kauri. [ He backs off a pace, eyes welling. To Moana ] Sorry about him. He’s been going through a lot lately.

[ Moana gradually calms down as Terra talks to her. Kauri turns and walks a few paces away, clearly still upset. Hauoro places a hand on Ren’s shoulder. ]

Ren: I’m okay. I think I’m gonna talk to him for a bit, find out what’s going on.

Hauoro: That’s fine. I’m gonna go talk to the whismur.

Ren: [ surprised ] O-okay. [ He starts marching off towards the tunnel. ] Wait! [ he pauses ] Take Mele with you [ sending out Mele ] and be careful!

Mele: [ He looks from Ren to Hauoro, sees Hauoro leaving and bounds after him. ] Oro, what’s going on?

Ren: [ walking up to Kauri ] Hey, can I ask you a few questions?

Kauri: What do you want to talk to me for?

Ren: Huh?

Kauri: You’re with Aqua right? Listen, I’ve heard enough today. Just let me be.

Ren: Actually, I’m not with them. My loudred just happens to be from here and wanted to visit home. And I’m sorry for Moana. I just want to talk, I promise.

Kauri: Sure. I shouldn’t have gotten so worked up either. It’s just been really tough.

Ren: What has, if you don’t mind my asking?

Kauri: Well, it’s hard to go to work everyday and get heckled by all these people and we always have to worry about the stampedes and… I’m not an idiot. I know that with all of these delays it only a matter of time before the money runs out or Aqua finally gets to Mr. Stone. He used to not pay them any mind, but, well, we’ve all heard that he’s met with Archie twice now and…

Ren: That does sound like a lot to deal with. I’m sorry.

Kauri: And the tunnel really is more than just a job to me. Rosalie was able to run her own business because of it.

Ren: Rosalie?
Kauri: My fiancé. She could do what she loved instead of working some dead end job in Mauville. She moved out of her parent’s place and everything was going so well. If this drags on too much longer she’s going to have to move back in with them and Wally already took her room and it’s all just such a mess.

Ren: Wait, Rosalie Scott? The pokemon breeder?

Kauri: Yeah. You know her?

Ren: Yes! Well, actually no. I’ve never met her. But I’m good friends with her cousin Wally.

Kauri: Oh, you’re Ren!

Ren: Guilty as charged.

Kauri: Wally wouldn’t stop talking about you the last time he was over.

Ren: Haha, really?

Kauri: Yeah, and how you got him onto his favorite show, *Dual Pulse*.

[Pan out slowly. Kauri looks cheerier as they talk about the Scotts.]

---

**Scene 8:** *Pan over into the mouth of the tunnel. Hauoro passes the opening for cars and heads straight for the footpath. The construction workers part as Hauoro marches past with Mele trailing in his wake. They look after the two pokemon and one man even calls out to them, but they continue deeper into the tunnel. Mele sticks close to his friend as he heads down a side tunnel into the dark. There is a faint noise in the distance. After a while, Hauoro stops and places a hand against the wall.*

Mele: *rubbing up against him* What is it?

Hauoro: I’m not sure. There’s too much noise. Something is very wrong.

Mele: What should we do?

Hauoro: Do you think you could sing them quiet again for me, like you did when we met?

[Mele begins to sing out soothingly into the darkness. He keeps singing as they continue further in, guided through the turnings by Hauoro’s hand on his shoulders. Eventually they reach a large cavern that glows very faintly with bioluminescent lichen, fungi and worms. It is full of murmuring whismur and three loudred near the center of the crowd. All turn towards them as Hauoro and Mele enter. Mele falls quiet.]

Whismur: Long it’s been since we heard the singer.

[Murmurs of agreement. The gathered whismur and loudred begin to speak in rapid succession, sometimes talking over each other or finishing each other’s thoughts.]

Loudred 1: *This loudred is middle aged and has a thoughtful expression.* We thought him gone.
Whismur: Dead.
Whismur: Eaten.
Whismur 1: Who is with him?
Whismur: They smell of human.
Whismur: Trainer pokemon.

Hauoro: I am a trainer pokemon but I was born here, of the Great Mother, just as you. I have traveled far and seen wondrous things.

[Sounds of surprise and wonder.]
Whismur 1: Why return?
Whismur: This is a place of sorrow!
Whismur: Anger!
Whismur: Death!

Loudred 2: [This loudred is older and has a grim countenance. As Hauoro opens his mouth to respond] Take your human smell away. It makes them restless.

Loudred 3: [This loudred is young and has anger in her face.] It grieves us.
Whismur: You know of the humans.
Whismur: It is said that if trained by humans, one learns their speech.
Whismur 1: Why do they hurt the Mother?
Whismur: Yes!
Whismur: Why?

Mele: [to Hauoro] Who is ‘the mother’?
Hauoro: They mean the mountain.
Whismur: The Mother grew all of us.
Whismur: Sheltered us.
Whismur: Nourished us.
Whismur: Our home.
Loudred 2: Once she spoke to all of us.
Whismur: Told us where there was forage.
Whismur: Where shelter.
Whismur: Where friend.
Whismur: Where foe.

Whismur: She guided us.

Whismur: Told us the turnings.

Loudred 1: Even still she speaks, though the humans try and shout her down.

Whismur: She cries!

Whismur: Wails!

Whismur: Screams!

Whismur: Growls!

Whismur: Rants!

Loudred 2: The pain drowns all.

Loudred 3: They are killing the Mother!

Whismur: Why?

Whismur: Pain!

Whismur: Sorrow!

Whismur: We close our ears to it, but then we perish.

Whismur: The rocks

Whismur: The cracks

Whismur: The golbat

Loudred 3: Without ears we die.

All Whismur: Die!

Loudred 2: So we must listen to her pain.

Loudred 1: We have listened long enough.

Loudred 3: Too long!

All Loudred: We must drive them out!

Whismsur: Save the Mother!

Whismurs: Save ourselves!

Whismur 1: Why?

[ All ears turn to that one whismur in confusion. ]

Whismur 1: [ she elaborates ] Why do they hurt the Mother? What do they want?
Loudred 3: They eat her!
Loudred 2: They use her!
Loudred 1: They are cruel!
Hauoro: No—
Loudred 3: [angry] Quiet!

[Angry murmuring.]

Loudred 2: Hush!

[The whismur quiet a little.]

Loudred 1: Of course you say otherwise. They have treated you well.
Loudred 2: You were chosen.
Loudred 3: Given food!
Loudred 1: Given power!
Loudred 2: Given protection!

Whismur 1: [interrupting] He knows their minds! Tell us why, fierce loudred!
Whismurs: Yes!
Whismur 1: Why do they hurt the Mother?
Whismurs: Why?
Hauoro: They do it to help each other, to help themselves. They do not mean to be cruel, she is just in their way. [Utter silence falls.] They do not know how much they hurt her, how they hurt us. They cannot hear the Mother.

[A pause.]

Loudred 1: Cruelty born of ignorance is still cruelty.

[The murmurs start up again.]

Hauoro: Yes, but more easily remedied. We must speak for the Mother.

[A hush falls again.]

Whismur 1: But if they hurt the Mother for gain, why would they listen?
Whismurs: Yes!
Whismur: Why listen?

Hauoro: Many of them do not wish to harm us. Some would help us. My trainer would help us.
Loudred 2: I do not believe you.
Loudred 3: They will never stop!

Loudred 1: Together, our strength has many times halted their destruction.

All Whismurs: Yes!

Loudred 1: [stepping towards Hauoro] If you still care for the Mother, lend her your strength.

Whismurs: Lend us your power, fierce loudred!

Loudred 3: Turn it against them!

Hauoro: No—!

Loudred 2: They won't stop.

Loudred 1: When they have finished gauging and blasting they will start the droning again.

Loudred 3: [holding her head as if in pain] The ceaseless stampede!

Whismur: We could hardly sleep.

Whismur: Had to move.

Whismur: Had to scrounge.

Whismur: Couldn't hear the mother.

Hauoro: I remember. But you hurt the mother when you rage against them. It may be just, but it is no better for any of us.

All Loudred: We must stop them!

Hauoro: At what cost? You rupture her veins. How will she breathe? How will she live?

[ A solemn silence. ]

Whismur 1: Then what can we do, fierce loudred?

Hauoro: [stepping further into the great ring of whismur] We can speak for the Mother, speak for ourselves.

Loudred 1: Have our actions not spoken?

Hauoro: Not clear enough.

Loudred 2: Not loud enough.

Loudred 1: We must show them that we cannot be ignored.

Loudred 3: We must be furious enough to drown them out.

Hauoro: But we must be one voice, a clear voice, a voice befitting the Mother.

Loudred 1: Yes!

Loudred 2: Yes.
Loudred 3: Yes!

All Whismur: YES!

Loudred 1: [ as soon as the din quiets ] Will you lead the cry, trainer loudred, so that they may understand?

Hauoro: Yes.

[ Raucous cheers. ]

Loudred 1: And will you go with us, singer, to calm us if we rage too far?

Mele: Yes. I am with you.

Whismurs: Thank you, singer!

Hauoro: Thank you, Mele.

Mele: Always, my friend.

Hauoro: [ smiling ] You may want to cover your ears.

[ He starts to howl and glows ever so faintly as power flows into him. The loudred join in and then the whismur. They glow brighter and brighter, their voices becoming one. Hauoro glows brightest at the center, light and energy pouring into him from all sides. Mele crouches, covers his ears with his paws and squeezes his eyes shut as the light and sound become deafening. ]

---

**Scene 9:** [ Back outside the caves, Ren and Kauri are still talking, looking happy and relaxed now that they have friends and loved ones to discuss. Unfortunately, things are not going nearly as well for the nearby Terra and Moana. ]

Terra: Argh! You're so—you're so stubborn! You're not listening to anything I'm saying!

Moana: That's rich coming from you. I don't think you've heard a single word I said for the past five minutes. You've just been staring at my mouth, pretending to listen.

Terra: [ blushing ] W-what?

Moana: You're no better than the rest of them. You're already convinced you're right. You don't want to hear the other side. [ leaning in close ] Go on, tell me I'm wrong.

Terra: [ her eyes flick up from Moana's lips to her eyes ] Y-you're wrong!

Moana: [ She snickers but her eyes narrow as their eye contact lingers. Her eyes bore into Terra’s, which are burning with pent up frustration. ] I knew you seemed familiar. [ She pulls back just a little, back straightening to her full height. Terra’s eyes reveal her nervousness. ] You're that Magma grunt from Mt. Chimney.

Terra: [ looking panicked and covering Moana’s mouth with her hand ] Sshh! Please don’t say anything.
Moana: [She pushes Terra’s hand away and leans over her] Why? Give me one good reason I shouldn’t out you right now.

Terra struggles for a moment, glaring up at Moana before grabbing her by the collar and kissing her full on the mouth. Moana’s eyes blow wide in shock, but after a moment or two she relaxes and her eyes flutter shut. Her arms wind themselves around Terra’s waist, as if of their own accord, while Terra’s wrap around her neck. The shouting got Ren and Kauri’s attention, but the making out begins to make them slightly embarrassed for staring and they look away. Terra and Moana separate. Moana just stares at the slightly nervous but also almost smug Terra. She opens her mouth, closes it, and swallows.

Moana: [flushing] You make a solid point.

Terra laughs, expression happy and excited. Moana continues to stare at her, mesmerized.

Moana: I think… maybe we have more to talk about before I turn you in.

They start to walk off together towards the trees. Ren and Kauri look on in confusion.

Kauri: [to Ren] What the heck is going on?

Ren: Search me.

A distant and eerie howl begins to drift from the mouth of the tunnel. Everyone turns to listen, struck by the strangeness of the noise. It grows louder and louder reverberating through the air. Finally it fades. There is complete silence as everyone waits for something to happen. The mountain begins to rumble. It starts low but quickly grows, shaking the ground that everyone is standing on. People run from the mouth of the cave as the rumbling grows stronger and nearer. Moments later, an enormous horde of whismur pour out of the tunnel, even more than were in the cavern, led by an exploud flanked by three loudred and a delcatty. Everyone scatters as the whismur rush forward, except for Ren who stays rooted where she is. The exploud runs up to her and stops. All of the other pokemon come to a halt behind him and fall quiet.

Hauoro (now an exploud): Ren, we need your help.

Scene 10: [Far away somewhere, Hartmann, Brenton and Josh are hanging out in a sparse red living room. Hartmann is sprawled out taking up almost the entirety of a generous sofa watching TV, leaving Brenton perched on the end drawing some kind of design on a large sketchpad. Josh is sitting in an armchair in the corner reading a book entitled “My Side of the Mountain” with Fang sleeping at his feet. Shade, now a golbat, is hanging off the side of the chair. Hartmann flips the channel and perks up a little and rolls over onto his shoulder to look a little closer.]

Hartmann: Hmm, looks like Tabitha’s favorite trainer is on the news again.

Josh starts in his chair and looks up. The screen is showing a huge herd of whismur pouring out of Rusturf Tunnel led by an exploud and three loudred with Ren’s trainer photo in the corner. Josh jumps up and Hartmann sits up to get out of his way before Josh vaults the couch. Josh watches intently while Hartmann leans back. Brenton does not look up from his work, but seems to be listening.
Anchor: This huge but nonviolent stampede was apparently the result of trainer Ren Kosugi’s exploud organizing the whismur living inside Mt. Rose in protest of the Rusturf Tunnel. [Showing footage of workers running out of the tunnel followed by a cloud of dust and another clip of inside the tunnel when it begins to shake.] Reconstruction of the tunnel has suffered continued delays over the past few months from further cave-ins caused by the distressed pokemon. [Footage of Archie giving an interview on a different show.] Capt. Archie Seaborn, the leader of Team Aqua, has long held that these disturbances should be taken as evidence of how damaging the project is to the local wildlife. [Footage of team Aqua members protesting near the tunnel entrance.] Team Aqua members have also been on site protesting the construction and just yesterday were joined in their efforts by the whismur themselves. [Back to the anchor.] This demonstration resulted in an emergency meeting in Rustboro City Hall to resolve the issue. And so, in an unprecedented turn of events, the City of Rustboro, the Town of Verdanturf and the Devon Corporation negotiated a settlement with a group of wild pokemon. [They show a panning shot over the hall just as the meeting is starting. The mayors, police chief, Mr. Stone, head of construction, and Archie sit at the central panel (a raised semicircular desk) while board members of the town and Devon fill the wings and Ren, Hauoro, Mele, the loudred and the whismur make their case from the crowded floor.] City Hall was packed to the rafters with government officials, Devon executives, Aqua members, construction workers, whismur, and townsfolk. Mr. Stone, who in the past paid little heed to concerns over habitat destruction, seemed far more sympathetic to the pokemon’s plight, often arguing against members of his board and the head of construction. [Clip of Archie getting very worked up and yelling at the others while the young loudred and many of the whismur cheer him on.] Capt. Seaborn was also present and also made a case for preserving the whismur’s habitat. [Clip of Hauoro at the podium in front of the panel while Ren stands on his left and translates.] The whismur themselves were represented in this meeting by Ms. Kosugi’s exploud while she herself mostly acted as translator. [There is a close up of Ren.]

Hartmann: Arceus, what happened to her face?

[Josh stiffens but keeps his eyes focused on the screen.]

Anchor: [Further footage of the meeting, this time with the camera shaking slightly as a whismur initiates and uproar and it is picked up by others.] Negotiations became heated at times and were repeatedly disrupted by uproar amongst the wild pokemon. [Mele starts to sing and the whismur calm and go quiet.] However, a delcatty, also owned by Ms. Kosugi, calmed them each time with a special song.

Hartmann: Geez, she just can’t stay out of the spotlight, can she? No wonder Tabitha hates her guts.

[Josh throws Hartmann a glance that he doesn’t notice just as Azalea walks quietly into the back of the room. She stays in the doorway and watches the report.]

Anchor: [A clip of Hauoro and the loudred shaking hands with the mayors and the rest of the rest of the panel.] Sources say an agreement was reached that will go into effect tomorrow. [Back to the anchor at her desk] The whismur agreed to allow the tunnel project to continue with significant modifications so that traffic will not be as disruptive. This would be far more expensive than originally estimated, but some of the increased cost will be offset by the whismur themselves, who say that they will help to clear the tunnel in exchange for food while they are working. Construction is expected to resume within the next few days as plans are drawn up for the new and improved tunnel. Good news for commuters and wild pokemon fans alike. For more on this story, we go to—

Hartmann: I hope Tabitha is watching this.

Brenton: I don’t. It’ll just put her in a bad mood.
Azalea: [walking in and leaning over the top of the couch where Josh is sitting] I don’t see why it should. [They all turn around to look at her, unaware that she had come in.] That trainer got the tunnel project going again. And so much the better if the whismur don’t have to suffer because of it, wouldn’t you agree?

[She asks this question in general, but looks right at Josh as she says it. None of them answer and she reaches out and ruffles Josh’s hair before turning and wandering back out without another word.]

Hartmann: [after she is gone] What the hell did you do to get that bitch to like you?

Josh: [nervous shrug] I don’t know. [The other two look suspicious.] She stopped by on my last recon mission and I guess she thought I did a good job?

Brenton: [turning back to his artwork] Well whatever you did, just try and stay in her good graces. Even Tabitha’s a little afraid of her.

Hartman: Yeah, she’s hot but there’s something off about her.

[Hartmann changes the channel and they settle in on the couch again.]

Josh: How’s the tattoo coming, Brent? Should I start saving up?

Brenton: It’s going pretty good. I’ll have to call up Manaia soon and see what she thinks.

---

**Scene 11:** [Ren and her pokemon are sitting under a tree having lunch together. They are overlooking the mouth of the tunnel which has whismur, loudred and humans carrying rocks and pushing carts of debris out of the tunnel and filing back in in an orderly fashion. Some of the construction workers are loading the rubble onto trucks to be hauled away. Nearby, a pavilion with a line of tables has been set up and the caterers and Aqua members are serving the construction workers and whismur food. Everyone looks much happier and we can even see workers sharing lunch with the whismurs or high fiving them as they pass coming in and out of the tunnel. Ren puts a hand on Hauoro’s arm as they look out over the scene.]

Ren: I’m so proud of you Oro. I had no idea you were the leaderly type.

Hauoro: I saw that I could be a bridge and they needed a bridge, so I was one.


Hauoro: What we did. Thank you for helping us talk with the other humans.

Ren: Your humble translator thanks you for the compliment, but don’t give me too much credit.

Hauoro: It was your idea for the food-labor exchange that finally got everyone to agree.

Ren: And Mele that kept them from uproaring the place to the ground.

Mele: We did a wonderful thing, for the people and pokemon.

Ren: Yeah, I guess we did.
Kōtai: It weren't no easy fix, but it was all well worth it in my opinion. You should be proud.

[ Ren smiles a little, though it is strained and continues to look out over the construction site. Kata finishes her food and licks her hooves before getting up. ]

Kata: So what's next?

Ren: I'm not… really sure.

Roma: That's fine. We can just go wherever the current takes us.

Kata: And what exactly is that supposed to mean? We're not in the ocean, you know.

Kōtai: Why don't you take your own advice and just bounce with it?

[ Kata snorts. ]

Roma: Well, that man and woman invited us to stay with them, no? She breeds pokemon, we have two babies to raise. Seems perfect.

[ That wipes the smirk off of Kata's face. Kōtai grins. ]

Ren: [ She laughs. ] That sounds like a great idea, Roma.

**Scene 12:** [ The next day, Ren and Hauoro pick up the eggs from Dr. Aarden. He gives them special backpacks to carry them in, which they promise to send back once the fossil pokemon hatch. Hauoro hands off his egg to Kauri as he and Ren line up for a skarmory ride back to Verdanturf. Magma paid the service for several months before going underground, so the rides are still running. Rosalie has a tiny cottage down a lane off the main road. The property itself is spacious and has a greenhouse. Rosalie and many flower pokemon are there to greet them. They have dinner outside next to the little pond in the back and Rosalie shows off her hatchery in the greenhouse. She evaluates the fossil eggs and estimates they will hatch in the next or two. Ren and Hauoro lay the eggs in a sand bed Kōtai digs for them. Kōtai stays the night in the greenhouse with Roselie's roserade to keep an eye on them. Everyone else goes in the house to sleep. ]

**Scene 13:** [ Wally visits the next morning. They all have breakfast together before Kauri heads off to work on the tunnel. Ren and Wally have tea by the pond while Rosalie goes to work in her greenhouse. Kōtai digs some new flower beds, Kihei trims the hedges, and Aroha visits her family. Kata and Atiru take turns trying to put waterlilies from the pond in Roma's water sphere without her noticing. Hauoro, Mele and Kana nap together under a tree. ]

Ren: I'm glad you're feeling so much better.

Wally: Yeah, the air here really is helpful.

[ They both sip their tea to cover the lull in the conversation. ]
Wally: [breaking the silence] Sooo, I couldn’t think of a more tactful way to bring this up, so I’m just gonna be blunt. Why do you only have five pokemon with you?

Ren: Ha. I’ve been meaning to tell you all morning and couldn’t think of a tactful way to tell you either. My nuzleaf died, about a week and a half ago.

Wally: Arceus Ren! I’m so sorry!

Ren: I talked to my parents and Kai about it. And I thought about texting you, even calling, but I couldn’t do that to you.

Wally: [total confusion] What?

Ren: Y-you’ve wanted to be a trainer all your life and you’re doing so well, but it’s super hard for you and I didn’t want to add to all the other stuff you already have to worry about.

Wally: Ren! The last thing you should be worrying about right now is sparing my feelings! That’s just—that’s crazy, Ren! I’m not even mad about the coddling thing. You don’t have to be worrying about me right now. Mortality and I are well acquainted, okay? I know one of my pokemon could die or I could die doing this. If I wasn’t okay with that I would never have become a trainer in the first place. Look, that doesn’t even matter. You should take care of yourself for once! [Ren looks down, eyes brimming.] Shit! I’m sorry. I’m totally bungling comforting you with my dumb anime lecture. No wonder you didn’t call me. [That gets a half chuckle out of Ren.] Do you want a hug? I could probably manage that at least.

Ren: Yeah, that would be nice.

[They both get up and Wally gives her a nice long hug. They sit back down and have another sip of tea.]

Wally: How was that? Not too bad I hope?

Ren: Very good. Second best “sorry your pokemon died” hug I’ve had.

Wally: Oh? Whose was first.

Ren: [blushing a little] Okay, try not to get over excited… But it was Steven Stone.

Wally: [shrieking] WHAT? [He immediately starts coughing and has to pull out his inhaler.]

Ren: I told you not to get too excited.

Wally: [wheezing] I thought you meant like… my poor shipper heart… like it was Kai or something...

Ren: Sorry.

Wally: It’s fine… Nothing could have prepared me for that… You tried your best… [He collapses on the table and groans. After taking another moment or two to steady his breathing.] How did that happen?

[Ren tells him how Steven was just passing through and saw the grave and how nice he was about it and her scars. Wally is just in awe. When he calms down a bit, he reverts back to his usual slightly shyer self and doesn’t ask too many questions. They finish their tea and start talking about other things when Rosalie comes out of the greenhouse.]
Rosalie: Hey, do you two want to help with the eggs?

Ren & Wally: Yeah!

They all head into the greenhouse and Aroha totters in after them. It is full of shelves of plants and seedlings around the perimeter with raised tray tables for the eggs in a row down the center. Rosalie shows Ren how to check the beds and turn the eggs, how to knock on them and candle them to see how far along they are. Aroha helps turn the smaller eggs with her fronds. Kōtai is finished with his project so he comes in from outside and rinses off his claws in the floor sink. He joins them in caring for the eggs. Aroha turns an egg and looks up at her trainer for approval.

Wally: Good job, little bud.

Aroha smiles and jumps into his arms. She glows brightly and evolves into a roselia. The others look over to see what has happened. Wally hugs her tight, clearly overjoyed.

Wally: [ setting her down on a table ] Let me see you, little bud.

She strikes a pose showing off her variegated red and blue roses and leaf tunic, before twirling elegantly for them. She then aims a one-two punch at Kōtai, who is well out of range, but he staggers back, pretending to be hit and falls over. Aroha giggles, very pleased. Everyone goes back to work. Finally Ren and Kōtai get to the fossil eggs. Kōtai presses his ear against the lileep egg.

Kōtai: Hmmm, a little movement, but it doesn't seem like they're in too big a hurry to get out.

Ren presses her ear to the anorith egg and starts almost immediately at the intense scratching.

Ren: Rosalie, this one’s scratching.

Rosalie: [ coming over and putting her ear to the egg. ] Yep, that'll be out any minute. Hey, Wally, Aroha, get over here.

They gather around to watch while Rosalie goes to the door and calls Ren's other pokemon in. The egg rocks as all of the pokemon file in to watch. Ren's pokemon all look her over and trade nervous glances. After all, she reacted pretty badly to picking up Roma, so they have no idea how she's going to feel about a baby pokemon, especially now that her confidence has been shaken even further. Ren's face betrays some uneasiness as a crack appears on the egg. As they look on, another crack appears. A claw pushes off a piece of shell and flings it away. A second claw knocks off the adjacent piece and emerges from the egg. The sickle-shaped limbs move down the shell and hammer it in rapid succession, cracking it all down the front. With that done, the creature inside straightens out its body with one great heave and the rest of the shell explodes apart. It wipes the remaining bits of shell off itself and looks up at everyone. Anorith are strange looking to be sure, but there is something rather cute and charming about this one. Maybe it is the large, bright eyes or diaphanous pink fins. It looks right into Ren’s eyes and she is transfixed for a moment. To her pokemon’s surprise and even her own, a radiant smile breaks over her face.

Ren: Hey there, Pohaku. Welcome to the modern world.

Scene 14: [ Over the next few days, the lileep hatches and Pohaku grows very quickly. He seems to get the hang of aquakinesis almost immediately and swims around by Ren’s shoulder all the time,
watching everything she does. When Ren finally gathers her pokemon for a practice, the lileep is content to watch, but Pohaku wants to join in. He practices water gun with Roma and smackdown, fury cutter and metal claw with Kōtai. Kōtai is very pleased with his new pupil and calls him a natural. The next day they go down to the Pokemon Center and get Pohaku registered as Ren’s pokemon. They battle Wally when he visits in the afternoon. Kata manages a narrow victory over Kihei, Kana beats Mele again, Hauoro beats her and then Atiru and Pohaku only barely loses to Aroha, leaving Hauoro to finish her off as well. She is annoyed at not being able to win, but is still rather proud of her performance. After another day of hanging around, Ren and her pokemon say their goodbyes and head to Mauville. They travel on foot and battle trainers along the way. Pohaku is very enthusiastic and wants to catch up to the others, so he takes on the brunt of these battles. Near the beginning he loses a few matches but by the end he is pretty much crushing it.

Chapter End Notes

This marks the end of my ill-fated detour in game, so next chapter we shall return to the central plot. I still like how this worked for Ren's character and how it develops her relationships with the other characters. I had always planned for Steven to show up in this chapter, but he has since wormed his way in a great deal more than originally intended. He is a lot of fun to write and I really like the way he and Ren play off each other. Of course the whismur scene was my favorite to write. I love inserting little pieces of pokemon culture where I can.

Character Chart:
HUMANS:
Ren, our protagonist
Kai, Ren's friend who likes science
Wally, Ren's other friend who likes the internet
Steven, the Hoenn League Champion who is low-key flirty all the time
Josh, a Magma grunt who Ren has saved twice
Azalea, another Magma grunt who has a whismur
Senri, Ren's dad and a Gym Leader
Asuka, Ren's mom and a writer
Moana, an Aqua grunt who helps Ren out
Terra, a Magma grunt who works in construction as her day job
Kauri, Rosalie's fiance and a construction worker
Rosalie, Wally's cousin and a flower pokemon breeder

TEAM REN:
Tāraki the Sceptile
Akahata the Mightyena
Ikki the Masquerain
Panahi the Pelipper
Maia the Taillow
Putenga the Breloom
Mele the Delcatty
Hauoro the Exploud
Ao the Manectric  
Kata the Grumpig  
Kōtai the Sandslash  
Roma the Sharpedo  
Pohaku the Anorith

TEAM WALLY:  
Kihei, the shiny Gallade  
Kana, the Delcatty  
Aroha, the Roselia  
Atiru, the Swablu

TEAM STEVEN:  
Bessemer, the shiny Metagross  
Damascus, the Skarmory  
Gilchrist, the Aggron  
Tungsten, the Steelix  
Escutcheon, the Armaldo  
Ptilometra, the Cradily

OTHER POKEMON:  
Wheta, Ren’s former Nuzleaf  
Fang, Josh’s Mightyena  
Aster, Azalea’s Whismur  
Ehe, Moana’s Shapedo
A Storm Is Threatening

Chapter Summary

In which Ren decides what she will do right before the plot hits her like a freight train.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Scene 1: [ Ren has her entire team out in the pal park in Mauville. They all gather around for Ren’s big announcement. Most of them look at least a little worried about what she will say, except for Roma and Pohaku, who seem perfectly content in their respective water balls. ]

Ren: Alright, gang. I’ve been thinking very long and hard about what I want do with my life, just like you asked, and I hope you’ve been thinking about what you want as well. I know I’ve done nothing but worry you for the past month or so, and I’m really sorry about that. It’s just been one thing after another and it was a lot to put you all through. But the good news is I’ve finally decided what I want to do… I’m going to take on the Pokemon League, the whole challenge. [ While the reactions vary, the general surprise of her audience is evident. ] I’m going to try and do what otōsan never could and become the Champion. [ Putenga and some of the others are grinning. ] No matter how bad things get, or how hard I am on myself, training and battling with you gals is far and away my favorite thing in this whole crazy world. [ She starts to tear up a little. ] I love you and I know now I could never give this up, no matter how much I kind of want to sometimes. I want to help you all reach your goals and be the best that you can be. And I want to be the best and strongest trainer I can be, from now until I die. How does that sound? [ Tāraki looks ready to burst into tears from sheer joy. ] Oh, tiger…

[ Tāraki rushes her and swoops her up in his arms. He squeezes the wind right out of her lungs and she squeezes him back until she gasps for air. He sets her down and they continue to hug at a more reasonable level of pressure. Ao and Akahata step forward and rub against her legs and soon all thirteen of her pokémon are piling on top of her nuzzling and hugging and stroking her. She laughs with joy at the total outpouring of support, even from her less touchy-feely pokémon. After a few minutes of reveling in it she begins to bat them all away so she can breathe. She looks over them all, a big smile on her face and they all smile back at her. ]

Ren: Now, I realize that this kind of challenge may not be everyone’s cup of tea. The training alone is going to be grueling, not to mention the League battles and, Arceus forbid, if I run afoul of Magma again. Bottom line, I would never want to force that on anyone, but if you think you’re up to it, I’d be honored to have any and all of you come along. Of course, only six of you would be fighting the Elite Four and Steven, but that doesn’t mean support wouldn’t be appreciated. Even if you don’t really want to be a battler and want to help in some other way, that’s fine. You all are my family, and you’ll always be my family no matter what you choose, okay? [ All nod. ] Well, I know Tāraki wants to come. [ He nods vigorously. ] It’s always kinda been his dream after all. But what about the rest of you? What do you want to do?

[ Kōtai is the first to step forward. ]

Kōtai: Luv, being a champion has been my dream ever since I was a pup. I can’t wait to kick some League ass!
Māia: I like the sound of that! I’m in.

Pohaku: I love battling! And we’ll travel and get to see even more crazy stuff I don’t remember! It’ll be the best!

Kata: Sounds like fun. Count me in!

Ao: [She and Akahata step forward.] We’re with you, Ren! You made us strong and I know now we can get even stronger! With you maybe we can even beat the League!

Akahata: We’re with you to the end.

Mele: [glancing at Ao] I don’t want to leave either. I know I’m not much of a battler, but I could still sing for you all or help in some other way.

Ren: Of course Mele. I’d be happy to have you.

Panahi: Well, someone has too keep an eye on you and I guess that means I’m coming too.

Ren: Happy to have you on board, you old softie. [She smiles, but then doubt flickers over her face.] Are you two sure though? I absolutely don’t mind having you around even if you never fight another match, but are you sure that’s what you want?

Panahi: We love you, honey.

Mele: Yeah, and I for one don’t want to go back to the wild. This is a far better life.

Panahi: Here here!

Ren: Okay. [looking around and smiling] What about the rest of you?

Hauoro: I think I want to go back to the mountain. You’ve helped me so much, given me so much. I think it’s time I paid it forward.

Ren: Oh, look at you, all grown up. I’m gonna miss you, Oro. [They hug.] You take care of them, okay? And you get someone to call me if you ever need anything.

Hauoro: I will.

[Ikki flutters forward.]

Ikki: I’ve always wanted to raise a family of my own and I think I’m finally ready to try. You and Aka and Ao are right. Doing what you love and getting what you want isn’t always easy, or even possible, but it’s worth fighting for. And I’m stronger now, in so many ways, so I’m going to do my best.

Ren: Come here! [Ikki zips up to her and Ren hugs her.] I’m so proud of you, little bug. You’re going to be a wonderful mother. I’ll come and visit sometime. I don’t want to miss out on all of the adorable surskit you’re going to have.

[They part and Ikki zips back into the group. There is only one pokemon left who hasn’t said anything.]

Ren: Putenga, are you coming?

Putenga: Actually, I think I have some unfinished business in the forest.
Ren: [clearly shocked] Wha? O-okay. So you want to go back to the Petalburg woods then?

Putenga: It wasn’t an easy decision, but yeah, that’s about the size of it.

Ren: Hey, no. That’s totally okay. I’ll miss you a lot though. It won’t be easy to whip this lot into shape without you there, drill queen… [They hug too.] Do you want me to take you all back? We can—

Hauoro: [smiling] No, Ren.

Putenga: We want you to keep moving forward.

Ikki: We’ll travel together. That way it will be totally safe.

Putenga: Yeah. We’re all going in basically the same direction anyway. Besides, we don’t have anything to worry about from wilds anymore. You made sure of that.

Ren: Thank you gals. You’re the best.

Ikki, Putenga & Hauoro: We know.

Ren: I could transfer you back to the reserve and have Prof. Birch release you from there if that would be easier.

Ikki: That sounds perfect Ren.

Ren: Okay, but before anyone goes anywhere, I have a little surprise for you all.

Kata: Oooh, I love surprises!

Ren: We are all gonna have one last team day where we do whatever you all want as long as it’s in or around Mauville somewhere.

Tāraki: Woohoo!

Ren: And I want to take some pictures to remember you all by and sort of commemorate things.

Kata: Aww!

Putenga: That's precious!

Panahi: [exasperated] Girls!

Kata: No, I like it. I'll even man the camera. That way we can get one shot of everybody and—

Ren: Oh, no no no. This going to be a super professional photo shoot. I've already rented out a studio with a full costume wardrobe and hired a photographer for a whole day.

Māia: They have that here?

Ren: Just one of this city's many ridiculous amenities.

Panahi: A full costume wardrobe, you say?

Ren: Oh, and a makeup artist. You'll love it. So that's what we are doing for the rest of today. I'm sure there will be plenty of down time, and I want you to use it to think about what you’d like to do for our super-fun-team-day tomorrow. Sound good?
All: Aye, captain!

**Scene 2:** [They pour into the studio and introduce themselves to the photographer and makeup artist. First they take a team photo against a plain white background. Ren sits in seiza just left of the center front. They all crowd together so that there is no negative space except for a perfectly nuzeleaf-shaped hole dead center in the frame. Everyone smiles. It takes a while and it isn't easy, but it comes out beautifully. Pleased with themselves, they head into the rest of the photoshoot with good attitudes. Next is a long series of full body portraits of Ren with each of her pokemon in the order that she got them. 1) Her photo with Tāraki involves the photographer getting out his high speed camera. Ren dons a track uniform and puts her hair up in a tight braid. Ren and Tāraki sprint opposite diagonals and cross paths right in front of the camera, with Ren slightly in the foreground. 2) Next, Ren puts on a black leather jacket, white tank top and dark jeans. The makeup artist puts white streaks in her hair and gives her some black lipstick and eyeshadow. Ren and Akahata pose back to back, Akahata’s hackles raised for full effect. 3) For Ikki’s portrait, Ren puts on a full set of samurai armor, complete with frightening mask, and Ikki strikes a power pose next to her in the air, flashing her false eyes menacingly. 4) For Panahi’s, Ren wears a diaphanous pink gown with a large blue necklace to match Panahi’s as well as blue flowers tucked into a long braid. She stands in profile, showing her right side to the camera and Panahi perches on her arm so that she and her incredible bill are in profile facing the other way. 5) Once again using the high-speed camera, the photographer captures Māia shattering a vase in midair with boomburst. Her wings are fully flared, tips pointed skyward, her mouth is wide open, and her forked tail is swinging forward to help stop her momentum. Ren strikes a classic trainer pose just behind her. 6) For Putenga’s, Ren ties a bandana over her head and they both put on boxing gloves and sweatbands. They touch gloves, pretending to square off. 7) Mele and Ren get done up like pop stars and sing a duet into old-fashioned microphones. 8) Ren and Hauoro get done up like rock stars and Ren shreds on an electric guitar while Hauoro provides the bass. 9) Thanks to greenscreen, Ao and Ren are hikers surmounting a cliff over a breathtaking vista, their hair shining in the sun. 10) Kata cocks a hip and winks at the camera as Ren’s pose is completely ruined because she is turning to see what is poking her. 11) For Kōtai’s photo, Ren wears nothing but a sports bra and briefs. She faces the camera dead on, legs shoulder-width apart and well-muscled arms flexing, with her head turned to her right to show off the full extent of her scars. Kōtai stands next to her with his back to the camera to show off his own. He looks over his shoulder, arms splayed at his sides so that we can see his impressive claws. 12) Ren wears a wetsuit and leans on a surfboard while Roma zooms past her, water sphere distorting from the speed. 13) Finally, for Pohaku’s portrait, Ren puts on a charcoal grey dress with a pink silk scarf and coral bracelets and necklace to match him. She holds him in her arms without his water sphere. Ren looks up attractions in the area on her nav and reads them to her pokemon in the downtime so they can plan out their day tomorrow. Kata helps a lot with setting up equipment and props with psychokinesis. She seems very interested in the camera and the whole process and the photographer shows her some things. Ren also has the photographer get plain headshots of everyone to use for her trainer card. By the end of the shoot they have all had enough, but everyone is pleased with the results. The photographer in particular is very happy and asks if she can use some of the shots in her portfolio. The makeup artist also had a lot of fun helping out and they congratulate Ren on being able to pull off so many styles. They both give Ren their cards in case she wants to do this again.]
Scene 3: [ The next morning starts early with Ao and Akahata taking them all on a hike to Echo Cave. They all have fun shouting things into it and having their voices bounce around and come back. By the time they get back to Mauville, they are all starving and they get breakfast at the food court. After that the shops are open and Panahi picks out sick battle items for all of Ren's newer pokemon (a gem on a bracelet for Kata to boost power gem, a black belt for Kōtai to boost brick break, a mystic water gem and saddle for Roma, and special contact lenses for Pohaku to boost his accuracy). Ikki gets her helm and gems polished at a metalworker. Kōtai takes them to a nice restaurant for lunch, which Kata also really enjoys. Pohaku and Roma just want to see the light tower so they can marvel at how humans have harnessed electricity. Māia finds the toughest looking trainer she can in the central square and beats their mawile's ass. Putenga takes a boxing lesson and loves it. Kata wants to go to the arcade and she wins tons of prizes. Then they all get dinner at the food court. Mele and Hauoro take Ren to the underground nightclub from last time and put on a very special performance. Hauoro generates music and beats while Mele sings and they both dance. They are super popular and everyone begs them to come back some time. Tāraki closes the night with moonlight surfing and snacks on the beach.]

Scene 4: [ That night Ren stays up late looking at want ads and pokemon adoption sites. We see her making profiles for Mele and Panahi. For Panahi she writes: "Contest hopeful seeking partner. Rosy pelipper with excellent beak and plumage. Move pool suitable for clever, cool and beauty contests, but personality probably best suited to beauty contests. Confident, creative and experienced battler. Competitive but not aggressive or confrontational. Lives for attention and has a natural dramatic flare. Very easy to work with as long as you don’t mind some gentle teasing. Loves looking her best and helping out. Her maturity makes her a wonderful starter for a new coordinator, but means she could also easily keep up with someone more experienced. Will you give her and yourself the chance to become contest stars?" For Mele she writes: "Songbird kitty looking for companion. Angora delcatty who was wild born but clearly pedigree bred. A huge sweetheart with incredibly soft and luxurious fur. Has battling experience, but much more suited to be a companion pokemon. This kitty was born to sing and it's his one true passion amid numerous talents. He has an incredible voice and range and frequently composes his own songs. He can also pick up and remember a tune after hearing it only once. He is a moving performer and happy to take requests. Also a truly excellent conversationalist and pretty good story-teller once you get to know him. Calm, patient, supportive and companionable. Anyone would be lucky to have this kitty by their side." She also puts in a little background on who she is and why she is trying to place her pokemon. The next morning she says a tearful goodbye to Ikki, Putenga and Hauoro at the Pokemon Center. All of the pokemon say their goodbyes as well before Ren puts them back in the box. Prof. Birch is ready on the other side and she watches as each of them disappear. She turns to Tāraki and hugs him.]

Scene 5: [ Ren keeps her promise and heads out to Route 118. She suits up and crosses the wide river delta on Roma, then changes again on the far shore. Ren, Akahata, and Ao hike east for a while until they stumble on a small deserted cove. They all have lunch on the sand and Ren wades in the surf a little. Roma and Pohaku explore the cove together to be safe and Kōtai harvests berries
Ren gets a text from Kai while drying out on the sand and pulls out her nav. He tells her about his search for feebas further up the river.

Ren: I'll probably catch up to you before you get to Fortree, but if I don't just wait for me there.

Kai: Will do. So how are you?

Ren: It's been super tough and emotional lately, but I'm actually doing a lot better. I even decided what I'm going to do.

Kai: Really?!

Ren: I'm gonna take the Hoenn League challenge.

Kai: Ahhhh!!! That is so awesome! Not that I wouldn't have been supportive if you decided to do something else but… Gah! I'm so excited! I'm behind you 100%! I don't know about the Elite Four, but I'm gonna try and get through all of the gyms. We can help each other train and take them on together if you want.

Ren: Haha. Sounds good. It is a little bittersweet through. I released three of my pokemon this morning.

Kai: Wow, that must have been tough. What happened?

Ren: We had a big team meeting and decided what we wanted to do. Oro (my exploud) went back to keep helping the whismur, Tenga (my breloom) wanted to go home and deal with some forest politics, and Ikki (my masquerain) wanted to raise a family.

Kai: Wow. All three of them were such good battlers, especially your breloom. It must of been sad, but it's really cool that they are making new lives for themselves. We’ll have to check in on them sometime.

Ren: I don't think it's really sunk in yet. I'm gonna miss them a lot.

Kai: I bet. By the way, Angela from my dad's lab is in Rustboro researching the whismurs, so I could have her send a message to your exploud if you want. She was super grateful for the tip-off, so she wouldn't mind at all. Because of you she got there before they restarted construction.

Ren: Good to hear!

Kai: And I also heard through the jade vine that someone from Prof. Sycamore's lab in Kalos is there. It's so cool!

Ren: On behalf of both myself and Oro, you're welcome. Oh, I had portraits taken with everyone before they left. Wanna see?

Kai: Yes!

Ren: Sending… [ She sends the pictures but then remembers the Kōtai one may not be super appropriate. ] By the way… I'm not wearing very much in one of them.

Kai: Oh. Should I not open them?

Ren: No. I mean that's up to you. I don't mind. It just occurred to me that I should probably warn you… You know. Given the circumstances…

[There is a pause while he looks at them. Ren sends the photos to Wally as well.]

Kai: These are crazy awesome Ren! I love them.

Ren: I'll have you know that Ren Kosugi does nothing by halves.

[Her nav boops as she gets a message from Wally in another window.]

Wally: First of all how dare you.

Ren: Wha?

Wally: Why do you have to be such a rock star! This is so unfair! Have you even looked at these! (Oh)

Ren: Well they did cost a pretty penny.

Wally: And they were worth each and every cent. And that is beside the point. We are discussing your poor sportsmanship. How is anyone supposed to compete with this?! (Smirk) How is anyone supposed to compete with this?!

[Ren cackles to herself as she goes back and forth between the chats. However, she is soon interrupted by a metallic flutter of wings. She looks up to see Steven dismounting his skarmory not ten feet away.]

Steven: [walking over] Well hello again, Ren. I see you’ve found another one of my little spots.

Ren: Huh?

Steven: I visit this cove sometimes when I have things to think about. It’s usually deserted.

Ren: Oh, I’m sorry—

Steven: No, not at all. I don’t mind sharing. [He plops down on the sand next to her.] Besides, it’s not like I own the place… [He looks out at the water as Roma and Pohaku breach the surface for a moment before diving back down. Then he turns back to Ren.] It’s actually good to see you again. You had me a bit worried. You look better. How are you doing?

[Ren ignores the soft beeps from her nav that tell her that the boys are still texting her and puts it away.]

Ren: A lot better. It's been rough, but I've had a lot of support. Thank you so much for everything you said last time. That helped a lot too.

Steven: You're welcome. To tell you the truth, I said what I thought would have helped me after I lost Hecate. I'm glad it worked out. In any case, it certainly seems as though you are taking the loss better than I did.

Ren: I'm coping.

Steven: That's good. I see you are still in the training business. Oh! Speaking of which, do you mind if I send out my other pokemon? They love it here.

Ren: Go ahead. A lot of mine are big fans. I'm sure it would give them a thrill.
Steven sends out his Metagross, Armaldo, Cradily, Sandslash, and Steelix. They fan out across the cove while Bessemer settles down in the sand by his trainer's side. A little ways behind them down the beach, Tungsten the Steelix rocks back and forth trying to sink into the sand.

Ren: I've actually got a new goal in mind now. I'm going to take the League challenge.

In the background, Kōtai approaches Steven's Sandslash and marvels at her ice scales, having never seen an Alolan variant before.

Steven: Oh? That's wonderful news! Gives me something to look forward too.

Ren: Ugh, stop being so suave. Mild terror flashes over her face as she realizes she said that out loud.

Steven: He laughs. My apologies.

He waggles his eyebrows. Ren snorts. They both look out at the surf for a bit, Ren to calm her blush. Steven's Armaldo and Cradily are wading out into the water. Roma and Pohaku swim up to them.

Pohaku: to the Armaldo Whoa, what are you?

Ardalo: I'm you but stronger.

Ren turns back to Steven.

Ren: So, are you doing okay? It seems like you have a lot on your mind.

Steven: I'm alright, thank you. The whole Magma mystery is just complicating my life quite a bit, as if I didn't have enough on my plate... He sighs, then seems to come back to himself. Sorry, didn't mean to complain. He aims a half smile at Ren. There are a lot of responsibilities as Champion. Are you sure you want the job?

Ren: grinning Positive. And you can totally vent to me. After everything it's really the least I could do.

Behind her, Kōtai is talking and joking with Steven's Sandslash as they share the berries he has collected.

Steven & Bessemer: Thank you, Ren.

Bessemer: He doesn't take care of himself sometimes. I'm the one who dragged us out here for a break.

Steven does not react to this at all, so Ren assumes that Bessemer only made the comment to her. She thinks "you're welcome" back. Bessemer winks at her. Just beyond them, Tungsten(Steelix) is looking a little dejected. Akahata and Ao walk up to her and after a quick conversation, start burying her the rest of the way.

Ren: Oh, that reminds me. I have rocks for you. I keep forgetting to give them to you.

Steven gratefully receives each, keeping a running commentary as he examines them...
Steven: Oh, what a lovely beryl specimen, great structure. This fluorite is such a beautiful color. Bismuth, very nice. A stromatolite! The earliest fossilized form of life. And a meteorite! [He holds it up and Bessemser brings it the rest of the way to their eye with telekinesis so that they can better examine it.] My my, you've been lucky.

Ren: You don't know the half of it.

[She holds out the final stone to him. He goes to take it but then stops.]

Steven: A mega stone. Ren, you don't have to give me this.

Ren: I know, but I want to. Also that isn't the only mega stone I found and I'm keeping the other. Besides, I have good reason to give you that one. Here, just take a closer look.

Steven: [He takes the stone and holds it up to the light, turning it this way and that. He grins and nods. I've only ever seen one other piece. Thank you so much. Tungsten, come over here! Look at what Ren gave us!]

Steven hops up and his steelix reluctantly wriggles out of the sand Akahata and Ao just finished covering her in. She slithers up and peers at the rock before her eyes go wide. She hums excitedly and looks at her trainer. Steven nods and she lets out an even deeper growl and grins, clearly pleased.

Steven: [turning back to Ren] Well now I am very glad to have run into you. [He offers his hand and Ren takes it. He pulls her to her feet. Say, would you like to—] He starts and lets go of her hand. Ren looks at him in confusion, but we know what has his attention.

Latias: [in Steven's head] Steven! Team Magma has found the island. Latiost cannot hold them off for long. We need your help. I am coming to you.

Steven: Uh, actually, I forgot I have something I should be doing right now. I should really go.

Ren: O-okay.

Steven: [recalling all of his pokemon, including Damascus] Sorry to leave so suddenly. I—

Latias: [in Steven's head] I sense another trainer with you. Would they help us?

Steven: [to Latias] I'd rather not involve her. She's been through so much already.

Latias: [in Steven's head] Let her decide.

Steven: [to Latias] Latias, please—

[Ren is staring at Steven, totally perplexed by his strange behavior when the air next to him begins to shimmer. Latias materializes next to him and Ren gaps. Steven steps partially between them, arms splayed as if to try and conceal Latias, until he seems to realize the complete futility of his actions. He puts his hands in his pockets.]

Steven: [hissing] Latias!

Latias: [She floats another foot or two towards Ren, completely ignoring Steven's reproach. Her large, golden eyes consider Ren thoughtfully.] So, Steven, who is your friend?
Ren shivers as Latias touches her mind and sends the thought gently across. When Kata uses telepathy, she feels no more than a nudge, if anything at all. This is wholly different. It is like dropping into a huge and swift-running river or sticking a finger in an electrical outlet. Only she is not swept away or drowned or in pain. She is enveloped but left to be by the immense power that surrounds her, every atom of her body and consciousness buzzing. Latias's presence is somehow calming, and yet Ren still has the sense that she is protected only by Latias's whim and that the pokemon could overwhelm her at any time should she wish to.

Steven: [ He sighs. ] Latias, may I introduce Ren Kosugi. Ren, this is Latias, Guardian of the Eons.

Latias dips her head in greeting, long neck arching gracefully. Ren automatically dips her head back.

Latias: I sense great power in her. Is she a strong trainer?

All of Ren's pokemon have stopped what they are doing to watch.

Steven: Yes, but—

Latias: Then why not ask for her help?

Steven: Please, Latias. I can handle this.

Latias: Don't be arrogant, Steven.

Steven flushes in embarrassment and looks away. Ren stares at him with a mixture of amusement and disbelief before her eyes flick back to Latias. The Eon Guardian floats up to her and offers her paw. Ren puts her hand in Latias's and Latias places her other paw over it.

Latias: Ren Kosugi, Team Magma has found the island that is my and my brother's home and are attempting to capture him and steal his soul dew. Will you help us?

As Latias explains, feelings and images of the events appear in Ren's mind: Latias peering out of the trees to see Team Magma members landing on the beach in a speed boat. Courtney and Blaise approaching a pool in front of a waterfall. Blaise reaching for the soul dew at the bottom of the pool, only for both him and Courtney to be thrown back by Latias's barrier. Courtney and Blaise's pokemon attacking. Latios urging Latias to go while he uses luster purge.

Ren: [ She stares into Latias's eyes for a moment as she takes in all of the information. ] Yes. [ turning to her pokemon ] Are you ready to face Magma again?

Tāraki: Yes!

[ Akahata and Ao nod. ]

Kōtai: Aye, luv. Let's send those scoundrels packin'!

Pohaku: [ flashing his claws in excitement ] A battle? I'm ready!

Ren: [ turning back to Latias ] How will we get there?

Latias: I will take you.

There is barely enough room on Latias's back for two people, so Ren isn't sure how she is supposed to fly them. But then again the pokemon is floating in midair and is clearly a psychic-type. Ren withdraws her pokemon and Latias crouches on the ground so that the humans can board.
Steven settles onto her back with practiced ease and holds out his hand to Ren. She takes it and he guides her to sit with her legs tucked under her on Latias's shoulders just in front of him. He puts on his flight goggles and Ren quickly rummages in her bag and puts on hers.

Latias: Grip with your knees and hold onto my fur with your hands. We must go very quickly.

Steven: [ as they begin to float upward ] Latios is not going to like this.

Latias: Don't be ridiculous. He'll love her.

Latias shoots south across the sky, rapidly accelerating until the ocean is nothing but a blue blur far below them. Steven begins to slip and has to wrap his arms around Ren's waist to stay in place. Ren hardly notices she is so swept up in the sensation of flying. A huge grin splits her face and she whoops and laughs into the rushing air. A cross breeze tries to tear Ren off Latias's back and she struggles to hold on.

Latias: Lean down over my neck. You will break less wind.

Ren follows Latias's instructions and is secure once more. Steven is forced to lean into her to stay out of the wind. Ren smiles.

Scene 6: [ Soon enough the island comes into view and Latias angles down toward it, slowing so as not to crash. She lands in a clearing on the north side of the island. Steven slides off her back and holds out a hand to help Ren down. She wobbles and grips Steven’s hand for support, laughing at her own unsteadiness and the residual high of the flight. Steven looks at her. Her hair is wild, face flushed, eyes bright, and smile radiant. He can’t help but smile too, though much more reservedly. ]

Steven: You alright?

Ren: [ recovered and straightening up, but still a little breathless ] Yeah! I’ve never flown before!

Steven: Quite something, no?

Latias looks amused. Suddenly there is a loud bang from nearby and their heads all whirl around, smiles dropping off their faces.

Latias: We must hurry.

Latias zips off towards the noise and Ren and Steven run after her. They race down a path through the trees which soon opens out into another far larger clearing with a waterfall at the back. Latios is there doing battle with Courtney’s torkoal and Blaise’s weezing. He is clearly weakened and being slowly backed up against the falls. He fells her torkoal but she just replaces it with a ninetails. The ninetails aims a flamethrower at Latios, but Latias is in front of him in a flash and throws up a protect. The flamethrower bounces harmlessly off the shield. The Eon Guardians glare down Courtney and Blaise as Steven and Ren rush between them. Behind them, Latias checks over Latios, running her paws through his fur and feathers and carefully moving his limbs with her arms to better evaluate his injuries. He is covered in various burns and scratches and it looks as though one wing shoulder has been dislocated.

Latios: [ to Latias ] Why did you bring another human?! Steven and I could have handled it!
Latias: [as she uses heal pulse on him] I think you mean Steven and I could have handled it. Besides, it's that attitude that got us into this mess in the first place.

Latios: No, it was playing our hand too soon that brought these humans down on us.

Latias: They already almost made a volcano erupt. [cracking his shoulder back in place] Is that really not large enough of a disturbance for you? [He snorts from the pain but does not cry out.] It's well past time we got involved.

Latios: Whether or not I agree with you is no longer relevant. You’ve left us no other option. We are too exposed now.

Latias: Good. Then I’m sure you will also agree that it is time you made a pact.

Latios: [grumbling] Yes.

Latias: Well Steven and I found you a candidate.

Latios: [bristling] You can’t just bring me the first strong trainer you bumble across and expect me to accept them!

Latias: [calm and confident] Just touch her mind. You will see.

Meanwhile Ren and Steven, unaware of the argument taking place behind them, are busy dealing with the two Magma members.

Steven: [sending out Bessemer] Dr. Courtney Kagari. Maxie still sending you on errands even though you failed to get the parts from me?

[Courtney bristles and Ren sends out Tāraki.]

Blaise: Latias must have brought them.

Courtney: [eyes fixing on Ren and her pokemon] Ren Kosugi? We have to terminate her.

[Tāraki bristles and growls deep in his throat.]

Blaise: [looking askance at Courtney, clearly startled] Do we really—

Courtney: [screaming] SHE’S ON TABITHA’S LIST! [Blaise shies away from her. Courtney calms just a bit but grins wickedly.] As co-admin, I must respect her decisions. [She laughs.]

Ninetails, melt that metagross!

Blaise: Sludge bomb, Smog!

Steven: Earthquake!

Ren: Slam!

[The ninetails moves first but only by a second. Bessemer blocks the brunt of her fiery onslaught with a wave of earth that rushes towards her and sends her sprawling. Tāraki rides the crest of the wave and whirs, roaring as he slams the weezing with his tail. The weezing hits a tree and stays imbedded in the trunk. Blaise's hand shakes as he withdraws his weezing and sends out a darmanitan. Courtney seems unfazed and sends out a camerupt.]

Courtney: Eruption!
Blaise: Fire punch!

Steven: Iron defence!

Ren: Tāraki, get behind Bes!

[Tāraki leaps back to Bessemer's side as he projects a silver barrier around them. The darmanitan rushes forward with a roar of its own and molten rocks shoot out of the camerupt's back. The combined fire attacks smash into the barrier at the same time and shatter it. The fiery remains rain down on Bessemer and they groan. ]

Ren: Keep that darmanitan off them!

[The darmanitan comes in for another fire punch, this time swinging at Bessemer's leg, but Tāraki parries with dual chop. We can see Ren moving in sync with Tāraki as he pushes the darmanitan back with one arm and punches it in the face with the other. Bessemer uses earthquake again, but fails to fell the camerupt. Tāraki trades blows with the darmanitan, clearly weakening. ]

Steven: Meteor mash!

Ren: Get down!

[The darmanitan cocks back a flaming fist for the final blow and Tāraki ducks. Instead of knocking out his foe, the darmanitan himself is taken out as Bessemer nails him in the gut. ]

Courtney: Lava plume!

Ren: Mega drain!

[The lava erupts right under Bessemer and they totter backwards. Tāraki retaliates with a mega drain, bringing himself back from the brink as the camerupt falls to its knees. Courtney withdraws it and sends out a golbat and Blaise sends out a swallow. Steven pats Bessemer fondly before withdrawing them and sending out his Alolan sandslash. ]

Steven: Avalanche, Alwyn!

[The swallow dodges the wall of ice but the golbat is not so lucky and Courtney growls. The swallow dives and catches Tāraki in the shoulder. Ren goes to withdraw him but he stops her. ]

Tāraki: No, please don’t! I have to be here.

Ren: Okay, tiger, but at least tap out for a bit.

Steven: Icicle spear!

[Alwyn launches icicle after icicle at the swallow but it dodges expertly. Courtney sends out a pyroar. ]

Courtney: Fire fang!

[Now it is Alwyn who is forced to dodge as the pyroar runs at her, jaws burning. Courtney cackles and Ren sends out Kōtai. ]

Ren: Sand tomb!

[The pyroar’s legs are bogged down, leaving Alwyn open to go after the swallow once more. ]
Ren: Dig!

[Kōtai dives into the ground as one might into water and disappears from view. This time Alwyn is more clever about her onslaught and manages to outplay the swellow’s maneuverability. It takes a direct hit and it goes down.]

Alwyn: Ha!

[However the pyroar has gotten behind her and readies a flamethrower. Kōtai bursts from the ground just in time and uppercuts it in the jaw.]

Kōtai: Oh no you don’t.

Ren: Brick break!

[The pyroar falls over. It tries to get up only to have Kōtai pounce on it and smack it in the forehead.]

Kōtai: You just stay down now.

[Courtney and Blaise withdraw their pokemon and the sandslash tap claws in their version of a high five. Courtney sends out her weezing, face wild with rage.]

Blaise: We can’t take them. We have to get out of here!

Courtney: [She ignores him] Flamethrower!

Blaise: [calling someone on his nav] The situation has gone south. We need to get out now.

[Kōtai jumps in front of Alwyn, taking most of the flamethrower himself.]

Steven: Metal claw!

[Alwyn jumps up from behind Kōtai and slashes at the weezing. She only strikes a glancing blow and it readies another flamethrower, floating higher.]

Ren: Smackdown!

[Kōtai runs forward and Alwyn holds out her claws. He bounds into them and she launches him upward. The combined force sends Kōtai high into the air above the weezing and he strikes it down. It smashes into the ground and begins to float away again when Alwyn darts in and slashes it with metal claw. It sinks down again in defeat. Ren and Steven glance at each other and smile.]

Courtney: GET UP!

[The smiles fall off their faces at this horrific treatment of her pokemon.]

Blaise: Let’s go!

[He grabs her by the arm and pulls her away. She growls but follows, only withdrawing her pokemon as an afterthought. Steven makes to go after them.]

Latios: Let them go. It doesn’t matter.

[Latios’s presence is very similar to Latias’s but slightly weaker, less comforting and more dangerous. She meets his eyes and his mind presses into hers. For a moment thoughts and feelings]
and images rush by in a flurry, some hers and some his. A second later, he pulls back. Ren lets out
the breath she didn’t realize she was holding.]

Steven: Are you alright, Latios?

Latios: I’ll live.

[Ren looks out over the clearing. What was once a beautiful, verdant glen is now burnt and scoured
almost beyond recognition. The tree that the weezing was thrown into is cracked and a limb is
partially down. The ground is heaved up and scored and littered with rocks and cooled magma and
melting ice.]

Ren: I’m so sorry about your home.

Latias: Nonsense. It wasn't really your doing anyway.

Latios: [dryly] I call that a generous assessment, but nonetheless I much prefer this to being
imprisoned or enslaved by those idiots.

Latias: Worse things have happened on this island. This damage can be repaired.

Kōtai: I can help get that started at least.

Latias: How very kind of you. Thank you, sandslash.

[Kōtai dips his head and dives underground. Alwyn starts hauling the rocks away to the side.]

Latios: [to Ren and Steven] And thank you two. I and my soul dew would have been lost without
your help. [He dips his head.]

Latias: Yes, thank you.

Ren: You're welcome.

Steven: [bowing] It's been my honor.

[Ren glances over at Steven, feeling that she has perhaps addressed the legendary pokemon a bit
too informally after that display. She looks around again, unsure what to do now that the danger has
passed.]

Latias: You probably have questions.

Latios: [wryly] Humans usually do.

Latias: We will answer what we can.

Ren: Actually, if you don't mind my asking, what is a soul dew?

Latios: It is our one and only possession. [He reaches into the pool, pulls it up and holds it out in his
paws so that she might look at it. It is about fist sized and very like a blue gem. It is perfectly smooth
and spherical and glows with an inner light, not unlike a nebula.] Mine was created when the first
Latios died and hers when the first Latias died. They give us power in times of great need.

Steven: They are actually mega stones, albeit unique and powerful ones. Latias allowed me to run
some tests on hers.
Ren: Thank you for showing me, Latios. It's beautiful.

Latios: Of course. [ *He puts it carefully back, then stares into Ren's eyes with his red ones for a moment.* ] What is your name?

Ren: Ren Kosugi.

Latios: Hmm... I wonder if you would help me and my sister with something.

[ *It sounds as if he is unsure rather than asking for her help, but Ren tries to answer anyway.* ]

Ren: If I can.

Latios: You can, but first let me explain. Then we shall see if you will. As you may have surmised, my sister and I have not been dubbed 'guardians' by mere chance. We, like the other so-called 'legendary' pokemon, have been given a purpose by the great lord Arceus. When the balance of the cycle is threatened, it has always been our duty to set it right. Though we were granted great power with which to complete our task, we sometimes require help. Almost since humans appeared on this planet, we have sought them out as allies for their ability to share power and make us more than ourselves. In this cycle, Latias has chosen Steven. So I ask you, Ren Kosugi, would you be my partner and help us prevent the terrible disaster Magma intends to unleash on us all?

[ *Ren does not immediately respond. There are far too many thoughts and emotions swirling through her mind to make proper sense of them. She tries to keep a lid on it which only makes her face redden before she eventually blows her top.* ]

Ren: [ *yelling at Latios* ] Why now?! After all the shit I've been through! After I finally decided what to do with my life! How can you—ARGHHH!

[ *She turns around and storms off, but doesn't go all that far. She crosses her arms and huffs, but already a lot of the wind has gone out of her sails. Behind her, Steven looks sympathetic more than anything else. He shoots a reproachful glance at Latias, but the Eon Guardians seem quite unaffected by the outburst. Ren tears up just a little, her back still to them, and sighs. She watches as the two sandslash clear and level the battlefield to much the way it was. Tāraki walks up to her and rubs his head on her shoulder. She caresses him gently with a hand.* ]

Tāraki: You know I'm with you no matter what, don't you?

Ren: Yes, and I know what I have to do too. It's just... a little frustrating, you know?

[ *He burbles and leans into her. She smiles and wipes her eyes. She turns around and walks back up the the Eon Guardians with Tāraki at her side.* ]

Ren: I'm sorry. That was childish. Of course I'll help you. [ *Steven's surprise and confusion at the sudden change is evident, so she explains herself.* ] You two are Guardians of the Eons. If this wasn't super important, you wouldn't have asked me. It's also inescapably obvious to me now that Magma will come after me and my pokemon. I may as well give them a reason.

[ *She shoots a sort of lopsided smile at Steven and he smiles faintly back.* ]

Latios: Thank you, Ren Kosugi.

Ren: Are you sure you want me though? I'm not exactly... perfect.

Latios: You are young and a little rash, but also wise and compassionate. And your strength runs
deep, deeper now than it ever has before. I am quite sure you will be up to the task ahead of us.

[ Ren smiles a little wider and more sure. Latios extends a paw and she places her hand against it. She looks deep into his eyes and his mind once more presses powerfully against hers, but less guarded this time. She allows herself to be enveloped by it. The world around her disappears, replaced by the endless river of his consciousness, but she is not afraid. She lets the thoughts and images and emotions flow freely around her until she is almost unable to tell which are hers, where she ends and he begins. On the outside Latios’s eyes glow and hers unfocus. After a few moments, her green eyes flash red and a rounded red triangle (Latios’s mark) flashes on her forehead. The next moment she blinks a few times and comes back to herself.]

Latias: [ smug ] A fine choice, Latios. [ He rolls his eyes. ] Although, I’m not sure she is quite as good as my chosen. He is the Hoenn League Champion after all.

Steven: Don’t brag Latias.

Latias: And why shouldn’t I? [ She strokes his hair. ] I picked the strongest and most beautiful human in the world! [ slyly to Ren ] Wouldn’t you agree?

Latios: That is your opinion. Personally, I find they all look a bit funny.

Ren: [ going a little red ] I don’t think it is an opinion. He is the Champion, which means he is the strongest. And empirically he is attractive.

[ Latias laughs, though it sounds nothing like human laughter. Still, it is a merry, ringing sort of sound. Ren laughs too. Steven jerks away from Latias’s continued ruffling of his hair and bats at her, which only incites more laughter. Even his sandslash chuckles a little. He smooths himself out, trying very hard not to smile himself, but not really succeeding. He clears his throat and fixes a sterner expression onto his face as they gradually quiet.]

Steven: If you are all quite done, I think we have a little business to take care of. The soul dews cannot stay here. It’s only a matter of time before Magma tries to take one again. I think Ren and I should hold onto them until we can get collars made so that you two can wear them. That way they will never be unguarded and you can call on their power at any time.

Latias: A fine idea. Thank you, Steven.

[ Latios merely nods in agreement.]

Steven: And Ren, I think we should exchange numbers. We can communicate through the Guardians, but it would probably be best to have a back up.

Ren: [ remarkably calm considering Steven is asking for her number ] Alright. Makes sense.

[ She pulls out her nav and hands it to him while he gives her his. After they enter their contact info, they trade back.]

Steven: And there is something else I should probably give you. [ He pulls out his vapor box and and a small rainbow colored gem materializes. He hands it to her. ] It’s a keystone. You may need to mega evolve Latio or one of your other pokemon at some point. And you are responsible enough to have it.

Ren: Steven, thank you. I don’t even know what to say.

Steven: Not at all. We should probably head back though. Now I actually am late for something.
Ren: O-okay.

Latias: I will take you.

[ Ren looks over at Latios. ]

Latios: I think I shall stay here a while and recover. I will come and find you soon.

Ren: Okay.

[ By this time the sandslash have done a remarkably good job of clearing and tilling the battlefield so that it looks more like a garden ready to be planted. Ren and Steven withdraw their pokemon and climb back aboard Latias. ]

Scene 7: [ The second flight is not quite as thrilling as the first, and Latias goes a bit slower, but it is still quite beautiful and Ren enjoys it. She is feeling a bit overwhelmed, but remarkably calm considering all that has happened when they land back on the beach. Once again Steven helps her disembark, but she is less wobbly. They say their goodbyes and Ren begins to head north. Before she gets more than ten feet off the beach, Steven calls out to her. ]

Steven: Ren?

[ She turns back to look at him. Latias has disappeared, but she can’t be sure if she is gone or just invisible. ]

Steven: …Thank you. I'm sorry if I seemed… dismissive or that I didn't want you there. Overconfidence is a fault of mine. I'm glad I had your help today.

Ren: [ smiling ] Anytime. And if you need me again, you have my number now. Just give me a call.

[ With that astonishing feat of flirtation accomplished, she turns around and saunters off. He stares after her just long enough to see her do a little skip he probably wasn’t supposed to. ]

Scene 8: [ That night Ren is staying in a hostel surrounded by berry fields. She lays back on a bunk in her pajamas and heaves a big sigh. She opens her nav and sees that she has several messages from Kai and Wally. She reads through them before typing out a message to both. ]

Ren: Sorry to leave you hanging. I got distracted.

Wally: You were just ducking out of being scolded. ~<(∀`)/ Can't blame u tho.

Kai: nbd i do it all the time

Ren: I ran into Steven Stone again.

Kai: WHAT!?!?
Scene 9: [ Josh is sitting in an armchair in the usual red living room reading a book. We can see from the title on the spine that it is “Watership Down”. Fang is napping next to him on the floor while his golbat dozes in the dark corner behind his chair. Azalea enters and walks right up to him. ]

Azalea: [ barking ] Josh! [ He starts violently and drops his book. ] Did you start those rumors that we're fucking?

Josh: [ terrified ] N-no! Shit! I'm sorry! It was Hart and Brent. [ realizing he is throwing his friends under the bus ]—But it wasn't really their fault either! [ words running together in panic ] They just saw you being nice to me all of a sudden and assumed things and I didn't know what else to tell them so now they're telling everybody that we hooked up and I'll fix it I promise!

Azalea: Whoa, pump the breaks, kid. All I was gonna say was that it was a good idea.

Josh: Wha?

Azalea: We'll play along with it. It's the perfect cover if we need it. And it's a good lie: easy to maintain. You better let me handle it though. The less you say, the safer we are. [ She saunters over to the door before turning and winking roguishly at him ] Later, chew toy!

[ She exits and he blushing hard and whines, sinking down into the armchair. ]

Scene 10: [ The next morning Ren has another team meeting in the pal park by the hostel and tells everyone what happened. Ren looks over her pokemon to gauge their reactions and Panahi looks about ready to explode. Ren opens her mouth to say something to her but doesn’t get the chance. ]

Panahi: [ outraged screeching ] WHAT? I can’t believe this! [ rounding on Ren’s party from yesterday ] And you all just let her do this? Kōtai! I thought I could trust you at the very least!

Kōtai: She’s grown, Panahi. She can make her own calls.

Panahi: Clearly I have to keep an eye on her myself!

Ren: Panahi!

Panahi: One of you switch out with me right now!

[ They all glance at each other. ]

Ren: Ahi, calm down.

Panahi: You! Newbie! Switch out with me!
Pohaku: Me?

Panahi: No, you’re a battler. I’m talking to that dope with the fins! [ Roma starts. ] Yes you! The pleasure cruise is over!

Ren: Ahi , that’s enough! Just let me explain—

Panahi: Don’t you Ahi me right now, missy! We’ll chat later! Where is this “Eon Guardian”? I’m gonna have some words with him first.

Ren: He’s not here. He got hurt battling Magma. He’ll show up in a few days.

Panahi: [growling] Fine. I take back that stuff I said about Steven though! You are no longer permitted to date him!

Ren: He’s actually the only one who tried to stop me getting involved.

Panahi: Nevermind. He is a fine young man of good sense. You may continue to court him.

[ Ren’s head lolls back and she covers her face with her hands and groans exasperatedly. ]

Panahi: In the meantime you are GROUNDED, you hear me! There’ll be no fighting Magma or saving the world or whatever hairbrained nonsense you suddenly think is a good idea! And here I thought we were making some progress! That you were maturing! But suddenly the moment you take control of your life you throw it at someone else’s feet? What in Arceus’s name is the matter with—

Tāraki: Cut! It! Out! Panahi!

[She deflates, wings drooping so that they touch the ground and beak hanging open. Everyone stares at him in shock. ]

Panahi: Hun…

Tāraki: You’re not the leader of this team, Ren is! She’s not an idiot and she's not irresponsible! None of us are! We went because she’s our trainer and we respect her! And if you took a moment to listen, you would see she made the right decision! So why don’t you just shut up for a second and listen to what she has to say!

Panahi: I’m sorry, Tāraki. I was just…

Tāraki: Worried. I am too. But she's right Panahi.

Panahi: [smoothing herself out and turning back to Ren.] I’m sorry for yellin’ at you, honey. Let me know what you're thinkin’.

Ren: Well, I just don't think there is any way for us to stay out of this now. I already pissed them off too much even before this latest incident. I was fooling myself to think if I just kept my head down we’d all be safe. I didn’t want to have to face the consequences of my actions. But this is me owning up and taking responsibility. We are going to have to face Magma. There is no question of that. And we’ll have a much better chance if we have some powerful allies. Does that make sense?

Panahi: …Yes. You’re right. I just wish it didn’t have to be this way. I’m behind you, honey.

Ren: Thanks, Panahi. That means a lot. [to everyone] I wish I had a little more to tell you right now,
but honestly I’m just about as in the dark about what’s going on as I ever was. All I’ve learned is that this is really serious and that Magma’s other admin is crazy. But Latios said that he would explain some things, so we should learn more when he shows up. Any questions?

Māia: Are we still going to battle and train?

Ren: Absolutely, if anything we are going to kick the training into overdrive. I want to be ready for the next time we have to face Magma.

Pohaku: Wow! I was reborn into such an interesting time!

Roma: If you don’t mind, I actually would like to switch with Panahi. You can always call on me if you need me, but I wouldn’t mind a break if you are going to be landlocked for a while.

Ren: Sure thing, Roma. Thank you for your help. Panahi, do you still want to switch out?

Panahi: Absolutely, honey. I still want to at least meet this Eon Guardian.

Ren: Sounds good.

---

**Scene 11:** [They spend the rest of the day helping out on the berry farm in exchange for the food and lodging and a bunch of rare berries. The farmer and his family and the other trainers staying there are of impressed by what a pro Kōtai is. The farmer tells Ren to come back anytime and stay as long as she likes. The next morning she sets off north towards Fortree with Tāraki, Akahata, Panahi, Māia, Ao, and Pohaku. The entire way to Fortree is one enormous and hilly river valley. And the path is very winding due to all of the obstacles and littered with rope bridges. In some spots it dips to almost the level of the river and in other places it climbs up into the great sloping sides of the ravine. The landscape is heavily forested, but there are many open spaces covered in patches of tall grass as well as steep slopes where the bare rock has been exposed. There are a lot of bug and bird trainers by the river on Routes 118 and 119, which means that Māia, Panahi, Ao and Pohaku get tons of practice while Tāraki and Akahata have to sit most of the day out. They meet a ranger and Tāraki finally gets a battle with her breloom. It’s a fast-paced battle with a lot of ducking and weaving but Tāraki comes out on top. The ranger shakes Ren’s hand and leaves. We pan out to see that something was watching them from up on a crag in the rock face above them. When it is sure that the other trainer has left, it stands up, revealing that it is an absol, and hops down to a lower ledge where it is more easily visible.]

Absol: [with telepathy] Greetings trainer!

[All look up to see the newcomer. It is a snowy white except for near its many dark points. Its horn, tail and claws are long and sharp. The absol’s telepathy is rather different from a psychic-type’s. Ren feels as though there is a shadow lurking just beyond her vision when it speaks. Unnerved, she pulls out her dex to find out what the bizarre creature is. The dex informs her that it is an absol and that this individual is a longclaw variant, which live at high elevations on remote mountain peaks. It also says that absol are often considered bad omens as they appear before disasters, but that some also revere them for this ability because they provide a warning.]

Ren: Hi.

Absol: I bring grave news that a great natural disaster, a cataclysm the likes of which has not been
seen for hundreds of generations, is on its way… [It pauses to let its message sink in.]

Ren: Oh, joy.

Absol: But I also wish to impart to you a message of hope. It has been foreseen by our elders and passed down in our tales that not all that looms must come to pass. There lies a possibility, however small, that this disaster can be averted. It is not considered the task of absol to change the course of events, but only to warn of what we feel is coming. I, however, have decided not to follow in that tradition. I want to do my part to prevent this disaster. It is for this reason that I come before you now. This task will require great strength, and though I have for many months honed my skills in battle, my power can only grow so much while I am alone. Thus, I seek a powerful trainer to help me on my quest. Though you may not choose to ultimately confront the disaster or its causes by my side, we may still be of great service to one another. If you would but lend me some of your power and help me to grow, I would do battle in your name and win you honor among the humans until such a time as my destiny calls me onward. What say you to my proposal?

Ren: Wow, um, okay. Actually, I think our goals may be aligned here. [Her pokemon nod. ] You see, we are, um, enemies with a group of humans known as Team Magma who seek to unbalance the cycle in some way. Maybe they are the cause of this disaster you’re talking about? In any case, our goal is to stop them.

Absol: Oh! How fortuitous indeed! It is as if the great Lord Arceus smiles upon my quest!

Ren: …So would you like to join us then? I’m sure we could use the help.

Absol: Well… [It taps a long claw against its chin thoughtfully. This is a bizarre gesture coming from a quadruped and Ren is a little weirded out, not having expected its forelimbs to be capable of that kind of rotation. ] I must first test your strength. I saw you defeat many trainers, but to be certain, I must match you and your pokemon’s strength against my own.

Ren: Okay then. Ao, you’re nice and warmed up, want to take this one?

Ao: Sure thing, Ren!

[She trots forward and Ren and the rest of her pokemon clear the area, already well aware of the damage their teammate can do. The absol grins and tenses, ready for battle.]

Ren: Alright, Ao. Charge beam!

[Ao squares off and fires a charge beam at the absol. It leaps down just as the bolt of electricity hits the ledge it was standing on and races straight for Ao, sickle-shaped horn glowing darkly.]

Ren: Don’t let her close! Discharge!

[Ao lets loose all of the electricity stored in her pelt and it arcs toward absol in a wave. Undeterred, the absol powers through the attack, taking the damage and slicing Ao across the chest with its horn. The impact sends Ao sprawling. She raises her head and shudders, but does not get up.]

Ren: Whoa! Okay. Let’s see how it does against another dark-type. You’re up Akahata. [Akahata steps forward and squares off with it, while Ao retreats to Ren’s side. ] Alright, crunch isn’t going to do much, so go for thunder fang.

[Akahata leaps forward, clearly faster than the absol was expecting, and grabs it by the leg, sending a jolt of electricity through it. The absol shakes her off and they face each other once more. Akahata lunges again, but this time the absol is ready and smiles as its horn glows a bright lime green.]
Akahata tries to pounce from above, but the absol crouches and then slashes upward. She connects powerfully with Akahata’s gut and sends her flying. She lands heavily and rolls, coming to rest on her side.

Ren: Aka?
[She groans and flicks her ears to show that she is alive.]

Ren: Holy shit. I think that was megahorn.
[She looks back at the rest of her pokemon, unsure who to send out next. The absol waits patiently, a look of satisfaction on its face.]

Māia: [from her perch in a nearby tree] Now there is a worthy opponent. Send me in, Ren.

Ren: Are you sure. You’ve been battling a lot today.

Māia: I only need one hit.

Ren: Alright then, do your thing.
[Māia flits forward and circles the absol. It is clearly surprised by the choice and rolls it shoulders in preparation, looking confident. Māia circles out farther before swooping down to face the absol head on. Its horn glows purple this time with what looks like a psychic attack and it lunges forward to meet Māia in the air. Māia opens her mouth and lets loose a boomburst. The absol is knocked back by the concussive sound wave and rolls across the ground. It comes to a rest and tries to get up but stumbles. It makes eye contact with Ren and then bows its head respectfully in defeat. Māia lands back on her branch and fluffs herself in satisfaction.]

Ren: Good job everyone.
[She kneels down and pulls a potion out of her bag and starts spraying it on Ao and then Akahata. They perk up a bit, but are still sore from the beating they took. After they are taken care of, she turns back to the absol.]

Ren: [to the absol] You are some battler. How’d a wild like you learn to battle like that?

Absol: Some of it is natural advantages that I was born with, some is countless hours of practice, and some is lessons learned from opponents.

Ren: Well, I can safely say I've never met a wild like you before. [holding up the potion] May I? It's a healing spray.
[The absol nods and Ren sprays her with the potion.]

Absol: Rejuvenating. My mentor told me that trainers carried many such useful things.

Ren: …Yeah, I guess we do.

Absol: [She gets up and shakes herself off.] Since you have defeated me in battle, I would be honored to join your team and submit to a pokeball.

Ren: Okay, but you should know that you could be in there a few days and wouldn't be able to be sent out. Since I already have six pokemon with me, once you enter a pokeball, it will lock until I can get to the next town.
Absol: Hmm. That does not seem ideal.

Ren: I agree. That’s sort of a long time to be in a ball. I think it would be better if you just traveled with us for now and bond to a pokeball once we get to Fortree.

Absol: Yes. That sounds far more agreeable. I thank you for your consideration.

Ren: Of course. It’s my job. But the other thing you should know is that you can train with us in the meantime, but you can’t battle with me against any other trainers until we visit a Pokemon Center and register you as my pokemon. Battling with an unregistered pokemon would get my trainer licence revoked pretty much immediately.

Absol: My mentor did mention that humans had many rules to ensure fairness and prevent death in battles. I will respect them.

Ren: Okay then, sounds like we have a deal.

Absol: Yes.

Ren: So, how would you feel about Naihi as a name?

Absol: It has a pleasant sound to it. You honor me with this name. Thank you, trainer.

Ren: You’re welcome. And my name is Ren. You can call me that instead of ‘trainer’.

Naihi: If that is what you wish… [ turning to look over Ren’s pokemon, who are gathered in a loose circle a little ways away. ] So, this is you team?

Ren: Yes. Or most of it anyway. I have four more who aren’t with us at the moment. Since I can only have six of you at a time, the rest stay in a reserve far to the southeast of here when they’re not training.

Naihi: Hmm, that is interesting. Impressive that you can manage so many.

Ren: Um, thank you, I guess.

Naihi: I'm sorry if my initial manner startled you. I know it is not the usual way of wild pokemon to approach humans thusly.

Ren: Yeah, no offense, but that was probably one of the strangest and spookiest things I have ever experienced and when I tell you how my life has been going lately, you’ll understand the gravity of that statement. But that being said, you’re not exactly alone on this team either. Māia, the taillow you battled asked me to be her trainer too, and challenged me to a battle. And Akahata, that’s my mightyena, also challenged me to a battle after I asked her to be my pokemon and I had to defeat her before she joined.

Naihi: [ She looks over at Akahata, who is sitting with Ao and the others. ] Ah, I see.

[ While Ren and the absol are talking, the rest of Ren’s team are having their own little conference some distance away. Akahata and Ao are sitting side by side on the ground, Tāraki is standing a few feet away leaning back on his tail, Māia and Panahi are perched on the low branch of a tree, and Pohaku is floating lazily around in his water sphere. ]

Māia: [ glancing over at the absol as it talks to Ren ] Geez. That new absol is weird. Are we sure she’s okay? It seems like she might be a little crazy. Or a lot crazy.
Panahi: I don't know... All absol are pretty strange in my limited experience.

Tāraki: I wish Putenga were here. She'd be all over that.

Panahi: Hah! Didn't think I'd see the day when you missed her, hun.

Akhata: We should give her a chance. It could take a while, but I'm sure she'll adjust. We all did. And she's strong. We could use her... [She notices how everyone is staring at her, but pretends not to.] Besides, you all gave the little bug a pass.

Panahi: He was regenerated from a million year old fossil.

Māia: Yeah, we expected him to be weird.

Tāraki: Awww, he's not so bad! Lay one on me little guy!

[He holds up a hand and Pohaku swims cheerfully up and taps it with a claw. Tāraki grins as he shakes the seawater from his hand.]

Panahi: You just like him because he worships you.

Pohaku: Tāraki is so strong! And I love the way he [he slashes at the water in front of him with a “ha! yah!”] slashes his opponents!

[All laugh except Pohaku who does a little loop de loop in his water sphere in an imitation of one of Tāraki’s signature backflips.]

Ao: Aka's right though. She probably isn't so strange once you get to know her.

[Akahata looks over at where Ren and the absol are talking and finds the absol staring at her.]

**Scene 12:** [The next day Ren and her pokemon are doing training exercises. She gets them all set up before walking over with Akahata to Naihi, who has been silently observing.]

Ren: Okay, so we’re going to do a little evaluation to see where your strengths and weaknesses are and then I can come up with a training regimen for you. Akahata will be helping us out. Sound good?

Naihi: Of course trainer—Ren. Whatever you think is best.

Ren: Let’s start with whatever move you feel most comfortable with and we’ll move on from there.

Naihi: I am most practiced at my dark-type move.

Ren: Alright. It’s called “night slash”. Could you use it on that downed tree over there please?

[Naihi dips her head and turns to face the tree. She tenses, leaps forward and slashes it with her horn, leaving a deep gash in the dead wood. Naihi steps back and Ren inspects the cut.]

Ren: Good form. One more time.
Ren. Whoa. [She and Akahata glance at each other.] Okay, what did you do differently that time?

Naihi: When I struck the first time, I felt a weak point in the tree, so the second time I struck that place instead.

Ren: Hmm. Okay, this time I want you to attack Akahata. Aka, do your best to dodge.

[Aka nods and they square off. Naihi paces, evaluating her opponent before leaping forward as fast as she can and slashing at Akahata’s left shoulder. Akahata is faster however and is stuck in the side. She rolls once and pops back up to her feet. Naihi looks irritated.]

Ren: Good job Aka! This time just stand your ground and let her hit you.

[Akahata nods and Naihi tenses up, preparing to strike with all of her strength. She launches forward, horn glowing and eyes wild. She slashes Akahata across the chest and she slides back, claws digging into the dirt, but doesn’t fall over. She shakes herself out. Naihi looks even more frustrated than before.]

Ren: That second hit looked much stronger. What do you think, Aka?

Akahata: She hits like a hammer. It’s amazing. And the second hit was much stronger. It was definitely a critical.

[Naihi glances between them, not quite understanding what they are talking about.]

Ren: I think she must have gotten one on Ao yesterday too. It's really the only way she could have taken her down in one hit. But to get critical hits so often… I think she must have super luck. [The two dark-types look confused so Ren explains.] It's a natural ability only a few pokemon have, like how you get faster rather than slower when paralyzed and how Tāraki’s grass-type moves get a power boost when he's injured. It allows her to sense weak points and increases her accuracy. And since slash, night slash and psycho cut are all high accuracy moves, that would mean that she actually has a high probability of getting a critical hit every time she attacks. No wonder you are so strong.

Naihi: Thank you.

Ren: So here’s what I see already: your attack is obviously very high. You bowled Aka over with a move that she is resistant to. So I don’t think we have to work too much on that. Now, the dex said that absol can run special moves too, but you only have physical moves right now and they work really well with your typing and ability. So I don't think we should bother with that. Our top priority right now should be your speed. You hit hard enough that you can probably take down most opponents in one or two hits, so striking first could easily win you matches without you taking any damage at all. Our second priority will be your evasion and defenses because, while it's nice to win battles quickly, you will need a backup strategy for longer matches. How does that all sound to you?

Naihi: I see that you are very knowledgeable in the ways of battling trainer—Ren. I will defer to your expertise.

Ren: Alrighty then. The first exercise you’ll be doing is sprints with Akahata. You’ll start between those two trees, run and touch that rock over there and then run back and tag the near tree. Aka will touch the far tree. After each you'll take a little breather, then line up and do it again, got it?
She nods and they go to line up between the two trees. Ren blows a whistle and they race forward towards the rock. Akahata touches first and easily reverses direction. Naihi’s eyes narrow in irritation as they pass each other. She leaps at the rock and bounces back off. She throws herself into the backstretch but Akahata easily beats her. The next time Akahata doesn’t manage to pass her until the turn, because she reverses direction much quicker. The next round Akahata pulls ahead on the backstretch. Each time Naihi improves a little, but she still isn’t as fast as Akahata and is clearly frustrated by it. Afterwards, Ren goes to work with Panahi and Pohaku who are practicing brine together. Naihi sits down to watch Ren from a distance and Akahata approaches her.

Akahata: You worked hard today and you did well. Those exercises don't always come so easily to newcomers.

Naihi: I wanted to assure my trainer that she had made the right choice in taking me on.

Akahata: You don't have to worry too much about Ren, but if you have questions you can always ask me. I've been training with her for a long time now.

Naihi: [narrowing her eyes for a moment] Very well. She introduced you to me as Akahata, but often refers to you as Aka. Why is that? What is its significance?

Akahata: Oh, Aka is a nickname. Humans sometimes use nicknames to show familiarity. Ren is particularly fond of them. You will probably have one before the week is out.

Naihi: I see… Can you tell me anything about our enemies, this “Team Magma” our trainer spoke of? Who are they? Their strengths, their weaknesses, their goals?

Akahata: Well, we don’t know a lot but…

We lose track of their conversation as we pan out and over to Ren’s other pokemon. Ren is working with Tāraki and Pohaku and the background. The rest are taking a breather.

Panahi: [looking over at Naihi and Akahata talking together] Huh, that’s unusual.

Ao: [following her gaze] What is?

Māia: Akahata being all friendly with the new recruit.

Ao: What do you mean? It’s like she said yesterday. She’s trying to get to know her a little.

Panahi: Well, I guess it wouldn’t seem all that odd to you since the two of you have always been close, but Aka usually takes a while to warm up to new pokemon. Before you got here, she pretty much only talked to Ren and Ikki and only because they took the initiative.

[ Māia nods in agreement. ]

Ao: Maybe she’s just happy to have another dark-type on the team.

Māia: She was never interested in Wheta.

[ Ao looks over at Akahata again. ]

Panahi: Don’t get us wrong, hun. She’s come a long way since we met her. I just think there might be something going on there.

Ao: I'm going to talk to her.
She gets up and heads off. The two birds look at each other. Māia shrugs and they both take off and follow her.

Ao: [ cheerfully ] Hi there!

[ Naihi looks around at them, slightly puzzled. ]

Ao: We just thought: "why are we all hanging out over here when we could be getting to know our new teammate?"

Naihi: I suppose it is a good idea to learn a little about each other since we must all work together towards a common goal.

Ao: Exactly.

Naihi: So how long have you all been training with Ren?

Ao: Well Tāraki over there was Ren's first pokemon. And Aka, Panahi and Māia were all part of her original team. I joined later on and Pohaku has only been around for maybe two weeks.

Naihi: What exactly is he? I've never seen a creature like him before.

Panahi: That's because he's an anorith. They all died out eons ago, but their claws were preserved in the rock and the humans dig them up sometimes and revive them.

Naihi: Brought back from the dead after becoming rock? My mentor told me that the humans had many wondrous powers, but never did he mention anything like that.

Panahi: Well, he's not exactly the same anorith that died. Sometimes he seems to remember things, but other times not. I don't know how it works though.

Naihi: How strange and fascinating.

Ao: So you are a mountain absol, right?

Panahi: That's awful far from here. What made you come all this way?

Māia: How did you get to be so strong?

Akahata: And who is this mentor you keep mentioning?

Naihi: [ She looks at them all in surprise and then taps her chin with a long foreclaw, looking thoughtful ] Perhaps a short summary of my past could answer all of these questions. [ She nods ] Yes. I was born on a high mountain far to the northwest and far from any humans. Down the north slope lies the sea and down the west slope lies a dessert.

Ao: We know it. That desert is where Ren got her scars. So did you live there with other absol?

Naihi: We mountain absol are not quite as social as you manectric, but neither are we wholly solitary. I knew many absol on the mountain. When we first felt the disturbance, I knew that I did not want the great disaster to happen and thus spent long considering if there was some way I might prevent it and asked the elders if that were possible. They told me that it was possible to alter the course of time and that it had been done before. I knew then that I had to become stronger to reach my goal, and so I began battling my fellow absol. The move passed down from my father, which I later learned is bug-type, gave me advantage in these matches and resulted in many victories. But the elders did not approve of my quest, told me it was not our place, and so I ranged further afield and battled many
other types of pokemon. From these I learned many things, but my greatest teacher was an old
gallade who lives on the highest peak of my mountain. He is a retired battler himself and taught me
strategy, precision, and power. He even taught me a psychic move with which to fell poison-types
and even fighting-types to which I am at a natural disadvantage. One day, I asked him how he
became so powerful and he told me about his trainer and how humans can make pokemon far
stronger than they ever could make themselves. And so I decided I must get a trainer of my own and
left my mountain. I have been traveling for a long time now. I am glad to have finally found you all.

[ As she tells this story, we see images of her past in the background: a group of absol on a stark
mountainside, looking as one into the distance, her battling other young absol and defeating them
with megahorn, her speaking with defiance to her elders, her roaming the slopes alone and battling
other pokemon, her bowing before an old and battle-scarred gallade on the peak, him tapping his
chin thoughtfully, them practicing psycho cut together and talking and looking out at the world
below. ]

Ao: Wow. That is… quite a story.

Ren: [ calling from the other side of the clearing ] You gals want some food?

Naihi: Oh? We do not need to hunt for our meals?

Panahi: One of the perks, kid.

Naihi: How marvelous!

[ She bounds off to Ren an the others just stare after her for a moment. ]

Māia: Wow, she really is crazy.

Panahi: Like you have room to talk, drama queen.

Māia: I have a special move and had one bad thing happen to me, okay? I don’t think I have some
kind of super awesome destiny and I sure as shit didn’t have a magic sensei on a mountaintop! No
way that’s true!

Akahata: It would explain why she knows psycho cut.

Māia: I guess…

Ren: Aren’t you gals hungry?

[ They all look up to see her standing over them. In the background, Tāraki, Pohaku and Naihi are
already chowing down. Panahi recovers first. ]

Panahi: Of course, honey. What are we eating?

Scene 13: [ The next day they are all hiking north along Route 119. They run into a few trainers and
battle them but Naihi stays out of sight so as not to arouse suspicion. They are alone again when
Latios materializes before them. Everyone starts, but Ren and Tāraki immediately relax. The rest do
too after another moment except for Naihi who gapes at him in wonder. ]
Ren: Hello Latios. Are you feeling any better?

Latios: Yes, thank you. My sibling's power works very quickly. Are these pokemon all with you? How can there be seven?

Ren: Oh, right, introductions. Tāraki you know, then we have Akahata, Panahi, Māia, Ao and Pohaku. And this is our latest member Naihi. She's traveling with us until we get to Fortree before bonding with a pokeball. Everyone, this is Latios, Guardian of the Eons.

[ Latios dips his head to all of them and they all dip their heads back except for Naihi who bows low. Ren opens her mouth to speak, but Panahi cuts across her. ]

Panahi: Before you all get caught up in your world saving nonsense, I have a clam to shuck with you!

[ Latios turns to look at her. ]

Ren: Panahi—

Panahi: [ She holds up a wing to silence Ren. ] If you're the Guardian of the Eons and it's your job to save the world, why drag my girl into it?

[ Everyone else looks a little horrified at the level of disrespect, but Naihi looks positively stricken. The only one completely unruffled is Latios himself. ]

Latios: Sometimes problems created by humans are best solved by humans. And though I have been granted great power, it may not be sufficient for the task ahead. She may have knowledge or intuition that I lack. There is also security in numbers. This is why the Eon Guardians have sought allies ever since the first incarnations died.

Panahi: [ grumbling ] Fair enough. But why not partner up with a stronger trainer, one with more experience? Like one of the Elite Four maybe?

Latios: I admit to not being acquainted with these trainers, but I am quite confident that I have chosen well. It is not power alone that determines worthiness. There are other qualities which I look for as well.

Panahi: [ flushing in frustration ] She's already been through so much! It's not fair! You don't care at all what happens to her!

Latios: You mistake me. Though I have lived many lifetimes, it is in my nature to care for others, not callously disregard them. And as her partner, I promise that I will do everything in my power to protect her.

Panahi: There's a difference between them sending one or two goons after us and what you want, which is to go after them. That's much more dangerous!

Latios: I do not propose to face them head on and certainly not at this stage. She is not ready, nor am I. We could not hope to stop them that way. But we have time. Time for us all to grow stronger. with a few moves here and there, we can make more. And we have allies to aid us. I would have no one fight this alone. [ Panahi begins to tear up in frustration and he floats up to her. He takes her beak gently in one paw and strokes the top of it softly with the other and his eyes glow white. ] You are scared for her. I understand. But do you really think, based on her actions thus far, that she would not fight them anyway?
Panahi shakes her head and he lets go, eyes no longer glowing. She covers her eyes with her wrists and sniffs.

Ren: Oh, Panahi... She kneels down and hugs Panahi. It's going to be okay.

Ren hugs her tighter as Panahi cries into her shoulder. Naihi steps forward and bows again.

Naihi: My Lord Latios, I hope her manner did not offend you. She cares very deeply for our trainer.

Latios: Not at all.

Naihi: Thank you, my lord. I am most honored to meet you.

They talk for a while, but Ren loses track of their conversation, although she does absorb that Naihi is overjoyed to meet Latios and serve him on their quest. Mostly Ren focuses on calming Panahi down. Once she is feeling a little better, the group continues north.

Ren: So Latios, correct me if I’m wrong, but most legendaries are immortal.

Latios: Indeed they are.

Ren: But you keep referencing previous incarnations, so are you immortal or...?

Latios: I am and I am not. My sibling and I are born, we age, and we die, but we are also reborn. I have many memories of past lives and in some ways I do not alter, but in others I am never the same.

Ren: Whoa. I had no idea. Do you and Latias die at the same time?

Latios: Not exactly, but we are never very far apart.

Ren: That must make things weird.

Latios: Definitely strange to a creature like you. In the last cycle, I died first and the previous Latias raised me. Then she died and I raised the current Latias. So really we are more than siblings. She is also mother and daughter to me as I am to her... Although, I do have to say that we have existed together so long that it is most often the sibling dynamic that wins out.

Ren: She knows how to push your buttons, huh?

Latios: Yes.

Ren: I don’t have any siblings, so I’m not sure I can relate.

Latios: Do you have other questions?

Ren: Yes. Do you know anything else about Team Magma and what they are trying to do? We're pretty much in the dark here.

Latios: With Steven's help, we were able to learn a good number of useful things. First, that Team Magma's goal is to find and awaken Groudon.

Ren: What? But why do they want to do that? I mean, wouldn't that be terrible for everyone?

Latios: If woken and set loose without their sibling, they would boil away the oceans and reduce the
forests to ash. It would be a drought more catastrophic than the planet has seen in many eons. Only your anorith would remember the world as it was before the last such event.

Ren: [that stops her dead in her tracks] …I—I knew it had to be serious, I just—that's so much worse than—great Lord Arceus, why?!

Latos: Obviously they plan to capture Groudon and bend it to their will. They may be misguided, but they are not so self-destructive as to actually seek the end of the world as you know it.

Ren: Okay, but what do they want to use it for? That's a huge risk to take.

Latos: They wish to create more landmass. First an island and then perhaps add on to the mainland once they have proof of concept and have swayed more to their cause.

Ren: But why? What are they going to do with it?

Latos: They feel this will help their fellow humans by giving them more space to develop and grow. As I understand it, they have long lobbied without success to open more of the current land to settlement. This way they would not be disturbing protected pokemon habitat and so couldn't run into resistance that way. They are…well intentioned and plan to be generous with the land they create.

Ren: But what about the ocean? I think plopping another island in it out of nowhere might disturb some pokemon too. Especially if it's anywhere near the coast. What about the reefs?

Latos: Humans tend to be shortsighted about such things. In any case, I very much doubt they could control Groudon and it certainly isn't worth the risk.

Ren: What if Kyogre woke too?

Latos: That is the far more common occurrence and it would mitigate the effects a great deal. However, it would still prove fairly disastrous for the people and pokemon in the region. Then our only real hope would be that Rayquaza calms them before too much damage is done.

Ren: Wait, who is Rayquaza?

Latos: The third of the climate trio with the power to negate the other two. They are somewhat more sympathetic to the plight of humans and pokemon. In the past they have spared humankind and the planet from great disasters, sometimes alone, at other times in partnership. They never sleep but reside high in the atmosphere beyond the reach of normal pokemon.

Ren: Wow. You're gonna be useful.

Latos: I should hope so.

Ren: Sorry. I was just afraid you weren't going to tell me anything to be mysterious or because of top-secret taurosshit reasons.

Scene 14: [Suddenly Latios disappears and Naihi starts and tenses. For a split second Ren is afraid she has offended him.]
Naihi: Another trainer approaches!

Ren: [relieved] Oh, that should be Kai.

[A few moments later Kai and Jay wander out of the trees. Ren runs up to them.]

Ren: Kai! [She hugs him tight and he hugs her back.] I’m so happy to see you!

Kai: Good to see you too, Ren. How are things?

Ren: Uhhhhhhh…

Kai: Don’t worry about it, we can talk later. [catching sight of Naihi] Whoa, is that the absol?

Ren: Yeah, her name is Naihi.

Kai: She must be a longclaw variant. People say that they are the strongest variant but really difficult to catch and train.

Ren: My string of luck continues.

Kai: I guess yeah.

Naihi: Greetings friend of Ren.

Kai: Hello, nice to meet you. [to Ren] Her telepathy feels so strange. I mean, I haven’t met too many psychic-types but…

Ren: Yeah, this is different for sure. I’m glad she can though. It’s been making things a lot easier.

Kai: And is that your anorith?

Ren: Yep! That’s Pohaku. I can’t wait for you to see your lileep. She’s so cute. They kind of look alike, actually. I think they both used to live in a coral reef.

Kai: Awesome! I’m so excited for tomorrow!

Ren: [smiling] Me too. I want a bed and a hot shower. But first, you want to have that battle you promised me?

Kai: Yeah! Jay and I are all warmed up from climbing this morning.

Ren: Three v three battle?

Kai: Four v four. We have a new member now.

Ren: Oh right, the swallow you told me about. No type advantages?

Kai: Sounds good. Ready, Jay?

[Jay nods and the trainers enter the battle terms on their navs. Jay steps forward and Ren sends in Ao as she is the only one who isn’t vulnerable to fire or fighting.]

Kai: Blaze kick!

Ren: Charge beam!
Jay has gotten fast, but Ao is even faster. She darts just ahead of Jay's flaming kicks and punches, little more than a blur to the unaided eye. Each time she gets far enough away, she fires off a charge beam. Jay takes these attacks as if they are mere annoyances, never ceasing her pursuit. Finally Ao comes to a stop and faces Jay head on, preparing to unleash a discharge. Jay uses flame charge, barreling towards her at full speed. A wall of electricity arcs out from Ao and connects with the burning Jay, creating a blinding explosion of light. A fraction of a second later, Jay barrels into Ao, sending her sprawling. She looks up at Jay and bows her head in defeat a moment before Jay's fire goes out, she staggers, and she falls. Next up is Tāraki and Dusty. Dusty starts off the match by lowering his head and charging Tāraki. His form has improved and he looks more battering ram than pokemon as he accelerates towards his opponent. Undaunted, Tāraki tenses as if to catch him only to dive out of the way at the last second, tail sweeping low. Dusty pitches forward, but is prepared for the tactic. He tucks his head in as he lands on it, spine going from ramrod straight to perfect wheel. He rolls a few times before popping back up to his feet. The next time he charges, he goes for a succession of quick jabs. All of Tāraki's practice with Putenga seems to have paid off as he successfully parries with dual chop. Dusty slides back but uses the distance to lean on his tail and strike out with his powerful hind legs. Tāraki stops the blow with crossed arms and un-steadies Dusty with x-scissor before swinging his tail around and toppling the teetering breloom with a slam. Dusty groans and Tāraki crows his victory. Next is Kiko versus Akahata. Akahata charges in, jaws sparking, but Kiko overwhelms her with a surf. He charges at her through the water, but she swims down in time and digs into the soil. The swell of water runs off and Akahata bursts out of the ground next to Kiko and grabs his fin, jolting him with electricity. He wincses but rolls sideways, flinging Akahata through the air and into the ground before rolling over on top of her. She pretty much disappears beneath his side, but apparently does not release his fin as he is jolted once more and rolls off her. He deflates and she gets up and shakes herself off. Finally Kai sends out his newest pokemon: a rufous swellow. Ren sends in Māia to face her. She looks Māia up and down with obvious disdain.

Ruby (swellow): [ looking back at Kai ] A taillow? I thought you said this trainer was strong.

Kai: [ embarrassed hiss ] Ruby!

Māia: I don't need evolution to win.

Ruby: Them's fightin' words! Bring it little birdie!

Ruby spreads her wings, preparing to take off, but Māia just squares her shoulders and takes a deep breath. Ruby brings her wings down and launches into the air just as Māia fires off a boomburst at her. The sound wave misses but buffets her as she ascends.

Ruby: Whoa. [ as Māia launches into the air ] So you have a special move? So what! [ rushing towards Māia, wings glowing ] You'll need more than a trick to beat me!

Māia dives under her, just out of range of her reaching talons, before using her increased speed to swoop steeply upward. She performs a flawless loop de loop and strikes Ruby in the back with an aerial ace. Ruby rolls in the air and catches Māia across the chest. They are both forced to recover. They circle each other and this time Māia initiates with steel wing. Ruby blocks it with quick guard and blows Māia back with her wings. Māia flies off in the other direction before climbing.

Ruby: Oh no you don't!

Ruby speeds after her. Māia swoops this way and that to try and shake her, but Ruby eventually catches up and grabs Māia in her talons. Māia struggles to get free as she dives. As they fall Māia stops struggling and uses steel wing. The added weight sends them plummeting faster. Ruby pulls up and lets go. Māia waits just one extra second before opening her wings. She skims over the ground
before using the momentum to climb. She flips just as she comes to a stop and dives downward. She is in the sun and takes Ruby completely by surprise. She slams into her and bears her to the ground. Māia pushes off her back just in time and circles around to land in front of her trainer. Ruby struggles to get up, wings shaking, but collapses. Kai goes to her and applies a potion.]

Kai: [scooping her up] Come here, Ruby. You see, that's what you get for trash talking.

Ruby: Hey taillow! Next time we meet, I'll be stronger and I won't loose.

[Māia just shrugs, clearly unimpressed. Ruby looks furious and starts struggling in Kai's arms.]

Ruby: Are you refusing my challenge?! You coward! How dare you—

Kai: Ruby! Cut it out!

[Māia flies to Ren's shoulder as Ruby flails and yells obscenities. Kai tries to quiet her for a few more moments, but in the end recalls Ruby to her ball.]

Kai: Sorry about Ruby.

Ren: Oh, am I lucky I can't understand her?

Kai: Haha. Yeah. I'm hoping she'll calm down a bit. She is super competitive. [He sighs.] I'm not ready for this gym yet. My two best battlers have a severe type disadvantage. Maybe we'll just tag along for support this time.

Ren: Hey, that's okay. You could always train with us for a little while. I'm sure we could take the gym, but most of my team has been on break for a while, so we could all use more practice. Maybe you should take a little break from research and get your team up to snuff. What do you say?

Kai: That sounds great actually. Thanks, Ren.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was way easier and way more fun to write than the last few. Lots of plot things are starting to fall into place and I got to write some more of my faves. I especially enjoyed Steven cracking just a bit. It will happen again as things get even more stressful for our poor beleaguered champ. And I LOVE Josh and Zinnia's dynamic. It's gonna be a lot of fun. I finally got to introduce Naihi and Pohaku, who I have been excited about since the beginning. Basically I got to do a lot of character development for this chapter and the next few chapters will have a lot too and I am so very excited.

Thanks so much for reading!

Character Chart:

HUMANS:
Ren, our protagonist
Kai, Ren's friend who likes science
Wally, Ren's friend who likes the internet
Steven, the Hoenn League Champion
Josh, a Magma grunt who Ren has saved twice
Hartmann, a Magma grunt who is friends with Josh
Brenton, a Magma grunt who is friends with Josh
Azalea, another Magma grunt who has a whismur
Courtney, a Magma admin
Blaise, a Magma grunt and Courtney's assistant

TEAM REN:
Tāraki the Sceptile
Akahata the Mightyena
Ikki the Masquerain
Panahi the Pelipper
Maia the Taillow
Putenga the Breloom
Mele the Delcatty
Hauoro the Exploud
Ao the Manectric
Kata the Grumpig
Kōtai the Sandslash
Roma the Sharpedo
Pohaku the Anorith
Naihi the Absol

TEAM KAI:
Jay, the Blaziken
Dusty, the Breloom
Makō, the Wailmer
Ruby, the Swellow

TEAM STEVEN:
Bessemer, the shiny Metagross
Damascus, the Skarmory
Tungsten, the Steelix
Escutcheon, the Armaldo
Ptilometra, the Cradily
Alwyn, the Sandslash

OTHER POKEMON:
Fang, Josh's Mightyena
Shade, Josh's Golbat
Aster, Azalea's Whismur
**Chapter Summary**

In which Ren learns to open up a bit more and listen.

**Chapter Notes**

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Scene 1:** [The next morning Kai, Ren, Jay, Akahata and Naihi are walking north along the river. There is no sign of Latios, but Ren is pretty sure he is closeby. They cross a long suspension bridge and stop in the middle to admire a high waterfall not far in the distance. Ren notices a three-story, glass building just a little ways from the far end of the bridge and points it out.]

Ren: What is that?


Ren: I love the architecture.

Kai: Yeah, it's so they're always connected to the weather outside. We should visit. It's really cool.

Ren: Alright, we'll look at your nerd stuff.

Kai: [as she walks away over the bridge] Rennnn. [He jogs to catch up with her.]

Ren: What, I'm not allowed to tease you?

Kai: [grumbling] Fine, then I get to tease you too.

Ren: About what?

Kai: You don't think there's anything I could tease you about?

Ren: Of course not. I am perfect and flawless in all possible ways.

Kai: [both giggling] I don't know. I bet if I thought really hard about it I could come up with something …

[He trails off because they have reached the end of the bridge and they can see a Team Magma grunt standing outside the Weather Institute entrance. Ren and Akahata scoot quietly across the open space to some nearby bushes and take cover, followed quickly by the other three. They all wriggle under the bushes and look out from underneath. Kai pulls out his nav and Ren pulls out a pair of binoculars to take a closer look. The grunt guarding the entrance is Josh with Fang sitting at his side. Some of the glass is at such an angle that it is only reflecting its surroundings, but through other panels we can see the red of Magma uniforms and what are obviously pokemon moving around inside.]

Ren: Chikusho. It's Magma alright and there's a lot of them.
Kai: [shaking his nav] I can't get a signal. My reception has been fine here. It doesn't make any sense.

Ren: Actually, it makes a lot of sense. They must have some kind of signal jammer. [She reaches out with her mind and Latios is right there. He is floating above the bushes they are hiding under. In her mind.] Can you get a message to Latias?

Latios: Of course. I'm explaining the situation now. They'll come as soon as they are able.

Kai: We can't call the police. What should we do?

Ren: I have to go in there. I have to stop them, whatever they're up to it can't be good.

Kai: Okay, I could totally make fun of you for that.

Ren: But—

Kai: Seriously, what kind of hero complex shit is that? That doesn't even make any sense. Why don't we just go back the way we came until we can get a signal? Whatever they've got has to have some sort of range. Or we could go to the ranger base. That's not far.

Ren: I admit those are both good ideas…

Kai: But?

Ren: And I think you should totally do one of those things, but I still have to go in there.

Kai: Ren no!

Ren: Kai—

Kai: We don't even know what they're doing. Just barging in there could totally escalate the situation!

Ren: Kai just listen—

Kai: No, you listen! This is you being reckless again! Just calm down and think about it for a minute. We don't know anything that says risking our lives here is going to help anyone.

Ren: No, Kai! This time I'm not. This time I actually know what I'm doing and I really have to charge in there.

Kai: Wha—

Ren: Argh! [putting a hand over his mouth] Just be quiet for one second—[She growls in frustration and then sighs.] I guess this is my fault too. Listen, [she removes her hand] a lot has been happening lately and I found out some stuff about Magma and I didn't tell you because I didn't want to freak you out and drag you into it.

Kai: Ren, we talked about this.

Ren: I know, and I thought about telling you, and after this I promise I will, but I don't have time to explain everything right now. Just, if Magma actually accomplishes what they are trying to do, tons of people and pokemon could get hurt. This is really big. Someone has to step in.

Kai: Okay, I trust you. If you really think this is important, we'll go in there. But it's we, okay? I'm
not letting you go alone this time.

Ren: [ She takes a deep breath. ] Okay. [ squeezing his hand ] Thank you.

Kai: You’re welcome… I really wish there was some way to call the police though.

Ren: I already did.

Kai: But you said—

Ren: I was trying to get you out of here.

Kai: [ facepalms ] Ren!

Ren: I’m sorry, okay?

Kai: Wait, how come you have a signal?

Ren: [ lying on the fly ] Remember how Mr. Stone gave me a special nav for returning those prototypes?

Kai: Ohhhhh… So what is the plan exactly? Should we try and sneak around back?

Ren: Naw, that guy’s mightyena already spotted us. [ Fang is staring right at them, hackles raised. ] Hopefully he hasn’t called it in yet. [ wriggling back out from under the bush ] We may as well barge in the front door. It might distract them. But we’ll interrogate that guy first.

[ Everyone else is back out from under the bushes and brushing themselves off. ]

Kai: Sure. Okay.

[ They all start heading straight for Josh. ]

Ren: Naihi, remember you’re not technically my pokemon yet, so you can help if you want, but I can’t give you commands in front of other humans.

[ She nods. ]

Ren: Just stay close and be careful.

Josh: [ awkwardly calling out as they approach ] Hey, Ren. How goes training?

Ren: Stow it, Josh. Why don’t you just tell me what the hell Magma’s doing here.

Kai: [ looking very confused ] Um—

Josh: Okay. We need some climate data on the ancient past. Something about the last time Groudon awakened. I don’t really know much. They don’t tell me stuff.


[ She makes for the door and he steps in front of her. ]

Josh: Don’t! Tabitha’s in there. And the scientists are all cooperating. The whole thing is going smoothly. We’re not gonna hurt anyone, I promise. Please just go.

Ren: Move, Josh.
Josh: N-no. You said you wanted to stay out of it. This is your chance.

Ren: Things have changed. I know what Magma is trying to do. I can't let you all go through with this. Now out of the way.

Josh: What's so wrong with what we're trying to do? I understand if you have a problem with our methods, but we are trying to help people!

Ren: It's never going to work! Reviving Groudon is crazy! [Kai’s eyes blow wide.] Argh! You're wasting time! Out of the way!

Josh: No! I'm not moving.

Ren: [face hardening] You know what, fine. We can do this the hard way just as easy. Aka.

[ Akahata steps forward and growls, hackles raised. Fang immediately lunges between Akahata and her trainer. Spittle flies from her muzzle as she snarls. Everyone else backs away a little as the two mightyena square off. ]

Josh: Take down!

Ren: Rock smash!

[ Fang lunges but Akahata is faster and ducks under before smashing her skull up into Fang's chest. Fang lands heavily on her face and forelegs but scrambles back up a second later. She is clearly hurting, but tries to mask it and lunges again. Akahata sidesteps, but can't get in a counter attack. Fang keeps pressing, lunging this way and that trying to maneuver herself back between Akahata and Josh. The two lunge forward at the same time. They meet in the air and go down in a tumble. Akahata uses her superior weight and skill to gain the upper hand. She wrestles Fang onto her back and headbutts her in the skull. Fang yelps and her head lolls back. Akahata makes to get off her and she snaps up and grabs Akahata by the leg, drawing blood. This time it is Akahata who yelps before sinking her teeth into Fang's leg. Fang cries out and let's go and they bark and shriek as their jaws meet and snap at each other. ]

Josh: Fang! FANG STOP!

[ They stop and look up at him. ]

Josh: I'll be okay.

[ He withdraws Fang. Akahata licks the blood off her lips and shakes herself out. ]

Ren: Aka, are you okay?

[ Akahata just snorts. Josh sends out Shade, who is now a crobat, and he swoops over the battlefield. Akahata tenses, ready for combat, but Ren and Kai just stare at Shade for a moment. ]

Kai: [confused] A crobat?

Josh: Poison fang!

Ren: Thunder fang, Aka!

[ Shade dives and Aka grabs his wing, shocks him and tosses him to the ground. He tries to scramble up but shakes with paralysis. Josh withdraws him. ]
Ren: Alright, now out of the way.

Josh: [centering himself more firmly in front of the door] I can’t, Ren, not this time.

Ren: Josh, don’t make me move you.

[He says nothing and does not move. She grabs his jacket and slams him up against the door. He winces but stares down at her defiantly. She holds him with one hand and cocks the other back to punch him. The color drains from his face and he flinches away, clearly terrified, and she pauses. She takes hold of his jacket again with both hands and forcibly shoves him to the side. She is met with little resistance as he wilts against the doorway. She pulls the door open and he makes to grab her hand, but Jay pushes him back against the wall and holds him there with and arm. Kai glances from Ren to Josh and then follows her inside. Jay releases Josh and he slumps as she, Akahata and Naihi also go inside. There is no one in the lobby, but the group can hear raised voices upstairs.]

Kai: [to Ren] You and I are having a long talk tonight.

Ren: Great. That’s what slumber parties are for.

Kai: Please stop calling it a ‘slumber party’.

Ren: I'm only trying to make up for lost time you poor, deprived child.

Kai: Ren! Can you stop teasing me for two seconds. I am so stressed out right now!

Ren: Oh, sorry! Jokes are kinda how I deal with this shit. I’ll try and zip it.

[Outside, Josh heaves a big sigh and just stares at the ground for a moment. Suddenly he jolts upright.

Josh: Oh shit! Azalea’s gonna kill me!

Scene 2: [Inside, Ren and company look up through the frosted glass floor as they cross the empty lobby to the stairs. It looks like most of the scientists and other staff have been rounded up and are sitting in a corner, guarded by a few Magma grunts. There is some distant noise, probably from the third floor. Ren pauses and looks back at the others.]

Ren: Akahata, I think you should tap out for a bit and let Tāraki handle it, okay?

[She nods and Ren withdraws her and sends out Tāraki. He looks around.]

Ren: Looks like you don't get a break after all, tiger. Magma took over this weather station. [pointing up] We'll deal with these grunts first and get the Weather Institute people out. Then we'll go up to the third floor and stop Tabitha.

[Tāraki bristles at the name. Jay brushes past them all without a word and rushes soundlessly up the stairs. She stops near the top and peers out at the floor above. She motions them to follow. Of course they are all spotted the moment Kai and Ren’s heads pop above the floor.]
Quintuplets: Hey! What are you doing here?

[ Their mightyena rush forward and Jay jumps up the last few steps and rushes into the middle of them with flame charge. Before Kai and Ren can react, Tāraki roars and leaps up the stairs past them. He fells both mightyena that slip past Jay with x-scissor. Naihi is next into the fray, K-Oing another mightyena with megahorn while Jay defeats the remaining two with double kick. The quintuplets just stand there, in shock at how quickly the tables have turned. Naihi advances on them, flashing her sharpened horn menacingly. They all back away. ]

Quintuplet 1: Whoa!
Quintuplet 2: Hey!
Quintuplet 3: Alright!
Quintuplet 4: We'll cooperate!
Quintuplet 5: Yeah, just call of your absol!

Ren: I would, but she's wild. You'll have to work it out with her.

[ They all gulp and back further into the corner. ]

Quintuplet 1: [ nervous and placating ] Nice absol.
[ He yelps as Naihi growls and swipes at him with her long foreclaws. ]

Ren: Everyone alright?

[ The assembled scientists and other office workers nod and a few mumble affirmatives. ]

Ren: Good. We'll go help the people upstairs. You all should head for the ranger base. There is one more guy outside, but his pokemon are down for the count, so don't worry.

[ Several of them say “okay” and “thank you” as they make their way downstairs. They can now clearly hear Tabitha yelling at someone on the third level. ]

Naihi: [ in Ren’s head ] Go, trainer. I will keep them here.

[ Ren thinks “thank you” back and heads back up the stairs. This time Tāraki takes the lead as they ascend. The third floor is in much greater disarray than the first two. Desks are knocked over and papers and other office supplies are scattered about. There is another smaller group of scientists being held in the corner by another five Magma grunts (Terra and Whenua are among them) and their pokemon (a sandslash, a numel, a duskull, a kecleon and a linoone). We can see Tabitha and a climatologist arguing through the open door of the main office, while Gloria, her weezing and Tabitha’s magmortar watch. ]

Tabitha: What do you mean that’s ‘just the facts’? You said it was your hypothesis just a minute ago!

Climatologist: It's the facts so far as we are able to tell okay? Unlike you I don't have some kind of agenda to support here. [ Tabitha glares at her. ] Look, my paper was just a piece of it. Climate pokemon induced shifts is a theory supported by decades of research not to mention history. We have evidence of it from tons of sources. [ looking around her desk ] Wait just a second, I have Strathmore's paper here somewhere. [ grabbing it out of a pile ] Here! This summarizes most of the work that's been done on glacial core drilling to track atmospheric CO2.
Ren and company's observation of this debate is cut short by Terra, who is the first to spot them.

Terra: Oh shit, it's her.

Ren: Leaf blade the ground types, Tāraki!

Kai: Take out the duskull first!

Terra: Flamethrower, Ember!

Whenua: Dig!

Grunt 1: Flame burst!

Grunt 2: Slash!

Grunt 3: Mud sport!

Utter chaos erupts as all seven pokemon rush into battle. The sandslash goes for Jay, claws glowing brown but it is intercepted by Tāraki, who takes it out with a single leaf blade, but he takes a flamethrower from the numel in the process. Meanwhile Jay uppercuts the duskull with fire punch before it can get off an attack. It phases partially through the roof before sinking back down, skull hitting the floor with a soft clink. In the background we can still hear snippets of Tabitha and the lead climatologist.

Tabitha: But why was the Permian extinction so much worse then?

Climatologist: Because Groudon woke alone and underwent primal reversion.

The linoone nails Jay with mud sport, putting out her wrist fires while Tāraki slashes the numel with leaf blade. The kecleon slashes him across the calf, making him fall to one knee while Jay uses mach punch on the linoone, who spewing water at her. Tāraki rounds on the kecleon and slashes at it with leaf blade. Its stripe turns green as it shifts to grass-type. Tāraki then hits it with x-scissor and it topples over as Jay finishes off the linoone.

Terra: Uhhhh...

Ren: Get out.

The Magma grunts all withdraw their pokemon and hurry off down the stairs.

Kai: [ to the scientists ] You should head for the ranger base. We'll go get her.

The four of them advance on the main office while the scientists file downstairs. Inside the office, the debate continues.

Tabitha: Alright already! Enough with the technical jargon! This is plenty to take in without all the made-up words to make it seem even more complicated.

Climatologist: I'm sorry. I'm not used to explaining it to someone who doesn't have a background in —
Tabitha: Whatever! Look, I may not understand the particulars, but I get the gist of what you're saying. It's not all that complicated. What I really don't get is—if all of this is true—why isn't it national news? Why isn't everyone panicking? That thing could wake up at any time, right? Why is no one concerned about this?

Climatologist: Well it is possible, but it's not probable. Events like the K-Pg extinction have been at least a hundred million years apart. We're not due for one for many millions of years.

Tabitha: But if it did awaken and undergo this 'primal reversion', we all die?

Climatologist: Well… Yes, yeah, that's the theory.

Ren: Finally seeing how crazy this whole crusade is, huh?

[ The three women look up to see Ren, Kai, Jay and Tāraki standing in the doorway. Tabitha and her magmortar glare at Ren. ]

Tabitha: How are you always popping up where you shouldn't be?

Ren: I'm not looking for a fight, Tabitha, just some reason.

Tabitha: Well you found one.

[ The climatologist backs away into one of the far corners of the room as the pokemon all step in front of their trainers. ]

Tabitha: Bunsen, take care of them.

Gloria: Sludge bomb, Weezy!

Ren: X-scissor the weezing!

Kai: Mach punch! Keep that magmortar away from Tāraki!

[ Jay and Tāraki are faster than their opponents and manage to dodge their opening attacks. Jay gets right up in the magmortar’s space to try and keep him away from Tāraki. Tāraki pushes the weezing back and then uppercuts it with dual chop. It hits the glass ceiling and bounces off with a clink. ]

Ren: Careful tiger! We don’t want to bring the place down on top of us.

[ Tāraki nods and uses dual chop, but this time hits it first in one direction and then darts around and hits it another way with the second blow. Tāraki pants as it sinks to the floor and Gloria withdraws it and sends out her growlithe. Meanwhile the magmortar grabs Jay and flips her. She lands heavily on her back. The magmortar then goes for a fire punch and Tāraki is too tired to avoid it. ]

Ren: TARAKI!

[ Jay sees her friend about to get hit and manages to trip the magmortar with a dragon’s tail kick. It misses Tāraki by a hair’s breath. Ren sends out Panahi just as Kai sends out Ruby. ]

Ren: Get back, Tāraki! Brine that magmortar, Ahi!

Kai: Wing attack, Ruby!
Ruby strikes the Growlithe across the face while the Magmortar staggers back under the torrent of salt water.

Gloria: Get the Sceptile!

Tabitha: Thunder punch!

Ruby is too busy slashing the Magmortar across the back to notice that the Growlithe is headed straight for Tāraki. Panahi stops soaking the Magmortar and swerves to come to her teammate’s aid, but the Magmortar hits her in the chest with thunder punch and she goes sailing.

Ruby: [ seeing this as she turns ] Oh shit!

Ren: [ running forward to catch Panahi ] Ahi!

Ren manages to catch Panahi and the Pelipper crumples in her arms. The Growlithe is about to sink it’s burning teeth into Tāraki when it is knocked aside by Naihi, who comes leaping seemingly out of nowhere. The Growlithe rolls and jumps back to it’s feet, eyes glowing brightly, fangs bared and snarling.

Naihi: [ in Ren's head ] Are you alright? I heard you cry out.

Ren: [ in her head ] Yeah. That Growlithe has justified. Don’t use dark attacks!

Naihi is already leaping forward, but it seems she got the message because her horn is glowing white instead of black as she slashes at the Growlithe. Ren carefully shimmies Panahi into one arm so she can reach her pokeballs. She sends out Pohaku to help the floundering Ruby who is frantically dodging the Magmortar.

Ren: Brine!

The Magmortar is clearly weakening by this point, but it powers through Pohaku’s attack to deliver another thunder punch. Pohaku crosses his arms in front of him as a shield and takes the hit before retaliating with another point blank brine attack to the Magmortar’s face.

Ren: [ spraying Panahi with a potion ] Just hang in there, Ahi.

The Growlithe uses its speed to try and get around Naihi’s horn, but she just kicks him with the spurs on her hind legs. The Magmortar staggers and falls back and Tabitha withdraws it. Pohaku starts to glow and his water sphere falls away as he evolves. As an Armaldo his armor is light blue with yellow borders and coral protrusions. His sickle-like foreclaws are black tipped with red and his swimmers are still a pale pink on his back.

Pohaku: Look Ren! I evolved! I'm so pretty!

Tabitha sends out her Mightyena and Ruby dive bombs it with Steel Wing.

Ren: You look awesome, Po! Metal claw!

Pohaku roars at the mightyena and charges. It uses Crunch on one of his arms but he slashes it with the other just as Ruby lands another steel wing on it's back. It drops Pohaku's arm and slumps to the ground just as Naihi defeats the Growlithe. Tabitha and Gloria withdraw their Pokemon.
Scene 3: [Meanwhile Josh is sitting on the ground outside with Fang and Shade. He is applying a bandage to Fang's injured leg as the Weather Institute employees pour out the doors past him. They are soon followed the second group of Weather Institute employees. He winds medical tape calmly around the bandage as the Quintuplets exit and run off in a different direction. He is just finishing when the final group of Magma grants exit. Terra pauses when she spots him.]

Terra: We should get going.

Josh: Right behind you.

[Terra jogs off to where Whenua is waiting up for her and they disappear. He sighs as he checks his work. Moment's later, a shadow passes overhead. He looks up to see a noivern circling down and scrambles to his feet. Azalea disembarks, moves her goggles to her forehead and withdraws the pokemon.]

Josh: [very confused] You have a noivern?

Azalea: [snapping] Yeah, and if you tell anyone you're dead. Now what happened?

Josh: She just came walking over that bridge and there was this guy with her who had a blaziken and I tried to stop her but she wouldn't listen and she beat my pokemon and shoved me out of the way and I'm so sorry I tried I really—

Azalea: Relax, kid. I'm not gonna hurt you. You did what you could. Just call me first next time. I mean of course she kicked your ass, all you have is a mightyena and [catching sight of Shade] a crobat? What the—how long was that guy a golbat, like a week?

Josh: Week and a half.

Azalea: I can’t believe you pulled off a bond evolution. Guess there’s more to you than I thought, kid. Anyway, you stay here. I’m going in—

Josh: [pointing over her shoulder] Um, Azalea.

Azalea: Well, if it isn’t the Hoenn Champion.

Josh: We are so f*cked.

Azalea: [turning back to Josh] No, this completely solves our problem.

Josh: Well, I guess it solves our problem, but what about the…

[He trails off because Steven is standing right behind Azalea staring at them in bewilderment. Azalea follows Josh’s gaze and turns back to Steven.]

Azalea: What are you staring at? [gesturing at the doors] Go get her!

[Steven gives them both one last confused glance before going inside. Azalea rolls her eyes so hard they are in danger of falling out.]

Azalea: Honestly.
Josh: [panicking] Shit! What are we going to do?! Tabitha's still in there! The mission!

Azalea: [perfectly calm and unaffected] It's cool. Tabitha already sent over all of the data we need. Maxie and the team are analyzing it now. Not sure what they're all still doing in there, but that's not our problem. Let's go back to base. [putting on her flight goggles] You ever flown on a noivern before?

Josh: [not liking where this is going] Uhh, no.

Azalea: [grinning wickedly] Then this will be a treat.

---

**Scene 4:** [Back on the third floor of the Weather Institute, Ren withdraws Panahi.]

Ren: Enough. This has to stop. You’ve heard what this little experiment of Maxie’s could do to everybody. Do you really think it’s worth the risk?

Tabitha: [sending out her magcargo] I don’t need you or anyone else telling me what to think. Pāhoe, get her.

[The magcargo aims a rock throw at Ren’s head.]

Steven: [from the stairwell] Ren, look out!

Kai: Jay!

[The projectile is about a foot away from Ren’s face when Jay punches it apart. Pebbles rain down on Ren, but she is unharmed.]

Tāraki: YOU’RE DEAD SLUG!

[Ruby barely manages to flutter out of the way as Tāraki charges the magcargo in a blind rage.]

Steven: [running to Ren’s side] Tabitha!

Tabitha: [growling] Steven.

[Tāraki pummels the magcargo and it’s lava shell cracks. Steven grips Ren’s shoulders, looming over her protectively. Kai catches sight of him and does a double take.]

Gloria: Let’s get out of here.

[Tabitha withdraws her magcargo and sends out her weezing.]

Steven: [letting go of Ren’s shoulders to run at Tabitha.] Don’t you dare!

[The weezing releases a huge cloud of smoke as Tabitha and Gloria turn to run. We can hear but not see papers flying off the desk as Steven vaults it. We hear a scuffle followed by a thud. Ren, Kai and their pokemon back out of the smoke-filled office, coughing. The climatologist crawls out a moment later.]

Ren: [pulling her up] You okay?
Climatologist: Yes, thanks.

Kai: [ to Ren ] Are you okay?

Ren: Yeah. Thank you for that save. You too Jay.

She starts to say "you’re welcome" when Tāraki sweeps her up in a crushing hug.

Tāraki: Thank you so much, Jay! You saved us both! Thank you thank you thank you!

Jay: [ groaning ] Tāraki! That hurts! Put me down!

Kai: [ shaky and distant ] You're welcome.

Ren: Hey, how are you holding up?

Kai: Okay, I guess? For some reason I thought it’d be less scary the second time? How do you handle this stuff?

Ren: I’m not sure. Maybe I don't. Sorry about dragging you into this.

Kai: No, don't be. But did Steven Stone just run through here or am I legit going insane?

Ren: [head whipping back around to the smoke-filled office] Oh no. Steven?!

She is about to run back in when Steven stumbles out, holding his temple.

Ren: Geez, are you okay?

Steven: Yes. One of them kicked me on their way out the window. [ coughs ] I’m fine.

Suddenly there is a loud beeping and the sprinklers go off. They are all soaked in about ten seconds. Jay looks particularly bedraggled as her feathers begin to stick together. Steven’s expensive suit wilts as it becomes waterlogged. He lets out a long, low sigh.

Steven: [ done with this day ] Perfect… All in favor of continuing this conversation outside?

---

**Scene 5:** They all head out of the building and unsurprisingly, no one is outside. Tāraki and Pohaku look rather refreshed by the shower, but the rest of them really could have done without it. Jay and Naihi shake themselves out and Jay fluffs up. Steven shakes out his hair and pushes it over to one side before taking off his jacket and untucking his shirt. Ren tries not to look at him. Kai on the other hand is staring at him, unable to process the fact that his idol is actually standing right in front of him.

Ren: Thanks for coming so quickly. I'm sorry about your suit.

Steven: I'll just buy a new one to cheer myself up. This has not been my best week ever. I don't think you need to thank me. It looks as though I was a bit late to the party.

Ren: I get the feeling we all were.
Climatologist: She took all of the data she wanted first thing and sent it off somewhere.

Ren: Great. But still, it's a good thing you came when you did. It deterred any further attempts on my life.

Steven: I suppose that is true.

Ren: [she smiles teasingly as she allows herself to check him out just a bit] And once again it was very dramatic entrance.

Steven: [grinning back just a little] Yes, my specialty. I'm not even sure why I tried to chase them. I was just angry, I guess. At least you had someone to help.

Ren: Oh! Right! Introductions! Steven, this is my good friend Kai Birch. [grinning a little at Kai’s starstruck expression] Kai, this is Steven Stone, the Hoenn Champion.

Kai: [stuttering] I-it's an honor to m-meet you.

[They shake hands.]

Steven: [warm smile] Likewise. Any friend of Ren's is a worthwhile acquaintance I am sure. [Kai’s legs have turned to jello.] Kai, Ren, this is Prof. Leonie Pihama, head of the Weather Institute and resident expert on the climatological past.

Prof. Pihama: Nice to meet you all.

Ren: I'm sorry if we just made a mess of things.

Prof. Pihama: No, don't worry about it. You two did the right thing and got everyone out. Besides, the whole building’s glass. It's easy to clean. Haha … This has been such a strange day for me already and it’s not even lunch.

Steven: Yes. You said Ms. Turia had already gathered what she wanted before we arrived. Do you mind telling us what happened?

Prof. Pihama: Well, they came in all at once with their pokemon turned on us and we couldn't get a call out, so we were just cut off here. But after scaring us all half to death to ensure our cooperation, it was all very organized and civil. She seemed to not want things to escalate. She was after a bunch of data from some papers I presume they already have as well as some of our climate models and then a whole ream of other research papers including a lot of mine. She was sort of skimming the outlines to make sure I was giving her what she asked for, but then she got very interested in the conclusion of my last paper. [to Steven] She was asking a lot of the same questions that you did when we talked: about Groudon and primal reversion et cetera. She was was skeptical and I want to say… alarmed? She wanted to know how I got to my conclusions and I tried to explain. I think some of it got through. It doesn’t seem as though she’s had a lot of formal schooling, but she was obviously intelligent. I don't know. Then you two showed up… They're not really going to try and wake up that monster, are they?

Steven: I'm afraid so.

[Everyone looks very grim at this. Ren is the first to offer a little hope.]

Ren: Well, I've personally had pretty miserable experiences with Tabitha, but at least she doesn't seem totally unhinged like their other admin. Maybe if what you told her really did go through, she'll change her mind.
Steven: We can only hope that some good comes out of this. Dr. Matsuda may be an extremist, but he is still a scientist. Perhaps some facts will shake him. I hope he comes to see things your way Prof. Pihama.

Kai: Here come the rangers.

[ They all turn to see a few rangers headed their way. The humans talk for a while, all going back and forth about the incident. Meanwhile the pokemon talk amongst themselves. ]

Tāraki: You were so amazing in there Jay! If you ever need anything just ask okay?

Jay: [ smiling a little ] You're welcome. I know you'd do the same for me.

Tāraki: Of course! We're friends aren't we?

Jay: Yeah… This is bad, isn't it?

Tāraki: Yes and it will get worse before the end, but we'll train really hard and we'll get stronger.

Naihi: Yes, with strength we can turn the tide.

Tāraki: And we'll fight together. They call themselves a team. We're a team and together we can beat them! We won't let them hurt our trainers and we won't let them hurt everyone else either!

[ Pohaku and Naihi nod along in agreement. Jay seems a little less sure of their chances, but looks at her optimistic friend with fondness. ]

Tāraki: By the way, thanks for your help with that growlithe, Naihi. It was brave of you to fight with us even though you aren't officially a battler yet.

Naihi: You are welcome. It is as you say: we are a team now.

Tāraki: [ He smiles and turns to Pohaku ] You did great in there too, buddy! [ holding up both hands for Pohaku to high-five ] Up top!

Pohaku: [ blushing ] O-oh, t-thank you! [ He uses his new height to tap Tāraki's waiting hands with his claws. ]

Tāraki: You're so tall now!

Pohaku: [ waving his arms and wriggling in delight ] I know!

---

**Scene 6:** [Ren and Kai finally reach Fortree city, and Ren drops Panahi off at the Pokemon Center. They make their way to their expensive hotel, looking much too damp and bedraggled to be staying there. Ren pulls out her nav while they wait at the front desk and texts Wally.]

Ren: Are you coming tonight or tomorrow?

Wally: Tomorrow. Why? Do you two need a chaperone? (*‿*)

Ren: No! Just making sure.
Wally: Making sure you’re alone? ♪(→.delegate鸥)♪

[ Ren blushes and furiously types out a response. ]

Ren: NO. NOT THAT EITHER. How come you are never this sassy in person?

Wally: Didn’t know I was allowed to be. (✿´ `) Will take this into consideration from now on… JK I could never do this in person. I’d totally chicken out. (⊙︿⊙) Texts are so much safer.

Ren: Except that they are recorded.

Wally: Touché.

[A bellhop appears and takes them up to their room. There are two twin beds, a bunch of bean bags of varying sizes and a cute little table with two chairs. Ren and Kai take turns showering and unpacking before ordering dinner and eating it in their pajamas. Ren explains about Josh and what she has learned about Team Magma while they eat and after as they sit on their beds. Their pokemon are scattered about the room, mostly dozing on bean bags. Eventually Kai is out of questions and Ren out of explanations and they just sort of lay there in silence for a while thinking it all over. After a time, Kai stretches and sits back up, swinging his legs over the side of his bed to face Ren. ]

Kai: Soooo, I have a hypothesis for you.

Ren: Oh yeah?

Kai: I hypothesize that this person you have a crush on is… Steven Stone!

Ren: What?? Your hypothesis is INCORRECT.

Kai: I'm pretty sure I saw you checking him out.

Ren: [ blushing a little and sitting up ] I was not!

Kai: All this time I thought it was something embarrassing. But this is totally understandable. I felt a little overcome myself. [ He fans himself for emphasis. ]

Ren: [ turning to face him ] Kaiii!

Kai: I'm saying you don't have to be embarrassed about it. He is super good looking. Besides, everyone is allowed their little celebrity crush.

Ren: It's not like that.

Kai: Oh really?

Ren: Okay, so maybe it is a little like that, but there's a lot of other stuff I like about him too.

Kai: So you are admitting to having a crush on him now?

Ren: [ She growls and her face screws up in annoyance. She looks away, chewing her lip before finally grumbling ] Alright, fine. You got me. Happy?

Kai: It does make me feel a bit better actually. I mean, how is anyone supposed to compete with that?

Ren: Kai…
Kai: Come on, he's like the total package: ticking Steven's qualities off on his fingers insanely handsome, smart, wealthy, loves pokemon—

Ren: Kai!

Kai: I'm just jealous you had the nerve to flirt with him. You saw me: I turned into a puddle just being in his presence.

Ren: blushing harder and throwing a pillow at him Ohmygod! No I wasn't! Shut up!

Kai: laughing Looks like I found something to tease you about.

[ She grabs her other pillow and smacks him with it. ]

Kai: Ren!

Ren: By the laws of the slumber party, this is grounds for a pillow fight!

Kai: trying to fend her off as she continues to hit him with the pillow Gah! Ren! pillow hits his face It's not a slumber party!

Ren: Yes it is!

Kai: Oof!

Ren: chanting Pillow fight! Pillow fight! Pillow fight!

Kai: grabbing his own pillow You're in for it now!

[ She stumbles back into her own bed under the barrage of blows. She hits him over the head and he stumbles. She laughs as they go back and forth. She climbs up on the bed to get some leverage over him but he follows her up. ]

Kai: Why is battling your solution to everything?

Ren: Pillow fights are a very important part of any slumber party.

Kai: Says you!

Ren: Who here is the slumber party expert?

Kai: Is my deprived childhood ever going to stop being funny to you?

Ren: No!

[ He smacks her with his pillow and she falls down and rolls off the bed to get away. From there the battle ranges all over the room, disturbing their resting pokemon. Ren falls back next to Tāraki who opens a golden eye. ]

Ren: Help me!

Tāraki: Nah, I think you got this one.

Ren: as Kai pummels her from above Betrayer! I thought you loved me!

[ Tāraki just yawns and closes his eyes as Ren squeals. She kicks out and trips Kai. He falls down and she pounces on him. He uses his own pillow as a shield to limited effect as Ren looms over him ]
on her knees. Finally Kai deals her a blow to the head and she falls back dramatically with a groan. They just lie on the floor for a while, panting and giggling.]

Ren: So?

[Kai takes his pillow and thumps it right on top of her smug face. She pushes it lazily off.]

Kai: Alright, I admit that was fun.

Ren: Ha!

[There is another pause while they catch their breath. They both stare up at the ceiling.]

Kai: So what do you like about Steven? You know, besides him being super hot.

Ren: [groaning and covering her glowing face] Kai.

Kai: You don't have to tell me. I’m just curious.

Ren: [sighs] Well, like I told you before back in Lavaridge: he’s really kind. And it's like… He totally doesn't have to be, you know? He could easily get away with being a jerk all the time, but he doesn't. He's rich and famous and, no offence, but guys really don’t have to be nice at all. He just always surprises me with how compassionate he is. He is kind of vain, and a little bit of a show-off, but he knows it and he can take a joke and even be a little self-deprecating now and again, which is nice. And I guess I like that he is kind of nerdy too. It’s cute… [They both smile a little awkwardly at that.] He’s really passionate about a lot of things and he’s super smart of course. [She heaves a big sigh.]

Kai: What’s the matter?

Ren: I guess I thought I’d get over it? I thought the more time I spent with him, the more of an actual flawed human he’d become instead of this perfect dreamboat. And that is true I guess, but it made it worse? Like the more of an actual person he becomes, the more things I find to like about him. I even like some things that I really didn’t expect to.

Kai: Yeah, I guess I understand that.

Ren: [pained whine] Oh nooo! [She rolls over to look at him.] Shit, I'm so sorry, dude. I'll shut up now. Please just pipe up next time I'm pummeling you in the gut like that.

Kai: It's okay. I brought it up. I'm not idiot. I knew what I was signing up to hear.

Ren: It’s just— I wasn’t even thinking! I should really get someone else to dump this kind of stuff on. You shouldn’t have to put up with it.

Kai: But I like talking to you. And like I said before, I knew what I was doing. It— it actually doesn’t bother me as much as I thought it might. It's okay.

Ren: That’s good. I’m not rescinding the apology though.

[She flops onto her back again. The silence is less comfortable this time and finally Kai has enough and breaks it.]

Kai: Sooo , what didn’t you think you’d like about him?

Ren: You really want a round two?
Kai: We were having a good conversation. I just wanted to get it back on track. And he is my idol. I’m curious what he’s actually like as a person.

Ren: Well, if you’re super sure… I guess I kind of like how theatrical he is? Usually that would annoy me but with him… I don’t know it’s just different. It’s— it’s kind of nice that he has some flaws. Oh, and he’s a flirt, which makes things a little tough, but I’d be lying if I said I didn’t enjoy it.

Kai: [interest suddenly spiking] Wait, does he flirt back? Like with you?

Ren: No! I don’t know. A little, I guess? But I’m not sure he means it. I think he just has a sort of charm offensive going all the time. But anyway, it doesn’t really matter. He’s way out of my league.

Kai: That’s not true! You may be green, but you’re really strong! You could totally catch up.

Ren: [surprised] Thanks, but he’s also still way too old for me.

Kai: He’s not that old. He’s only, what, twenty-five?

Ren: And I’m eighteen.

Kai: Almost nineteen.

Ren: Fine, almost nineteen. But my point still stands. Maybe in a few years it would be fine, but right now, no way. Even if I beat the League it would still be weird. [She sighs.] He’s still pretty cool to have as a friend though.

[She smiles, blush completely gone. He smiles too, though a little wistfully. We see Pohaku in the background, watching this interaction with particular interest.]

Kai: Yeah, I gotta admit I’m jealous. You have his number and I didn’t even get his autograph.

Ren: Who said I had his number?

Kai: You called him. That’s why he showed up, right?

Ren: Oh, yeah. Um… I could get you an autograph next time I see him.

Kai: [genuine] Thanks, Ren.

Ren: [turning her head to him] You’re okay though?

Kai: Yeah, of course. You whooped me pretty good, but they're just pillows.

Ren: No, I meant about everything else. [She heaves up onto an elbow to look at him.] You got like a truckload of shit dumped on you today. Are you going to be okay?

[He is quiet for a long moment, staring at the ceiling, thinking it over. He finally looks over at Ren, making eye contact.]

Kai: Yeah. I think I am.
Scene 7: [Kai is up first the next morning as usual and he orders them breakfast. He is already eating when Ren wakes up and toddles over to the table. Kai makes fun of her bed-head, but she is too sleepy to react and pours herself a cup of tea. By the end of the meal, Ren is much more alive. They change out of their pajamas and start planning out the day. Wally arrives before lunch and they drop off his stuff in the hotel room before heading off to the "highest sandwich shop in Hoenn" which is situated in the crown of a massive tree. The two boys are a bit shy and awkward with each other so Ren sits between them to try and get a conversation going. After lunch, They head out onto Route 119 for training. They hike up to the top of the falls and find a nice, large, open space and send out all of their pokemon. Wally new has a magnemite and a maril to complete his team while Kai has the lileep and a castform. Panahi is taking a break after her close call, so Naihi can remain out with them as the sixth member. They do a big round of introductions. Naihi is pleased to meet another gallade and Kihei listens with some interest as she tells him about her mentor. Meanwhile the three humans are all marveling over Kai's two new pokemon.]

Wally: Have you n-named them yet?

Kai: Oh, uh, no. Hmm. I think I'll call [ to the lileep ] you Lily… [ to the castform ] and you Paki. How does that sound?

[ Lily squints her eyes ever so slightly and waves her fronds, looking happy. Paki burbles and undulates. Kai smiles and Wally looks a bit confused. ]

Ren: [ taking Wally's shoulder ] You and I put a lot of thought and consideration into naming our pokemon, but Kai here is very much of the "whatever pops into my head first" school of pokemon naming.

Kai: They're good names!

Wally: A flower name is good for the lileep. She's such a lovely color after all.

Ren: Yeah, but lilies aren't purple.

[ Kai and Ren start arguing and Wally chuckles to himself as he watches them. After an appropriate amount of bickering, he interrupts them. ]

Wally: I can't believe the head of the Weather Institute gave you two a castform. They are so rare. Even rarer than lileeps.

Kai: I know! My dad is so psyched!

Ren: I don't know what you mean, Walter. We are responsible adults, [ striking a dramatic pose ] not to mention heroic.

Wally: [ chuckling ] So how come Kai got to keep it?

Ren: Well, Ren already has a lot of pokemon and—

Ren: And Kai wanted it for his nerd stuff.


Ren: Ahhh! Nooo! I'm never telling you anything!

[ Kai laughs at how red in the face she gets and Wally glances back and forth between them, wondering what the heck is going on. Ren takes a deep breath and collects herself. ]
Ren: Alright! That's enough fooling around. We came out here to work, remember?

Kai & Wally: Yes ma'am!

Ren: Okay, for starters let's get all three starters practicing together. [ Tāraki wraps his arms around his two friends and bounces in excitement. ] Jay, could you please show the boys here how you pulled off that superb dragon's tail kick for low sweep? [ She smiles and nods. ] Tāraki, you might need to use your tail instead, but see what you can improvise. I think it would work well as a slam technique [ He nods eagerly. ] And Pohaku, why don't you tutor Lily here on using ancient power? You've gotten good at smack down and she could really use it for the gym.

Pohaku: T-thank you! I'd be honored to help out my hatch-mate.

Ren: Good, but remember lileeps are pretty sessile, so use the projectiles instead of those close quarters techniques Kōtai showed you.

[ Pohaku nods and lumbers over to where Lily is sitting. He dwarfs her now and he leans down to talk and listen to her. ]

Wally: Oh, Ume could practice magnet bomb with them. That's similar.

Ren: Good idea.

[ The magnemite floats over to join them. ]

Naihi: Ren, may I do some sprints with Akahata? I would very much like to work on my speed.

Ren: Sure thing. Ao, you work with them. Show them how it's done.

Wally: Want to work with them, Kana?

[ She dips her head and saunters over to join them. ]

Kai: You too Dusty.

Dusty: I'll do my best.

Ren: Let's have the three birds practice some aerial maneuvers. Māia is the most experienced so she'll lead.

[ Ruby eyes Māia eagerly, ready to steal her secrets so that she can one day beat her. Kai gives her a warning look. Aroha tugs on Wally's pant leg and he leans down to listen. ]

Wally: [ straightening up ] Aroha wants to practice petal blizzard by herself. She just learned it and she is super excited.

Ren: Okay. So lastly, why don't we have the water types and Paki practice a drizzle gambit?

[ Kai explains the strategy to Mako, who then relays it to the other two. Paki looks confused for a while, but once she finally gets it, her eyes glow and thunder sounds overhead as a small, dark cloud forms above her. Rain begins to fall over her the maril and the wailmer. She shifts into rainy form, looking pleased with herself. Mako bounces over toward the river bank and the others follow, then they all three practice their boosted water moves into the river. Overhead the three bird pokemon practice barrel rolls and Māia's signature drop turn followed by pulling up at the last moment. Ao and Akahata are consistently first and second for sprints while the other three duke it out for third. Tāraki can't quite manage the kick as Jay and Kihei are doing it, but he has come up with two }
different sweeps with his tail to serve the same purpose. Lily is launching increasingly large rocks at Pohaku and he giggles as they shatter against his armor. The boys looks over this with awe and Ren with satisfaction.

Kai: Wow.

Wally: So what should we do?

Ren: We are going to practice a little self-defense.

Kai: We are?

Wally: Are you sure I can, you know…

Ren: You have your inhaler with you, right?

Wally: Yeah…

Ren: Then absolutely. If you ever feel short of breath, you can just tap out and take a break, okay? That goes for you too, Kai.

Kai: What about you?

Ren: I've been practicing Judo since I was seven, with a few years of MMA and kickboxing mixed in there because I'm a rebel. You boys are going to have to work pretty hard to keep up with this. [She flexes for effect and they both look genuinely intimidated, although Kai is blushing a little. Ren puts her hands on her hips and smiles.]

Don't worry. We're going to start with the basics. I've taught before. It'll be fine.

[She has Wally take off his ever-present cardigan has them start them start with some stretches. She is quite a bit more flexible than they are, but they manage just fine. Next she shows them some basic principles and footwork before starting on the first throw. She demonstrates as slowly and carefully on Kai as she can, but he still lies there on his back for a moment, stunned.

Ren: [leaning over him] You okay dude?

Kai: [blush creeping up his neck] Yes! Yeah! I’m fine!

[He hops back up and Ren throws him a few more times. Then they practice the parts of the throw for a while and finally Kai tries it on Ren. She commends him on it not being half bad before having him do it again. This time something goes wrong and Kai winces in pain, grabbing his back. Apparently he hurt himself free-climbing the other day and aggravated it. Ren has him do some stretches and works on the spot for a bit. Kai tries to wave her off and continue, but she gets out a camp chair and has him sit down. He watches her and Wally a bit before pulling out his notebook and pencil. Wally has to take a break after a bit and sits down by himself while Ren goes to work with the pokemon. She shows Jay, Kihei and Dusty some jabs while Tāraki and Aroha practice mega drain together. When Ren goes to check on Kai, she finds that he has been sketching and calls Wally over to look. Kai blushes a little as they look over his work. There is a sketch of Lily and Pohaku and another of Paki, but also one of Ren with her fists raised, ready to throw a punch and one of Wally leaning back on his hands in the grass. Wally blushes a little too as he compliments Kai. They are jerked to attention by an outraged cry from one of the pokemon. They turn to see that Lily, Ume and Pohaku have joined the water pokemon by the river. Pohaku is yelling at a cackling Paki but is interrupted by Lily's laughter. She sways contentedly back and forth and Pohaku looks relieved. The three trainers start to wander over when Paki launches another weather ball at Lily. It splashes off her and she giggles, glowing slightly.]
Kai: What are you guys—

[Mako uses surf on Lily. The water overwhelms her completely for a moment, but she once again emerges giggling and unharmed except this time she glows even brighter. ]

Kai: [alarmed] Hey! What was that for?

Ren & Wally: She has storm drain!

[Ren and Wally geek out about it and Kai calms down once he has realized that Lily is immune to water attacks. She demonstrates her boosted ancient power for everyone and they cheer.]

---

**Scene 8:** [That night at the hotel, both boys try to offer Ren their bed to sleep in but she insists they both need it more: Kai because of his back and Wally because he isn't used to camping out. They ignore these arguments and gang up on her to try and pull her onto one of the beds. She is holding out valiantly when Tāraki walks over and plucks her out of their grasp. He gives them both a scathing look before carrying her over to his giant bean bag. She sticks her tongue out at them over his shoulder. Tāraki puts her down and curls around her protectively as he settles in. She snuggles up against him and they are asleep in less than a minute. The boys chuckle quietly before shrugging and climbing into their own beds and going to sleep.]

---

**Scene 9:** [The next morning the three trainers set out to see more of the sights. Fortree is truly a unique city with more than half of the buildings and walkways situated several stories up in enormous trees. All of the suspension bridges make Wally a bit nervous at first, but he soon gets used to it and really enjoys the views. After a while they split up to run separate errands. The first thing Ren does is visit a metalworker to have Latios’s collar made. With that done, she heads to the pal park on the edge of town to have a team meeting.]

Ren: So I wanted to talk strategy for the gym. It's been quite a while since the last one and I'm confident you are all strong enough, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't be careful and give ourselves the best chance possible. So, Ao, I want you to main. Aka, Kata, and Pohaku can run point for you. [They all nod. ] Naihi and Māia, you two are welcome to come along as a little extra back-up.  

[They nod too, but don't seem best pleased. ]

Tāraki: Hey, Ren, can I challenge the gym instead? I want to help get this badge and I want the practice.

Ren: I'd rather you sit this one out, tiger. You're at a type disadvantage and you got to main the last one.

Tāraki: You just said I was strong enough and I want to do it. What's the problem?

Ren: Why don't you let the others have a turn?
Tāraki: But—

Ren: They need the experience more than you.

Kata: He can have my spot if he wants. Gym battles sound like fun, but I don't mind passing on one.

Tāraki: See, problem solved!

Ren: No it isn't. Kata, you're staying in.

Tāraki: Why? She said it was okay.

Ren: I don't want you fighting in this gym! You didn't complain last time.

Tāraki: Last time I had just fought Magma. I was beat.

Ren: So what's different? You just fought Magma again.

Tāraki: But this time I feel fine. I really want to fight the gym.

Ren: They're all going to have a type advantage on you, Tāraki.

Tāraki: You're acting like I've never fought flying-types before!

Ren: This is different.

Tāraki: How? You don't think I can do this?

Ren: No, that's not—it's too easy for something to go wrong. It's not worth it.

Tāraki: You're not making any sense! I'll be fine!

Ren: What if you're not fine? Then what am I supposed to do? I can't lose you too!

[Ren bursts into tears and Tāraki goes from angry to sorry in an instant.]

Tāraki: Ren—

Ren: You're not going!

Tāraki: O-okay.

Ren: Good. [wiping at her eyes] Why do you have to be so stubborn?

[He lowers his head.]

Ren: Okay, I guess that's it for the team meeting, but I still need to talk to you, Ahi. Would the rest of you mind…?

[They shuffle away except for Panahi.]

Panahi: You know I could say the same about you, honey. He's a tauros in the nesting grounds, make no mistake, but he didn't deserve that.

Ren: I know. But I can't always let him have everything he wants. He has to grow up.

Panahi: I agree, but that isn't what this is about.
Ren: I want him to come, but I— I just can't. I'll make it up to him.

Panahi: You don't have to do that. You should just apologize.

Ren: I will, I just can't right now. I'm not—I know I'll botch it.

Panahi: Fair enough. What did you want to talk about?

Ren: Well, I've been mulling it over for a long time, and I think you would be a lot better off as a contestant than a battler—and you're a good battler so what I'm saying is you would slay at the contests.

Panahi: Without question, honey. I'm a knockout. But where are you going with this? You thinking of putting aside your heroic quest and becoming an entertainer?

Ren: Well no, but I put up an ad for you and I got a response.

Panahi: What?

Ren: A coordinator contacted me. They want to meet you.

Panahi: Ren, this had better not be some ploy to send me away just because things have gotten dangerous.

Ren: I swear it isn't. Do you remember back in Slateport when we saw that coordinator and her altaria? I've actually been thinking about it since then. But I didn't take out an ad until right after our last big team meeting in Mauville because I didn't want to lose you. I've been selfish or maybe just self-deluding. I wasn't thinking about what was best for you. You kept saying you were better off with me than you were before and I convinced myself that that was good enough. But you deserve a better life than this, to do something you are really passionate about. You've taken such good care of me and I think it's time I took care of you.

Panahi: But what about Magma? What if you need me? I wouldn't be there.

Ren: I'm under the best protection possible. I have the Guardians and Steven and Kai and even Wally to help me. You wouldn't be leaving me alone. And I've grown up a lot. I love that you take care of me—well maybe not all the time—but I'll be okay. I don't want to feel like I'm holding you back anymore. I want to see you happy and doing something you love, not mothering me because you've got nothing better to do.

Panahi: I don't know what to say.

Ren: The coordinator is in Lilycove, so you'll have a little while to think about it.

Meanwhile the rest of Ren's team is talking amongst themselves. Tāraki sits some distance away from the others looking very upset.

Naihi: Excuse me, but what upset out trainer just now?

Kata: We lost a teammate a while ago. She's still pretty torn up about it.

Mele: She blames herself. Wheta wouldn't tap out even though she was at a type disadvantage and the other pokemon killed her by accident.

Naihi: That is unfortunate, but it hardly seems like her fault.
Ao: She's our trainer. She feels responsible for us.

Kōtai: It's still a fresh wound for her.

[Tāraki hangs his head.]

Naihi: Hmm. Well, I can see why it may have prompted her to be harsh on Tāraki just now.

Kōtai: I'm gonna go talk to the kid.

[Kōtai shuffles over to where Tāraki is sitting and starts talking low and gentle.]

Kata: So, what's your deal, newbie?

Naihi: What do you mean?

Kata: Why are you here? And like, are all absol a so… pointy?

Naihi: The absol on my mountain looked like me, but I have met one or two forest absol that looked different. As to why I have allied with your trainer, I seek to stop the great disaster Magma is about to unleash on the world.

Kata: [gleeful disbelief] Is she for real?

[Akahata growls low, lip lifting just far enough to show her fangs. Kata clamps her hands over her snout and bounces from hoof to hoof, only barely managing to stifle her mirth.]

Pohaku: Hey Kata, you were with Ren when she found my fossil right? Why did she give Kai the lileep?

Kata: Oh, well, Kai and Ren found your fossils together, but Kai didn't have the money to revive his, so Ren had it done for him. This fossil guy owed us.

Roma: It was sort of a thank you for when he saved her life.

Pohaku: [very excited] Oh my goodness, tell me what happened!

---

**Scene 10:** [Later in the afternoon, Ren, Wally and Kai are out training their pokemon on Route 120. After a while Ren pulls the boys aside to learn Judo together. Wally has an easier time with the stretches and basics than Kai. Their practice gets interrupted when Ruby spots a pikachu and goes after it. Māia and some of the others tell her to lay off, but she insists and continues to dive at the terrified pokemon until Kai throws his body between them. The pikachu cowers behind his legs while Kai yells at the enraged swellow. Ruby flutters back and forth as they argue, trying to get behind Kai. He warns her that it is an electric type and dangerous which only makes her scoff. The pikachu chooses this moment to poke it's head around Kai's legs and electrocute her. Ruby's body jerks and she tumbles to the ground. Kai is concerned, but she pops back up after a moment. The pikachu attaches himself to Kai's leg and stutters out some threat, rosy cheeks sparking for emphasis. Māia swoops over and plants herself between them and Ruby eventually backs down. The trainers go back to working with their pokemon and the pikachu sticks close to Kai. Some other trainers come by and they have a few battles. As everyone packs up to head back to Fortree, Kai offers the pikachu a]
spot on his team and it happily accepts. Ren decides she wants a walk before she turns in and the boys head back to Fortree while she sets out further down Route 120 alone.

---

**Scene 11:** [It is early evening and the sun has only just begun to set. Low clouds and mist hang heavy as she trudges along, mostly watching her feet rather than the beautiful scenery. She comes to a tall, steep riverbank and continues along it as the woods open up. The path turns abruptly west across the river and Ren looks up and out across a long suspension bridge over a huge clear pool. She looks down and sees the colorful evening sky reflected in the water. She starts to walk across the bridge and looks up to see Steven standing at the other end. He starts across and they meet in the middle.]

Ren: Hello Steven.

Steven: Hello Ren.

Ren: [smiling a little] So, are you just hanging out here or…

Steven: I was looking for you. I saw you with your friends earlier, but I thought it would be best if we could talk alone.

Ren: Yeah, probably. What did you want to talk about?

Steven: Well, first I have something for you. [He takes a small box out of his jacket pocket and hands it to her with just a hint of hesitation. As she opens it] I wish—I wanted to give you this under better circumstances.

Ren: [looking down at the green and red polished stone] Is this sceptilite?

Steven: Yes.

Ren: [holding it up to the light to reveal little golden flecks within] It’s beautiful.

Steven: [He hums in agreement.] It’s actually my fifth favorite stone.

Ren: [placing it back in the box] Oh? What are your top four?

Steven: Well, my top favorite would have to be Latias’s soul dew, second favorite is metagrossite of course, aggronite in third, and at the moment steelixite is occupying fourth.

Ren: [flirtatious smile] I’m glad you finally have a piece then.

Steven: Thank you so much for that. Tungsten is constantly admiring her own reflection these days.

[Ren laughs a little and closes the box. She stows it in her pocket and looks back up into Steven’s face.]

Ren: I don’t even know what to say. Täraki is going to lose his mind. And you don’t have to feel bad about the timing. I don’t. [She smiles but his face is strained. She looks down again.] …It actually works out well for me to tell you the truth. We had a bit of a fight this morning. [tapping her pocket] This will make an excellent apology.
Steven: I’m sorry to hear that. I’m sure he’ll come around.

Ren: I know he will. It makes me feel a little more guilty, if anything.

Steven: What happened?

Ren: I didn’t want him to fight in the gym. I know he can do it, I just couldn’t— [ quiet ] After Wheta I couldn’t risk it. He was right, I wasn’t making any sense. I let him battle tons of fire and flying-types when we’re fighting Magma… But it’s different, you know? Those battles are for something and I know he would never stay in his ball anyway… It would be one thing if I was doing it to protect him, but for once I can’t hide behind that. This time I know for certain it’s only because I’m scared.

Steven: Then I would say you are already more than halfway there. We all have our ghosts to carry, but it’s the ones we can’t see that weigh us down the most. I am confident you will find the best solution for both of you. He’s still young, and from what I’ve seen he’s very much the sort to leap first and look on his way down. But I think given a little time, he will understand. He loves you very much.

Ren: Thank you, Steven.

Steven: Of course…

[ Ren smiles up at him, though a little weakly when a raindrop lands on her nose and her face scrunches up. Steven smiles for a moment at her comical expression then looks up and holds out a hand. Sure enough more raindrops begin to fall one by one. ]

Ren: Oh no, not your suit again! I’m sorry. I don’t have an umbrella.

Steven: [ pulling out his vapor box ] Not to worry. I have my own.

[ He pulls out a large black umbrella and opens it just as the rain starts to come down heavier. The inside of the umbrella is silver and while it is quite large, Ren does have to stand right next to Steven to stay dry. Steven holds it between them as the raindrops patter off it. ]

Ren: [ looking up at the umbrella instead of the very close Steven ] Wow, this thing is huge.

Steven: [ He regards the underside of the umbrella too for a moment as he stows his vapor box ] When one likes silk suits, one must take certain precautions.

Ren: [ She chuckles, glancing at him before looking away again. ] So, what was it you wanted to talk about?

Steven: I actually wanted to apologize for the Weather Institute, I should have been there sooner.

Ren: [ looking up at him ] Don’t—

Steven: I feel terrible about the whole thing. I—

Ren: Steven, what should you have done differently? You have no reason to feel guilty about this. I, on the other hand, have plenty.

Steven: You were there when I should have been!

Ren: We were both too late. I may have been there sooner but it didn’t make any difference. They were a step ahead of us, plain and simple.
Steven: That’s what bothers me. This is my responsibility. I should be able to—

Ren: To what? Read their minds? Steven, you can’t blame yourself for things that you can’t control. [He looks away.] You’ll go crazy. Believe me, I know. It wears you down. It causes you to make mistakes you didn’t even have to. This is going to be difficult. We both need to be as strong as we can be.

Steven: Then you shouldn’t be blaming yourself either.

Ren: [turning away] It’s different. I made an error in judgement. For once I thought I knew what I was doing, that I was making the right choice, but it was just my hot-headedness getting the better of me same as ever. Kai was even there to talk sense this time and I just ignored him. I blundered in there and created a mess without achieving anything. You came in and defused a situation that nearly got me killed. So please stop beating yourself up about it.

Steven: Now I think you are the one taking too much responsibility for what happened. There was no way for you to know that you were too late. And time was of the essence. We often must make decisions without the benefit of all of the pertinent facts. Just because something doesn’t turn out well doesn’t mean it wasn’t the right decision to make in the moment.

Ren: I—

Steven: And Latios was there with you. He would have stopped you if he thought it was a bad decision. Are you really going to blame yourself for not having more insight than an Eon Guardian?

Ren: Hmm… Maybe you are right. [glancing cautiously back at him] And maybe we should both take our own advice, huh?

Steven: Probably. I’ll think about it. For now, perhaps it would be best if we both tried not to dwell on what could have happened and focus on what did. I, for one, am very glad you had someone else there to help you since I couldn’t be.

Ren: I, uh, told him by the way. Not about the Guardians, but about Magma and Groudon. And Wally too. I hope that’s okay. I probably should have—

Steven: It’s fine. [their eyes meet] If you trust them, I will too. We may not know each other very well, but I know that you are no fool, Ren Kosugi.

Ren: [looking down and blushing hard] I don’t know. If I was really smart I probably would have at least told Kai sooner. [blush fading] I was trying to protect him, but all I managed to do was let him go in there blind.

Steven: [glancing sideways at her with a teasing smile] I know how that goes. I guess it’s better to let others make their own choices.

Ren: [meeting his gaze with a lopsided smile of her own] I’m glad you think so, because it’s high time you stopped blaming yourself for involving me.

Steven: [looking away in embarrassment] Well—

Ren: [grinning and wagging a finger at him] Ah-ah, none of that now. I know you think all of this is your job because you’re the Champion.

Steven: [sheepish] It kind of is—
Ren: But I chose, this remember? I may have been prodded along a little by luck or coincidence or whatever you want to call it, but it’s my decisions that landed me here. Give me a little agency.

[ She looks up into his face, meeting his eyes boldly this time as if daring him to refuse. He stares back at her and his mouth works a little, as if he was about to object but thinks better of it. A warm smile settles on his face. ]

Steven: You are right. Forgive me?

Ren: As long as you get off you high mudsdale? Done. [ poking him in the chest ] Because we were both chosen by the Guardians and that makes us partners. We should have each other’s backs. This will never work if you are always trying to shield me.

Steven: I’ll try my best.

Ren: Good. I think you can manage it. I’m very stubborn, but I’ve learned that much and so can you.

Steven: [ grinning ] Understood.

[ It doesn’t take very long for Ren to melt a little under Steven’s rakish grin. She just smiles dreamily back for a moment before she feels her body leaning towards him of its own accord. She jerks upright and turns away a bit to hide her blush. After she calms down an idea occurs to her and she turns back to face him. ]

Ren: Speaking of trusting each other and sharing the burden: you wouldn’t happen to have a blazikenite, would you?

Steven: At the moment, no. But I am of course very well connected where mega stones are concerned. I’m quite confident I could get hold of one. I’ll be sure to send one along when I find one. His last name was Birch, correct? The son of Prof. Alan Birch, might I assume?

Ren: Yep, that’s him.

[ They both fall quiet then, becoming lost in their own thoughts. They look out into the rain as it begins to come down harder. The droning of the raindrops on the umbrella is soothing and draws them farther into their own separate worlds. Ren is the first to drift back and she watches Steven in profile. He does a good job of hiding it, but he looks tired and weary. ]

Ren: Hey Steven, do you have any friends you can talk to about this stuff? You know, besides your pokemon obviously.

Steven: [ coming back to himself with an affected smile ] Ren, you have quite enough on your plate as it is. You don’t have to worry about me.

Ren: There you go again.

Steven: Hm?

Ren: Stop trying to spare me! I’m already worried. There’s no point in telling me not to be. [ She sighs. ] Look, I’ve just realized how helpful it can be to have someone to confide in. And I’m more than willing to be that for you. [ looking away ] But you’re right that we don’t know each other that well, so maybe I’m not the best person for the job. It’s certainly clear that you would rather not tell me everything.

Steven: [ face falling ] Ren—
Ren: [-looking earnestly at him] And that’s okay. I just want to know if you have anyone else there to support you.

[He fidgets, looking away, and doesn’t answer.]

Ren: [crossing her arms] Well if you don’t, you should.

[She sighs, not knowing what else to say, but Steven breaks the silence.]

Steven: I do actually—have a friend that is. He knows almost everything. I actually wanted to tell him about the Guardians, and Latias thought it was a good idea, but…

Ren: [nodding] Lati conv didn’t. I’m not surprised. He was happy I didn’t tell my friends, even though I didn’t ask him. I just thought it might be a little much all at once… [Ren looks down, drifting off into her own thoughts again. The irony strikes her suddenly and she shakes her head. She smiles a little awkwardly and glances shyly back up at him.] We’re a pair, huh? Here I am lecturing you and I haven’t even told my parents yet because I’m afraid it will freak them out.

Steven: I think our instinct to protect those we love may be part of the reason the Guardians chose us. Scratch that, I know it has more than a little to do with why Latvia chose me. She is the more defensive member of the duo after all.

Ren: Is that so?

Steven: [He nods.] And Lati is the more offensive, which suits you I think.

Ren: [quirking an eyebrow] And you, Mr. Vaults-a-desk-to-tackle-a-dangerous-criminal?

Steven: [a half smile that becomes a grimace] That sort of outburst is… very unusual for me, [composing his features] whereas you openly admit to being hot-headed.

Ren: [challenging] Maybe I was exaggerating.

Steven: [knowing smile] I don’t think so. I’ve seen that righteous fury of yours too many times now for you to hide it.

[They both laugh, her a little sheepishly.]

Steven: Anyway, I don’t know Kai, but if he was willing to charge into the fire with you without even knowing why, He can probably handle knowing a few unsettling things. Rire can definitely handle it… [big sigh] You’re right: I should talk to him more. Arceus knows he pesters me about it enough.

Ren: Good. And while we’re on the subject, you should also listen to Bessemer more. They’re your better half.

Steven: [whining] Not you too! What did they say?

Ren: [not giving in the slightest] That’s between us. Bottom line: we both have to start taking better care of ourselves.

Steven: [gesturing at himself] I bought myself this new suit. Does that count?

Ren: I’ve never personally understood shop therapy, but if it makes you feel good, then yes: it’s a step in the right direction.
Steven: You were supposed to make fun of my wealth and vanity. I left myself wide open.

Ren: I don’t need you to make an opening for me. [ stuffy caricature of his diction ] I have ample opportunity whenever I should feel the inclination.

Steven: That I cannot argue.

Ren: And were you fishing for a compliment back there?

Steven: Never! Why, the insolence . I can get compliments at any time and from anyone I choose.

Ren: [ leaning towards him, hands on hips ] Except from me right now because I’m onto you.

Steven: And what kind of partner are you? You just finished lecturing me on how I need support and now you refuse to give it to me. [ He touches the back of his hand to his forehead, pretending to be faint. ]

Ren: [ not backing down ] I didn’t volunteer to be the one to provide it.


Ren: [ trying not to grin ] Alright alright , you beautiful peacock of a man! You look stunning in that suit.

Steven: Thank you.

Ren: [ as she stares into them ] It really brings out your eyes.

Steven: [ staring straight back into hers but wiggling his eyebrows ] Do go on.

Ren: [ blushing but refusing to get flustered ] Pffff. You’re really milking this, aren’t you?

Steven: Needing constant validation is another of my many flaws.

Ren: I doubt that.

Steven: Well, maybe not, but I still enjoy it more than I probably should. It’s hard to grow up with everyone telling you how great you are and not get a little conceited.

Ren: [ teasing ] Poor you.

Steven: At least I know how blessed and obnoxious I am.

Ren: As if. You are extremely charming. A little too charming if you ask me. What’s up with that anyway?

Steven: It’s always been my part-time job. And it makes a lot of things easier, so it’s tempting to use all the time. And now I’m so used to it, it’s kind of become automatic. It’s a bit hard to turn off.

Ren: So you don’t enjoy the effect you have on people?

Steven: Well, that too, obviously.

[ Ren laughs lightly at the admission. ]

Ren: I’m glad we’re getting to know each other a little better.
Steven: You say that, and yet you haven’t told me much about yourself. As much as I enjoy talking about myself—

Ren: Oh please. You’re not half as self-involved as you pretend to be.

Steven: [not letting her wiggle out of it] Either way, perhaps it would be best if you took a turn. Any foibles I should know about?

Ren: Well, the temper and the recklessness you already know. And I already admitted to being stubborn… I guess I’m not that self-reflective. I don’t like dealing with my problems.

Steven: I would venture to say that no one does. And I’m not so sure that is accurate. You seem to have a clearer picture of yourself than most.

Ren: That took years of work and training and I still resist it all of the time. My first impulse is always to bury shit down deep where it can rot and come back as something worse that I barely even recognize anymore.

Steven: I guess that is less universal, but still exceedingly common.

Ren: I’m not very open either, at least not about the bad things. Even little stuff I tend to keep to myself. It makes me unpredictable in the worst way possible. Most of the time when I lash out, people have no idea why and it’s entirely my fault.

Steven: I still say you know yourself very well, even if you had to work harder than some to get there. Thank you for sharing that… [He sees her looking down and tries to lighten the mood again.] I did say foibles though. They’re small flaws or eccentricities. Have anything like that for me?

Ren: Hmm. I guess I like food a little too much? I definitely spend way more time than I should thinking about it. My friends back in Johto used to make fun of me for it. And the food is what I miss about Johto more than anything else, by a significant margin. The food here is good too, it’s just not the same. And I eat a lot, like really a lot. Probably enough for two people.

Steven: But you’re so small. Where do you keep all of this food?

Ren: I burn it. My doctor always joked that I run hot, like my metabolism is too fast or something? Anyway, I object to that description. This is average height in Johto!

Steven: [dipping his head] Shazai itashimasu.

Ren: [in Kantonese] You speak Kantonese?

Steven: [in perfect Kantonese] Some, but I am by no means fluent.

Ren: Ugh. Naze anata wa subete de totemo sainō ga arimasu ka?

Steven: Arigatōgozaimashita.

Ren: No, I asked why are you so talented at everything. You slipped up.

Steven: Regardless, the compliment is still implied, so thank you.

Ren: [out of the side of her mouth] True. But let me have this at least. I want to savor it.

Steven: Alright then. You’ve indulged me enough for that to be fair, I suppose. My Kantonese is rusty. I haven’t had anyone to practice with.
Ren: Well now you do. [coloring a little] That is—if you want too.

Steven: Absolutely. But another time perhaps. I have to go, I’m afraid.

Ren: Okay… Oh, uh, wait. [rooting around in her bag] I almost forgot. [pulling out a small package wrapped in brown paper] Kōtai, my sandslash, made me promise to give this to you. It’s for your sandslash. I think she left an impression.

Steven: [smiling and accepting the package] I’ll be sure to deliver it. Would you mind holding the umbrella for a moment?

Ren: Sure—uh—no.

[Their hands touch as he hands it off to her and the tremor it sends through her makes it hard to hold the umbrella steady, but somehow she manages. Steven gets out his vapor box and pulls some black clothing out of it. He puts the garments over his suit and switches out his shoes for boots. He also gets out his flight goggles and puts them on his head, though he doesn’t yet lower them into place over his eyes. Ren marvels at the effect. The clothing turns out to be rain gear (pants, a jacket and a short poncho) with reflective silver stripes running lengthwise instead of the normal horizontal.]

Ren: Damn.

Steven: Okay, you’ve done enough now. You’re a good partner. I take it back.

Ren: No, this time I’m serious. How does even a rain-fly make you look good?

Steven: Well, it helps that I get everything custom…

Ren: [disbelieving] No!

Steven: Oh yes. It’s my mountain of money and I shall spend it as I choose.

Ren: [grinning wide despite herself] Get out of here, you filthy rich, silver spoon, gorgeous dandy!

Steven: [with an exaggerated bow] As my lady wishes.

[He lowers his goggles over his eyes and the reflective surface obscures them completely. He sends out his skarmory, who stretches his wings but seems unconcerned by the rain. Steven turns to mount up and Ren bites her lip.]

Ren: Hey Steven.

Steven: [turning in the saddle to face her] Yes?

Ren: Thanks for cheering me up. I really needed it.

Steven: [big smile] You’re welcome. And thank you for kicking my ass. I really needed it.

[With that, Damascus takes off, leaving Ren alone under the umbrella, blushing crimson. She puts a hand over her erratically pounding heart and her eyes flutter as she thinks over all of the bald-faced flirting that just happened. This does not help her heartbeat at all and she takes a few deep breaths while pressing on her chest with one hand and gripping the umbrella unnecessarily tight in the other. Then she remembers that it is Steven’s umbrella she is holding and that he clearly left it on purpose so that she wouldn’t have to get wet. It also occurs to her that he didn’t bring it up so that she wouldn’t refuse. She is surprised and maybe a little annoyed at how the gesture makes her feel]
Scene 12: [That night Ren wakes up in a cold sweat. At first she doesn’t seem to know where she is or what is really happening. Her chest heaves as she looks around the room getting her bearings. She is on a top bunk in the Pokemon Center. Kai and Wally are asleep on the bunks across from her. She slides quietly down so as not to wake anyone and grabs Steven’s umbrella on her way out. It is not raining when she gets outside, but she grips the umbrella handle tightly as she wanders away from Fortree and into the surrounding woods. She wends between the trees, twigs cracking under her bare feet. She wanders into a clearing and her feet and ankles soon become soaked in the wet grass. She holds the umbrella in front of her, tip resting on the ground, and looks around. Steven does not miraculously appear in a random clearing in the woods in the middle of the night, but Latios materializes next to her in the air. He floats there for a moment before stretching out his hind wings and touching down on the turf. His feathers reach almost down to his scaled toes. He flaps his forewings before settling them at his sides and leans forward ever so slightly so that his forepaws rest on the ground. Ren has never seen him sit before.]

Ren: You really do watch over me, don’t you?

Latios: I do. We are connected.

Ren: …So, do you sleep?

Latios: I do, and I dream like any other creature. I sensed when you woke. You were in distress.

Ren: It was just a nightmare.

[Latios makes no response to this, but he doesn’t dismiss it or leave. Ren sighs.]

Ren: Why did you choose me?

Latios: I have already told you.

Ren: So that’s really it then?

Latios: Yes.

Ren: I guess I just don’t buy it. Maybe I’m being paranoid. I don’t know. Are you sure there’s not some big secret or tauroshit destiny going on?

Latios: I do not believe in fate.

[Ren looks away from him and out into the dark woods. She doesn’t know why she came out here.]

Latios: However, there is one criterion that I have not mentioned before.

[She turns to look at Latios again, clearly surprised.]

Latios: Not only must my partner be willing to risk their own life, but also those of their pokemon, or rather, allow their pokemon to risk their own lives. This is harder.

[Ren looks down, face tight.]
Latios: And such willingness cannot be born of ignorance. In other words, I would never ask this undertaking of a trainer who didn’t… know the cost.

Ren: Do you think someone else will die?

Latios: I do not know. Nothing is certain either way. But that means that you may yet pull them through this. I will do all I can to help.

Ren: You were there in the Weather Institute, weren’t you. I could… feel it.

Latios: Yes. Although, I didn’t need to help you, as it turned out. Steven, on the other hand, almost fell out of a window. I pulled him back in.

Ren: Thank you… Do you think you could do him another favor?

[ Latios turns to look at her. ]

Ren: Do you think you could let him tell Rire about you? Please.

Latios: [ He looks away again. ] I will… consider it.

Ren: I understand why you don’t want to. I remember how we met. But I’m also sure that Steven wouldn’t even consider telling anyone he didn’t trust completely.

[ She reaches out a little hesitantly and rests her hand against his neck. His fur is soft and the contact feels much more natural than she expected. She tunnels her fingers into his fur and scratches absently at his neck. He floofs out just a bit and leans into her. ]

Scene 13: [The next morning, Ren goes to the pal park to talk to Tāraki. He is uncharacteristically quiet and listless. He does not meet her eyes and hangs his head. Ren looks pained as she watches him fidget in front of her, looking guilty.]

Ren: I'm so sorry, tiger.

Tāraki: No, I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking. I don't have to fight in the gym. It doesn't matter.

Ren: I shouldn't be holding you back just because I'm scared. You're the whole reason I'm here. And I should never have yelled at you. Everything you said was true.

Tāraki: But I still shouldn't have pushed you. I acted like your feelings didn't matter. Like the only thing that was important was what I wanted. You've done everything for me and all I do is demand more. We're supposed to be partners. We should take care of each other. I thought the only thing that mattered was protecting you and if I could do that, everything would be fine. I thought that was being selfless, but it's not. I'm selfish. I love you and I don't want you to die. I don't know why I didn't think it would be the same for you. Looking back I can see now how I've failed you. I didn't think about what happened to Wheta because I wasn't there. I wasn't there for you when you really needed me.

Ren: Tāraki, that's not true.

Tāraki: It is! And I never bothered to ask why you didn't want to be a trainer. It's always what I
want. I'm bad at that stuff so I just ignored it. But you don't need me to keep you safe. You can
handle danger. You need someone to listen like Panahi and Kōtai and Mele do. And Panahi's
leaving. I don't know what I'm doing, but I'm going to try and step up. Actually support you, in a
way that really matters.

Ren: Well then I really have to stop treating you like a child because you are so grown up. Come
here.

[ He is a little hesitant but she is not. She hugs him tightly and eventually he relaxes into it and
returns it, humming gently against her. ]

Ren: How did I get so lucky? No matter what you say, I'm always going to think you are the best
pokemon a girl could have.

[ He tears up a little, unable to say anything in response. He sniffles on her shoulder and she
squeezes him and lets go. He wipes at his eyes. ]

Ren: [ pulling out the box Steven gave her ] I have something for you. Steven gave it to me. We can
set it in your anklet instead of your miracle seed.

Tāraki: Oh, it's pretty. What is it?

Ren: It's sceptilite. With that and this [ pointing to the keystone on her glove ], you can mega evolve.

[ He is speechless. He stares at the stones and then looks at her. Before she can say anything he
sweeps her up in a crushing hug, crying all over again but laughing too this time. She hugs him
back, teary-eyed herself. She starts coughing and he puts her down. She holds up her hand and he
puts his clawed hand in hers. She squeezes tight, holding their hands up between them and looks into
his eyes. ]

Ren: You and me, we're the ultimate team. We're going to be the best there's ever been! We'll be
stronger than otōsan and Kenta, stronger than Steven and Bessemer, maybe even stronger than
Kaspa and Tessen! There's no room for doubt anymore. We're going to do our best every day and
we're going to get better every day. We are going to figure out mega evolution, we are going to stop
Magma, we are going to save the world, and we are going to beat the Pokemon League!

Tāraki: YEAH!

[ They stare into each other's burning eyes and grin with a confidence and fire that would make any
opponent flinch. ]

Ren: Together we can do it! Together we can do anything!

[ Tāraki crows and thrusts his fist in the air. Ren laughs and whoops to back him up. People are
staring but they don't care. ]

Ren: Okay, let me hold onto that mega stone for a minute. I'll go right now and get it fitted.

[ Tāraki looks at his empty claws and then at the ground, obviously searching for it. ]

Ren: Did you drop it? [ laughing ] Tāraki!
Scene 14: [Later that night, Ren video calls both of her parents on her nav. Her mother picks up the call in her office and her father is already walking into the room.]

Senri: Hey! If it isn't our daughter!

Asuka: How are things going, Ren-chan?

Ren: Actually, I have something pretty big to tell you. Are you sitting down?

Meanwhile, off in Mossdeep, Steven is laying on top of his bed in nothing but a pair of boxers. He moves his toes in a smooth circle as he stares up at the ceiling before rolling over and staring at the nav on his nightstand. After a moment, he reaches for it. He sits up and voice calls a "Rire" in his contacts. On the other end, a nav rings on a side table next to a large tub in a well-appointed bathroom. The man sitting in the tub has his eyes closed and his long blue hair gathered up in a bun so that it doesn't get wet. The surface of the water is covered in a thick layer of bubbles and there are candles lit around the edge as well as a partially empty glass of wine.

Nav: Steven Stone calling.

Wallace: [sitting up and eyes snapping open] Answer. [The nav boops to indicate it has picked up the call.] Steven, is that really you?

Steven: Hi Rire.

Wallace: Oh thank Arceus, you're still alive. I was beginning to wonder.

Steven: Sorry. It's been a while.

Wallace: No kidding. I thought after last time I'd at least hear from you with some updates on the Magma shit show. So what's the crisis this time?

Steven: No emergency. I just wanted to talk.

Wallace: Really? I can hardly believe it. Are you sure there isn't anything else trying to end life on Earth?

Steven: Well, the Magma thing does keep getting worse, but no. No new threats to the planet. I'm just very stressed out by the current ones. Is it okay if—I mean—are you super busy or—

Wallace: Darling, I'm always super busy. You know that doesn't matter. Lay it on me.

[Cut back to Ren and her parents talking. They are both seated at Asuka's desk staring at her computer screen. Ren can barely look at them on the other end, but does her best to seem calm.]

Ren: So that's pretty much everything.

[Asuka sits back in her chair a bit, looking shell-shocked. Senri has his arms crossed over his chest, but looks more grim than anything.]

Ren: Otōsan, you don't seem all that surprised.

Senri: [he sighs] I wouldn't say that, but I was briefed on the Magma situation. All of the gym leaders were. I am a little shocked that you didn't tell us you'd been running into them before now.
Asuka: [quietly] I'm not so sure that I am.

Ren: Okāsan.

Asuka: Ren-chan, I know that you did it because you love us, but please never keep anything like this from us again.

Senri: [putting a hand on his wife's shoulder] Agreed.

Asuka: Understand, it's so much worse imagining what kind of trouble you might be in than knowing exactly what to worry about.

Ren: [eyes tearing up] I'm sorry! I'll keep you in the loop from now on, I promise!

[There is another pause in which they try to take everything in.]

Senri: I'd tell you to stay out of this, but I think we all know what good that would do. [Ren hiccups with laughter and wipes her eyes.] Not to mention it would be a bit hypocritical. I'll probably be joining this fight sooner rather than later.

[Ren gives one last sniff before she is composed again.]

Senri: He's been trying to handle the whole situation himself, but there's only so much the kid can do before he crashes. [catching himself with a little smile] I shouldn't call him kid. He's the Champion. [He puts a hand over his mouth, thinking for a moment.] Hmm. You know what, I'm gonna do something about this. [getting up] I have to go call Wattson. I love you, Ren. Be careful.

Ren: Love you too, otōsan.

[He walks out.]

Asuka: He'll take care of it. Don't you worry, Ren-chan.

Ren: Are you going to be okay, okāsan?

Asuka: Of course I am. I'm always worrying about you two no matter what, but I'm glad we are all on the same page now. And I'm not worried about Magma or Groudon, not with my two strong trainers on the case.

Ren: Okāsan.

[Cut back to Wallace and Steven, who are laughing. Their laughter tapers off into a comfortable silence. The bubbles are mostly gone from the bath and the light from Steven's window has faded completely.]

Wallace: Don't get me wrong. I'm thrilled that you called, but did something happen?

Steven: I finally had a little sense knocked into me.

Wallace: By who? Did Bes finally get to you?

Steven: Well no, not that they haven't tried—
Wallace: Steven, are you seeing someone?

Steven: Haha. No, not exactly.

Wallace: [suspicious] What on Earth is that supposed to mean?

[Steven looks around his room, thinking about things. Latias has come in and is snoozing on the end of his bed. She opens an eye and looks at him.]

Steven: You know, actually there is something else I should probably tell you.

[Cut back to Ren and her mother.]

Ren: Okay, I will.

Asuka: You had better. If you don’t, I’ll know.

Ren: Understood. I love you, okāsan.

Asuka: I love you too, Ren-chan. Goodnight.

[Ren hangs up and flops back on her bed. Ao opens her eyes and looks at her trainer. Ren pats her absently.]

Ren: Yeah, I’m okay. That wasn’t as bad as I thought it was going to be.

[Cut to Wallace and Steven again. Wallace is out of the tub and sitting in a towel on his own bed.]

Wallace: The actual Eon Guardians. After all of this time…

Steven: Are you okay?

Wallace: It makes me feel a little better actually.

Steven: Good.

Wallace: But anyway, we’ve gotten way off topic here. The point is: if you aren’t seeing anyone, maybe it's time you did.

Steven: [sighing] I don't have time to date right now, Rire.

Wallace: Neither do I, but I don't let that stop me. If it's something you want, you can make time. You make time for your rock collecting.

Steven: This is more than normal levels of busy and you know it.

Wallace: Then just don't get anybody high maintenance.

Steven: Already made that mistake once.

Wallace: Words hurt, Steven.

Steven: Sorry. I meant that in a loving way.

Wallace: I kid. I need someone who can take care of me. You on the other hand… You won't let anyone take care of you. I'm not sure what you need. A kick in the ass maybe?
Scene 15: [The next week is mostly spent training with Wally and Kai and is documented by Kata. The grumpig has taken an interest in photography since the photo shoot in Mauville and Ren has bought her a very durable, simple camera (like a gopro). Initially the photos are a little sloppy while she gets the hang of it, but she quickly improves and gets a ton of great angles since she can hold the camera anywhere she wants with telekinesis. 1) First there is a photo of the three trainers and Kata sitting on stools at a sandwich counter with Kata in the foreground, then Ren followed by Wally and finally Kai in the back. An impressively large sub sits on the counter in from of each of them. 2) The next shot is the same except that the girls have already finished theirs while the boys are still eating. Kata pats her distended belly in satisfaction while Ren flexes for the camera, clearly proud of herself. Behind her the boys stare at the empty plates in shock, half finished subs in their mouths. 3) The three trainers and their starters doing Tai-chi barefoot in the grass on a misty morning. Wally and Kihei are clearly very practiced and their form is excellent. Ren, Kai and Jay are doing pretty well, but Tāraki looks as though he is struggling and has already run out of patience with the proceedings. Next is a few shots of the three starters together. 4) First, them all throwing a punch together, arms blurring from the speed. 5) Second, them standing in a circle and talking. Jay has a hand on Kihei's shoulder and is laughing at something he said. Tāraki looks pleased as punch that his two friends are getting along. 6) Third, the three of them posed together. Jay is in the middle doing a high kick, Tāraki is on the right performing a sweep with his tail, and Kihei is on the left slashing with his arm. 7) Fourth, Tāraki holding his bleeding snout while Kihei tends a broken frond on his tail and Jay scolds him. A caption reads "poor kid doesn't need me to prank him". 8) Finally another candid shot of them all sitting in the grass together and relaxing. 9) Next is Kihei and Naihi parrying with psycho cut as Kata blasts them with power gem. 10) Later Kata captures Akahata and Naihi mid sprint. Naihi is a just behind Akahata's shoulder and her teeth are grit in concentration as she tries to pass. Akahata is glancing back at her, the ghost of a smile on her face. 11) Next Akahata and Naihi are standing side by side using crunch and night slash respectively. Once again Naihi seems fiendishly focused on the task while Akahata is watching her rather than fully concentrating on the exercise. 12) Apparently Kata has noticed the pattern, because the next photo has her wagging her eyebrows in the bottom corner while Akahata gapes in admiration as Naihi mega horns a rock into the sun. The caption reads "looks like Lady Disaster has a fan". 13) Next is a shot of Kai and Ren grappling while Wally watches in the background with a goofy grin on his face. 14) Next the boys are sitting facing each other, legs criss-crossed. They are playing cat's cradle and Wally is blushing a little while Ren stands over them giving instructions. 15) Another shot of the boys sitting next to each other in the grass. This time Wally has Aroha in his lap and is pointing at something in Kai's notebook while they talk, heads together. 16) Wally, decked out in sunglasses and swim trunks, is laying on Mako's back as the wailmer floats in a river pool. Nearby Ren and Kai splash around with Pohaku, Roma, Lily, and Hōpua (Wally's azumarill). 17) Next a selfie of Kata holding a ball of water in the air next to her while Roma lies behind her on the turf looking irritated. A caption reads "who's the queen of hydrokinesis?". 18) Captured a moment later is the blurred image of Kata the instant she gets blasted in the back with aqua jet with the caption "not me apparently". 19) Next up is an awesome aerial shot of Māia flawlessly executing her signature drop turn, 20) followed by Ruby bungling it. 21) Next, the three birds posed on a branch with Ruby puffed up to her tallest in the middle. 22) This is followed by one of Ruby falling off the branch with Kata winking at the bottom of the frame and the caption "greased it". 23) And then one of Ruby back on the branch and raging at Kata. Māia is rolling her eyes while Atiru laughs hysterically. 24) Another of Kata looking horrified in the foreground as she pulls the clouds away from Atiru's wings.
caption reads "Lord Arceus, they have little dragon wings under there!". 25) Next is a shot from above of Wally being levitated way up in the air. He is laughing while the other two trainers fret on the ground. Kai has his hands cupped to his mouth calling up to Wally while Ren is yelling at Kata who is waving her off. 26) A glamor shot of Panahi using brine with the caption "look out contest scene, your new queen is on her way!". 27) Ao, Kata, Ume (Wally’s magneton), and Zach (Kai’s pikachu) all practicing charge beam together. 28) Mele singing and strutting his stuff in front of an enthralled audience of both the trio’s pokemon and even a few wilds. A caption reads "How many kecleons are in this photo? Take your time." 29) Pohaku leaning down to push his claws against Kōtai’s. The sandslash is holding out impressively considering the size difference. 30) Another selfie of Kata grinning and giving the thumbs up with Kana in the background, eyes wide, back arched and fur fully fluffed, staring at a rindo berry in the grass. The caption reads “thanks for the tip, internet”. 31) Panahi, Hōpua, Mako, Roma, and Pohaku using water attacks on a glowing and giggling Lily. 32) Aroha standing tall and proud dead center in the frame while all of the water pokemon from the last shot lay on the ground around her, collapsed in defeat. 33) A terrified Zach the pikachu dodging all four flying types who are swooping down at him. 34) This results in a pile-up in the next photo, courtesy of Ruby’s competitiveness. Zach sits back on his haunches in the foreground, a sheepish smile on his face.

Scene 16: [During their final practice, everyone has the pokemon they will be using in the gym with them except that Mele has swapped with Pohaku. All of the pokemon are working in pairs. Ume and Kata are practicing charge beam together while Zach and Ao work on their speed and accuracy nearby. Zach tries to zap Ao while she tries to dodge. She is blindingly fast, but his aim is impeccable and most of his strikes land. Soon enough they switch places and surprisingly Ao has a much harder time pinning him down. He is used to running erratically to escape predators like herself and she can’t seem to anticipate his movements. Her confidence soon falters. Mele sees her drooping and stops what he’s doing to saunter over to her side. He begins to sing a song he composed for her which he calls "Daughter of Raikou". He sings about how beautiful and powerful and strong and brave she is. Ao blushes brightly and looks down but Mele keeps singing about how she dazzles and defends all around her. Soon Kana notices and comes over to join them, singing the harmony. At first Ao blushes even harder, but the delcatties continue to sing and she smiles. She readies herself again and Zach prepares to dash. The first charge beam misses, but then she hits him four times in a row. He calls a break and lies down on the ground. Ao’s pelt stands on end from the built up charge as little strands of electricity flicker across her, making her glow. Ume starts floating involuntarily towards her, drawn by the charge. They fight it for a moment until they start to glow. The pokemon’s eyes meet and Ao discharges into the magneton. The surge of energy kick-starts their evolution and they emerge from the blinding explosion a magnezone. They let out an excited, metallic squeal and thank Ao profusely as the delcatties sing the outro. Everyone gathers around and cheers and Ao smiles wide and proud. Even Naihi marvels at the sight, saying that Ao is far stronger than any manectric she has seen. Wally hugs his magnezone tight, causing his hair to stand on end from the residual charge. Kata snaps a picture. Ren and Kai watch them, then glance at each other and smile. Zoom in on Māia whose smile fades. She takes a deep breath in preparation before calling out quietly to Ren.]

Māia: Hey Ren, can I talk to you for a minute?

Ren: [holding up her arm for Māia] Sure thing, my birb.

Māia: [lands on Ren’s arm] Away from the others?
Ren: [confused] Okay. [She walks a little way away from the others. No one seems to notice much as they are all still preoccupied with the excitement.] What's up?

Māia: I want to fight this gym, alone.

Ren: You mean you want to lead instead of Ao?

Māia: I mean I want to face this gym leader and all of her bird pokemon without help from the others.

Ren: Whoa, I don't know, Māia. That's—

Māia: I know it's selfish. We've all been training so hard. And I know it's a lot to ask of you. But I think I need to do this. I need to prove myself.

Ren: To whom? We all know you're an amazing battler.

Māia: To everyone who still looks at me and thinks I'm nothing, to myself, to that loudmouth swallow, to you even.

Ren: Māia, I believe in you. You don't have to—

Māia: Ren, I haven't lost a single battle since I became your pokemon, not one. You've never had to withdraw me, never had to send in someone else, but you still hesitate to use me. After all this time, I still have to volunteer myself for battles, much more so than everyone else.

[Ren looks down, totally unable to deny the accusation.]

Māia: I don't blame you for it. I know it's unconscious and that you respect me. I know you have faith in me. And you've done everything you can to make me all I can be. But I'm tired of having everyone doubt me, tired of the funny looks and shrugs and laughs we get before we demolish other trainers. The only way to stop that is a true demonstration of my abilities. One where no one can say "oh that was just a type advantage or a cheap trick". This would just be me against some of the strongest flying-types in the region. If I beat them, no one could say anything. There would be no more doubt.

Ren: You know how dangerous this is though, don't you? Winona's not exactly the softest gym leader. She may think we're not taking the challenge seriously. And her pokemon aren't going to want to lose to you. They'd see it as humiliating.

Māia: I know. That's exactly why I have to do this. But I need your help. With you I can beat them. I know I can. Please, Ren.

[ Māia peers at Ren pleadingly from her perch on her arm, large gray-blue eyes searching her face. Ren unconsciously holds her breath, arm trembling ever so slightly from the strain of being held up so long. Ren releases the breath.]

Ren: You're right. I know you can too. We'll face Winona together, just the two of us.

Māia: Thank you!

[ Māia spreads her wings, ready to embrace her trainer.]

Ren: Hold on. If something does go wrong though, you have to promise to let me withdraw you. I can't let you die for this. It would... I'm not sure I'd recover and there's still a lot I need to do. Can
you promise me that?

Māia: Yes. I understand. I promise.

Ren: Thank you. I promise not to withdraw you unless I think there's no other way.

[ Māia dips her head. ]

Ren: Alright, now you can bring it in.

[ Māia hops to Ren's shoulder and wraps her wings around Ren's head, nuzzling her cheek. Ren is a little surprised at first with the show of affection but nuzzles her back, laughing, and gives her a kiss on the head. ]

Ren: Are you sure you're ready for tomorrow? I know I haven't been concentrating on your training this past week.

[ Māia refolds her wings at her sides and puffs out her chest, standing her full height on Ren's shoulder. ]

Māia: I was born to do this!

Chapter End Notes

That was a lot of quality time with Kai, Wally and Steven. Zinnia is in and out but I love her. And we finally have Wallace! He is my beta reader's favorite. I feel like there was a lot of variety and characters in this chapter. I had a really great time watching everyone grow and learn and interact. There was a lot of stuff I had been waiting a long time to do and a ton of important set up for things to come. It was very long and there was a lot going on. Kind of a monster chapter. As much fun as it was for me, I'm glad it's over. I hope you all enjoyed it.

Thanks so much for reading!

Character Chart:
HUMANS:
Ren, our protagonist
Kai, Ren's friend who likes science
Wally, Ren's friend who likes the internet
Steven, the Hoenn League Champion
Josh, a Magma grunt who Ren has saved twice
Azalea, a Magma grunt who is helping Josh protect Ren
Terra, a Magma grunt partnered with Whenua
Whenua, a Magma grunt partnered with Terra
Quintuplets, all Magma grunts with Mightyena
Tabitha, a Magma admin
Gloria, a Magma Grunt and Tabitha's assistant
Prof. Pihama, head of the Hoenn Weather Institute
Senri, Ren's dad and a Gym Leader
Asuka, Ren's mom and a writer
Wallace, a Gym Leader and Steven's friend/ex

TEAM REN:
Tāraki the Sceptile
Akahata the Mightyena
Panahi the Pelipper
Māia the Taillow
Mele the Delcatty
Ao the Manectric
Kata the Grumpig
Kōtai the Sandslash
Roma the Sharpedo
Pohaku the Armaldo
Naihi the Absol

TEAM KAI:
Jay, the Blaziken
Dusty, the Breloom
Makō, the Wailmer
Ruby, the Swellow
Paki, the Castform
Lily, the Lileep
Zach, the Pikachu

TEAM WALLY:
Kihei, the shiny Gallade
Kana, the Delcatty
Aroha, the Roselia
Atiru, the Swablu
Ume, the Magneton
Hōpua, the Azumarill

OTHER POKEMON:
Fang, Josh's Mightyena
Shade, Josh's Crobat
Aster, Azalea's Whismur
Damascus, Steven's Skarmory
Alwyn, Steven's Sandslash
Goodbye Ruby Tuesday

Chapter Summary

In which Ren earns another badge, team drama develops, Ren and Tāraki practice mega evolution, Steven gets an intervention, and the plot returns in a big way.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Scene 1:** [The next morning Kai, Ren, and Wally all head over to the gym. The Fortree gym is not so much a building as an outdoor arena with a few auxiliary structures attached to it. Ren, Kai and Wally check in at the gatehouse before being waved into the central arena. It is essentially a huge, perfectly circular clearing in the forest. Ancient, dizzyingly tall trees stand at regular intervals around its circumference. The gaps between them are filled by twenty-foot stands to keep people and wild pokemon from wandering in. The gap next to the gatehouse is filled by the mess hall. All of the perimeter trees are ramrod straight and almost identical in size except for the one in the due north position which is nearly double the size. The leader arena, which is considerably smaller, is tucked into its branches a good twenty-five stories up near the treeline. Beyond it is the dormitory and gym leader's residence. Nested in the crown of the tree is a flight platform. The three trainers can see pokemon and other flying machines launching from it by craning their necks and shading their eyes. There are flying-type pokemon from every region sitting in the branches all around the ground arena. Some are roosting while others eye the group with interest.]

Wally: Somehow I thought this would stop being so amazing at some point. I don’t know how I’ve spent my whole life cooped up in Petalburg.

Kai: You had to get stronger, right? So you could travel?

Wally: It would have been worth dying to see this. [pointing at the leader arena] Just look at that. I’m gonna earn my fifth badge up there!

[Ren glances over at him and smiles. Kai just stares, not sure what to think. Wally looks over and sees Kai’s expression.]

Wally: [coloring a little] Well, I guess I’m glad I waited.

[Another trainer walks into the arena and a taillow swoops down to her shoulder.]

Trainer: Which one of you is Wally?

Wally: Um, that would be me.

[They shake hands and Ren, Kai and their pokemon head into the stands to watch. Aroha easily defeats the tailow and several other flying-types with extrasensory. Soon Wally is taken up to the leader arena and Kai starts his trainer battles. It is not long before Kai heads up too and it is Ren’s turn. Naihi goes first and quickly and gracefully defeats a pidgeotto in a single hit. Next, Pohaku easily beats the snot out of a fearow. Akahata easily takes out a xatu. Kata battles a tropius and wins with a grin. Finally Ao faces off against a dodrio. It is very fast and good at dodging, but she keeps]
Scene 2: [ Finally Ren and her pokemon head up to face Winona. Māia perches on her shoulder as a large open elevator whisks them up to the leader arena. Wally and Kai are sitting together in the small stands with their pokemon, grinning from ear to ear. They give her the thumbs up as she and her team step out of the elevator. Winona stands opposite her on a platform with what are clearly some of her top tier pokemon sitting in the branches behind her. Ren looks over an alteria, honchkrow, braviary, skarmory, pidgeot, pelipper, decidueye, talonflame and three swallows, one of which is a shiny.]

Ren: [ muttering to Māia ] I don’t know how I let you talk me into this.

Māia: This is perfect!

Winona: Greetings, challenger. You have quite a well-rounded team. Do you think they are ready to earn their sixth badge?

Ren: Yes, but I don’t intend to fight with them today. My taillow has requested to face you and your pokemon without the aid of her teammates.

Winona: [ eyes narrowing ] You may challenge me as you choose. When your taillow is unable to battle, you may send out your next pokemon or forfeit at your own discretion. I will be limited to four pokemon for this battle.

[ Winona whistles and her striped swellow swoops down onto the field. Māia glides down to face her. ]

Winona: Aerial ace!

Ren: Air slash!

[ Māia slashes her wing, sending a blade of wind at the swellow as she launches into the air. The swellow takes the hit and lands one of her own as she shoots past, bowling Māia over. Māia pops back to her feet as the swellow whirls around. ]

Ren: Fly!

[ Māia crouches before rocketing upwards just ahead of the swellow's talons. The swellow banks the turn and starts climbing, but Māia is already well above her. She arrows down and strikes the swellow across the back. She wobbles but keeps flying as Māia angles away. ]

Winona: You have the weight on her, Slipstream. Bring her down!

Ren: Not for long! Steel wing, Māia!

[ Māia's wings gleam silver as she banks to face her oncoming opponent. They meet each other in the air and it is the swellow who is knocked aside and goes tumbling. ]

Ren: Got her! Great job, Māia!

[ Winona withdraws her swellow and her pelipper swoops into the ring. Meanwhile, the rest of Ren’s ]
Naihi: Though it is happening right in front of me, I still find it difficult to comprehend that she would face the gym leader with nothing but a taillow. And after what she said to Tāraki… [She trails off, shaking her head.] I guess I still have much to learn about our trainer.

Kata: She's one hell of a strong human. You all didn't see her after Wheta died. She's come so far.

Ao: She battles for us as much as she does for herself, maybe more so. In this instance, she let Māia's wishes take precedence.

[Māia nails the pelipper with an air slash, but it is larger and more resilient than the swallow and counters with brine.]

Kata: So, my good Lady Disaster, may I ask why you want to be in a gym battle so badly? [She shoots a cautious glance at Akahata who just rolls her eyes.] I mean, you're a wild right? What do you care about gyms and badges?

Naihi: My mentor told me of them.

Kata: You mean your gallade sensei who lived on a mountaintop, right?

Naihi: Yes.


Naihi: He told me about the badges he and his trainer won and what they signify. Gyms are a proving ground for pokemon and their trainers. A true way to test their strength and compatibility. I want our trainer to know that she can rely on me. See how strong I am in a real battle. Not just practice.

Ao: You don't have to worry. Ren knows that.

Pohaku: Yeah, I'm the only one you lose to when we spar and that's cuz of my armor and stuff. Everyone has one type they can't beat.

Naihi: You all have been with her much longer than I. And anyway, isn't that why our teammate is up there now? To prove her strength?

Ao: I suppose that's true.

Naihi: You all have earned you place on this team, but I've yet to earn mine.

[They are all quiet for a moment as they watch Māia narrowly avoids another brine attack with a barrel roll.]

Naihi: Akahata, you have been with Ren the longest. You must have taken part in many gym battles.

Akahata: Only one. It was against Flannery, a fire-type trainer.

Naihi: Oh, that surprises me. Still, it must have been some battle. Would you mind telling me what it was like?

Akahata: I went up against a torkoal. The gym is famous for them. They all possess a very powerful fire move that few can withstand. Our strategy was for me to use dig to avoid this attack and the type advantage to take it down. But their shells are thick and their defense is high. I got in two attacks but
couldn't take it down before it was able to use overheat on me. I was overwhelmed by the attack and Ao had to take my place. She was fast enough to avoid it and her special attacks were more effective against it's defenses. She won us the battle.

Naihi: Well, what's important is that you played your part in the team and weakened it. Congratulations on your victory, Ao. Was that your first gym battle?

Ao: First and last so far. I was pretty new to the team at the time.

Naihi: My then, I must admit to being even more impressed.

Ao: Thank you.

Kata: WHOO! Nice one Māia!

Pohaku: Yeah! Knock ‘em dead!

Ao: You've got her on the ropes now!

[ The others don't seem to notice Akahata looking down, face tight and shoulders slumped, but Naihi shoots her a glance and smiles to herself. Meanwhile Māia lands the finishing blow on the pelipper and it falls. Winona withdraws it and nods to her skarmory. He takes to the air after Māia in a metallic flutter of wings. The two combatants circle clockwise around the ring. ]

Winona: Steel wing, Halberd!

Ren: Parry with steel wing!

[ The two birds charge each other, wings gleaming. Māia hits him near the shoulder and is knocked aside by his superior size and weight. She tumbles through the air but rights herself before he can bank the turn. However he now has the momentum while she is fluttering. He goes straight for her, a predatory glint in his eyes. ]

Ren: Boomburst!

[ Māia fires off a boomburst right at the skarmory's head. He makes no attempt to evade and the sound wave hits him dead on. He powers through the blow with smug confidence and keeps coming. Māia has never seen her move do so little damage before and only just manages to dive beneath him as he aims a steel wing at her. Māia glances nervously at Ren as both birds sweep around the turn. ]

Ren: Just keep hammering him, Māia! You've got more boombursts in you than he can take!

[ He banks into the next turn and she climbs, trying to gain some altitude. ]

Winona: Metal claw!

[ He comes at her, claws raised and glowing and she swoops forward to meet him in response. ]

Ren: Roll!

[ Just as they are about to meet in the air, Māia rolls to the side and let's out a boomburst. She hits him in the wing and he rolls in the air as the wing is flung over his back by the impact. ]

Winona: Pin her down! Aerial ace!

[ The skarmory rights himself and pumps his wings, climbing rapidly. Māia climbs too but he is
quickly gaining on her.

Ren: Drop turn!

Winona: Got her!

[ Māia swoops sharply upward, folds her wings and plummets straight at the waiting skarmory. He is about to nail her with his glowing beak. ]

Ren: Now!

[ Māia lets out another boomburst at point blank range. The skarmory is knocked aside, but she cannot evade his wing and takes a glancing blow as they pass. She recovers quickly. But the skarmory remains disoriented, flight erratic for several seconds. ]

Ren: Great job, Māia! Get some distance!

Winona: We've got the remedy for that! Air cutter!

[ The skarmory launches blades of air at Māia who dodges by swooping and dipping and changing directions on a dime. Eventually the skarmory must recharge and he returns to gliding clockwise around the edge of the arena. Māia stays opposite him, waiting for the final confrontation. They are both drained and the next hit is likely to be the last. The skarmory caws out a challenge and angles for the center of the arena towards Māia. Māia flies to meet him. ]

Winona: Air cutter!

[ The skarmory waits until they are fairly close to unleash his attack, but Māia still dodges, tilting her wings between the strikes as she rolls. ]

Ren: Now!

[ Māia lets out a boomburst just as she passes him. The force pushes them apart and while she sweeps cleanly away, he rolls, crumples, and plummets towards the ground. Winona withdraws him just before he hits. Māia alights on the ground in front of her trainer.]

Winona: Impressive. Your taillow is looking drained. Will you withdraw her?

[ Māia is panting, but she looks back at Ren half pleading, half daring. Ren wavers for a second, then nods to her pokemon.]

Ren: No.

Winona: Very well.

[ She nods to her altaria and it glides to the ground in front of her. The giant bird beats its dragon-like wings, clouds shifting to cover them. Māia half furls her wings, wrists pointed forward like arrows, ready for any command. Ren can see her heaving, controlling the trembling in her tired muscles while the fresh altaria looks a little bored if anything. The only way to end this is quickly. ]

Winona: Dragon breath!

[ Karaki looks back at her trainer and their eyes lock once more. ]

Ren: **Brave bird!**
The altaria flaps its wings to take off while Māia glows brightly, bracing herself. The altaria swoops across the ring towards her and Māia goes off like a shot to meet her, a shining streak in the air. The altaria pulls her neck back in preparation and opens her beak. Blue flames shoot out at Māia, but the taillow plows through them and right into the altaria's gut. The altaria crumples comically around the tiny missile, flames guttering out with a wheeze as it is fired back across the ring at its trainer. The two birds crash to the ground and skid to a stop in front of Winona. The altaria lands on it's back with Māia sprawled on it's chest. The altaria's wing twitches, but it makes no attempt to rise. Māia opens her eyes and picks herself up. She wobbles for a moment before taking a deep breath and standing tall and proud on her fallen foe. She spreads her wings and calls out a challenge. The branches around the arena erupt with sound as all of the flying-types call out in answer. Winona looks around in wonder. Māia cries once more and the chorus answers, quickly building to a crescendo before tapering off slowly. Māia folds her wings and looks up at Winona. Winona bows her head. Māia nods and takes off, flying back to Ren's waiting arm.

Ren: You did it, Māia! You really are the strongest bird in Hoenn!

Māia: I don't know about that. Maybe it's time I admitted I'm not. Those weren't her strongest after all. That was a sixth badge team.

Ren: Yeah, that you beat all by yourself!

Māia: I'm not saying I'm not awesome, just that I'm not the best yet. But now I know I can be.

Ren: [smiling] Alright.

Winona makes her way over to them, her shiny swellow on her shoulder.

Winona: That was an incredible battle. I've never had another quite like it. I'm sorry that I doubted your intentions. She's a remarkable battler and you are a wonderful trainer. Please, Māia the taillow, accept my humblest apologies.

She and her swellow bow their heads. Māia dips hers back.

Māia: Thank you for letting me battle anyway. I learned a lot.

Ren conveys this message to Winona.

Winona: A decision that benefited me more than her, I think. I profess to believe in the potential of all bird pokemon, and yet I doubted her. I am grateful to be so humbled. It's been an honor.

She hands over the Feather Badge with a wistful smile and turns away. Ren looks down at her badge, then clenches her fist around it.

Ren: Hey Māia, would you like to stay here and train with Winona?

[ Māia looks up in confusion. ]

Ren: Well, you're right. You can get stronger. You can be the best there is. And Winona is a flying-type specialist, the best in the region, maybe even the world. Maybe staying here is the best way to reach your goal. With me there are going to be a lot of detours and down time. You won't even have a flying-type training partner after Panahi leaves. Here you could train with other flying-types all the time.

Māia: But I owe you so much. You could be facing Magma again any day now. I don't want to leave you. It wouldn't be right after all you've done for me.
Ren: Are you kidding me? Do you have any idea how many times you’ve saved my ass? Saved all of our asses? You don’t owe me a thing, Māia. And that can’t be the reason you make this decision. We should all be working towards our own goals, whether that's together or apart. I’ll miss you too, but I’ll still have everyone else. I’ll be okay. And besides, it wouldn’t be goodbye forever. I could call you on the nav. I'll come and visit you just like the others. And if you decided that you wanted to challenge the Elite Four with me, I'd come and get you. You'll always be my pokemon no matter what you choose.

[They look into each other's eyes for a few moments. Māia takes a deep breath and puffs out her chest.]

Māia: Okay. I'll do it.

[Ren raises her arm and Māia nuzzles Ren's nose with her beak and hugs Ren's cheeks with her wings. They break apart and Ren takes a deep breath.]

Ren: Winona. [She turns.] Māia would like to train with you.

---

**Scene 3**: [Ren and Tāraki are by a small clear pond on Route 120. Kai, Jay, Wally and Kihei watch as Ren and Tāraki try and sync up their breathing. Ren places her left hand over the keystone on her right glove. She breathes deep and exhales forcefully, trying to focus her energy. The keystone begins to glow and a moment later the sceptilite on Tāraki's anklet glows in response. Both partners breath slowly in time with one another, muscles tense and straining as the light from their stones grows brighter and connects. Tāraki begins to glow himself and a restless breeze whips around them. The light pouring out of Tāraki becomes blinding as he begins to change. He grows and the light fades a little. They can see part of his mega form before it snaps back. Light pours out unevenly as he flashes between the two forms. Finally it gutters out completely leaving both of them slumped and panting. Tāraki is back to normal and Ren's hair is mussed from the wind.]

Ren: We almost had it that time. I could feel it.

Tāraki: I was a mega for a moment there. We'll get it next time.

Ren: I feel like this is more of a strain than it should be. I've seen Steven mega evolve his aggron up close. Maybe it just takes time to get good at.

Wally: I think you should try battling.

Ren: I should. I just wanted to get a halfway stable mega form before we tried actually fighting with it.

Wally: But it's a battle form, right? It's temporary. Maybe trying to hold it outside of battle is the problem.

Kai: I wish there was more research on this stuff. It’s still so new. But I think Wally is right. It might be a lot easier if you two were in an actual fight.

Wally: Yeah! Battle me and Kihei! We can always stop if two aren't feeling so well.

Ren: What do you say, Tāraki? Want to give it a shot?
Tāraki: **Yeah!** Battle!

Ren: [ **laughing** ] I don't know why I bother asking.

[ **Kai and Jay move to the side while Wally and Kihei move to face Ren and Tāraki.** ]

Wally: Ready?

Ren: Let's go.

Wally: Psycho cut, Kihei!

Ren: Leaf blade!

[ **Kihei lunges forward but Tāraki is plenty fast enough to get his guard up in time. They trade blows for a while, both unable to land a hit.** ]

Ren: Slam!

[ **Tāraki shoves Kihei back and whirls to slam him with his tail. Kihei leaps back just in time and Tāraki's tail tip misses him by a hair. Ren puts her hand over her keystone again and Tāraki's mega stone responds almost immediately. Light arcs between them and around them. Kihei is forced to keep backs as a fierce wind whips around Tāraki and he transforms. The light and wind break simultaneously and Tāraki roars, flexing his new form.** ]

Wally: [ **awed** ] Whoa. [ **snapping back to the battle** ] Brick break, Kihei!

Ren: Dragon claw!

[ **Ren moves with her pokemon as he wipes a glowing paw at his opponent. Kihei is knocked flat on his back by the boosted power of the attack. Tāraki advances but both he and Ren shiver. Kihei swings his legs around and kicks up from a handstand. He strikes Tāraki square in the jaw and he and Ren stagger. They slump forward and Tāraki drops his mega form. They pant and grip their knees to stay upright.** ]

Wally: Are you okay?

Ren: Yeah, we're good. That went better than last time.

Tāraki: [ **standing up** ] I was a mega! It felt so powerful!

Kihei: I'll say. That dragon claw hurt like hell.

Tāraki: Sorry!

Kihei: [ **stretching** ] I'm fine.

Tāraki: Jay! You should battle me!

Jay: Okay, but give yourselves a breather. You're sapping Ren dry.

Tāraki: [ **looking back at his trainer** ] Oh no! Are you okay?

Ren: [ **waving him off** ] Absolutely, tiger. I've got at least one more in me. Let's do it!

Kai: [ **trading places with Wally** ] Are you sure?
Ren: [flexing with Tāraki] Bring it, nerds!

[Jay readies herself and Ren touches her keystone.]

Kai: Flame charge!

[Jay bursts into flames as Tāraki begins to mega evolve.]

Ren: Dragon claw!

[Jay charges at Tāraki and he crosses his glowing claws in front of him in a block. He slides back as she plows into him but his mega form clearly drastically reduces his vulnerability to fire. He throws her off and and leaps after her, slashing with his elongated claws. He strikes her once before she blocks with mach punch.]

Ren: Leaf blade!

Kai: Blaze kick!

[Tāraki slashes at Jay, face lit up with confidence and she counters with a flaming kick. The sheer force behind Tāraki's blow is enough to unbalance her and she stumbles back. He slashes again and she drops to the ground to dodge.]

Kai: Low sweep!

[Tāraki wobbles a little from the over extension and she does her dragon’s tail kick and connects powerfully with his ankles. He falls and transforms back.]

Ren: [winded] We left ourselves wide open for that.

Wally: I don't know. Usually Tāraki is a little faster. I think you were about to loose the mega form anyway.

Kai: This is working a lot better though.

Ren: Yeah! This is way better. If we could just hold it through a battle we'd be golden.

Tāraki: We'd be unstoppable! I'm so much stronger as my mega. Neither of you stood a chance!

Kihei: I can't argue that.

Jay: You just can't faint before the fight is over.

Tāraki: I should fight both of you!

Jay: What?

Kihei: Hmm.

Tāraki: Think about it: the pressure from battling one of you really helps the energy flow. Imagine what battling both of you could do!


Tāraki: Thanks!

[Kihei laughs.]
Tāraki: Can I, Ren?

Ren: Yeah. I like your thinking.

Kai: What's he saying?

Ren: We want to try battling both of you at once.

Kai: Shouldn't you two rest first?

Ren: Naw, we're good.

Wally: Yeah! They're making such good progress. Let's do it.

Kai: [hesitant] Okay.

[Everyone takes their places. Tāraki rolls his shoulders in preparation.]

Wally: Psycho cut!

Kai: Fire punch!

Ren: X-scissor!

[ Tāraki parties both of them, one right after the other, and thrusts them back. He mega evolves in a flurry and light and wind that keeps them at bay for a moment. He readies dragon claw with a roar and Kihei rushes back in with Jay just behind him. He parries Kihei's jabs but Jay darts in and punches him in the gut. He absorbs the blow without much effect and grins as he slashes at both of them. They mostly manage to parry his blows and alternate attacks to try and land a hit. Tāraki’s boosted speed gives him an edge and he cackles as he blocks their blows. Ren moves in sync behind him but they soon get a little overconfident and swing wide. Jay and Kihei both land a hit and Tāraki staggers.]

Ren: Sweep them! Slam!

[ Tāraki spins and slams them both as they close with his huge tail. They go flying back but land on their feet. They glance at each other just as their trainers glance at each other.]

Kai & Wally: Brick break!

[ Jay and Kihei run forward together this time. Tāraki tries to block them but tumbles over and lands flat on his back. He groans and returns to his normal form. Ren staggers and falls to her knees before collapsing face down on the ground.]

Kai & Wally: [alarmed] Ren!

[They run up to check on her. She turns her head and exhales with a groan.]

Wally: Are you two okay?

[She pushes herself up just enough so that her face is no longer smushed against the dirt.]

Ren: Better than okay. We’re great! Right Tāraki?

[He nods vigorously.]
Kai: You both just collapsed!

Ren: Yeah, but did you see how long we held that mega form? And we only dropped it because you beat us. It lasted the whole battle! We did it, tiger!

Tāraki: Yeah we did!

[She crawls forward a bit and kisses him on the head. He wiggles and burbles and she giggles. The rest try to look stern but can’t help smiling.]

---

**Scene 4:** [Ren and Naihi are battling a trainer and their tropius on Route 120 while everyone else watches. Ao is sitting with Mele resting against her chest looking supremely pleased with himself. Kana is sitting right next to them looking a little jealous. Akahata is laying down and Kata is sitting back on her hands next to her. Tāraki is trying hard to pay attention but not really succeeding. The tropius pelts Naihi with razor leaf but she runs just ahead of the barrage, horn glowing lime green and slashes it across the chest. The tropius staggers back and falls.]

Ren: Great job, Naihi. Your speed is much better.


[He sends out a hariyama. It pounds its huge hands together, all confidence and swagger. Naihi just crouches, ready to spring.]

Trainer: Arm thrust!

Ren: Psycho cut!

[The hariyama lunges, arm cocked and ready, and Naihi runs forward to meet it. Just as it thrusts its arm at her Naihi jumps over it, somersaulting with such speed that both her horn and blade-like tail slash its head and back. She lands with perfect poise behind it while it falls heavily forward and does not rise. Naihi circles back to Ren and the trainer sends out a gardevoir.]

Trainer: Disarming voice!

Ren: Shadow claw!

[Naihi zigzags towards her target as it fires pink rings at her. It tries to keep her at bay, but Naihi closes and slashes it with lavender claws. The gardevoir collapses and the trainer withdraws it. Naihi shakes herself out.]

Ren: Did she get you? Want to switch out?

Naihi: Just a glancing blow. I can finish this.

Ren: Alright.

Trainer: [sending out a medicham] You can finish this, Medea! Force palm!

Ren: Shadow claw again!
The medicham is a little faster and Naihi only barely manages to sidestep. It's palm ruffles Naihi's fur as it passes by. It keeps after her and Naihi dances lightly to and fro, trying to get a bit more distance. The medicham darts around her back and Naihi kicks out powerfully with her hind legs. The medicham falls back as it is struck under the chin by Naihi's glowing spurs and hind claws. The trainer withdraws his pokemon in near disbelief.

Trainer: Great Arceus. That is one monster absol you've got there.

Ren: Thanks!

He makes his goodbyes and Naihi trots back to Ren's side.

Ren: Nice sweep, Naihi. Slip me some claw!

She holds her hand down for Naihi to slap, but pulls it out of the way before Naihi can actually manage it.

Ren: Too slow!

Naihi: Probably fortunate for you.

She wiggles her long, sharp claws by way of explanation and Ren laughs.

Kai: She really is one beast of a battler.

Kai, Ren and Wally start talking. Pan back to the pokemon.

Ao: You've gotten so much faster, Naihi. Congratulations!

Mele: I loved that somersault you used against the hariyama. So graceful.

Naihi: Thank you, Ao, Mele. Ren's training has certainly improved my technique.

Kata: elbowing Akahata in the ribs And all of that fancy footwork Aka taught you really seems to be playing off. That medicham couldn't even touch you.

Naihi: I suppose so.

Akahata looks away. Pan out to show both the pokemon and humans talking happily in their separate groups. Ren glances over at the pokemon and notices that Akahata is missing. She excuses herself and goes to look for her. Akahata is not far off, examining her reflection in a puddle.

Ren: Hey there, Aka.

Akahata's ears twitch in acknowledgement and Ren sits down by her side.

Ren: How are you?

Akahata: Fine.

Ren: sighing Don't give me that. You haven't been yourself for the better part of a week now.

Akahata glances at her trainer but says nothing.

Ren: Did something happen between you and Naihi?

Akahata looks away.
Ren: Because it seemed like you two really hit it off at the beginning and now you're not talking.

Akahata: She just needed to get her bearings and now that she's comfortable she doesn't need my advice. It is nothing for you to worry about.

[ Ren's brow furrows at this. She chews over what to say next. ]

Ren: It is if it bothers you. You know you can tell me stuff, right?

[ Akahata meets Ren's eyes for a moment before glancing away again. ]

Akahata: I'm glad that she has settled in. I was worried at the beginning. The others were… a little skeptical. But they like her now. And she is very strong. It's good for us.

Ren: Well, if you two aren't fighting, then what is the problem?

[ She does not respond or make eye contact. ]

Ren: Please, Aka. I want to help.

[ She waits another few moments greeted with only silence, but just as she opens her mouth to say something else, Akahata finally speaks. ]

Akahata: Why do I fight?

Ren: [ confused ] Hmm?

Akahata: Everyone on the team has a reason why they battle, why they chose this life. They all have something they fight for. Tāraki, Māia, Kōtai, Wheta and Pohaku battle because they love it, for the glory, to show the world their true potential. Ikki battled because she wanted a family, Mele because he loves us. Hauoro battled to survive. Panahi and Roma for the benefits and experiences, to be comfortable and to explore. Ao battles because she wants to be useful and to be adored for something she did herself, because she earned it. Kata battles for the fun of it and the challenge. Naihi fights to be free, to prove her strength and change her fate. But me… I don't know why I'm here. [ looking into Ren's eyes with sudden vulnerability ] Why did I wait so long to ask myself?

Ren: I can't answer that for you.

Akahata: [ looking away again ] I know.

Ren: And you know that you can do whatever you want now, don't you? I'd miss you terribly if you decided to leave, but we're all here because of all you've done. I owe you, not the other way around.

Akahata: Thank you. I'm not sure what I want…

[ Ren leans over and puts an arm around her mightyena. Akahata relaxes into the contact and Ren rests her head against Akahata’s. As we pan out we see that Naihi was coming over to talk to Ren and stops. She watches the two of them for a moment then turns and walks away. ]

---

Scene 5: [ We pan up and away to the west and descend into the Safari Zone. As we zoom in, we can see tall grass rustling. A small, pale pikachu with long legs dashes out of the grass across the
open space followed closely by a brown mightyena. The pikachu darts from rock to rock, zigzagging to try and keep the mightyena at bay. She is faster but panting hard. The mightyena doesn't lunge, just stays close enough so as not to lose sight of the pikachu, waiting for it to tire. The pikachu's eyes dart to the grass and she dashes for it. The mightyena rushes after her. She turns on a dime and runs along the edge of the tall grass. The mightyena bumps into the grass as it follows. Suddenly, a much larger, spotted mightyena erupts from the grass and and slams into the brown mightyena, bowling it over. The brown mightyena yelps and the other quickly pins it to the ground, flat on its back. The pikachu stops to watch, a satisfied grin on her face. The brown mightyena struggles and screams but the other is too strong. It snarls and delivers a few bites before the brown mightyena stills, eyes wide and panting in terror.


Brown mightyena: N-no I—

Spotted mightyena: Would you like to challenge me for that right, or would you prefer to keep poaching from me like a sniveling coward?

Brown mightyena: N-neither. I d-didn't m-mean to—

Spotted mightyena: Everyone knows this is my territory!

Brown mightyena: I-it's the pikachu! Her burrow is in my territory. She's always stealing berries from my bush! I was caught up in the chase! I didn't realize—

Spotted mightyena: I don't care! If you can't keep your prey under control, that's your problem. I control from the overlook to the stream and no one crosses me. Understand?

[The brown mightyena nods vigorously as the pikachu trots past the pair of them, completely unafraid. She stops a few feet away.]

Pikachu: [over her shoulder] And steer clear of my burrow unless you think you can survive a round two.

Spotted mightyena: [to the pikachu] Why don't you disappear before I have to go back on our bargain?

[The pikachu nods respectfully before vanishing into the long grass. The spotted mightyena turns its attention back to its victim.]

Spotted mightyena: And you, let's see if you can remember where my border is since your life now depends on it.

Brown mightyena: Yes! I—

[It screams again as the other mightyena sinks its teeth in. We pan away to the pikachu running away through the grass smiling to herself as the sounds of the mightyena's punishment fade into the distance. She continues back out of the tall grass, across a meadow and into a small grove of trees. The entrance to her burrow is among the roots of one. There are claw marks around the hole but the roots have clearly prevented her enemies from digging her out. She scurries down the tunnel and into her sleeping chamber. Nestled in the hay and other soft materials is a rough, glittering, blue and gold stone. She pulls a berry out of the corner and eats it as she looks at the stone. When she is finished, she curls around the stone and goes to sleep.]
Scene 6: Ren is lying on her back in the grass with Tāraki laying next to her and the rest of her pokemon scattered around nearby. Kai and Wally are off somewhere else at the moment and Ren seems to be enjoying her nap. Her nav buzzes and she grasps for it blindly and brings it up to her eye. The screen informs her that Steven is video calling her. She snaps upright, staring at the screen, heart suddenly pounding.

Ren: [muttering quietly to herself] It’s probably no big deal. He’s probably calling you because of Magma stuff. If he was in imminent danger he wouldn’t bother with video. Just breathe.

[Ren takes a deep breath, pushes her hair behind her ear and answers the call.]

Steven: Hi Ren.

[Steven appears to be sitting in the grass leaning against a stone wall. He looks far more disheveled than usual and there are dark circles under his eyes.]

Ren: [concerned] Hey Steven. Is everything okay?

Steven: Hmm. How to answer that? Yes and no, I suppose. [seeing her look of panic] Nothing life-threatening! No Magma or Groudon or asteroids involved. I just wanted to talk to you about something and I can’t talk to Rire, so…

Ren: No, go ahead, what’s up?

Steven: [rambling] Well, we had a League meeting this morning. I stayed up the night before working on the agenda because of—you know—and I admit I looked like crap because I forgot my concealer and I was tired, but that can’t be the reason. It doesn’t make sense. They obviously planned this ahead of time. This was not a spur of the moment thing.

Ren: Steven, back up a minute. You’re not making sense.

Steven: Oh. Sorry. [clears throat] So, we went through the whole agenda and I was about to call the meeting but then it turned into like… an intervention … for me.

Ren: [confused] What?

Steven: They all said that I was taking too much on myself and had to delegate. And they wanted me to get more sleep and keep them updated and coordinate stuff with them. Not just regular League things, the Magma stuff too. They obviously talked it all out beforehand. All of them! I didn’t think they knew about… I don’t know. But who started it? I would say it Wallace, but…

Ren: You know, maybe ambushing you like that was a little much, but all of that stuff sounds good. It’s nice that they care about you and want to be more proactive.

Steven: You don’t understand. It’s like a conspiracy. Everyone is in on it! Wallace talked to Bes and now they have the rest of my pokemon in on it too. I’m supposed to take the rest of the day off. Damascus won’t fly me anywhere and Anthy insists on keeping house now and is trying to learn how to cook. I have Ptilematra in there making sure she doesn’t burn the place down. Alwyn and Komatsu are planting a garden—Oh, Alwyn likes her gift very much and wanted me to tell your sandslash thank you. I think she may be working on something to send back? I’m not sure. Anyway, she roped my excadrill into into helping her plant all of those seeds.
Ren: That’s good. I’m sure Kōtai will be happy.

Steven: But you see what I mean, right?

Ren: That does sound like a lot, but maybe it’s for the best?

Steven: I know. What’s really been driving me crazy is how this all started. Wattson was sort of the ringleader, but I don’t think it was his idea. I’ve hardly seen him at all lately and he’s such a workaholic himself. He’s usually the one that tells Wallace to get off my case. It doesn’t add up. But I know it wasn’t Wallace because I grilled him already. Wattson called him. But who called Wattson? You know them a little right? Got any idea who it might have been?

Ren: Her face twitches because by this point she actually does have a pretty good idea. Um, no. I can’t say that I do.

Steven: Dammit.

Ren: Steven, I think you should take a deep breath and try to relax a little. Otherwise all of this effort is for nothing. And I’m sure you’ll figure it out eventually. Maybe you’re overthinking this. And I do know how you feel. I hate being forced to do things, even stuff I like doing. But you do need to take better care of yourself, like we talked about. And the more people working on the Magma thing the better. They are all League members, right? They are not going to blab and they can all handle themselves if something happens.

Steven: sighing You’re right. I know you’re right. And I know I’m being a baby about this. Today has just been very surreal. Thank you for listening. It helps a lot. I feel a little calmer now.

Ren: That’s good. That’s really good.

[ He rests his head back against the stone wall and while he is looking away, Ren smiles fondly at him. She rests her head on her free hand and her eyes go soft and her expression dreamy. There is stomping on his end and Ren snaps out of her reverie. He looks over at the source of the noise. ]

Steven: Yeah, I’m okay now… No, Bes, I’m not working, I’m just talking to Ren.

[ A huge metal leg edges into the corner of the screen and pushes gently up against Steven. He leans away. ]

Steven: Whatever. You are still on thin ice. I know perfectly well this is all your fault somehow.

[ Ren chuckles as Bessemer continues to nudge Steven both physically and mentally until he gives in and leans against his pokemon. Steven readjusts himself so that more of Bessemer is in the frame. ]

Steven: Sorry about that. Bes says hello.

Ren: Hi Bessemer.

[ She can hear them rumble. Steven leans back against them, looking almost peaceful when something occurs to him and he starts. ]

Steven: It was you.

Ren: What?

Steven: Bes talked to you and you must have told Senri, he’s your father. So it was Senri who called Wattson and all of this was really your doing.
Ren: [ guilty ] All I said was I was worried!

Steven: [ loud and theatrical ] Here I was, confiding in you, and you were at the root of my problems all along!

Ren: [ defensive ] That’s hardly fair. And I didn’t plan any of this, I swear.

Steven: I know. It’s just funny. I just—

[ He starts laughing and covers his face with his free hand. Ren laughs a little too. Steven stops himself abruptly and tries to look stern, but he is still smiling underneath. ]

Steven: No. This is serious. [ a stray chuckle ] How dare you. [ stifled snort ] I'm—I’m disappointed. Don’t you trust me?

Ren: [ trying not to laugh ] With most things...

Steven: Well I hope you're happy because now, thanks to you, the Hoenn League Champion has a strictly enforced bedtime.

[ Ren loses it and starts laughing really hard, almost dropping her nav. Steven laughs too but tries to fight it. ]

Steven: This is my life, Ren! It’s not funny!

[ Ren just laughs harder. She falls over and drops her nav so that all Steven can see is the sky. Ren can still hear him laughing on the other end before he quiets a little, distracted by something. ]

Steven: [ still laughing intermittently ] No, Bes! I'm not going to say that! You can tell her yourself when you see her. No! Get off me!

[ Ren rolls over onto her stomach and grabs her nav to see what is happening. The camera on the other end is going a bit haywire as Steven flails around, but it seems as though Bes has him on the ground. From the strangled giggles it also seems likely that they are tickling him. ]


[ Steven pops back up and swats the hair out of his face, aiming the camera at himself again. He takes a moment to catch his breath, then sighs. ]

Steven: Bes says thank you.

Ren: [ stifling giggles ] Is that all?

Steven: And a lot more besides that they will tell you [ directed at Bessemer through gritted teeth ] when they see you.


[ Bessemer rumbles happily. Steven shoves them away and sits back against the wall. ]

Steven: You know, I would never have pegged Senri as the instigator.

Ren: Well, he may not be the best dad, but he is still a dad.

Steven: At least the mystery is solved.
Ren: I wish I could say I was sorry for accidentally siccing the League on you, but I’m kinda not.

Steven: Well, at least you’re honest. I forgive you.

Ren: That's very generous of you.

Steven: It is.

Ren: [ chuckling ] Yeah, just go ahead and pat yourself on the back.

Steven: Will do. [ He lets out a long sigh and readjusts himself against the wall. ] So, we already talked about me. What have you been up to lately?

Ren: Pretty much training non-stop. I got my sixth badge.

Steven: Very good.

Ren: Oh, and my taillow decided to stay and train with Winona. Do you, uh, know her very well? I asked oto-san about her already, but he's not always great about… personality. He pretty much just talked about what kind of trainer she is, which was helpful but… I mean, I'm not too worried. She promised to let Māia stay a taillow and keep the stones you gave her and everything. I just, yeah, I can't help it.

Steven: No, I get that. Hmm, where to start with Winona? Is it safe to assume you know about the whole amnesia thing?

Ren: Yeah.

Steven: Well, I think that is a big part of the reason she doesn’t always give the best first impression. As I understand it, she spent a lot of time after the accident trying to be the person she was before and please all of these people who, for all intents and purposes, she didn’t actually know. So, at some point, she abandoned her old self and became someone new. I think the whole thing made her very uninterested in what anyone thinks of her. And losing all of one’s formative memories definitely shows, though it’s a little hard to pinpoint how exactly. It’s made her a singularly present person. She can’t dwell on the past and it makes her throw everything into whatever she is doing at the moment. She’s incredibly focused and tenacious, just maybe not the best people person.

Ren: She actually sounds like a good fit for Māia. Thank you, Steven. That helps a lot.

Steven: Happy to be of service.

[ He smiles and yawns. He slumps against the wall and blinks slowly. ]

Ren: Maybe you should take a nap.

Steven: I haven’t napped since college.

Ren: Well, you’re already falling asleep. I’m just saying maybe it should be on a couch or a bed.

Steven: I am not.

Ren: At least lie down in the grass. I know you love rocks, but that wall can’t be comfortable.

Steven: Alright.

[ He edges away from the wall and out into the full sun. He lies down on his side in the grass and }
turns his nav so that he is still upright in the frame. Ren rolls onto her side and follows suit.

Ren: Better, no?

Steven: [ sleepy ] Hmm.

[ They smile at each other for a moment and his eyelids drift shut. Her face fills with warmth as she watches him fall asleep. It isn’t long before Kai and Wally can be heard returning, but it doesn’t really register until ]

Kai: We’re back!

[ Ren starts and looks up to see them approaching. ]

Ren: Bye Bessemer, if you’re still there!

[ There is a rumble on the other end. ]

Ren: [ quiet ] Goodbye Steven.

[ She snaps her nav shut just as Kai and Wally reach her. ]

Wally: Who were you talking to?

Ren: Uh… my parents?

Kai: Ren, you’re red as a slugma.

[ She rolls over onto her face and whines. ]

Wally: [ bouncing up and down, hands hovering near his mouth ] Was it Steven?! Oh my goodness! What was he calling about? What did you talk about? What did he say?!

[ Kai can’t help but smile a little at Wally’s excitement. Ren tries to melt into the turf. ]

Scene 7: [ Ren Wally and Kai are walking together through the Safari Zone. They are only allowed one pokemon each so only Tāraki, Jay and Kihei are with them. Jay finds a spotted mightyena and Kai flips out about it. Wally sees it slinking off and tries to calm Kai down but it is too late. Kai facepalms and Ren pats him consolingly. They see only brown mightyena after that but there are plenty of other interesting variants to keep Kai occupied. They are all just hanging out while Kai sketches. Wally pulls the cat’s cradle out of his pocket and begins to play with it. He makes the Lumiose Tower and grins at Kai as he holds it in his teeth. Kai laughs. A moment later the pale pikachu peeks her head out of the tall grass. She looks over them and their pokemon appraisingly. ]

Pikachu: Psst! Gallade. [ Kihei turns to look at her. ] You are a trainer pokemon, right? [ He nods. ] So you won’t hunt me? [ He nods again. Jay and Tāraki are looking at her now too. She takes another step out into the open. ] How many badges do your trainers have?

[ The three starters look at each other. ]

Kihei: Five
Tāraki: Six
Jay: Six

Pikachu: [ She takes another step towards them. ] So they must win a lot of battles.

Tāraki: Of course we do.

Pikachu: Which means they can trade for stuff with the other humans.

Kihei: Do you mean money? We earn money from battles and use the money to buy things.

Pikachu: Yes, yes, that is what I meant. So they must have a lot of the money thing, which means they can get lots of other things, rare things even?

Jay: What are you after?

Pikachu: Nothing. Or not something from you, per say. I am curious about humans.

Jay: [ narrowing her eyes ] Those were very specific questions.

Tāraki: Lighten up, Jay. She can’t steal money. It’s digital.

Kihei: What would she do with it anyway?

Pikachu: I don’t want to steal from your humans. I want to offer them something.

[ The three starters glance at each again and the pikachu walks the rest of the way over to them and sits down. ]

Pikachu: I have a treasure. I’m not certain what it is, but I am sure that it is rare and contains a powerful energy. It is of no use to me, but perhaps it would be to a strong trainer.

Jay: So you want to trade for it?

Pikachu: In a manner of speaking.

Jay: Hmm.

Tāraki: Ren! Ren, come over here!

Jay: [ hissing ] Tāraki!

Kihei: Like you don’t want to know what it is.

[ Jay raises her crest in annoyance but doesn’t contradict him and he smiles. Ren joins them and spots the pikachu. ]

Ren: Aw, she’s so cute. That’s a runner variant right?

Kai: Yeah, they live in areas like this where there’s a lot of open space.

Wally: Wow, she’s a lot smaller than Zach.

Ren: Check out those legs though. No wonder they’re called runners.

Tāraki: She says she has a treasure she wants to show us.
Ren: Really?

Tāraki: Yeah, she thinks maybe we could use it.

Ren: Okay.

Tāraki: Lead the way, little pikachu.

Pikachu: Before they see it, I want to discuss terms.

Jay: Told you.

Kihei: What are the terms?

Pikachu: I want to be one of their pokemon. I’ll battle for them and whatever else they need. I just ask that they treat me decently and I want them to give me a thunderstone so that I can evolve. They can work out who gets the treasure amongst themselves. It doesn’t matter to me. They just have to promise that they will keep up their end of the bargain if they decide to take it.

[ Kihei relays this to the trainers. ]

Ren: I sort of have a lot of pokemon, and we’d have to talk over a few things, but I promise I won’t steal your treasure.

Kai: I already have a pikachu, but i’m kinda curious to see what it is.

Wally: It’s not a thunderstone. Ooh, maybe it’s a shiny stone!

Tāraki: They promise.

[ The pikachu takes them through the tall grass and across a rocky field to her burrow. They wait outside as she goes to get her treasure. ]

Ren: Look at those scratches. Something must have tried to dig her out. No wonder she wants out of here.

Kai: Looks like mightyena and linoone to me.

[ The pikachu comes back out, pushing the blue and yellow gem ahead of her. It rolls down off the roots and she scampers after and grabs it. She then holds it up for them to look at. ]

Pikachu: It seems electric in nature, which is why I kept it, but it is no thunderstone.

Ren: [ reaching for it ] May I?

[ The pikachu hoists it a little higher and Ren takes it. She turns is over in the light. ]

Ren: Woah. Maybe it’s a mega stone.

[ She passes it to Kai and pulls out her nav. She has a stone ID guide app on her home screen and pulls it up, looking through the mega stones. Kai passes it to Wally who passes it to Kihei and then Tāraki before Jay finally takes it. ]

Jay: [ muttering ] I think she may be right.

Ren: [ gasp ] I think it’s manectite! Jay, hand it back for a second. [ Jay places it in her open hand }
and Ren turns it. ] Look! It’s got the red flecks!

Pikachu: [ looking pleased by her excitement ] Will you take me on as your pokemon?

Tāraki: Are we going to take it for Ao?

Ren: I really want to, but I have to talk to her first. [ to Kai and Wally ] You guys don’t mind, do you?

Wally: Of course not.

Kai: Did Steven get you that app?

Ren: No! The clerk in the stone shop in Mauville recommended it.

Tāraki: Yeah, but you got it so you could check your rocks before you gave them to Steven.

Ren: [ blushing ] Shut up!

[ Kihei translates this for Wally and Kai and they laugh. Ren huffs and sits down heavily, ignoring them. ]

Ren: [ to the pikachu ] So, I do want the stone, but we before you agree to anything, I want you to know that my team and I are trying to become League Champions. You won’t have to fight the Elite Four if you don’t want to. I already have a manectric.

Pikachu: [ after Tāraki translates ] I can already tell you are a serious trainer. It doesn’t concern me.

Ren: The other thing is that I may have to fight some other trainers called Team Magma and they don’t fight fair. They’ve tried to kill me and my pokemon in the past and chances are pretty good they’ll try again.

Pikachu: But you defeated them in these previous encounters?

Ren: I had help, but yeah. If you don’t want to participate in non-league matches, that would be your call. I would never force you to risk your life.

Pikachu: As long as you hold up your end of the bargain, I will be your pokemon and I will do whatever you need of me.

Ren: Alright then, looks like we have a deal.

[ She offers her hand and the pikachu tentatively taps it with her paw. Ren gets out her vapor box and puts the manectite in it. The pikachu looks a little alarmed as her treasure disappears into the wood. ]

Ren: Don’t worry, it’s just going into storage. Now, I don’t have a thunderstone at the moment, but I do have something else you might like in the meantime.

[ A bright yellow translucent marble appears on the vapor box and the pikachu cocks her head. ]

Wally: Is that a light ball?

Ren: [ offering it pikachu ] Yeah.

[ The pikachu takes it and a shiver runs through her. She stares at it and then back up at Ren. ]
Ren: It increases the power of your attacks and it only works for pikachu.

Kai: I’d never even heard of it before.

Ren: Oh, uh, sorry. I was actually gonna give it to you.

Kai: It’s okay. I think Zach wants to evolve anyway. You could always get me a thunderstone instead, moneybags.

Ren: Har har. I’ll consider it.

[ Ren pulls out the single safari ball she was given upon entry and notices that the pikachu is staring at the light orb again. She grips it tightly between her paws and for just a moment her eyes flash back to the entrance of her burrow. ]

Ren: [ offering her the pokeball ] Um, I’ll get a collar or something so you can wear it.

[ The pikachu starts at Ren’s voice and glances up at her before noticing the pokeball in front of her. She looks at the pokeball but doesn’t seem to want to let go of her new treasure. ]

Ren: Actually, Wally, do you still have the cat’s cradle?

Wally: [ pulling it out of his pocket ] Yeah, here.

[ Ren puts down the pokeball and takes the string from Wally, quickly snapping the loop with her teeth. With the ends free, she starts tying little loops in the middle. The pikachu watches her, puzzled. ]

Ren: It’s only temporary, but it should do for now. This way you can wear it right away.

[ She holds out her hand for the light ball. The pikachu listens carefully to Tāraki’s explanation before slowly placing the marble in Ren’s palm. Ren slips it inside the loops and ties a few more to be sure. When she is satisfied, she reaches out to tie it around the pikachu’s neck. The pokemon holds very still until Ren sits back up. She feels the new necklace with her paws, making sure it is secure. ]

Ren: That’s better, huh?

[ Ren offers her the pokeball again. The pikachu reaches out to touch the pokeball, but hesitates. She looks up at Ren’s smiling face, takes a deep breath, and presses the button. She is enveloped by red light and flows into the pokeball. It closes and locks, the button turning a dull gray. ]

Jay: That was close.

Tāraki: What do you mean?

Jay: She almost ran off with that light orb.

Kihei: At least she gave Ren the manectite.

Tāraki: Yeah, it doesn’t matter. I’m sure she’ll do fine.

Ren: [ not hearing their conversation ] We’ll have to see what kind of a battler she is later. [ to Kai ] Would you and Zach battle us?

Kai: Sure.
Ren: Thanks. I think I’ll head out now. I don’t want her stuck in this ball for hours without checking on her. And I can’t wait to tell Ao. You two have fun!

[ She heads back towards the entrance, Tāraki following behind her. We can see her grinning mischievously to herself as she walks out of the frame, leaving Kai and Wally alone together. They watch her go and Wally glances over at Kai. Kai glances at him a moment later and shrugs. Wally turns away, not trusting his expression. ]

Wally: So! What part did you want to check out next?

---

**Scene 8:** [ A few hours later, Kai and Wally walk out of the Safari Zone gatehouse. Wally is looking at the ground but smiling while Kai waves to Ren who is waiting for them with Ao and the pikachu. ]

Ren: So, so you want to do this now, or do you need a break?

Kai: [ sending out his pikachu ] I’m ready.

Ren: Alright, Teka, let’s see what you got.

[ The pikachu nods to her seriously and bounds forward. She arches up to her full height, fur on end and sparks leaping across her. Her gaze bores into Kai’s pikachu with feral intensity. Zach takes a unsure step forward and she prepares to spring. He flinches away and hides his head under his paws. Teka’s tail lowers a little and she cocks her head. ]

Teka: Hey, are you okay?

[ He peeks an eye out to look at her but doesn’t answer. ]

Teka: Are you sick?

Zach: N-no…

Teka: What’s the matter?

[ Her ears are still raised in question, but her fur and stance have relaxed a great deal. Zach stays flattened to the ground in submission, but he peeps his face over his front paws. ]

Zach: [ horribly embarrassed ] I j-just get sc-scared of b-battling sometimes.

[ Teka looks surprised and then laughs. Zach’s ears fall even lower as she sits back on her haunches and giggles. After a few moments she notices his expression and stops. ]

Teka: No, I wasn’t laughing at you. It’s just that no one has ever been scared of me before. Look at me: I’m small even for a pikachu. [ This only seems to embarrass Zach more so she changes tack. ]

Hey, it’s okay. If you’re not feeling up to battling right now, why not just ask your trainer to use one of his other pokemon?

[ Zach looks away. ]

Teka: Are you afraid he’d get rid of you?
Zach nods.

Teka: Hmm. I'm curious though: if you're afraid of battling, why are you with a trainer?

Zach: Just surviving out there is scary too. I thought maybe I'd be better at this. Having a trainer is really nice so far. I just lose my nerve sometimes. I really hope he doesn't get rid of me. He seems nice. Maybe that's silly...

Teka: [pacing closer] It's not silly. Pikachu are popular with beginners, but it's rare for us to make it to the top. I'm worried about that too. That's why I have some insurance, so I can stay as long as I want. What about you? Have you given him a reason to keep you?

Zach: …I helped him get a badge.

Teka: [sitting down in front of him] That's great! And if you took on a gym, you can't be that terrible a battler. Gym pokemon are super experienced. If you beat even one, you must be good.

Zach: …I guess that's true.

Teka: See, you've got nothing to worry about. As long as you keep helping him, he has no reason not to keep training you. And these battles we have to do are nothing to be scared of. Back in the wild, you were weaker and losing a battle meant you could die. But we are both trainer pokemon now, so battling is more like… a game. Like the battles you had with your littermates as a kit. We're not trying to hurt each other, there's nothing big at stake. We're just testing ourselves, our skills and strength. It's easy to get used to being scared, but as soon as you do something about it, you've already broken free.

Zach: That's a really beautiful way to look at it.

Teka: It's something my mother told me.

[Now that Zach has stopped cowering, the size difference between the two pikachu is much more apparent. He is about fifty percent larger and has a much stockier build. He is darker in color and his stripes are more pronounced.]

Zach: Thank you for all of that and for not just zapping me.

Teka: [smiling] You're welcome.

[The three trainers have been watching this whole interaction. Kai and Wally look confused but Ren is smiling.]

Ren: Aww, kawaii!

Wally: Wait, did you understand any of that? You just got her and Zach isn’t your pokemon.

Ren: Not what they were saying, but he was scared and she made him feel better. Look.

[Zach is indeed looking much more relaxed.]

Teka: So, do you want to show our new trainers how well we can play the game?

Zach: Yeah, alright.

[Teka circles back to Ren and tenses again. Her posture is less threatening this time and she even wags her tail a little. Zach copies her stance.]
Kai: You two ready now?

[ Zach nods. ]

Ren: Remember the strategy, Teka. Agility!
Kai: Spark!

[ Zach charges forward and Teka takes the hit while she is charging up. She goes flying but lands on her paws. Zach is right after her for a second hit but now she is fast enough to dodge easily. ]

Ren: Yes! Now a tail whip!

[ Teka dodges to the side and strikes Zach with her tail. It does almost no damage, but there is a glimmer as his magical defences are lowered. ]

Kai: Go for a brick break!

[ Zach’s tail glows a dull red as he swings it around to strike Teka. She bounds away before zipping back in for another tail whip. Once again she narrowly dodges Zach’s tail and strikes him across the back with her own. She goes in for a third but he finally catches her in the side and she rolls away. ]

Ren: Spark!

[ Teka charges straight at Zach, surrounded by electricity. She is too fast for him to dodge and he goes flying. He lands heavily and groans. ]

Kai: [ getting out a potion and applying it ] Looks like that’s it for us, huh buddy?

Ren: Nice work, Teka.

Teka: [ walking over to Zach ] I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to hit you quite so hard. I don’t know my own strength now that I have this [ touching her light orb ].

Zach: I—I’m okay. That was was smart— how you battled, I mean.

Teka: Thank you, my trainer and I came up with it together. She’s clever. I think we’ll get along.

Kai: Nice strategy. We didn’t stand a chance.

Ren: Thanks! It was mostly her idea.

Ao: Great battle you two! It’s so nice to have another electric-type. I hope we all get to travel together for a while.

Zach: Oh, yes! I want to see you mega evolve!

Teka: Ooh, so do I.

[ Pan out as the three settle into a conversation. ]

---

**Scene 9:** [ Ren and company are battling a bunch of ghost-type trainers on Route 121. Naihi takes
down another duskull and trots back to Ren. Ren ruffles her fur and she smiles. The rest of the crew is sitting nearby watching. There are a few more trainers cued up waiting to battle Ren. She turns back to her other pokemon.

Ren: [ to Akahata ] Are you sure you don’t want to take any of these battles?

Naihi: I think I can do a few more, but I could take a break now if Akahata would like a turn.

Akahata: That’s okay. You two go ahead.

[ Ren and Naihi go back to battling. Ao and Mele watch as Akahata lays her head on her paws and sighs. They glance at each other and go to sit on either side of her. ]

Ao: What’s wrong, Aka?

Akahata: [ confused ] Nothing. What makes you ask?

Ao: Because we can all tell that something is. I was hoping maybe you would come around on your own time, but it’s been a while now and it’s only gotten worse.

Akahata: I didn’t mean to worry you.

Mele: It’s okay. We just want to know what’s up. Maybe we can help.

Akahata: I guess… I understand now how you felt, Ao, back before your gym battle. I thought I didn’t care what my role was as long as I got to stay on the team. But now that she doesn’t need me anymore… it hurts.

Ao: [ very shocked and upset ] How—what—I don’t—how could you think that? Of course we need you!

Akahata: [ wry smile ] You really don’t. Naihi is stronger, she’s a better battler and she has better coverage. You all would be better off with her than with me.

Ao: That’s not true!

Akahata: [ laughing ] Yes it is.

Ao: [ tearing up and yelling ] But she wouldn’t be you! Don’t you have any idea what you’re saying? How could you think so little of yourself? Don’t you know what you mean to all of us? What you mean to me? [ Akahata looks at her in confusion. Ao’s tears overflow and she bolts. ]

Akahata: Ao! I didn’t mean—I’m sorry!

[ Ao is already quite far away and shows no signs of stopping. Mele is on his feet and looks after her worriedly, but stays where he is. ]

Mele: Oh dear.

[ Akahata’s ears droop and she lays her head back down on her paws. Mele sighs and sits back down. ]

Mele: I won’t yell at you, but I hope you know that I feel the same way.

Akahata: I didn’t want to hurt her like that. I don’t want to hurt any of you. And it’s not that I think I’m worthless. I’m a good battler.
Mele: Certainly better than I.

Akahata: And I don’t mind not being the best. You know that. It’s just that all of this time I thought I knew why I was here and now… I think I became a battler because it’s all I’ve ever known. Both of my parents were battlers. It’s what I was bred for, all my father ever taught me, what’s kept me alive all this time. I can’t picture a life for myself without it and I’m not even sure I want to. I could easily survive on my own now, but why?

Mele: Well, I certainly wouldn’t have bet on you as one to have an existential crisis. You always seemed so grounded. [ Akahata grumbles. Mele’s tail waves slowly back and forth as he thinks of what to say. ] I’m not really a big picture kind of cat. I don’t think there’s a reason for anything, even with all of the crazy things that have been going on around us. But I do believe in a meaning in that meaninglessness.

[ Akahata looks at him and scrunches her eyebrows. ]

Mele: [ clearing his throat ] What I mean is: why do I sing? Because I love to. It gets me attention, which I like. It makes me happy. It makes those I care about happy. It even makes strangers happy. It’s my own way of spreading joy and other feelings, of leaving my mark on the world. If nothing has a purpose, than why not just do what makes you happy?

Akahata: So, you think I should do whatever makes me happiest?

Mele: Exactly. And maybe you’re not sure what that is right now, but things are always easier to find when you know what you’re looking for.

Akahata: Thank you.

Mele: Happy to be of service.

Akahata: I just feel silly that all of this started over a little heartbreak. Not sure why it was that that suddenly opened my eyes.

Mele: I can’t help you with that. [ puffing out his chest ] You know I’m the heartbreaker and not the heartbreakee.

[ Akahata chuckles. ]

Mele: Are you sure she doesn’t like you though? Maybe she’s just bad at showing it. It’s a little tough getting thrown in the mix with the rest of us. We’ve all know each other so long, it must be hard to break in. And the Magma threat is stressful even if she is seeking it out. Maybe you should ask?

Akahata: At the beginning I thought maybe she could, but now I’m sure she doesn’t. Anyway, I’ll figure it out. This has never been a problem before, so with any luck it’s not something I’ll have to deal with again. But first I have some more pressing matters to deal with.

Mele: True. True. Prioritizing is good.

Akahata: I’m sorry about all of this.

Mele: No apology needed. Or at least not to me.

Akahata: Do you think I should go talk to Ao?
Mele: Maybe not just yet. I’ll talk to her first. Just wait here.

[ Mele trots off in the direction Ao disappeared. It doesn’t take him long to find her. She is lying under a tree and tears are still slowly streaming down her snout. Mele licks them away as he talks softly and soothingly to her. She cries a little more, but eventually calms. They head back together and Akahata goes to greet them, ears and tail lowered in submission. Akahata apologizes and explains a little so that Ao doesn’t worry. The two of them nuzzle each other and Mele looks on with pride. Ren and Naihi finish their battles in time to see this. ]

Ren: Ahh! You two are adorable. I love you.

[ She bends down to hug them and gives them each a kiss. They lick her face and she laughs. Naihi looks on with worry. ]

---

**Scene 10:** [ Ren, Kai and Wally take the ferry to Mt. Pyre. They lean out over the bow as the island comes into view. It is almost permanently misty and crawling with ghost types, which gives it the proper ambiance. They disembark at the dock and head inside. The shrine is built into a natural divot in the slope of the mountain, from the last time the ancient volcano erupted and blew out one side. A sign by the entrance lays out rules of conduct. Battles are strictly forbidden and quiet requested to respect the mourners. Catching pokemon is forbidden within the shrine, but acceptable on other parts of the island. Ren makes her way to one of the many altars set here and there among the gravestones. ]

Ren: Would you two mind leaving me alone for a bit?

Kai: Are you sure?

Ren: Yes. I’ll meet you on the peak when I’m done.

[ Wally gives her a hug and Kai follows suit. They both head for the stairs and disappear onto the next floor. Ren pulls out a stick of incense from the cup beside the shrine and lights it. She rifles through her bag for a few acorns and lays them on the altar as well. She kneels down and takes a deep breath. ]

Ren: I’m sorry I couldn’t help you. I’m sorry the world was so cruel to you and I’m sorry you had so little time. You deserved so much better. You were a wonderful pokemon and such a great fighter. We all miss you, especially Kata. She’s had a terribly rough time finding another buddy. [forced cheerfulness breaking] You deserved better. [ The tears break free and she bows until her head touches the floor. ] I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.

[ We pan out as she sits back up and then bows again. As she bows a third time, Josh enters the side of the frame. He is alone and in civilian clothes. He looks out over the room as he weaves between the gravestones, trying not to draw attention to himself. His eyes pass over Ren without recognition, but he is walking in her direction. His face is a little tighter than his regular neutral sullen look as he combs over the mourners. His eyes pass over Ren again and he stops, now only about 10 feet away. ]

Josh: Ren?

[ Her head snaps up and he can see plainly now that it is her. Her face is wet and tearstained. The
scarred side looks particularly irritated and puffy. She looks surprised to see him and stands up, wiping her nose on her sleeve. Their eyes meet and his are soft with concern while hers turn unbearably sad.

Josh: I’m so sorry, Ren.

They seem to forget why they know each other. He moves toward her and she closes the distance and throws her arms around his middle, holding him tight. She sniffles into his shoulder and he almost pats her head, but thinks better of it and wraps his arms gently around her shoulders.

Josh: [after a few moments] It—it wasn’t in the Weather Institute, was it?

Ren: No. It was more than a month ago. My nuzleaf.

Josh: Oh… The one who threatened me in Fallabor?

Ren: Threatened you?

Josh: Uh, she was sort of pantomiming staving my head in behind your back.

We see a flashback of the scene from Josh’s perspective. He stumbles over his sentence as he watches Wheta imitate putting him in a headlock and pounding him repeatedly with her wooden fist. In the present, Ren laughs.

Ren: And here I thought you went along with it because I was nice to you.

Josh: Well, that was part of it…

She chuckles again a little more softly. Her tears are beginning to dry up.

Ren: Um, Josh, why are you here? Did—did one of yours…

Josh: No! No, Arceus, I can’t even imagine what you’re going through. And my life hasn’t exactly been a cake walk.

She is quiet for a few moments.

Ren: I guess I shouldn’t be surprised anymore. You have a crobat for Arceus’s sake. You may be an asshole, but you obviously love your pokemon.

Josh: Of course I do. They’re like family, right? What family is supposed to be? They love you and take care you no matter what.

Ren takes in his uncertain fidgeting with confusion.

Ren: I actually wanted to thank you for never going back on anything you said you would do for me.
I’m not sure why you didn’t: if you’re just too scared or if you still feel like you have to repay me.

Josh: Oh, uh—

Ren: You don’t have to tell me. You don’t owe me that.

[ Neither of them says anything for a while. Ren sighs and turns back to the alter. She says a few more words very quietly in Kantonese so that Josh won’t understand. She bows again and Josh dips his head behind her. She stares at the smoke trailing out of the burning incense when suddenly her eyes go wide. Her face hardens. ]

Ren: [ quiet, but anything other than soft ] Josh, why are you here?

[ It is a false calm that Josh knows well and he shies away from her. It is a good thing too because in another beat she whips around violently to face him, hands balled into fists. He takes another step back and she advances on him. He shrinks before her as he is backed up against a gravestone and she looms over him. ]

Ren: Magma’s here. [ pounding her forehead ] I’m stupid! I’m so stupid! I just went right along and let you distract me! Look everybody, it’s Ren Kosugi: the village fucking idiot! Why do I keep doing this with you? I just let you fucking get to me! I just hand you ammo every Giratina-damned time thinking you’ll never figure out the weapon it goes to. You know, I’m actually really lucky all you’ve managed to do so far is stall me.

Josh: I wasn’t—

Ren: [ shouting over him ] Oh, just stow it already! I am so far past caring right now. Just tell me why in all of Lord Arceus’s’s creation Magma is here! This is a shrine to the dead! What the hell kind of humanitarian plot involves desecrating something this sacred?

Josh: [ totally unable to meet her eyes ] There’s something here. Something we need. I don’t know what it is, just that it’s—

Ren: [ holding her hand up to silence him ] That’s enough for me. Where are they?

Josh: The peak. [ She turns to leave and he grabs desperately at her wrist. ] Don’t! They’re all up there, all three of them!

Ren: [ through clenched teeth ] Let. Me. Go.

[ He lets go and she strides off towards the stairs. He hesitates for a second or two before going after her. ]

Josh: Please don’t go up there! They’ll kill you!

Ren: [ over her shoulder as she mounts the stairs ] And why do you care, Josh? It’d be one less problem for you. Besides, you don’t even know me.

[ He is climbing the stairs after her, but that makes him stop. She continues unaffected. ]

Josh: [ losing his temper and starting back up the stairs ] You saved my life twice! I just don’t want you to die! Is that so hard to understand?

[ She doesn’t stop and as soon as Josh reaches the top he sees that Kai and Wally are there. Ren storms right past them, rage blocking out all else as she makes for the next set of stairs. They look at
her and back at Josh for a second before taking off after her.

Kai: Ren? Ren, what’s going on?

[ Josh stays where he is as they run up the next flight of stairs. In another moment he remembers what he should have done from the beginning and pulls out his nav. His hands are shaking as he pounds Azalea’s number and he fidgets as he waits for her to answer. ]

Josh: [ the moment the icon goes green ] Azalea! We have to do something! She’s here and she’s headed up right now. Everyone is up there! It’s such a mess! I can’t stop her. She’s got two other trainers with her this time! What do I do?!

Azalea: Where is she?

Josh: Third floor now.

Azalea: Shit. That doesn’t leave a lot of time.

Josh: [ pulling at his hair, voice frantic ] What do we do?!

Azalea: I’m going to run interference.

Josh: [ trying to calm down ] Okay. Okay… What should I do?

Azalea: You are going to promise me you’ll keep your mouth shut about anything you happen to see, although I think you know what happens if you don’t.

Josh: Yes, ma’am.

Azalea: Good. And if you have a moment maybe pray that good old Steven is on his way.

Josh: The Champion? But won’t that—what about the mission?

Azalea: I’ll handle it. I have not worked this hard for this long to fail now. Maxie will get what he’s after.

[ She hangs up and we see her face harden. She and her whismur are standing alone on the grassy side of the island. ]

Aster: This is bad. What can you do as Azalea?

Azalea: Nothing. [ She unzips her Magma jacket and takes it off. ] Get out the vapor box, would you, flower?

---

**Scene 11:** [ Ren, Kai and Wally are still climbing but have ascended past the shrine and out onto the slope of the mountain. Ren is a little ahead of them and her face is still set in anger while the other two look worried. They send out their starters. ]

Ren: [ to Latios ] How is it up there?

Latios: [ in her head ] Most of Magma is here. Maxie and Tabitha are battling two guardians of a
shrine dedicated to Groudon and Kyogre. It contains two orbs sacred to the climate pokemon.

Ren: Why do they want them?

Latios: I believe they think the Red Orb can be used to control Groudon.

Ren: Can it?!

Latios: I have never seen it used thusly. However, it seems very likely to me that using the orb could awaken Groudon. My understanding is that the orbs are part of climate pokemon and grant them immense power, not unlike my soul dew.

Ren: So if Groudon is reunited with this thing, it undergoes primal reversion?

Latios: That would be my guess as well.

Ren: [out loud] **FUCK!**

[ *Kai and Wally jump.* ]

Kai: Are you okay?

Ren: [ *making a show of slamming her nav shut as if she had been looking at it.* ] Steven says there are some orbs up there and that’s why Magma is here. Basically if they get ahold of them, we are all dead.

Wally: Well shit.

[ *Everyone glances at him.* ]

Wally: What, I don’t get to swear? This is so bad!

Ren: No, dude, whatever helps.

[ *They are almost at the top now and Ren stops.* ]

Kai: Okay, so, what do we do?

Ren: Steven will be here soon and I sent Archie a wave too, so Aqua should be on their way, but I don’t think we can afford to wait. I think we just have to rush in there and try not to get our asses kicked too badly before our back-up gets here.

Kai: O-okay.

Wally: We just have to stick together. It’ll be fine.

Ren: Yeah, we’ll be fine. [ *She turns and catches Tāraki’s eye.* ] You ready, tiger?

[ *He nods.* ]

Ren: Let’s wreck ’em!

[ *Ren runs up the last set of stairs with Tāraki at her side and the other four in her wake. She pauses for a second at the top to take in the scene. The wide rounded top of the mountain is covered in Magma grunts. At the opposite end there is a small shrine. It is a bit too far away to see clearly, but she can see a battle going on in front of it. Suddenly, a bright sparkling light that Ren recognizes as* ]
Ren: [cupping her hands around her mouth and yelling at the top of her voice] HEY MAXIE! COME AND FIGHT ME YOU YUNGOOS-FACED ASSHOLE!

[Her friends look very startled, but there doesn’t seem to be much response from the group at the shrine. However, the Magma grunts nearby send out their pokemon.]

Ren: Worth a shot.

[Tāraki charges out into the middle of the oncoming Magma pokemon (linoone, vibreva, numel, duskull, shuppet, and golbat) as Ren puts her hand over her keystone. Tāraki mega evolves in the midst of them which sends them flying in all directions.]

Ren: Leaf blade!

Kai: Blaze kick!

Wally: Psycho cut!

[Tāraki shreds the vibrava and numel while Jay handles the two ghosts. Kihei takes the golbat down in a single elegant slice before transitioning into brick break and bludgeoning the linoone over the head. This swift and brutal ass-kicking certainly makes an impression on the grunts. Several of them only had one pokemon and high-tail it in the other direction. The remainder call for backup before sending out their other pokemon. It soon becomes apparent that the only viable strategy against the over powerful Tāraki, Jay and Kihei is to overwhelm them. In the span of a few minutes, the gang is suddenly facing down fifteen pokemon at once and more are on their way. Ren goes to her belt and sends out the rest of her pokemon. Kai and Wally follow suit.]

Ren: Everyone stick close together! The last thing we need is for anyone to get separated.

[Ren’s team nods and gets to work. Though still lopsided, the odds have improved a great deal. Kata and Ao stay by their trainer’s side, firing off charge beams and psybeams. Naihi leaps eagerly into the fray and has a move for almost every type of opponent. Akahata sticks closer to the humans to make sure no attacks slip past. Kotai uses dig and pops up here and there across the battlefield to punch someone before diving back underground. Once Ao is charged up, she darts out into the opposing pokemon and uses discharge. Not to be outdone, Kata uses psychic to hit several enemies in a row with one of their comrades. Kai and Wally’s pokemon are not doing quite as well since they are unused to this sort of melee. As more Magma grunts arrive, the battle begins to turn back against the gang. They are all looking very overwhelmed and nervous when a noivern shoots past like an arrow. Many Magma pokemon fall back as they are struck by its hyper voice attack. Ren shields her eyes to get a better look as it banks into a turn. There is a woman in a cape on its back.]

Kai: What the hell was that?

Wally: A noivern. They’re only native to Kalos. [following it with his eyes] Someone’s riding it.

Kai: Who is it?

Ren: No idea but they’re helping so I’ll take it.

[The noivern comes around for another pass and the trio’s pokemon retreat as it scatters the Magma pokemon. Blaise and Gloria appear a moment later to take charge of the emerging chaos. They have several grunts with flying pokemon go after the noivern while the rest close ranks around the trio. The noivern banks away to protect its rider and is struck in the chest and stomach by the...]

Latios’s luster purge surrounds the combatants.
Magma pokemon’s attacks. Meanwhile, Ren decides not to wait until they are surrounded and has Tāraki try and break through the line. He successfully knocks a mightyena and medicham aside, but a linoone jumps on his back and tries to tear one of the golden seeds off his back. He whirls and flails but can’t dislodge it and cries out in pain. Jay punches the linoone off Tāraki’s back and they retreat. The group is now successfully surrounded. And all three trainers glance around nervously. Blaise’s darmanitan charges at Tāraki and both Jay and Kihei rush to intercept. The darmanitan parries both of their attacks. Jay goes for a kick but the darmanitan grabs her by the leg and flings her into Kihei. The pair goes tumbling away and the darmanitan launches itself at Tāraki, cloaked in flames. Tāraki and Ren cross their arms in front of them to take the hit but just before the darmanitan reaches them it is bowled over by a rock. A second later a giant, brightly colored aerodactyl streaks over just over their heads. The aerodactyl and its rider swoop around over the Magma pokemon spreading panic before coming in for a landing. The trio and their pokemon jump to make room. Steven vaults down off the flashy aerodactyl’s back.

Steven: Is everyone alright?

Ren: Yeah. Thanks for getting here so fast.

Steven: I was in Lilycove. The darmanitan comes in for another hit, but the aerodactyl buries it beneath a rock slide. Good to see you again, Kai.

Ren: Oh, this is Wally Scott.

Steven: Ren’s told me about you. Glad to finally meet. Thank you both for your help.

Kai: No problem.

Wally: Y-you’re welcome.

Steven: Rock slide!

[ Steven’s aerodactyl rains rocks down on the enemy ranks as they come in. Ao and Kata take advantage of the confusion to hit a bunch of pokemon with charge beam. Soon all of the other pokemon join in and surrounding the four trainers. ]

Ren: So Steven, where’s Damascus? He wasn’t flashy enough for the occasion?

Steven: He pulled a wing muscle in practice yesterday. Besides Tulpi is a rock-type and needed the exercise. How dare you imply this is about my vanity. It was based purely on necessity and strategy.

Ren: My apologies. The noivern swoops by again pursued by a flock of swallows. Anyway, It didn’t have quit they same impact after those two already showed up out of the blue.

Steven: Friends of yours?

Ren: Guess so. Tāraki grand slams a koffing out over Team Magma’s heads. Ha!

Steven: You two certainly got the hang of mega evolution quickly.

Ren: Thanks! We’ve been working hard on it. You look more rested.

Steven: Thanks, I was compelled to.

[ Above them, the noivern is clearly exhausted and beaten. It’s rider sends out a salamence and hops down onto its back with a whismur before withdrawing the noivern. ]
Ren: Alright now they’re just showing off.

Steven: They must be Draconid.

[Steven and Ren refocus on the battle as the salamence wheels overhead. Zinnia looks down at the group from her dragon-type’s back, but seems to think they have things under control and steers her pokemon away. The salamence rushes towards the shrine and the combatants surrounding it. Balls of blue light appear around it and shoot forward, smashing into the Magma pokemon and their surroundings as the salamence passes overhead. Ren and Steven flinch and look towards the shrine.]

Steven: The guardians.

Ren: We have to get there now!

[Steven recalls his tired aerodactyl and sends out his steelix and metagross. Ren reaches out frantically with her mind and Latios responds.]

Latios: I am alive but beaten. I need your help.

Steven: Take care of them, Bes.

[Steven puts his hand over the keystone pin on his breast and mega evolves his steelix. She lets out a metallic roar and plows into the Magma ranks.]

Ren: Aka, Tāraki, let’s go! Everyone else stay with Kai and Wally!

[Steven, Ren, Tāraki and Akahata run after the steelix as she breaks through the line of pokemon and grunts and slithers towards the shrine.]

Naihi: Trainer, wait!

[She leaps after them but is intercepted by a hariyama’s force palm attack and goes tumbling. Bessemer rams the hariyama with zen headbutt.]

Bessemer: Careful, absol. We’re on our own now.

[Kai stares after Ren and Steven, looking pained.]

Wally: Are you okay? What’s wrong?

Kai: Nothing. I mean, I think I’m jealous?

Wally: Of Steven, or Ren?

Kai: [slowly] Yes.

[Wally can’t help but smile to himself as he directs his roselia to use petal dance. Meanwhile Blaise and Gloria have sent all of their pokemon after Steven and his steelix. The steelix manages to get both weezing at once with a rock slide but has a tougher time hitting Blaise’s swell. Akahata tries to keep Gloria’s growlithe at bay with thunder fang while Tāraki drains the numel until it collapses. Looking energized once more, he vaults over the steelix to help with the darmanitan laying into her side. Moving in sync with Ren, the mega sceptile slams the darmanitan away, dodges under its fire punch and slashes it across the face with dragon claw. Zinnia watches from her salamence’s back as Tāraki finishes off the darmanitan with a leaf blade. The quintuplets’ mightyena attack the group next and the steelix scatters them with a iron tail and Tāraki darts around finishing them off one after]
another with x-scissor. Ren keeps her position near the steelix’s tail, but stays with her pokemon as he runs back and forth, sidestepping as he dodges and swinging her arms as he strikes. Even when he is blocked by the steelix’s bulk it is as if she can see out of his eyes. And it seems as though Tāraki can see out of hers when he whirls and slams the swellow diving for his back. Akahata catches it her jaws and delivers a paralyzing shock. Zinnia looks on in awe, color rising to her face.

Aster: What’s wrong?

Zinnia: I did not come here to catch feelings.

Aster: For who? What the hell is going on down there?

Zinnia: The way she fights… She throws everything into it. Steven is good, don’t get me wrong, but it’s all in his head. He’s too precise and elegant. He doesn’t give anything away. She lays everything bare and there’s still no stopping her. She’s going to be the next Champion, I’d bet my life on it.

Aster: Not if she doesn’t survive until then. Let’s focus please.

Zinnia: It’s under control. Maxie’s taking it now.

[ Pan up to the shrine. Tabitha has one orb guardian restrained while her hariyama restrains the other. Maxie steps forward and removes the red orb from the rock at the back of the shrine. He smiles but then freezes and his eyes glow red. Courtney and Tabitha look very concerned. Tabitha drops the orb guardian and shakes Maxie. He does not respond. She looks down the hill and sees that Steven and Ren are close now and farther below Aqua members are pouring out of the entrance.

Tabitha: I need to get Maxie out of here. Stall them!

Courtney: But—

Tabitha: Just do it. I’ll take care of him.

[ Courtney hesitates, face tight with worry as she stares at Maxie, but in another moment she jumps down the hill to meet Steven and Ren, sending out her ninetails, pyroar and camerupt. Tabitha looks over Maxie, who is still frozen with the orb in his hand. Red lines are now spreading across his face from his glowing eyes. Tabitha pulls a pokeball out of Maxie's coat and sends out his crobat.

Meanwhile, Steven’s steelix groans as Courtney’s pokemon spew fire at her. Tāraki rushes the camerupt, slicing it across the shoulder with a leaf blade.

Steven: I’ll handle her. Go!

[ Ren nods and she and Tāraki charge up the hill. The camerupt, which has fallen to its knees, aims a column of fire at them. The attack goes wide as Akahata headbutts the camerupt in the jaw. In another moment, Steven’s steelix has surrounded Courtney’s pokemon and he sends out his armaldo and cradily to douse the fire attacks they unleash upon the screeching steelix. Ren reaches the shrine just as Tabitha takes off on a crobat, carrying Maxie in her arms. Tāraki launches a mega drain at the crobat. It dips, but stays airborne, gliding away on the stiff ocean breeze. They slump and Tāraki devolves to his normal form.

Blue Guardian: [ getting up ] You, partner of the Eon Guardians, we need your help.

Ren: How do you—

Latios: [ telempathy ] We told them.
Both guardians are dark skinned and covered by even darker tattoos. They are in traditional garb, one in blue and the other in red. The one who did not speak sits back against the stone and wipes blood off their brow.

Ren: Are you okay?

Red Guardian: I’ll be fine.

Zinnia sees Ren talking to the orb guardians from above and genuine fear flashes across her face. Her salamence take a gunk shot to the face and teeters unsteadily in the air, flying blind. Her face sets and she guides her pokemon into a landing. It isn’t smooth and Zinnia and her whismur fall off the dragon’s back as it hits the ground. Zinnia curls around her whismur and takes the impact herself. She rolls to a stop and releases her whismur, scrambling to her feet.

Zinnia: Are you alright, Koru?

Salamence: Nothing broken.

Zinnia withdraws her pokemon and runs for the shrine, limping a little from how she landed on her hip. Further down the slope, Kai, Wally, Bessemer, and the rest of the crew have left Team Aqua to deal with the scattering Team Magma and are running up the hill. Meanwhile Steven is still battling Courtney and Ren is talking with the orb guardians.

Blue Guardian: Please, you must take the blue orb.

Ren: What? Why?

Red Guardian: For safekeeping. We can no longer guard it here.

Ren: But it should be okay for now. Magma will be gone any minute and they weren’t after it in the first place. They wanted the red orb.

Blue Guardian: But Aqua is here. They cannot know about the orb or they will seek to use it just as Magma will use the red orb. It cannot fall into their hands.

Ren looks away guiltily.

Red Guardian: It’s not your fault. It’s ours. But we cannot let others die because of our mistakes. I wish there was another solution, or time to explain, because this will be hard, but there isn’t. Please take it.

Ren: [deep breath] Alright.

She reaches for the orb.

Zinnia: [running towards her, hand outstretched] Don’t!

Ren’s hand closes around the orb and she turns. Her eyes meet Zinnia’s and Ren goes as still as a statue. Her eyes glow a deep blue and markings appear all over her. Zinnia stops at her side, but makes no move to touch her. The orb guardians look on grimly. Steven jogs up a moment later with Akahata. They pause to take in what is happening and Kai, Wally and the pokemon come up behind them. Akahata butts Ren in the leg but she doesn’t respond. The mightyena and sceptile share a worried glance. Wally can barely stand and has to take a few breaths from his inhaler. Kai turns back to make sure he is alright.
Steven: [looking into her blank face] Ren? [There is no response and he becomes very alarmed. Shaking her shoulder] Ren!

Zinnia: [face hard] It's too late.

[He looks frantically from Zinnia to the blue orb in Ren's hand to the guardians.]

Steven: What's wrong with her? What is that thing?

Blue Guardian: It is Atua Kyogre's mauri. She faces them now.

[Steven's shock and confusion is mirrored by Ren's friends, but he recovers faster.]

Steven: [to the Eon Guardians] Can you help her?

Latios: [to Steven] I can still sense her, but I can't reach her. Kyogre isn't psychic. I think they've drawn her consciousness into the orb.

[Steven reaches for the orb.]

Red Guardian: You can't help her now. No one can. This is something she must do alone.

[Steven touches the orb anyway, but nothing happens. His arms drop to his sides.]

Tāraki: [to Kihei] What's wrong with her? What are they saying?

Kihei: She's facing Kyogre right now. They can't get through to her. They said she has to do it alone.

Tāraki: Like hell she will.

[The sceptile reaches out and grabs the blue orb. He closes his eyes, concentrating for a few moments before his mega stone begins to glow and then so does Ren's keystone. He goes still and when he opens his eyes, they are blank blue orbs just like Ren's.]

Jay: Tāraki?

Kai: Did he just follow her in there?

Steven: His mega stone initiated the link. I-I've never seen that.

Blue Guardian: [eyes widening] Well, I can safely say that nothing like this has ever happened before. [The other guardian nods along in agreement.]

[They all continue to watch in silence as Ren and Tāraki remain motionless. Kai fidgets, looking pained and Wally reaches out and takes his hand. He goes stiff for a second but then squeezes Wally's hand. A minute later Josh comes jogging up to the group, glancing around to make sure there are no more Team Magma members still there. The rest share confused glances and Josh pretty much ignores them. Alarm spreads over his face as he gets a better look at Ren. He glances over the rest of them before fixing the guardians with a angry glare.]

Josh: [taking a step towards them and yelling] What did you do to her!

[Zinnia puts a firm hand on Josh's shoulder and pulls him back slightly.]

Zinnia: They did what they had to.
Josh glances back at her and his shoulders slump.

Steven: [ to Zinnia ] Have we met before? You seem familiar.

Zinnia: Yes. I am Zinnia Dracon, lorekeeper for the Draconids. We met at your coronation ball.

Steven: Oh.

[ He does not seem completely satisfied with this answer but is too distracted to question her further and just nods vaguely. Josh, on the other hand, looks like he has been jabbed in the spine with a cattle prod. He looks over at Zinnia, eyes wide. She shoots him a warning glance and he swallows thickly. ]

Josh: Um, isn't there anything we can do?

Zinnia: No. [ He looks down. ] She'll be okay, kid. She's got her sceptile in there with her.

[ There is a long silence in which all wait for something to happen. ]

Bessemer: [ to Steven ] She wasn't even kidding about the harem thing.

Steven: [ telepathically to Bessemer ] Is it possible to be both surprised and deeply unsurprised?

Bessemer: I wonder if Zinnia is part of it. Do you think we're part of it? I mean, she does have a thing for you.

Steven: I know. I've been trying not to flirt. You know I don’t notice I'm doing it half the time. [ sigh ] Is this really what we’re worried about right now?

Bessemer: You know perfectly well it isn't. I'm just trying to prevent us from having an aneurysm or, more specifically, your delicate human brain.

Steven: [ out loud ] Oh Arceus, I did this.

Bessemer: [ nudging him consolingly ] No— [ Steven covers his face with his hands. ] She'll be okay.

[ Latias, still invisible, places her paws on his shoulders. Zinnia sees Steven slump. ]

Zinnia: [ patting his arm ] You did what you could. We all did. This is what must be.

Latios: [ placing his paws on Ren’s shoulders ] She will come through.

Scene 12: [ As soon as Ren touches the orb, she is plunged underwater. She can feel and even taste the seawater rushing around her as she sinks swiftly deeper and the light from the surface begins to fade. Just as the darkness becomes complete and the pressure crushing, Ren stops falling and a glow appears in front of her, swiftly moving closer. In another moment she can see that is is Kyogre swimming towards her. The god is massive, larger even than a wailord with great fins many times as broad. Their fluorescence lights up the water around them and their jaws open, revealing a row of giant orca-like teeth. They emit a low howl and the water shakes with the power of it. Ren gasps and for an instant is gripped with panic, expecting to drown. But the next moment she realizes that]
she can still breathe. She thrashes her arms and legs experimentally. While she can feel the water move around them, she does not appear to move herself. As real as the water feels, it isn't. She looks up to see Kyogre is almost upon her, mouth gaping. She tries to swim away but cannot. Just before she is swallowed, Kyogre veers downward, passing just beneath her. The water rushes around her and she is speeding through the depths. For a time she can barely see anything in the featureless dark. Suddenly wall of rock, perhaps the foot of an island, looms in front of her. She flinches as she is about to hit it. She passes through the rock and into an air filled chamber with a sandy floor. She crosses the chamber, never slowing even as she passes through the next wall and into another air pocket and another. Perhaps they are tunnels, but she is rushing through too fast. She stops. She is in a chamber with a deep pool. Kyogre glows faintly at the bottom, motionless and dormant. The blue orb glows brightly in her right hand and Ren is so startled that she drops it. It bounces off the stone floor and into the pool. It sinks rapidly and Kyogre swallows it. The god fluoresces brightly, letting out a cry that shakes the cavern. It rises to the surface and beyond, water running off of it. It morphs into its primal form, growing even larger as its fins elongate and more bands of fluorescence appear across its body. It's yellow eyes meet Ren's. It is even closer than before and terrifying. Kyogre brings its great fins downward and smashes into the ceiling. The rock buckles and breaks apart. Seawater pours in and Ren is caught up in the torrent of rock and water. Ren is lifted above the storm as Kyogre floats upwards. She can see a lighthouse far in the distance, perhaps the one at Lilycove. Thunder cracks and the blanket of gray clouds descends toward her. Ren is lowered down to the small spit of rock that is the sad remains of the island. Lightning strikes the rising cyclone and crackles through it as ocean and cloud finally meet. The storm is huge and howling and inescapable. Ren cowers even in the relative calm of the eye. Kyogre cries out again, haunting and deafening even above the howling of the storm. Ren looks up and see the god circling down to her.

Ren: [**yelling to be heard above the din**] Is this what you want? You want me to revive you so that you can destroy the world as I know it?

[**Kyogre sings in answer.**]

Ren: No!

[**Kyogre swims closer to her and she holds her ground. Once again the great beast does not eat her. Instead, the god bears their throat. Ren can see the blue orb glowing inside them.**]

Ren: It's part of you…

[ Ren can see clearly that the god and the orb are one, that they are broken without it. She can feel their need and for a moment she feels she must reunite them. She shakes her head.]

Ren: Humans aren't like that. We're selfish, you see. I'd never do something that would kill me.

[**Kyogre lowers their head to look at her and the air around her calms. She is left untouched by the calamity raging around her.**]

Ren: So you'd spare me? What about the rest of the world?

[ In a blink Ren is above the clouds, high in the stratosphere. The hurricane has become almost as wide as Hoenn. All of the western islands have already vanished beneath it. It tears into the mainland, stripping the coast to the bedrock and flooding ever further inland.]

Ren: [**horror**] They drown. They all drown… [Slowly her face hardens as she watches the continent be swallowed.] You're not doing a very good job of selling this. You spare me so I can
eek out an existence in waterworld with all of my friends and everyone I've ever known dead? I don't think so. I know you don't understand mortals, but this is crazy. I'm not gonna revive you!

[ Kyogre roars and for the first time it seems angry and frustrated. They are back at sea level again and Ren is pelted by rain, wind and hail. ]

Ren: No!

[ The wind intensifies until Ren feels as if she feels as if she is about torn off the rock. She closes her eyes against storm and staggers, but something catches her. She opens her eyes to find Tāraki's hand clasped over the blue orb in hers. It's been there all along. ]

Tāraki: Why don't you battle us for it, you deformed wailord!

[ Kyogre roars, wind and rain spilling from its mouth. ]

Tāraki: Look at you, so confident. You ever heard of a type advantage, water monster?

[ Ren laughs and Tāraki smiles. Kyogre flickers back to its normal form and sings out at them. The orb is pulled toward them, but Ren and Tāraki keep hold of it and plant themselves to the rock. ]

Ren and Tāraki: NO!

[ They yank the orb back. Team Magma appears in the water around them. They try and swim for the rock but are swept away and pulled under by a whirlpool. ]

Ren: I don't want this! I don't want to hurt them. Don't you get it? All I want is to stop them from doing exactly what you're asking me to do.

Tāraki: We're not giving you the orb!

Ren: There's nothing you can offer me that would even tempt me to consider bringing you the orb!

[ Kyogre rumbles and opens its mouth. Tāraki cocks his free arm back, sharp edge glowing in preparation for a leaf blade. Kyogre raises its fins and Ren brings her keystone to her lips to mega evolve Tāraki. In the instant before the link is initiated, they are underwater again and all traces of the storm are gone. The water is bright and warm and goes on forever. Ren and Tāraki look around, both floating but still connected by the orb that they hold together. A gentle current caresses Ren's face and neck. It spirals down her arms and then her legs. Something feels lighter, right, less painful. She looks at her arm and sees that it is no longer covered in burns. She raises her free hand to her face. It is unmarked and whole, as if nothing ever happened. ]

Ren: You—you can?

[ Ren's stomach bottoms out. She can't take her hand off her face. Emotions flood around inside her and her chest heaves with unsteady breaths. She shakes her head, trying to remember what is happening and what is at stake. Kyogre appears right in front of them, almost close enough to touch. The god is still, calm and quiet. ]

Ren: [ quiet and shaky ] N-no. I won't.

Tāraki: She said no. Now let us go!

Ren: [ raising her unmarked face to the god in defiance ] You can do whatever you want to us in here. We are never giving you the orb!
Scene 13: Ren and Tāraki are facing each other, clutching the orb. Their other hands have met in the air. They are panting and shaking. Ren slots her fingers through Tāraki’s and they rest their foreheads together. Her surroundings are blurry and it is hard to keep her eyes open.

Ren: Thanks, tiger. He blinks at her, letting out a trembling sigh. She straightens up and reaches for her belt. Rest in your ball for a bit, okay? He nods and she withdraws him. She staggers without the support and Steven catches her.

Steven: Ren, are you alright?

Ren: Steven? She leans back against him and looks around blearily at the circle of people and pokemon around her. Everyone’s here.

Kai: Yeah, we’re here.

Josh: Your scars…

Ren jolts out of her stupor and her hand snaps up to her face. She runs her fingers over it. Her face isn’t unmarked like before the accident, but it feels very different than it was before she confronted Kyogre. There are smooth, regular ridges where there was once a mess of uneven pulls. Ren extends her arm and sees that those scars have changed as well. Now they look more like ripples or waves flowing across her skin. Even the color has lightened to a pink. Kyogre has given her a gift, or perhaps more accurately, a demonstration. Proof that their offer was not idle. Ren’s hand shakes as she put the blue orb in her bag. She puts her hand over her face again, unable to stop herself.

Blue Guardian: It is said that Atua Kyogre can undo any damage done by heat or fire.

Steven: Do they hurt? Are you okay?

Ren: [almost to herself] They don’t hurt anymore. Nothing hurts… I’m just… so tired.

Kata: I’ve got her. The grumpig lifts her gently off her feet with psychokinesis and rotates her so that she is basically lying down in midair. Everyone should go back in their balls. I’ll make sure we get to the hospital.

Steven: I’ll take her to Lilycove. It’s closest.

Wally: [looking back over her shoulder] Um, I think Archie’s headed over here.

Josh jumps.
Steven: Who?

Kai: [pointing] Him. He’s sort of been helping Ren. She wouldn’t want Aqua getting hold of him.

Zinnia: I’ll take him. Anything so I don’t have to talk to Seaborn. [She sends out a flygon and hops aboard. Her whismur scrambles up after her. Holding out her hand] Come on, kid. [Josh grimaces, but takes her hand and she hauls him up.]

Ren: Hey dragon lady! [Zinnia looks down at her.] Thank you.

Zinnia: [grinning] Don’t thank me yet, spitfire.

[With that, the flygon takes off and sails into the distance. Steven sends out his aerodactyl and sprays her down with a potion.]

Bessemer: [to Steven] Don’t forget the mega stones.

Steven: Right.

Archie: [looking at Ren floating in the air] What happened here?

Steven: She held her sceptile’s mega form too long. She exhausted. I’m taking her to the hospital. But first, [he pulls out two small black boxes and hands them to Kai and Wally.] these are for you. [Kai and Wally let go of each other’s hands to receive the boxes] Thank you for your help today. Will you be alright?

Kai: S-sure.

Wally: Yeah, we’ll take the ferry back. We’ll be in Lilycove by tomorrow.

Steven: I hope we meet again under better circumstances.

[Steven climbs up onto his aerodactyl and Kata floats Ren up to him and settles her into the saddle in front of him. Steven wraps an arm around her to keep her upright and withdraws Kata. The aerodactyl takes off and all watch as they fly northeast. Kai looks back down at his box and opens it. He lets out a shocked squeak and slaps a hand over his mouth. Wally opens his own box and stares at the keystone and mega stone within.]

Wally: [murmuring] Lord Arceus above…

Archie: [peering over their shoulders and letting out a long, low whistle] Keystones from the Champion himself. Kyogre’s beard, now that’s an honor. Congratulations. You lads must be wonderful trainers. [taking both of them by the shoulders] Now, you wouldn’t mind telling me what this whole mess was about, would ye?

[Kai and Wally look back at Archie, Matt, Shelly and all the Aqua grunts coming up behind him and nod, smiling nervously. Archie looks over at the orb guardians as well, who stare impassively back.]

Chapter End Notes
So how about that gym battle ay? What happened in game is that I was kinda over-leveled by the time I got to Fortree and I had a whole bunch of pokemon with a type advantage, so it was pretty much a guaranteed cake-walk. Instead of taking that gift from the nuzlocke gods, I decided that nuzlocks were all about unnecessary challenge and that I would only use my Taillow for the gym. Māia proceeded to defeat every single pokemon in that gym all by herself. I healed her between the trainer battles and Winona, but that was it. So I actually toned down her badassery for the script. The final confrontation actually was that hair-raising though. Māia had very little health left when the altaria came out and I wasn't even 100% sure she would survive the brave bird recoil, but it was literally our only chance so I took it. She took out Winona's monster in one hit and survived it. I would also like to note here that she is my only nuzlocke pokemon to remain absolutely undefeated for the entire run. I never had to withdraw her because things went south. She always came out on top. I really should have cut my Pikachu out of this nuzlocke but I like her and her scenes are a good time so whatever. She stays in. Sorry about the team drama, but it is necessary to get everyone where they need to be. I hope you all enjoyed the Josh scene. His character development is super gradual and I really hope it pays off the way I want it to. Zinnia and Ren actually spoke to each other for a second. Incredible! Almost everybody met up right at the end there. What fun. Consider it a preview of the 16-car-pile-up that is the Groudon episode in Chapter 19. If you have a lot of questions about what the hell is going on, so does Ren and some of them will be answered in the next chapter, I promise.

Character Chart:
HUMANS:
Ren, our protagonist
Kai, Ren's friend who likes science
Wally, Ren's friend who likes the internet
Steven, the Hoenn League Champion
Josh, a Magma grunt who Ren has saved twice
Azalea, Zinnia's Magma grunt alias
Maxie, the leader of Team Magma
Tabitha, a Magma admin
Courtney, a Magma admin
Gloria, a Magma Grunt and Tabitha's assistant
Blaise, a Magma grunt and Courtney's assistant
Archie, the Leader of Team Aqua
Quintuplets, all Magma grunts with Mightyena
Wallace, a Gym Leader and Steven's friend/ex

TEAM REN:
Tāraki the Sceptile
Akahata the Mightyena
Panahi the Pelipper
Māia the Taillow
Mele the Delcatty
Ao the Manectric
Kata the Grumpig
Kōtai the Sandslash
Roma the Sharpedo
Pohaku the Armaldo
Naibi the Absol
Teka the Pikachu

TEAM KAI:
Jay, the Blaziken
Dusty, the Breloom
Makô, the Wailmer
Ruby, the Swellow
Lily, the Lileep
Zach, the Pikachu

TEAM WALLY:
Kihei, the shiny Gallade
Kana, the Delcatty
Aroha, the Roselia
Atiru, the Swablu
Ume, the Magnezone
Hōpua, the Azumarill

TEAM STEVEN:
Bessemer, the shiny Metagross
Damascus, the Skarmory
Gilchrist, the Aggron
Tungsten, the Steelix
Escutcheon, the Armaldo
Ptilometra, the Cradily
Alwyn, the Sandslash
Tulpi, the Aerodactyl

OTHER POKEMON:
Aster, Zinnia's Whismur
Not Fade Away

Chapter Summary

In which Ren and her team recover and prepare for her next encounter with Magma. Also some new characters are introduced and the world gets a little bigger.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Scene 1: [A flygon circles down and lands on an island just northeast of Lilycove. The island is small but plenty large enough to accommodate an estate complete with a large and elegant manor house seated on the highest point. Zinnia hops easily off her flygon onto the drive in front of the house. Josh slides carefully and clumsily down, looking a little wobbly. Josh goes to walk down the gravel road to the dock, but Zinnia whistles and he turns.]

Zinnia: This way, kid.

Josh: But—

Zinnia: We can’t get back before everyone else. It’s too suspicious. We’ll hang out here for a while. [She sends out the rest of her team (noivern, salamence, tyrantrum, goodra, and altaria).] Everyone take a break and stay out of sight.

[The ring of dragons eye Josh for a moment with surprise, but quickly lose interest. Josh shuffles over to the steps and out of their midst, looking mildly terrified. Zinnia sprays down her noivern and salamence with a burn heal and a potion before pulling some unknown salve out of her bag and applying it to her salamence’s sprained wing. Josh sends out his own pokemon and the three of them watch as she works. Fang and Josh talk quietly for a bit, heads together. He ends the conversation with a shrug. When Zinnia is finished, she walks up the steps and into house. Josh looks up at the grand facade before following after her. His pokemon remain outside. The interior of the mansion is just as grand and even more finely adorned than the exterior. There are finely carved side tables with elegant, empty vases atop them lining the front hall. Paintings hang on the walls and expensive draperies frame the many large windows. Josh follows Zinnia through the house and into a generously sized study complete with bookshelves, a fireplace and an immense walnut desk. He peers around curiously but his arms are crossed over his chest as if he is afraid to touch anything.]

Josh: We shouldn’t be here.

Zinnia: Relax, kid. The police have combed this place over a dozen times. They’re not coming back anytime soon.

Josh: But we’re not supposed to be up here.

Zinnia: Who’s to know? Besides me, only Courtney has a key and she won’t set foot in this place.

Josh: But it’s her house isn’t it? Why does she live in the base with us?

Zinnia: [poking around the liquor cabinet] I should think that’s obvious. It’s the same reason she won’t take any medication. I might not either after what her parents did to her.
Josh: What did they do?

Zinnia: Severely over-medicated her for Arceus knows how long. Guess they didn’t want to deal with having a ’broken’ kid. Plus I’m willing to bet on a lot of emotional abuse. I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but she’s pretty fucked up.

Josh: How do you know all this stuff?

Zinnia: I pay attention. Also my deductive reasoning is pretty good. You want anything?

Josh: Not really.

Zinnia: Suit yourself. The old man may have been an unrepentant fuckhead, but he had good taste. [She takes a rock crystal sphere out of the small fridge in the bottom of the cabinet and plops it in a whiskey glass. She pours some golden liquid in it from one of the many crystal carafes and takes a sip.]

Josh: Are you sure you should be drinking that?

Zinnia: Why not? No one else is going to. This is very expensive shit to let go to waste. [Josh is quiet for a moment while she takes another sip. Her whismur taps her leg and she pours the pokémon a glass of water.]

Josh: [looking around at the expensive furnishings and antique books] I didn’t know she was this wealthy— Well I guess I did. I mean, I know she covers most of our expenses…

Zinnia: But it’s another thing to see all of this opulence in the flesh. I feel you.

[Josh rings his hands, trying to get up his courage. Zinnia stops looking at him to give him some space.]

Josh: Azalea—Zinnia, that is.

Zinnia: It’s probably best if you stick to the fake name, kid. We wouldn’t want you blurting out my real name by accident.

Josh: Okay. Um, are we gonna talk about—

Zinnia: No.

Josh: But—

Zinnia: You’re out of your depth here, kid. Just accept it.

Josh: I’m not gonna tell anyone.

Zinnia: You had better not.

Josh: [hands clasped pleadingly in front of him] Please, just tell me something. I’m freaking out.

Zinnia: [big sigh] Fine. I guess you’ve been helpful enough so far. You get three questions.

Josh: Why are you working for Magma?

Zinnia: Explaining that to you is not gonna make your anxiety any better, believe me. [Josh glowers
Let's just say that for now our goals are aligned. Groudon must be awakened. After that I'll disappear. I promise I'm not mole or anything. I'm not interested in mowing down Maxie's army of misfit toys. Besides, most of you don't really deserve to go to jail.

Josh: Okay. I believe you I guess. It's not like I have much choice.

Zinnia: [ wink ] Now you're getting it.

Josh: So if you really are here to revive Groudon, why do you keep helping Ren?

Zinnia: Why do you? [ Josh looks away. ] That's what I thought… [ She flops down in the big executive chair behind the desk. ] Truth is I promised myself and Aster that I'd keep her safe. It's a little hard to explain. I just don't want there to be more collateral for this than there has to be. Alright, final question.

Josh: [ He takes a moment to think. ] How old are you?

Zinnia: [ bursts out laughing ] You're gonna use one of your questions on that? You know my real name now! You can look me up. I'm kind of a public figure. Come on, Josh!

Josh: [ flushing ] I know. It's just… been bugging me.

Zinnia: It's okay. We can't all be geniuses. I'll give you another shot for making me laugh.

Josh: [ sarcastic ] Thanks. Why do you want to revive Groudon?

Zinnia: Nope. Not telling you that.

Josh: But you said three questions!

Zinnia: I didn't say I would answer them. Now you don't get to ask anymore. [ Josh glowers at her again. ] It's for your own good… Sorry, kid. I know it's a dick move but it's true.

[ Josh gives her a scathing look before stalking over to one of the bookshelves. He looks through it for a while and pulls out a copy of “Julie of the Wolves”. Zinnia puts her feet up on the desk and Aster hops into her lap. Josh flops down into the armchair in the corner and starts reading. Zinnia finishes her drink. ]

Zinnia: Hey Josh, do you play an instrument?

Josh: Trombone.

Zinnia: Yikes, now there's a combo. I play violin. I was hoping for another string or maybe a woodwind. Oh well, beggars can't be choosers. Let's go to the music room and jam for a bit.

[ Aster hops down off of Zinnia's lap and they head for the door. Josh puts his book back on the shelf and follows, hands in his pockets. ]

Scene 2: [ Ren wakes in the hospital the next morning. Tăraki is sleeping on a pad in the corner and }
Ren: Ohayou.

Asuka: Ohayou. How are you feeling, Ren-chan?

Ren: Tired, really tired, but better.

Kai: I can’t believe you and Tāraki held that mega form so long.

Wally: We were looking into it and we think it might be some kind of record.

Ren: Awesome. Did Steven…?

Kai: Yeah, he left as soon as we got here.

Asuka: He and your father are at a League meeting right now.

Ren: [ she nods ] Thanks for keeping me company.

Kai: It’s nothing.

Wally: Well compared to yesterday anyway.

Ren: Thank you so much. I don’t know what I would have done without you there.

Kai: Charged in anyway. Can we maybe wait for Steven next time?

Asuka: [ stern ] Seconded. I know you want to help, but getting killed serves no-one.

[ Ren looks guilty. ]

Wally: We did okay. You shouldn’t beat her up over what she might have done or could have happened. Besides, if we hadn’t charged in there when we did, Maxie might have both orbs now.

[ All are quiet for a moment. ]

Ren: What happened to the orb guardians?

Kai: They’re okay. We came here with them after Steven took you. I think the one may have needed a few stitches, but nothing too bad.

Ren: Good. Did we ever figure out who dragon lady was?

Kai: Her name is Zinnia Dracon. She’s the Draconid Lorekeeper.

Wally: She used to work at the Mossdeep Space Center as a physicist, but it seems like she quit a while ago to focus on her Lorekeeper duties. That’s all we really know.

Ren: Huh. It might be worth it to get in touch with her since she knows what’s going on. Maybe she’d be willing to help some more.

Kai: I think we were really lucky she was around.

Ren: She must be one hell of a trainer to handle all of those dragon-types. They were powerful too.

Kai: She has all eight badges but never challenged the Elite Four.
Asuka: I think you should find out if there is a way to get in contact with her. As a Lorekeeper, she might know some useful information about this region’s legendaries. The native peoples of Hoenn have oral traditions going back thousands of years and each group has a Lorekeeper whose responsibility it is to preserve that knowledge. [Ren Kai and Wally look at her.] I did some research on the subject.

Kai: That’s a really good point. I’ll give Iriaka a call. She was working with Zinnia on her project, so she probably knows how to reach her.

Ren: Great. That’s something anyway. So what’s the plan? We’re in Lilycove ahead of schedule.

Kai: It gives me some extra time to survey the forest north of Lilycove, so we might be able to get some more training in.

Ren: Yes! [She looks at Wally.]

Wally: My parents are coming soon to pick me up. I think I might be grounded.

Ren: Shit, I’m sorry.

Wally: Don’t worry about it. I could use the break. And it’s not like they can actually keep me cooped up forever. If we get bored, Kihei and I will just leave.

Ren: [laughs] I really am a terrible influence.

Asuka: And a good thing too.

Ren: [shocked] Okasan!

Asuka: Wally is not an infant. He’s an intelligent young man. I understand their concern, but there comes a time when a parent must accept that their child has become their own person and let go.

Wally: [eyes wide] I always assumed Ren got it from Senri.

Kai: Me too.

Asuka: Now you know better.

[Ren laughs and Wally’s nav boops.]

Wally: We should go.

Kai: I’m gonna get brunch with them, but I’ll see you later.

Ren: Hugs first! [Kai and Wally both give her a hug.] Thanks again for everything. I’ll see you later.

[They leave and Ren turns back to her mother.]

Ren: Did you talk to the doctor?

Asuka: Yes. You collapsed from exhaustion, but there is no permanent damage. They expect to be able to discharge you sometime this afternoon.

Ren: Good. So what’s been going on with you lately?
Asuka: Hm. I got a very nice letter from a reader. Oh, and I finally invited myself along on one of Roxanne’s and your father’s dinners.

Ren: Really? How did it go?

Asuka: Your father was a little flustered, as expected, but he behaved himself. And she was wonderful. I understand why Senri spends so much time with her. Of course, she spent the first part of the dinner saying how nice it was to meet me and what a wonderful trainer you are and how she wished Senri would have had all of us meet sooner, so I was charmed. She’s such an intelligent and personable woman. We really… What is the phrase? Hit it off? We’re going to get lunch next week.

Ren: [ switching to Kantonese ] That’s so great!

Asuka: [ responding in Kantonese ] It was very nice. I feel better. But I do understand now why your father was reluctant.

Ren: Why?

Asuka: Well, I’ve always been more of the social butterfree of the two of us, so I think he was a little worried I was going to steal his friend.

Ren: That’s silly!

Asuka: A little. But you must understand your father is a little insecure about these things. He didn’t really have any friends when I met him. It was hard for him, you know. People treated him differently. He’s more obviously mixed race than you and you know how most people were back in Johto. Hoenn is much more diverse so it’s less of an issue. And you inherited my social grace where your father can be a little withdrawn sometimes.

Ren: That’s a good point. And It’s not like I’ve heard from any of my old friends since we moved. I’m closer to Kai and Wally than I ever was to them.

Asuka: It’s so wonderful to see you and your father thriving here as you should. I’m thankful every day.

Ren: Aw, okāsan, you’re the sweetest person in the world!

[ Asuka laughs and just then there is a knock and the orb guardians step in through the open door. Ren and Asuka look up at them. Ren notices now that they look identical except for their clothing and tattoos. The red guardian’s head is bandaged. Over in the corner, Tāraki opens an eye. ]

Blue Guardian: Good morning.

Ren: [ switching back to Anglic ] Morning. Are you two okay?

Red Guardian: Yes, thank you.

Blue Guardian: I hope we aren’t interrupting. We were hoping to speak to Ren alone.

Ren: Sure. [ Asuka gets up. ] I’ll see you later okāsan.

Red Guardian: [ to Asuka ] Thank you.

[ Asuka dips her head and closes the door behind her. Tāraki gets up, stretches and walks over to sit beside Ren. Latios appears next to Ren and the orb guardians bow. ]
Blue Guardian: Thank you for defending us yesterday.

Latios: And I likewise thank you for your service though we were unable to prevent the theft of the Red Orb. Ren and I will do everything within our power to ensure that the Blue Orb does not suffer the same fate.

Blue Guardian: We thank you again, Lord Latios and Ren. We are only sorry we were unable to fulfill our duty as guardians.

Latios: Do not distress yourselves, for even my sibling and I have known such failure. We must move forward.

Red Guardian: Of course, Lord.

Blue Guardian: Ren, is it safe to assume you have learned something of the nature of the Blue Orb yesterday, when you faced Kyogre?

Ren: It’s a part of them, Kyogre I mean. It allows them to shift into a much more powerful form.

Blue Guardian: Their original form. Many stories exist about the origin of the orbs in the various regions of the world. Some say that it they were created by Lord Arceus as a punishment for when the climate titans angered them. Others say it was a blessing granted to ensure humanity’s survival, a check against the destructive forces of nature. But the story of our people gives a different reason. Long before people or even pokemon inhabited the world, Arceus brought the old gods into being to help them with their work. The oldest of these gods are the governors of time and space, Dialga, Palkia and their dark sibling Giratina. With them, Arceus created the universe and its laws. Born later were the gods of our own planet. Once the base of the world had been molded from the molten elements of the universe, the climate trio was born to give the world shape. Groudon created the land, Kyogre the ocean, and Rayquaza the atmosphere. Once their work was completed, they rested. Plants and animals and pokemon arose and took root on our earth now that it was calm and fit for life. But when the trio had rested enough, they awakened and tried to remake the world anew. But Great Lord Arceus did not desire the slate wiped clean. They took an interest in life and wanted it to flourish. Arceus commanded the Climate Trio to stop before life died out. Rayquaza heeded this request, but the other two, because they were created to be in constant conflict, were unwilling to stop their battle. And so Arceus had Rayquaza quell them and while they rested, Arceus took from each of them a great part of their essence and power and placed it within two orbs. And thus the cycle of our planet was set in place and guardians created to protect it. [They gesture to Latios.] For Arceus desires that life continue, though it must occasionally be culled and born anew. The environment too requires cycles of destruction and creation to continue and to yield sustenance for all of us. And so Atua Kyogre and Groudon must occasionally awaken and perform those duties Arceus created them for. Though they destroy, they are not evil. Their actions sowed the seeds from which all life on this planet was born and has sustained it ever since.

Latios: But what Magma seeks to do could shatter that cycle.

Red Guardian: We knew that when you appeared to us, Lord. If there is any assistance we can offer, name it.

Latios: For now, your knowledge is most valuable and we thank you for it.

[The guardians nod.]

Red Guardian: The Red Orb must be retrieved from Maxie. He will certainly use it to revive Groudon and I fear he believes he can use the orb to control them. Groudon may even encourage this
belief if they think it will convince Maxie to revive them. But the orb cannot be used that way.

Blue Guardian: This is very important to understand. Groudon and Kyogre can exert influence through their orbs, not the other way around. It is their mauri after all. No one else can wield it unless the god consents. When you touch the Blue Orb, Kyogre may choose to speak to you or not as they wish, but they cannot contact your conscious mind unless you touch the orb directly. However, they may enter your dreams, so prepare yourself before you sleep. Next most important is that you are an orb-bearer now. You are bound to it. No one can take it from you unless Kyogre severs the bond and you will know if they do.

Red Guardian: The same goes for Maxie and the Red Orb. It cannot be retrieved by force or trickery, but there may be a way to break the bond. History tells us that one of our great heroes, Moana, once won the Blue Orb off a man in battle. If someone can defeat Maxie in a pokemon battle, Groudon may judge Maxie to be unfit for the responsibility of carrying the orb and sever the bond.

Ren: Alright, looks like the manhunt begins. But if you don’t mind me asking, why weren’t you two orb-bearers? I’m guessing you weren’t anyway since Maxie and I were able to take the orbs.

Red Guardian: The power and influence of the gods is dangerous. They always seek to be awakened. It was our job as guardians to ensure that there were no orb-bearers for the safety of all.

[This is followed by a solemn silence. Ren is not a fan and decides to break it.]

Ren: Um, I just realized I never asked your names.

Blue Guardian: We have none. They were sacrificed to the gods when we became the orb guardians. But if you wish you may call me Ōrangi and my twin Whero. These are the titles orb guardians have always borne.

Ren: Thank you. That was all very useful information.

Red Guardian: We will leave you now, unless there is anything else we can do.

Ren: I think we’re good for now. Where will you go?

Blue Guardian: Back to Mt. Pyre. Some of our pokemon fell in battle. We must honor them.

Ren: I’m sorry for your loss.

Guardians: Thank you.

Blue Guardian: If you need to reach us, this is my number. [They hand Ren a card. On the back are the coordinates where Groudon and Kyogre lie dormant, so keep it hidden. We wish you a speedy recovery. Farewell.

Ren: Goodbye.

[The orb guardians leave. Tāraki leans over and nuzzles Ren.]

Ren: Did you follow any of that, tiger?

Tāraki: Yes. Latios was translating for me.

Ren: I don’t think I should touch the orb again if I can help it.

Tāraki: And if you do I’m coming in with you.
Ren: Of course you are. [ *She strokes his head.* ] How are you feeling?

Tāraki: Tired like you, but also very proud.

Ren: Oh yeah?

Tāraki: [ *nodding* ] Of that mega form! Kihei was saying earlier that we may have broken a record!

[ *Ren laughs, pan out.* ]

---

**Scene 3:** [ *Ren checks into the Lilycove Pokemon Center that evening and bunks with Kai. Ren checks her messages before she goes to sleep and sees that someone has responded to her ad for Mele. The next morning Kai and his team head north into the forest while Ren and her team head to the Pal Park. She gets everyone out of the PSS and they seem very happy to see one another and catch up. Panahi, Mele, Pohaku, Roma and Teka listen raptly as Kata tells them about the Mt. Pyre showdown. Tāraki struts a little when she talks about his feats. Pohaku taps his claws together in a sort of applause, looking awed while Kōtai pats Tāraki’s leg jovially. Ren just sits by for most of this, looking at things on her nav. Once everyone is caught up, she calls Panahi and Mele over.* ]

Ren: So Panahi, I wanted to know how you were feeling about the contest thing. We can meet with the coordinator the day after tomorrow, but only if you want to.

Panahi: I have to admit leaving ya still makes me nervous, especially after this latest escapade, but maybe you’re right that it’s for the best. I’ve done a lot of hard thinking on my little break and the truth is I’m not the best battler. I’m good, but the way the team has shaped up has left me near the bottom of the heap. You can only have six of us with you at a time and most of the others would probably do a better job of backing you up. I was laid out in that last tussle and I don’t see things getting any easier from here on in. I could work my tail off and try and keep up, but you’re right that the prospect doesn’t bring me any joy. [ *Deep sigh.* ] You’re my girl and I want to watch over you, but I think maybe you don’t need me so much anymore. [ *small smile* ] Well, you could probably still use a good talking to now and then, but we could do that on your nav thing, right?

Ren: Absolutely… Do you want to be a contestant?

Panahi: I really really do. I just felt too guilty about abandoning you before to admit how much I want it. I want to meet this coordinator. Please just promise me you’ll be smart about this saving the world business.

Ren: [ *big grin* ] I’m always smart, mom.

Panahi: Oh hush and come here, honey.

[ *Ren kneels down in the grass and opens her arms for Panahi to come in and hug her. Mele watches with a big smile in the background. The pelipper rubs her beak against her trainer’s neck affectionately before pulling away.* ]

Panahi: Alright, let’s not turn this into too much of a goodbye. Who knows if this will even pan out. I’m not as young as I once was.

Ren: You’re gonna slay them, Ahi.
Mele: I agree with Ren. First you’re gonna blow this coordinator away and then the world!

Panahi: Flatterer.

Mele: So, uh, what did you want me for, Ren?

Ren: Because I did the same thing for you that I did for Ahi and I finally got a response.

Mele: You think I should be a contestant?

Ren: I’m not sure what would be best for you, but just like with Ahi I thought there might be a better life out there for you than spending half your time hanging out with us and the other half in a reserve. The woman who emailed me thought you might make a good actor.

Mele: What’s an actor?

Ren: Oh, it’s someone who tells stories by pretending to be someone else. The woman trains pokemon to be movie actors, so you would be making films.

Mele: You’re kinda losing me again.

Ren: That’s okay. We can go to a movie later and I can show you if you want. I think you might be good at it. You really love performing and you’ve got a lot of presence. If it doesn’t appeal to you, you can absolutely stay Mele. I don’t want to separate you from… everyone. I just want you to have the best life I can find for you.

Mele: I don’t know. I don’t think I have it so bad, but you’ve piqued my curiosity. I’ll see this ‘movie’ thing with you.

Ren: Great. I looked up what’s playing in town and there’s one with mostly pokemon actors in it. I think it’s supposed to be for children, but it’s got decent reviews. [Ren stands and calls out to the others.] Does anyone want to see a movie?

Tāraki: What’s that?

Kata: That’s like moving pictures right? I’m game.

Teka: And there’s sound. Humans use them to tell stories, but only some of them are true.

Pohaku: So strange! Let’s go! I want to hear a story!

Naihi: I’m confused.

Kata: Don’t worry about it, Lady Disaster.

Scene 4: [Ren’s pokemon are so curious about the movie that they wind up going to the first showing of the day. No one else is there and the ticket taker decides to wave the one pokemon per person rule as long as Ren buys them all tickets. They even have the projectionist put on the pokemon audio track with english subtitles for Ren. The movie is called “The Pyroar King” and is about a littleo who runs away after inadvertently killing his father via tauros stampede. He is adopted by a grumpig and a patrat and grows up and evolves. Meanwhile his uncle, who is played by a]
luxray, is ruling the kingdom with the help of a giant pack of mightyena. The pyroar pride and the entire kingdom suffers because of how this unbalances the circle of life. The main character’s friend from when they were littleos finds him and brings him back to help drive out his uncle. Together with his adopted parents, his father’s advisors (an infernape and a toucannon) and his mother, they battle the luxray and his mightyena pack and learn that it was the luxray who killed the littleo’s father in the beginning. They win the battle and balance is restored. Ren and her pokémon watch raptly through the whole thing. Kata is very excited when the grumpig shows up and Akahata seems quietly skeptical. Mele is particularly transfixed and bops along to the songs and even sings. They cheer when it is over and thank the ticket taker and projectionist profusely. All are happily discussing the film as they leave the theater.

Pohaku: That was so much fun! I’m so happy the pyroar and his friend wound up together! They were so cute and they cared about each other so much and—[ squeaks in delight ]

Panahi: You would, ya hopeless romantic. You know I’ve been telling this big softie flock drama from back in the day every time we’re at the reserve together and he’s been eating it up.

Tāraki: I liked the battle scenes!

Kōtai: No surprises there. I think it had some very nice messages for children.

Ren: Yeah, I really liked it too. It kinda reminded me of this show I used to watch as a kid back in Johto called “Kimba the Shiny Pyroar”.

Roma: I liked the grumpig and patrat’s philosophy. That’s the way to approach life.

Teka: It wasn’t fair that the luxray couldn’t be king just because he wasn’t a pyroar.

Ao: True, but he didn’t have to murder his own brother over it.

Kata: It lost a little immersion for me because I couldn’t sense the characters minds, but it was still a lot of fun. Maybe my followers are right and I should try making some of those short videos.

Ren: Sorry about the mightyena representation, Aka. It didn’t exactly paint them in the rosier light.

Akahata: [ shrugs ] I mean, first off, poochyena form packs, but mightyena are pretty solitary. It’s kind of hard to take offense at the other stuff when they start so far off them mark. Besides, it’s not like I expect humans to understand mightyena culture.

Ren: I still say it’s not that difficult to put a little research in. They nailed that scene with the absol after all. [ She chuckles a little. ]

Naihi: [ nodding ] All too true. Though I saw more of myself in the in the female pyroar.

Ren: I agree with you there. How about you, Mele. You’ve been awfully quiet.

Mele: It was so incredible! I had no idea humans made things like that! The emotions, the music, the drama! It was… It was like nothing I’ve ever seen or experienced! It was transcendent! I’d give anything to be a part of something like that! [ drooping just a little ] Of course, then I’d have to leave…

Ao: [ bounding up to him ] But we’d still see each other! We’d call you on the nav and visit sometimes. And when you make a movie, we’ll all come and see it together!

Mele: I think you may be getting a little ahead of things.
Ao: Don’t be silly. If I can be a top-tier battler, you can be a movie star. You’ve always told me I could take on the take on the Elite Four one day. Don’t go putting more faith in me more than in yourself.

[ *Mele purrs and rubs up against Ao. She leans down a little to nuzzle his face. The pair is walking a little ahead of everyone as they walk back to the Pal Park. Ren watches this affectionate interaction and turns to Kata walking beside her.* ]

Ren: [ *telempathy* ] Should I just ask who’s together on this team? I can never decide for sure, but it kinda feels like it’s their business.

Kata: You know what I always say: just bounce with it.

---

**Scene 5:** [ *The next day Ren goes with Kai to the forest north of Lilycove. They spend most of the morning and early afternoon collecting data. Zach and Teka help spot and interview wilds. The two pikachus seem to have really hit it off, which makes Ren happy. Teka has a new collar for her light orb and looks sleeker and shinier than before. After lunch, Ren helps Kai and Jay with some breathing exercises in a clearing. Once they feel ready, Kai and Jay have a battle against Ren and Ao, who both manage to mega evolve for the first time. The battle is close and Ao is winning in the beginning, but eventually Jay’s speed boost makes the blaziken faster than the manectric and Jay wins. Everyone has to take a break after that and lies down in the grass.* ]

Ren: [ *deep sigh* ] Today’s been really good.

Kai: Hm, I had fun.

Ren: It was almost like back when we were both just starting out: running around in the woods near little root, you collecting data, me distracting you with training.

Kai: Yeah. We’ve kinda been doing that since Fortree, but it’s different with Wally around—Not that I don’t like him!—But it’s nice hanging out just the two of us again.

Ren: [ *chuckling* ] I know what you mean and it is.

Kai: Of course things are different now.

Ren: No kidding. That’s probably why I’m enjoying this so much. I don’t know how many normal days I have left.

Kai: Have you had any Kyogre dreams yet?

Ren: No. I guess they can be patient having waited this long already.

Kai: But you’ll tell me when you do?

Ren: Yeah.

[ *Kai’s nav boops softly in the quiet and he checks it. Ren glances over to see what he’s doing.* ]

Ren: Is that Wally? [ *sly smile* ] I didn’t know you two were texting.
Kai: Oh, yeah… He’s, uh, kinda different when you talk to him like this.

Ren: I know! He can be even shyer than you face to face, but it’s all just a cover for his inner *sass*.

Kai: I donno. I definitely got glimpses of it. He may be a little self-conscious and quiet, but you can always sort of see the gears turning. And he’s fearless. Like after you and Steven went to help the orb guardians on Mt. Pyre, I was freaking out and Wally was having a hard time with all the smoke and stuff and kept having to use his inhaler, but *he* was the one who calmed *me* down and got us all out of there when Aqua showed up. It really made me pull myself together. And he is sassy, but he’s still really nice all the time. And he’s a super talented trainer. If he didn’t have to take breaks he would totally catch up with us. He might catch up with me anyway. [Kai turns his head to look at Ren and sees that she is grinning from ear to ear.] What?

Ren: Nothing. I always said he was really cool. I’m happy we’re all friends now.

[There is a sudden ruckus amongst the pokemon and the trainers look up to see Ruby going after Teka and yelling. Zack dives between them and Ruby rages at him.]

Kai: Ruby! We talked about this! [Ruby yells back at him. Zach pipes up and Ruby throws him a poisonous look, still swooping about in agitation.] She didn’t know! You have to tell everyone once and if they still get it wrong then you can pick a fight.

[Ruby huffs and flies to a branch, back turned to Kai and the pikachus.]

Ren: What’s up with her?

Kai: Him, actually.

Ren: But I thought your swallow was…

Kai: Ruby’s bigender and today he’s a him.

Ren: What? Really?

Kai: Yeah.

Ren: Wow, I guess I never really thought about pokemon having a concept of gender.

Kai: I didn’t either before Ruby. I’m not so sure that all pokemon do. In fact, I’m pretty sure they don’t. I wonder if it’s species specific or if it’s related to human contact. I think I’d like to do a project on it, but I don’t have the background. Maybe in college after I’ve taken a gender studies course or two.

Ren: That sounds really cool. Has anyone studied pokemon gender before?

Kai: I didn’t find much, just lots of articles about pokemon sexes and species that don’t have a male and female. Pokemon sociology is a pretty recent field of study, so I guess it’s not surprising.

Ren: You could be the first!

Kai: Maybe. I’ve always been interested in behavior, just haven’t had much opportunity to learn about it. For now I’m just trying to get Ruby to talk about his feelings rather than fight about them. Things have gotten better since I figured out the gender thing.

Ruby: I’ll say.
Kai: Sorry!

[ Ruby looks away, but he no longer has his back to them. ]

Ren: Me too!

[ Ren lays back down in the grass and Kai joins her. ]

Kai: …You know, I was thinking, after I’m done here I might go home for a few days. Would you want to come?

Ren: I don’t think so. I’ve got some things to take care of here and then I should probably move on. But you should visit Wally when you go home. I’m sure he’d appreciate it.

Kai: O-okay.

[ There is quite for a few minutes while Kai types on his nav and Ren stares up at the sky. Ren’s nav boops and she picks it up to see a text from Wally. ]

Wally: Ren! Kai wants to come to my house! ＊⁺*(***0°◊°)*⁺⁺ What do I do??!!

Ren: Let him?

Wally: Help me! 专栏(﹏专栏)

Ren: With what? You have an inhaler if you can’t breathe.

Wally: ε-(´・` ) I already used my inhaler you shitlord! ■ ■ (Ø Ø) ■ How could this happen??

Ren: Sometimes, when you have friends, they visit your house.

Wally: You’re the worst! ▲▲益▲)△ You’ve never been in my room. You don’t understand! * (´ D`) *

Ren: Is it a mess or something?

Wally: It’s covered in anime posters! What if he finds out what a weeb I am? (( ∀ |||))

[ Ren bursts out laughing and Kai looks at her questioningly. She tilts her nav to show the last few lines of the exchange. ]

Kai: I’m not gonna judge his posters. We’re friends. He doesn’t have to tear his room apart just because I’m coming over.

Ren: [ typing ] Calm down. Maybe you could watch one of your favorites shows with him. He’s a little sheltered. It’d be good for him.

Wally: But what if he doesn’t like it? (■ ½ô■) I’d die! *・*・( *´ ½≈ ½) ・*・

Ren: Then it wasn’t meant to be.

Wally: Shut up. (Ø 皿 Ø 皿) This is so unreal. He just asked out of the blue. (■ ォΨΨΨ■)

Ren: [ snickers, then types ] You’re welcome.

Wally: OMG YOU DID NOT!!! I’M GONNA KILL YOU!! AHHHHHHH!!!!!! (■■ ø・ ￠■)ackleackle!!!
Scene 6: Ren wakes up late morning in the Pokemon Center. She senses someone else is in the room and rolls over. It is not Kai, who left the day before, but a man of European descent and indeterminate age who is now sharing the room with her. He is sitting on the bunk opposite watching her and smoking a cigarette. He is tall enough that he has to hunch over so as not to hit his head on the bunk above him. He is wearing jeans and a biker tank and there is a leather jacket laying next to him on the bed. He has several piercings and looks like he could use a shower and a shave. Ren glances at the four pokeballs on his belt. Her own are hanging from the bedpost next to her. Ren sits up, clutching at the sheets in her lap while keeping her face neutral.

Trainer: [ as if this was all very normal ] Ohayou.

Ren: [ she blinks several times, looking puzzled, but responds in Kantonese ] You aren’t allowed to smoke in here.

Trainer: [ also in Kantonese ] I know. [ He takes one last long drag and exhales through his nose before flicking the still burning cigarette out the open window. ] So you are from Johto then? I couldn’t decide.

Ren: [ hesitant ] Yes.

Trainer: Well that certainly makes things easier. My Anglic is terrible.

Ren: Who are you?

Trainer: My name is Diomedes Alkaev, but call me Dizzy. I’m from Asagi. Nice to meet you. [ He dips his head. ]

[ She dips her head back, still clearly weirded out. Despite his appearance, his inflection and mannerisms mark him as a native speaker. ]

Ren: Ren Kosugi, Kogane City.


Ren: Yes…

Dizzy: Normal-types wasn’t it? Crazy stuff. Lost a lot of money on that run.

Ren: Excuse me, but are you just passing through or—?

Dizzy: Oh no, I was looking for you.

Ren: [ getting kind of irritated ] For me? Without knowing my name? Or were you just pretending not to know to be less weird? Cuz I’ve gotta tell ya, it’s not working too well.

Dizzy: Didn’t know your name, just knew what I was looking for. You’re Kyogre’s new
mouthpiece. Kaspa sent me to find you.

Ren: Kaspa? As in Kaspa Kitamsuye, the Sekiei League Champion? That Kaspa?

Dizzy: That’s the one.

Ren: Okay, glad we got that sorted out. Now back up to the Kyogre part.

Dizzy: You’re Kyogre’s mouthpiece.

Ren: What?

Dizzy: [surprised and confused] And Latios’s apparently? How the hell’d you swing that?

Ren: Could you back up and try that again please? I’m not even convinced you’re speaking Cantonese at this point. Actually, don’t say anything for a moment. Let me try and sort this out…

[He steeps his fingers, waiting for whatever little episode she is having to pass.]

Ren: Okay, the Kyogre taurosshit must have something to do with the Blue Orb, but that leaves the disturbing question of how you know I have it. And how the fuck did you know about Latios? [checking behind her for Latios] And you figured that out just now?? What in the hell is going on exactly!?

Dizzy: [quiet but vaguely annoyed] Am I allowed to talk now?

Ren: YES. Yes, please start talking!

Dizzy: I’m Lugia’s mouthpiece. I know about Latios because he and Lugia [jerking his thumb at the window] are having a little chat outside. I don’t know nothin’ about no blue orb.

[Ren gets up and goes to the window. There is nothing to see.]

Latios: [in Ren’s head] He’s telling truth.

Dizzy: They’re cloaked right now. Can’t have the public panic. You can meet Lugia later if you want.

[Ren grips the windowsill before ducking back inside and plopping back down on her mattress.]

Ren: So, if you don’t know about the orb, what makes you think I’m Kyogre’s mouthpiece?

Dizzy: Well, Lugia lives in the ocean and is a guardian deity, so they felt it when Kyogre awakened, or awakened somewhat. From what I gather, the weather would be significantly shittier if it was actually awake. Anyway, we told Kaspa and she asked us to come figure out what’s up. We followed Kyogre’s energy to you. I assume this “blue orb” has something to do with that, but I’ve never even heard of the thing before so don’t quote me on it.

Ren: Okay, so what is a mouthpiece?

Dizzy: I mean, I think it’s obvious. Mouth is in the name… uh, did you go to school? [Ren’s face doesn’t change] I’m gonna assume you did. I only went until 6th grade, but I was still in it long enough to learn about the defunct religions. You know, the old ones, before we knew about Arceus. But see, they had priests who said the gods spoke to them, and then acted out their will on earth. I’m that, except I’m not lying about talking to my god. If there’s something Lugia needs done that they can’t do directly, I do it. If they need help maintaining balance in Johto, I help.
Ren: So you chat with Lugia? Like regularly?

Dizzy: Well, they’re no chatter box, but yeah, that’s the gist of it.

Ren: And you know Kaspa, who is Ho-Oh’s champion or “mouthpiece” or whatever?

Dizzy: Yes.

Ren: How come I’ve never heard of you? The whole damn world knows who Kaspa is.

Dizzy: The spotlight’s not for me, and it doesn’t serve Lugia’s purposes at the moment. Ho-Oh is a guardian of life, it is their duty to protect people and Pokemon. Lugia’s duty is to keep balance in the forces of nature so that life might continue. This is why they are known as the master of the storm gods: Zapdos, Articuno and Moltres. And why I am here to investigate the awakening of the climate gods.

Ren: Are you getting this, Latios?

Latios: [telempathy] Yes. I am glad Lugia is here to offer their assistance. I thought them dormant since the storm gods were captured. This is a pleasant surprise.

Ren: [grimacing] For you maybe. [to Dizzy] Seems like we have some things to talk about, but I really need to eat before I can think any more. What are your feelings on [glancing at her nav] brunch?

Dizzy: I haven’t eaten for a while. Does this region have okonomiyaki?

Ren: Not exactly, but we can get the equivalent. Diner it is.

[Ren gets up and Dizzy leaves the room so that she can change. They head down the stairs together.]

Ren: Do you have any money?

Dizzy: A little, but not from this region.

Ren: [deep sigh] I’ll cover you.

---

**Scene 7:** [Steven is sitting in the grass near a stone cottage on a cliff overlooking the sea. His back is resting on the side of an old bastiodon, who is sleeping. Steven has his arms behind his head as a pillow and his eyes slowly drift shut as he looks out at the ocean. His nav boops and he pulls it out. He sees that there is a text from Ren and opens it.]

Ren: Everything is fine but a weird guy showed up in my room at the PMC this morning. He says he is Lugia’s mouthpiece and he is here to help. We’re going to get brunch.

[Steven stares at the text for a moment, going from relaxed to extremely tense in an instant. He sits up and furiously types out a response.]

Steven: Ren this is the most distressing text I have ever received. Are you okay?
Ren: Yeah, just weirded out. Latios says everything is on the up and up. His name is Dizzy and he knows Kaspa apparently. I just wanted to let you know.

Steven: Should I come there? Is Latios with you right now?

Ren: No I can handle this for now. And yes Latios is here. You are freaking out I can tell. Stop freaking out. This is probably a good thing.

Steven: I am not freaking out. I’m going to call Kaspa and confirm.

Ren: Cool.

[ Steven goes through his contacts and finds Kaspa’s number. He dials and waits for someone to pick up, fingers of his free hand drumming agitatedly against his knee. ]

Woman: Moshimoshi.

Steven: [ in Kantonese ] Good morning. I am Steven Stone, the Hoenn League Champion. I would like to speak to Kaspa Kitamsuye please.

Woman: Wait one moment, sir. I will check if she is available. [ Steven waits on the line for a minute before the woman returns. ] She will be with you in a few moments. Have a pleasant day.

Steven: Thank you. [ As Steven waits for the foreign champion to pick up, his face goes from nervous to “oh Arceus what have I done”. Just then there is another voice on the other end. ]

Kaspa: Moshimoshi. This is Kaspa Kitamsuye, Champion of the Sekiei League speaking. You are the Hoenn Champion? Steven Stone, was it?

Steven: Yes. Thank you so much for your time.

Kaspa: Ah, you speak Kantonese. Very fortunate. My Anglic is not strong. To what do I owe this pleasure.

Steven: [ panic spreads over his face as he realizes he probably should have gathered more information before making this call ] Oh, uh, I wanted to ask you about a man named Dizzy? He says that he—

Kaspa: So you’ve met my wayward ward? I apologize for him. He has a certain aversion to tact and… cleanliness. I do hope he didn’t alarm you too much.

Steven: Not at all. He is actually meeting with a friend of mine at the moment. I haven’t had the pleasure of making his acquaintance just yet.

Kaspa: [ laughing ] You are very polite. I seem to recall that you specialize in steel and rock-types. Is that correct?

Steven: Yes.

Kaspa: How very niche. So this friend of yours must be Kyogre’s mouthpiece?

Steven: I’m not so sure what you mean. She is currently in possession of the Blue Orb, which is an artifact connected to Kyogre. Her name is Ren Kosugi.

Kaspa: [ fondly ] My granddaughter! I see that she is doing well for herself.
Steven: What?

Kaspa: Forgive me. I’ve become a bit sentimental in my old age. Her father is one of my Victors and a personal favorite. I trust he is doing well as a Gym Leader?

Steven: Yes. Senri is a great asset to our League.

Kaspa: Wonderful. Now back to the matter at hand, you’ll have to explain this orb business to me. I’m not overly familiar with your region’s gods.

[Pan out again as Steven talks to Kaspa. Bessemer comes over and Steven puts his hand on the metagross’s leg. The bastiodon continues to sleep. There is an archeops perched on the roof of the cottage with Damascus the skarmory and Tulpi the aerodactyl. Damascus stretches out his wings and pumps them experimentally while the other two watch and caution him. Alwyn the sandslash and an excadrill are watering a garden next to the cottage with a hose.]

Kaspa: You understand it’s difficult for me to leave the country but, should the worst happen, I will come.

Steven: I understand. Thank you so much.

Kaspa: In the meantime, Dizzy will be present and he will keep me abreast of the situation. He can be a little rough around the edges, but he is extremely reliable. You may put your full trust in him without concern.

Steven: That is very helpful to know.

Kaspa: Feel free to contact me at any time should the need arise. Good luck to you, for all our sakes.

Steven: Thank you. Enjoy the rest of your day. [Steven hangs up and slumps back against his bastiodon. I can’t believe I did that.

Bessemer: I’m glad you did. And I don’t think you embarrassed yourself.

Steven: Maybe not.

[Steven looks back down at his nav and sees that there are a bunch of messages from Ren. He opens them and reads them.]

Ren: Holyshit this man eats more than I do. There goes my pancake budget.

[Steven smiles.]

Ren: He’s not so bad once he’s had something to eat. I don’t think he’s that used to people, but someone taught him some manners. He’s been nothing but polite and respectful since we sat down.

Ren: OMG he has the tiniest ninetails I’ve ever seen. He found her in a box when she was a kit apparently.

Ren: She was his starter, haha.

Ren: Her name is Pixie she’s so cute and friendly. Look.

[There is a selfie of Ren with her arm around a pale ninetails that must be less than three feet tall. She has a delicate pointed snout and large ears.]
Ren: Pixie is way better at explaining things. Everything is coming clear now. I’ll fill you in once he’s gone.

Ren: Holy hell his nidoking has got to be 10ft tall and he’s SO SPINY. I wanna say it’s a mountain variant? It looks nothing like most of the ones I’ve seen.

Ren: Oops. That was supposed to go to Kai.

Ren: Alright, he’s gone now. He’s gonna go talk to the orb guardians. He’ll probably drop by the League at some point to meet you too, so heads up.

Ren: Are you okay? How’s everything on your end?

Steven sighs and types out a response.

Steven: All good here. I just ended the call with Kaspa. She confirmed what Dizzy said and was very helpful.

Ren: That’s great!

Steven: Yes. I didn’t realize you knew her.

Ren: Kind of? I’ve met her a few times. She wrote my dad a letter of recommendation when he applied for Gym Leader. Are you alright?

Steven: Just a little in shock maybe. I probably should have put some thought into what I was going to say before calling up the most powerful trainer in the world.

Ren: I’m sure you did fine. This was a strange morning for both of us. I’ve actually got to go now. Thanks for looking out for me.

Steven: Okay. We’ll talk later about things.

Ren: I’ll let you know when I’m free.

Steven lays his nav down in the grass and sighs. Latias materializes in front of him and he holds out a hand to her. She presses her head to his palm.

Latias: Do you agree with me yet?

Steven: [ stroking her ] Yes, you were right.

---

Scene 8: [ Ren and Panahi are sitting at a table on the terrace of a small cafe in Lilycove. Panahi is glowingly clean and preened just so. She is wearing her delicate mystic water gem necklace and glances around nervously while Ren nurses a steaming mug of milk tea. They are approached by a person around Ren’s age dressed in light blue. Ren shakes their hand and they join her at the table. They are a young coordinator just starting their career and are looking for a partner. They remark on how impressed they were by the pictures of Panahi from the photoshoot and others than Ren and Kata have taken. It turns out that they know the makeup artist that Ren used in Mauville and they talk for a while. The coordinator explains more about contests since Ren and Panahi don’t know a lot. They also talk about their experience and goals. Panahi listens intently as Ren translates and ]
asks the occasional question. A little later they all step away from the table and Panahi demonstrates some of her moves, especially some showy water pulse techniques she’s been working on. The coordinator is impressed and excited. They give a suggestion and Panahi tries the move again. They are both very pleased with the result. They all talk a bit more and then it’s time for the coordinator to go. The humans shake hands and Panahi waves as the coordinator leaves. Ren and Panai sit back down at the table and Ren sends out Mele. Ren orders some snacks for them and Panahi goes back in her ball. A while later a middle aged woman arrives and Ren gets up to greet her. The woman sits down and tells them about some of the other pokemon actors she’s worked with and the films they made. Ren is pretty unfamiliar with Hoenn cinema, so the woman gives her and Mele some recommendations. She also tells them how her growlithe had passed away a few months ago and she gave up working on films for a while. Mele puts a paw on her arm and croons consolingly. Ren talks about Kiri a little and all three of them get teary. Mele sings a song to cheer them up and the woman is blown away by his voice. She’s never worked on a musical before, but would be interested in trying. Ren and the woman hug when she has to leave. Ren and Mele walk away together.

---

**Scene 9:** [ Ren gets everyone out again at the Pal Park. They all look expectantly at Mele and Panahi. ]

Panahi: We’re gonna be in showbusiness!

[ Everyone cheers and Ren smiles. Ao bounds up to Mele and headbutts him. Even Akahata comes over to congratulate him and touch noses. Kata takes lots of commemorative photos. Teka and Naihi are the only ones who are a bit more reserved. Once the pandemonium dies down a little, Panahi puts a wing around Kotai. ]

Panahi: You keep an eye on them for me.

Kotai: [ saluting her ] Will do.

[ Mele spots Naihi sitting awkwardly off to the side and excuses himself to go talk to her. ]

Mele: Naihi, could I talk to you in private for a moment.

Naihi: Certainly, Mele.

[ Mele leads them further away until they are out of earshot. He sits down and wraps his tail over his paws. Naihi sits as well. ]

Mele: I wanted to ask you for a favor.

Naihi: How may I be of service?

Mele: Can you promise to protect Ao and Aka for me when things go sideways again?

Naihi: [ clearly surprised ] W-why ask me?

Mele: Because you’re the strongest besides Taraki and more responsible.

Naihi: I— I, um…
Mele: I know we haven’t known each other long and that we aren’t that close, so really I have no right to ask, but it’s all I can do. They’re both so dear to me. Aka saved my life the day we met and Ao’s my muse. I’ve always known I could never protect them, that I’d have to repay them in other ways for all they’ve given me. So I’m asking you to protect them.

Naihi: And you trust me to do this?

Mele: Of course I do.

Naihi: [ looking away and speaking softly ] You shouldn’t…I-I’m not…[ She takes a deep breath and braces herself. ] I tried to drive Akahata off the team.

Mele: [ gently ] I know.

Naihi: But—how—when did you…?

Mele: I’ve been paying attention for a little while now, since Aka inadvertently tipped me off. And looking back on things it was always there. You’ve been trying to prove you were stronger than her since the beginning.

Naihi: Akahata knows?

Mele: Yes.

Naihi: [ alarmed and confused ] She hasn’t said anything, hasn’t done anything. Why hasn’t she…

Mele: I think she didn’t want to see it at first and now…[ shrugs ] Maybe she thinks you’re right.

Naihi: I thought it would be best for everyone. I thought it would make the team stronger, that she would just be killed and cause Ren more pain. She could have another life and Ren could move on. I was so sure…

Mele: And now?

Naihi: I’m not. She and Ren are so close. Their bond is strong, too strong for me to break. [ She looks around for the courage to meet his eyes again. ] I’ve been manipulative. I’ve treated her cruelly. Why would you ask me to protect her?

Mele: I’m an optimist. I’m hoping you’ll have a change of heart. And I choose to think you are good at heart. You’d risk everything to protect the world from Groudon after all. I don’t think you meant to be cruel, and I’m fairly sure a good chunk of it was accidental [ Naihi cocks her head. ]

Nevermind. It’s not my place to say. Everyone has their insecurities and everyone makes mistakes. Some things you can’t undo, but you can always change.

Naihi: Do the others know?

Mele: I doubt it. If they did, you’d be in very hot water.

[ She looks down at her claws, shoulders tense and hunched. ]

Mele: I won’t tell them no matter what you decide. I didn’t come over here to threaten you. I just had to try and help the pokemon I love. [ He stands and turns to go. ]

Naihi: [ jumping up ] I-I’ll do it. [ He turns back and she puts her clawed paw to her chest. ] I swear on the honor of my kind that I’ll protect them. I’ll protect all of them to the best of my abilities.
Mele: Thank you, Naihi. [ warm smile ] Really, thank you.

[ The absol bows her head and Mele walks back to the others. Kata has been watching them and bounces up to his side. ]

Kata: What was all of that?

Mele: Oh, you know, letting her down gently.

[ That gets the grumpig laughing heartily and she claps the delcatty on the back. He sits down with his friends and talks gladly and easily with them. Naihi looks on but stays where she is. ]

---

**Scene 10:** [ Ren and her team are deep in the woods near Lilycove. Ren has everyone training at different things. Taraki and Pohaku are practicing x-scissor together, Akahata is dodging Kotai’s dig attacks, Ren is coaching Kata on psyshock, and Naihi is off by herself practicing night slash on a fallen tree. She rakes it with her foreclaws, then backs up and launches at it. Her horn sinks into the wood and becomes stuck. She plants her paws on the wood and heaves. It takes a few tries, but she pries her horn free and stumbles back. The absol pants, limbs trembling and tail dipping low. She shakes herself out and grits her teeth. She jumps high this time, horn glowing darkly, and throws herself into the move. This time she slices clean through. Dirt falls from her horn and she wipes her snout with a paw. Ren comes up beside her. ]

Ren: Are you okay?

Naihi: Of course trainer—Ren. I’ve been working on follow through as you instructed.

Ren: I can see that. Why don’t you take a short break?

Naihi: [ tensing so as not to show the trembling in her shoulders ] There is no need. I can keep going.

Ren: I’m sure that you can, I just don’t think it’s best. You’ve been pushing yourself very hard. It’s okay to take a break now and then.

[ Latios appears and Ren walks off to talk with him. Naihi stays where she is and glares at the ground. Kata bounces up to her. ]

Kata: What’s the matter, Lady Disaster? Ren getting on your case? [ Naihi glances at her, but says nothing ] It’s okay. I get that all the time. What’d she chew you out for?

Naihi: She told me I was working too hard.

Kata: Now that I never hear.

Naihi: She doesn’t understand. I have to get stronger.

Kata: That’s what you’re worried about? Then you can relax. You’re already the ace on this team. Seriously, name the last time you didn’t win a battle in one or two moves.

Naihi: I do not think Ren shares your views.
Kata: Whaddya mean?

Naihi: She doesn’t think I’m strong enough to train this hard.

Kata: I don’t think that’s it at all. You’ve just been really throwing yourself into drills since Mele and Panahi left. We’ve all gotta get stronger, but you’re no good to the team if you injure yourself. Besides, taking it easy once in awhile is good for the soul.

Naihi: But what about when we were facing Magma? Ren took Akahata with her and not me. When it really mattered, she didn’t trust me.

Kata: That’s got nothing to do with strength. You haven’t been on the team that long. Ren and Aka go way back and they’ve been in those sorts of scrapes together before.

Naihi: …I think I’ve made a terrible mistake and I don’t know how to make it right.

Kata: Well, I can’t really give you any advice if you don’t tell me what it is. Naihi gives her a hard look. Okey-dokey then. It’s your business.

Just then there is a flash of light and a gust of wind. The two look around to see that Ren has mega evolved Latios. He is larger than before with much longer wings and purple where he was once blue. Ren’s eyes have changed from green to red and there is a glowing red triangle on her chest shining through her tank top. Naihi stares in awe at the transformation.

Kata: Why didn’t you tell me you were gonna do it now?! I would have gotten my camera ready!

Ren & Latios: This does not go on the internet!

Kata: Whoa. Your mental presence is something else! It’s almost like you two fused.

Taraki: Are we gonna finish this battle?

Ren & Latios: Apologies, tiger.

The rest watch as Taraki, Pohaku, Latios and Ren start battling again. Ren and Latios move in perfect sync dodging attacks and striking back. Pohaku takes the brunt of the attacks with his armor while Taraki darts around trying to take Latios off guard. He leaps above Latios while he is busy with Pohaku and bears him to the ground. Ren falls to her hands and knees and the mega evolution falls away. Taraki hops off Latios to offer Ren a hand while Pohaku sidles up to Latios to make sure he is okay. They both get up and brush themselves off.

Taraki: Are you okay?

Ren: Yeah. That was… strange. When I mega evolve Taraki I can sort of sense things, but I was seeing through your eyes.

Latios: It’s called sight-sharing. My sister and I do it often. We are able to do it with other pokemon and humans as well if we wish, but there was no conscious effort on my part in this instance. I think the mega-evolution must activate it.

Taraki: You were talking and moving in sync too.

Ren: I could feel everything…

Latios is nodding.
Kata: That’s what I was saying. It’s not like normal mega evolution. There’s definitely flow between you and Taraki, but you’re still separate. Steven and Bessemer are kind of like that all the time albeit quieter. But it was kind of like you and Latios became one mind. There were still two centers, but all within the same sphere, and they were so similar it was kinda tough to tell them apart.

Ren: I guess if your soul dew is a unique kind of mega stone, it stands to reason the mega itself would be unique as well.

Latios: Yes. I’m glad we did this experiment. I must try and train with you all more often.

Ren: And we’ll talk to Steven and Latias about how their training is going. He knows a lot more about mega evolution that I do.

[ Latios nods and his eyes unfocus, indicating that he is probably talking to Latias already. Ren looks around and notices that the sun is going down. She pulls out her nav. ]

Ren: Geez it’s late. And we’re pretty far out. We should probably just camp out here tonight.

[ Ren gets out her vapor box and starts pulling out food for everyone. Pan out as everyone gathers around to help. ]

Scene 11: [ Later that night, Ren is sleeping in her tent and the rest are scattered around nearby. Taraki has lay down near the tent entrance and has his head inside. Akahata whimpers and twitches in her sleep. She cries out softly and Naihi’s head pops up. She looks around for the source of the sound and sees Akahata struggling. She gets up, walks over and prods the mightyena carefully with a paw. ]

Naihi: [ gently ] Akahata.

[ Akahata starts violently and wakes, panting, ruff erect, fangs bared and eyes blown wide. Naihi takes this outburst in stride, shifting back slightly to give Akahata some space. ]

Naihi: It’s okay, you’re safe.

[ Akahata looks into Naihi’s face for a few moments and her breathing calms slightly and her ruff falls flat. ]

Naihi: Are you alright?

Akahata: [ sighs heavily and looks away ] Yes, just a nightmare.

Naihi: About what?

Akahata: My siblings…

[ Akahata looks away. Naihi settles down in front of her, claws touching Akahata’s and looks into her face. The mightyena continues to avoid the absol’s eyes. ]

Akahata: I tried so hard to keep us together, to protect them. I know there was nothing I could have done to save them. It’s just— It doesn’t matter how much I know that’s true, sometimes I still feel like I’m alive at their expense…
The mightyena bows her head and the absol searches in vain for something to say. She leans in and presses her forehead to Akahata’s.

Naihi: [quietly] I’m sorry.

[ Pan out as Akahata relaxes into the contact. ]

---

**Scene 12:** Ren is sitting in the grass with her back resting against Pohaku and the rest of her pokemon scattered around nearby. She is reading the news on her big nav screen when she scrolls by a headline about the deep-sea submarine launch that will be happening in about an hour in Slateport. She reads the article about the expedition and Capt. Stern. There are pictures of underwater life and a trench descending into the depths. Ren suddenly has a flash of the vision Kyogre showed her: the base of an island beneath the waves and crashing through the rock into the chambers within. Ren closes the app and calls Steven. She waits impatiently for him to pick up.

Steven: Hello, Ren. Is something wrong?

Ren: No—maybe? You know how Groudon and Kyogre are both sealed in underwater caverns? What if Magma knows that? Wouldn’t that make them interested in stealing the sub that’s launching today? I think we should be there just in case.

Steven: I’m at the launch now. [Steven is standing near the corner of the one of the dry docks in Slateport. There is a large crowd nearby and several men in suits waiting by a podium. ] My father gave money to the project but he couldn’t make it today and asked me to be here instead.

Ren: Oh. That’s good. Maybe I’m worrying too much but—

Steven: No. You’re right. I’m going to warn Stern… They’re here. I have to go. [He hangs up.]

Ren: Fuck! Everyone we have to go!

Latios: Get on.

[Ren withdraws her pokemon and vaults up onto his back. Latios rockets up and southward. By the time they pass Lilycove he has reach cruising speed and altitude. Ren puts her goggles on and looks out over Latios’s wing to see the coastline whipping by. The wind tears at her braid, freeing strands of hair as they race towards Slateport.]

Ren: [in her head since the rushing air would carry away her voice] Latios, what’s happening at the dock?

Latios: Steven and Latias are fighting through many Magma grunts. They are unharmed, but are making slow progress towards the submarine.

Ren: Can you show me?

Latios: Yes.

[Ren blinks and finds herself looking out of Latias’s eyes. She is swooping over the submarine, which is being lowered into the water, and firing off mist balls at Maxie and the pokemon]
surrounding him. Maxie and the Magma members with him atop the sub are crouching to present less of a target while they get the hatch open. It is rather obvious that their pokemon (weezing, swallow, loudred, macargo) cannot see their assailant and are firing off attacks at random. However, a kadabra and kirlia are throwing up safeguards that make it difficult for Latias to land very many attacks of her own. Seeing through Latias’s eyes is even stranger than seeing through Latios’s not only due to the spatial separation, but because is that there is no sound to accompany the vision other than the wind whistling in Ren’s ears. Ren catches a glimpse of Steven and his armaldo, cradily and archeops battling a bunch of grunts by the dock. A swallow dives for his head.

Ren: Steven look out!

[ Steven ducks just in time and his archeops catches the swallow and bears it to the ground. ]

Steven: Hello Ren. I didn’t realize you were here.

Ren: Sort of. This is really weird.

Latias: You will grow accustomed to it.

[ Latias has switched her focus back to the sub. She flies down to the nose and pushes against it with all her physical and psychic strength. Bessemer is on dock near the back of the sub and is doing their best to help by pulling the metal craft towards themselves with their own telekinesis and magnetokinesis. The sub rocks in its straps and the winch lowering it whines. ]

Ren: Sorry to barge in.

Steven: It’s okay. [ sheepish ] I may have done the same when you were on Mt. Pyre.

Ren: Steven are you still not telling me things?!

Steven: I got a little distracted, okay?!

Ren: Fine fine, you get a pass on this one.

Steven: Shit!

[ Ren wants to ask what the problem is, but is afraid of distracting him. Meanwhile Latias is pinned on the far side of the sub. Ren wishes she could still see Steven and is suddenly seeing through his eyes instead. He has withdrawn his cradily and sent out his steelix who doesn’t have a lot of room to maneuver in the confined space. However, her bulk also makes it easy for her to swipe Magma grunts and pokemon off the dock, which she is doing with frightening efficiency. ]

Ren: The hell!

Steven: Are you alright?

Ren: Yeah, I’m just, um, seeing through your eyes now.

Steven: Well I never did that.

Latios: We’ve never been able to do this before. It is likely connected to the mega evolution. Our bond is getting stronger.

[ Ren spots a mightyena diving towards Steven. ]
Ren: On your left!

Steven: I see it.

[ *His armaldo intercepts with and x-scissor.* ]

Steven: No bandstands-battling or I’m kicking you out.

Ren: Sorry.

[ *Tungsten the steelix has cleared off much of the dock, but a machoke and medicham have managed to get up against the wall and are shoving her towards the water. Steven turns in time to see Tabitha and Courtney sending out their hariyama and ninetails. Ren can see Steven pointing as his armaldo and archeops rush to intercept, but the hariyama darts around and lays into the steelix’s side. Steven’s archeops blocks part of the ninetails’s flamethrower, but the remainder hits Tungsten in the face. This is enough to send her sliding off the dock into the water and Steven withdraws her and sends out his excadrill. Steven is forced to glance back and forth as his archeops fights Tabitha’s hariyama on one side and his armaldo battles Courtney’s ninetails on the other. His excadrill is busy keeping anyone from climbing the ladder back out of the water.* ]

Bessemer: Latias and I can’t hold it. They are going to get away.

[ *Steven look up and sees the sub about to enter the water. Maxie and most of the others are aboard except one Magma grunt who is standing in the hatch. Steven bolts for the edge of the dock.* ]

Ren: STOP!

[ *Steven teeters on the edge for a second but manages not to fall in.* ]

Ren: What the hell were you doing?! You think you’re gonna pull an entire submarine out of the water all by *yourself*? You’d be a sitting ducklett in there!

Steven: Sorry. Stupid impulse. What do we do?

Ren: Latios and I are close. How about you and Latias just try and keep as many Magma assholes as you can there so that the police can catch some of them. Latios and I will track the sub. I have an idea.

Steven: Okay. Good luck.

Ren: You too.

[ *Latios descends, getting closer to the water so that they will be able to spot the sub. Ren bites her lip and then blinks back to Steven for a moment to make sure he is alright. He is backed up to the edge of the dock and his pokemon are clearly tiring. Tabitha’s magmortar and Courtney’s pyroar advance on him. Just then the door to the dock busts open behind him and police and their pokemon pour in. Courtney and Tabitha bolt and the grunts in the water swim for the exit. As soon as Ren is sure that Steven is alright, she blinks back to herself. She leans down over Latios’s shoulder to keep an eye on the water. They fly for a while in silence as Slateport grows nearer in the distance.* ]
Latios: The submarine is just ahead of us. It has not dived yet.

[ Ren cannot see it with her own eyes, but Latios shows her through his, which can see a great deal farther. Latios cloaks them and in another few minutes they are above it. ]

Ren: Can you reach Maxie’s mind for me? I want to talk to him.

Latios: I will have to relay back and forth, so you won’t feel his presence like Steven’s, but you will be able to communicate.

Ren: And you’re okay with this?

Latios: It’s not my first choice, but we don’t have many options… And he doesn’t like being contacted. How surprising… I have calmed him down. You may speak now.

Ren: Maxie Matsuda, my name is Ren Kosugi and I am the Blue Orb-Bearer.

Maxie: So you took the Blue Orb after I was forced to flee. Is it safe to assume from your record that this is not a friendly conversation? Or perhaps you’ve had a change of heart?

Ren: I have nothing against your organization, but you are risking the entire planet on one experiment. It’s madness. Give me the Red Orb. There are other ways you can help people.

Maxie: I think you already know I can’t do that. And if I thought there was even the slightest chance I wouldn’t be able to control Groudon once it wakes, I would never have gone down this path. Now that I have the Red Orb, I am quite assured of success. I have been talking with Groudon, and they are not some mindless beast as you seem to assume. They have already agreed to help me.

Ren: They are tricking you Maxie. I’ve spoken to Kyogre too. They offered me all kinds of things in exchange for freeing them, but that’s exactly what you’re doing. You won’t be mastering Groudon, you’ll be setting them loose.

Maxie: They are a pokemon like any other to be captured, trained and wielded as I see fit. No amount of fear mongering will sway me.

Ren: Then would you be interested in the Blue Orb? If memory serves, it was the two gods together that made the lands we have today. With both you could make anything you wanted.

Maxie: Are you offering it to me?

Ren: I can’t give it to you and you can’t take it. The only way you can have it is by defeating me.

Maxie: So you are proposing a pokemon battle? And the victor wins both orbs?

Ren: Yes.

Maxie: You’re bold and persistent for a child, I’ll credit you that much at least. Very well, I accept your challenge, but only if you will accept my terms.

Ren: Name them.

Maxie: The battle will be conducted at Team Magma’s headquarters and you must come alone.

Ren: Surely neutral territory would be more fair.

Maxie: I am uninterested in fairness. I must ensure that you cannot set a trap for me and my
organization. I think you can understand my suspicion after the losses you have already caused me.

Ren: Well what assurance do I get that you won’t set a trap for me?

Maxie: None save for my word. Those are my terms. If you cannot accept them, I shall have to make due with the orb I already possess.

Ren: Fine. We’ll see each other soon.

Maxie: Excellent, Ms. Kosugi. I look forward to it.

[ All is quiet for a moment and Ren glares down at the sub. ]

Latiost: He was pleased. Well handled.

Ren: [ big sigh ] Thanks.

[ Below them the sub starts to dive. Ren looks back over her shoulder to see police boats speeding their way. ]

Ren: Can you track the sub?

Latiost: Only if it stays near the surface. I will keep after it as long as I am able. It is probably safe to assume that Maxie knows where Groudon is, but I find it unlikely that he would go there directly. He has no way at present to break the open the cavern and he will want his admins with him.

Ren: Did they get away?

Latiost: Yes.

Ren: Dammit.

Latiost: As I was saying, Maxie is most likely headed back to Magma’s base right now. If we contact Lugia, they may be able to follow him back to it.

Ren: Right. I'll call Dizzy. [ She pulls out her nav. ] Um, Latiost, do you think you could hold off on telling Steven about that conversation until I’ve figured out what I’m doing?

Latiost: I see no reason to inform him right away.

Ren: [ smiling ] Thank you. [ Her nav buzzes and she checks it. ] Dizzy and Lugia aren’t close, so they probably won’t make it before the sub gets wherever it’s going, but they’re confident they can follow the trail.

Latiost: At least we’ll get something out of this.

[ Ren’s nave buzzes again but this time it is a message from Steven. ]

Steven: Thank you for bailing me out this time.

Ren: [ She smiles again and types back ] No problem.

Chapter End Notes
Things got a little weird in this chapter, but it's about time the wider world took some interest in the crazy that is happening in Hoenn. This is actually my second nuzlocke and Kaspa is the protagonist of my first, so mild spoilers for my HeartGold nuzlocke I guess. Anyway, I hope things weren't too confusing. Events from Kaspa's story will be referenced but everything relevant to the current plot will be provided within the text of this nuzlocke so that you don't have to know the plot of the previous one to keep up. I decided to use the Japanese names for the locations in Johto/Kanto so Kaspa is the current Indigo League Champion, which makes her both the Johto and Kanto Champion because they have a bizarre joint League system that I won't get into. Dizzy was created by my beta reader and was not in the original draft of the story. He's an odd ducklett, but I really like how things developed around him and I think the story works better for it.

So as you may have noticed, this chapter had a lot less editing and that will probably continue from here on out. It's too bad because I actually like editing, but my buffer is gone and I can't keep up a regular update schedule here and work on my other nuzlocke etc. without some things having to go. The good news is that I've already written most of the key scenes so those should be pretty on par. Feel free to send in any corrections and suggestions though. Once this is finished, I plan on going back over it and making a more polished final draft with more descriptions since a visual version is no longer in the works at this time. Thanks for sticking with me and reading all of this. It makes me so happy. The next chapter has a lot of stuff I've been pumped to work on for a long time now, so here's hoping it goes quickly.

**Character Chart:**

**HUMANS:**
- Ren, our protagonist
- Kai, Ren's friend who likes science
- Wally, Ren's friend who likes the internet
- Steven, the Hoenn League Champion
- Josh, a Magma grunt who Ren has saved twice
- Azalea, Zinnia's Magma grunt alias
- Tabitha, a Magma admin
- Courtney, a Magma admin
- Senri, Ren's dad and a Gym Leader
- Asuka, Ren's mom and a writer
- Orangi, the Blue Orb Guardian and Whero's twin
- Whero, the Red Orb Guardian and Orangi's twin
- Dizzy, Lugia's mouthpiece and friend of Kaspa
- Kaspa, the current Sekiei (Indigo) League Champion and Ho-oh's Chosen

**TEAM REN:**
- Tāraki the Sceptile
- Akahata the Mightyena
- Panahi the Pelipper
- Mele the Delcatty
- Ao the Manectric
- Kata the Grumpig
- Kōtai the Sandslash
Roma the Sharpedo
Pohaku the Armaldo
Naibi the Absol
Teka the Pikachu

TEAM KAI:
Jay, the Blaziken
Dusty, the Breloom
Makô, the Wailmer
Ruby, the Swellow
Lily, the Lileep
Zach, the Pikachu

TEAM STEVEN:
Bessemer, the shiny Metagross
Damascus, the Skarmory
Gilchrist, the Aggron
Tungsten, the Steelix
Escutcheon, the Armaldo
Ptlometra, the Cradily
Alwyn, the Sandslash
Tulpi, the Aerodactyl
Pavise the Bastiodon
Komatsu the Excadrill
Liaoning the Archeops

OTHER POKEMON:
Aster, Zinnia's Whismur
Undercover

Chapter Summary

In which Ren plots a preemptive take-down of Team Magma.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Scene 1: [Ren and her pokemon are having another team meeting. Now that Mele and Panahi are gone, there are just nine of them. They all listen carefully as Ren recounts what happened, even Tāraki.]

Ren: Dizzy called me just now and Lugia found Magma’s base. It’s in a network of caves under Kagari Island, which Courtney owns, and the only way in is completely underwater except at low tide. From what Lugia can tell, it’s a maze and they have a bunch of teleportation pads set up to connect the different parts. And I’m sure they have other security measures besides. All of that makes a frontal assault pretty pointless. The police would need one hell of a plan to pull off a successful raid and right now we have almost no intel to go on. The only way they have a chance is if we could get someone in to scope out the place.

Tāraki: So what are we going to do, Ren?

Ren: I was hoping we could figure that out together. We could always go through with what I promised Maxie. At least we could use it as cover to poke around the place a bit. How do you all feel about battling him? He has eight badges and a keystone, so he’s a pretty formidable trainer.

Tāraki: I still say we can take him. I know it will be dangerous, but I think it’s worth it if we can stop him right now.

Kōtai: I agree with the kid. I think any chance to end this is worth taking. Besides, this Maxie specializes in fire-types right? I’ll kick his ass.

Pohaku: I wanna try out x-scissor! Tāraki’s been teaching me.

Roma: This sounds dangerous. I know I have a type advantage but…

Ren: I don’t expect you to fight or even come with me if you don’t want to. You’re not a battler and that’s okay. I may need your help getting in, but I could always leave you outside just in case.

Roma: You helped me evolve and I’ve seen so much more of the world then I ever expected. I’ll take you anywhere you need to go.

Ren: Thanks Roma.

Kata: I wasn’t really planning on going out in a blaze of glory trying to save the world, but I guess it’s as good a way as any.

Naihi: [stepping forward] I for one think this is very good news and I would be honored to participate in the battle. We grow stronger every day and I feel quite sure we can win.
Ren: I think we have a pretty good chance as well, but only if he keeps his word.

Naihi: If he does not, he is an honorless coward.

Ren: Yes, that may well be the case. Certainly he’s not stupid or we would have caught the asshole by now. We’re pretty sure that he actually wants the Blue Orb, but he might decide to trap us there until he’s already awakened Groudon or something. What do you think, Aka?

Akahata: I have to admit I don’t like it. He has proven cunning. I think we can count on him to have thought out all the angles and at the very least devised some way to tip the battle in his favor. Still, there are some things he doesn’t know, so he’s likely to underestimate us. It’s very risky, but I don’t see a better option. We may not have long before he gets to Groudon and that would be a much harder battle. Much better to fight him now and end it.

Ao: Whatever we do, we’ll do together. We all support you, Ren.

Ren: Thank you. Teka, you’re the only one who hasn’t weighed in.

Teka: I think it’s almost certain to be a trap of one kind or another. If he was planning on a fair fight, he wouldn’t be trying to lure us into his web. And why risk his entire plan now that he is so close? Even if he does intend to batte us for the orb, he’ll have some insurance if he loses. But Aka is right that battling him now is much safer than risking him awakening Groudon. I think we have to take the chance. But if we are going in there, we need another angle. If we do as he says, we’ll just be playing right into his hands. We need some way to take back control of the game.

Ren: Excellent point.

Latios: I agree with Teka that we need a plan or we will have as good as handed him the victory. But if we can figure out some way not to get captured, I think the potential gains are well worth the risk. Even if we cannot get the orb, if we can expose any weaknesses, we will balance the terms of the next engagement. In the meantime, I will see if there is a way to enter their base undetected.

Ren: That’s good. Any info we can gather would be helpful. Just be careful.

Latios: I will.

Ren: Okay, I’m gonna do some shopping because we need some TMs if we are gonna take Maxie on, not to mention supplies if things go sour. And we battled a ton of trainers this past month so our money situation is good. In the meantime we should all think about some ways we can turn this to our advantage. Teka, you’re pretty good at strategy. Why don’t you come with me and we can brainstorm.

---

Scene 2: [Ren heads to the Lilycove department store and buys Stone Edge and Earthquake at the TM shop. She also stocks up on potions, ethers, burn heals and antidotes just in case. Once the shopping is done, Ren heads out to the beach and walks along it towards the lighthouse. Teka stays on the shoulder the whole time and they talk about what to do. They walk around the lighthouse and almost trip over a young man sitting in the grass. It is Josh wearing tattered jeans and a faded, baggy tshirt. Both he and Ren recoil in shock and Teka's cheeks spark in warning.]
Ren: [straightening up] It’s okay, Teka. [The pikachu relaxes on her shoulder.] Hi Josh.

Josh: H-hello Ren.

[Josh remains seated in the grass and folds his hands in his lap, not sure what to do or expect. Ren crosses her arms over herself.]

Ren: They told me you came to see if I was okay on Mt. Pyre.

Josh: Oh… yeah.

[Awkward silence.]

Ren: I’m sorry for blowing up at you again. I didn’t think you cared, but you risked a lot coming to find me after that battle, so it’s pretty obvious that you do. We’re on opposite sides of this thing, but I know you think you’re doing what’s right. And despite that you’ve tried to help me, even if it’s not always in the way I would like. You get in the way and it’s frustrating, but I guess I sort of appreciate you looking out for me. [looking down and scuffing the turf with her shoe] And I—I never thanked you for that TM you gave me back in Slateport, but it’s been really useful, so thanks.

Josh: [scratching at the back of his head] I kind of owe you again for having them let me go… [They drift into awkward silence again. Josh fidgets.] How are your, uh… [He gestures indistinctly at his face.]

Ren: Oh, um, it’s really weird. I was just getting used to the old ones you know? But it’s a huge improvement. They don’t hurt at all and they’re less stiff. It’s almost like having a real face again… [half smile] I know things are always going to be tense between us, but I just wanted you to know that I don’t hate you anymore and if I can stop Groudon from being revived without hurting you, I will.

Josh: I’ll try and stay out of your way.

[Ren laughs just a little and Josh glances around, debating whether or not to say something.]

Josh: Do we really—do you have to stop us? Maybe there’s another way. Maxie said he commands Groudon now that he has the orb and that they’re going to help us willingly.

Ren: Speaking as someone who has met with one of the Climate Titans, I can say with utter certainty that’s not true. They are not compassionate gods. If they cared about life at all, they wouldn’t be able to do what they were made for. When I spoke with Kyogre, they offered to kill you all in exchange for reviving them. [Josh looks away and his brow creases.] I don’t expect you to change your mind, but you deserve the truth… Magma was a great organization once and it’s done a lot of good, so I could see why you would work for them, but Magma’s crossed the line into extremism now. Good intentions don’t solve everything. I think a lot of you don’t deserve what’s coming if you go through with this, but that won’t change anything either. [Josh’s face hardens.] Sorry. Lecture over. I’ll just go.

[She turns but only gets a few steps away before Teka taps her.]

Teka: Wait, is that human the Magma grunt we have leverage over?

Ren: Yes.

Teka: Then don’t just leave! This is the perfect opportunity! He knows their base and he’s alone.
They both turn back to Josh, who is watching them.

Ren: [ muttering to Teka ] Fucking shit you’re right. [ She brushes her hair out of her face and walks back up to Josh. ] Okay, this is going to make me sound like a giant asshole after everything I just said, but I could really use your help.

Josh: [ tired ] I don’t know, Ren.

Ren: Just hear me out. I know where your base is. We found it after Maxie stole the sub. And Maxie has invited me there to battle him for control of the orbs. But I think it’s a trap—scrap that I know it’s a trap. Now, all I want—my best case scenario—would be to have a fair fight for the orbs, just me and Maxie, 6v6 and it’s over.

Josh: [ he plants a hand in the grass and leans towards her, looking concerned ] Ren that’s—

Ren: Whether or not I’m up to it is my call. And I think it would be a whole lot less messy than the alternative. The problem is that I don’t think that’s what Maxie wants. So I’m hoping you can give me a little information about the base so that I don’t get completely ambushed in there.

Josh: This is crazy!

Ren: Well I’m not the one who started this mess! [ She sighs and wipes her hand down her face. ] I know this is a lot more than I’ve ever asked of you before, but I don’t have a lot of options left and I would rather not get myself and all of my pokemon killed if at all possible.

[ Josh rings his hands and Ren waits silently for him to make a decision. ]

Josh: I guess I could tell you a little, like how to get around—

Ren: Thank you!

Josh: BUT, I’m not really sure how much it’ll help if you’re just going to march in there. The cameras would pick you up right away and you can’t use any of the teleporter pads without the gloves.

Ren: Hmm. That is a problem.

Teka: What?

Ren: [ to Teka ] The security measures. I’m not sure we can bypass them even with [ quiet ] you know.

Teka: What if we disguise ourselves? We can take his uniform and sneak in that way.

Ren: That’s brilliant, Teka.

Josh: [ glancing between Ren and her pikachu ] Uh—

Ren: I’m gonna need your Magma uniform.

Josh: I mean I guess that could— Why am I entertaining this?!

Ren: Because you don’t want anyone to get hurt who doesn’t have too, which is kind of sweet, if I’m being honest. But we’ll make it even this time, okay? You’ll give me a uniform, and I’ll buy you some normal clothes that don’t make you look like a vagabond.
Josh: I really don’t think—

Ren: [hands on hips] Aw, come on Josh! It’ll be fine, I promise.

Josh: [He grumbles and stands up.] Somehow I doubt it.

Ren: [waving him off] You worry too much. The department store here is great. I’ll buy you whatever you need. We’ll talk everything out on the way.

Josh: You’re not gonna let me just go, are you?

Ren: [smiling broadly] Not a chance!

---

**Scene 3:** [Ren is sitting in a chair outside the dressing room in the men’s clothing section of a huge department store. Teka is nearby studying her reflection in one of the many large mirrors. Josh emerges from behind the dressing room curtain sporting tight jeans and a graphic tank top. He slouches, clearly uncomfortable.]

Ren: [looking at him appraisingly] Alright then, give us a turn.

Josh: [muttering] I’d rather not.

Ren: [cocks an eyebrow] Are you seriously going to make me walk around you when I’m buying? Work with me a little.

Josh: [quietly through gritted teeth] **Fine**.

[He turns around and she nods with increasing approval. He faces her again, lips drawn into a thin, irritated line, silently awaiting her judgment.]

Ren: [almost smirking and with no shame whatsoever] Damn son, you look **fine** in that outfit. [He blushes from intense embarrassment.] I was right about the tank top. You have nice arms. You should show them off more. And those tat sleeves are awesome. Are they, um…?

Josh: [rubbing his arm] They’re traditional, but they’re not from my family. [looking down] My friend Brenton designed them for us.

Ren: That’s cool. [She cocks her head a little, no longer looking at his face, and grins.] That nice saleswoman was spot on with the jean size. A+.

Josh: [crossing his arms over himself and muttering darkly] I should have known this whole thing was just an elaborate scheme to punish and humiliate me even further.

Ren: [brow furrowing in confusion and slight exasperation] What are you talking about?

Josh: You’ve been making fun of me the **whole time**!

Ren: [crossing her arms] Dude, I just complimented you and I meant it, I swear. Sarcasm really isn’t my thing.
Josh: You can’t possibly have meant every single one of those compliments!

Ren: Except that I did. A little insecure are we?

Josh: No! But that doesn’t make any sense. You don’t even like me. We’re enemies, remember?

Ren: Who said anything about liking you as a person? All I said is that you are physically attractive and that this outfit is very flattering. Besides, I’d like to think we’ve moved past the whole “enemies” thing at this juncture. We’re frenemies.

[Josh’s face contorts into all kinds of expressions as he mentally grapples with the strange awkwardness of the situation. The gears in his head are clearly more grinding against each other than fitting together as conflicting thoughts and emotions assail him in no particular order. Eventually he just gives up trying to make sense of anything.]

Josh: [grumbling] You’re weird.

Ren: [Wry amusement passes over her face.] I’m aware. Now go change again and hand me those jeans when you’re done. We are so buying them. Don’t even try to argue. And you have to pick out at least one tank top before we leave. I spent eighteen Arceus-forsaken years without them in Johto and it’s no life, let me tell you.

---

**Scene 4:** [Josh is walking down the beach wearing one of his new outfits. He is headed North and Fang is trotting along at his side.]

Fang: So she trusts you now?

Josh: I guess. She even told me when she was going to show up to the base so that we wouldn’t have to be there.

Fang: Do you think it will work?

Josh: Not unless she has something up her sleeve and even then… She’s going to get caught.

Fang: What are we going to do?

Josh: I don’t know. Fang! I can’t stop her! We could help more, but I don’t want her to succeed either. She’ll ruin everything. Everyone will get locked up and nothing will change.

Fang: So… she’ll die?

Josh: [grabbing his head, eyes welling] This is wrong! Everything’s fucked up! How did it get so fucked up?! I can’t do anything! All of this happened because I couldn’t even steal that stupid package without fucking up. I’m just a screw up! I always have been!

Fang: That’s not true!

Josh: It is true! She would never have gotten involved if I hadn’t made so many stupid mistakes. I should have stopped talking to her after I gave her that TM. Now everyone’s in danger.
Fang: She decided it was her job to stop us. You’ve never made her do anything. Everyone makes their own decisions and no one else is responsible for them. If anything she dragged you into this. And you’ve done well so far. No one’s gotten hurt. We get the shit kicked out of us all the time, that’s just the hand we’ve been dealt. But despite everything, you’ve made a life for us. And we’re gonna help tons of other’s like us. You saved me, Josh, even though you had nothing. I’d be dead if it wasn’t for you. And you’ve always treated me well, like family, even though Hart and Brent make fun of you for it. So you’re a wonderful person and you’re not a fuck up!

Josh: [wiping at his eyes and sniffing loudly] Thanks Fang. And I guess we have to keep going, no matter what happens.

Fang: That’s right!

Josh: But what do we do?

Fang: [she looks thoughtful for a moment] What about Azalea?

Josh: Arceus, you’re right!

[He scrambles for his nav and pounds Zinnia’s number. He starts word-vomiting into the mic the moment she picks up, but she manages to calm him down before too long. He rounds a corner well north of the city and a small deserted bay comes into view.]

Josh: Okay. I’m on my way over now.

[Josh hangs up and shoves his nav back in his hip bag. He puts two fingers in his mouth and whistles loud and piercingly at the water. A few moments later, a wailmer surfaces and swims towards shore. Josh withdraws his mightyena and walks out to the end of a piled stone pier. The wailmer pulls up beside it and he steps carefully onto it’s back. The wailmer heads east without any instruction from Josh and they soon fade into the distance.]

---

**Scene 5:** [Not that far away off to the west, Ren is headed out into the woods with Teka on her shoulder.]

Teka: You sure had that boy squirming the whole time.

Ren: You’ll indulge me my fleeting amusements. Life has been very stressful lately. Besides, he’ll thank me later.

Teka: It was well played in my opinion. Helped distract him from how he was betraying his boss and all of his friends.

Ren: [uncomfortable chuckle] Heh, yeah… [sighs and shakes it off] Well, I’m feeling a lot better about things. I know it’s still crazy, but we actually have something to go on now.

Teka: Agreed. Hopefully Latios will have found out some useful information as well.

Ren: How goes recon, Latios?
Latios: As well as can be expected I suppose. I am on my way back to you now.

Ren: Great. Okay.

[ Ren sends out the rest of her pokemon. They look around and are surprised to see that the whole team is there out in the woods and not in a Pal Park. ]

Tāraki: How are we all here? I thought you weren’t allowed to have more than six of us signed out at once.

Ren: [ grinning ] Not if we’re on “vacation”.

[ Kata starts bouncing on her tail and cackling. Tāraki and Kōtai grin at each other. ]

Ao: How does that even work?

Ren: I registered us for a few days vacation at the Pokemon Center. Basically I can have you all with me as long as we’re not battling other trainers. I’ve never done it before because it’s paperwork, but seemed like the time to give it a try.

Pohaku: So we can all go fight Magma together this time?

Ren: Yep!

Akahata: Clever. I was wondering what to do about the party limit since we may need Roma to get in.

Ren: It was Teka’s idea.

Kata: Hey! The newbie’s pulling her weight!

Teka: Thank you.

Ren: In fact, she is today’s MVP. We have all kinds of good news to tell you.

Latios: [ appearing among them ] I am relieved to hear it.

Ren: We ran into Josh while we were in town and we wrung him dry for info. We now know the layout of Magma’s hideout and lots of other useful information. And I have his spare uniform, so I can sneak in and move about inside without tipping off security.

Tāraki: Woo! They are so going down!

[ Ren holds up her hand and they high-five. ]

Ren: Yeah, it’s looking very good, but there are still some issues. One, we still only know where the main entrance is. I’m 90% sure there are a number of emergency exits Josh didn’t tell me about, so I don’t think there’s any trapping them there. Second, the place is a fortress. It’s specifically designed to make breaking in next to impossible. The whole thing is split into at least twelve sections and the only way to move between them is via teleporter. And the only way to use the teleporter pads is with a Magma issued glove, which I only have one of. So unless we can steal more of them, there no way we are getting the police or anyone else inside to help us. That also means pokemon can’t move freely through the facility.

Latios: [ nodding ] I tried, but the pads are encrypted and I don’t have the expertise to get around it. I tried overloading the psychic energy in the system, but it shut down.
Ren: So Latios, if you are going to come in with me, you’ll have to bond to a pokeball. I bought one that’s unregistered, so you won’t be revealed.

Latios: I see. I suppose it can’t be avoided. I will bond to this pokeball.

[ In the background, Naihi’s jaw has dropped at this blasphemy. ]

Ren: The other thing is that Josh wouldn’t tell me where the sub is or anything else that doesn’t help me get to Maxie or not get cornered. He’s still pretty loyal, so I don’t think we’re getting any more help from him any time soon. But hopefully, if we’re smart enough about this, we can do some snooping around and find more out ourselves if the battle for the orb doesn’t work out. I made a map based on what Josh told me. Here.

[ Ren pulls out her collapsible screen and places it on the ground for everyone to see. They all look it over and some ask questions. Latios looks as though he is communicating psychically with someone and them points to the screen and Ren begins to draw on more parts. Pan out. ]

Scene 6: [Ren is standing at the edge of the woods overlooking the sea. Kōtai and Latios are resting nearby, Teka is practicing nuzzle on Naihi, Akahata and Ao are digging up molluscs, Pohaku and Roma are out playing in the surf, Tāraki has paddled out a ways on a longboard and is waiting for a wave, and Kata is snapping pictures of things. Ren stares down at her nav. She has Steven’s contact open, but hesitates.]

Kōtai: [ cracking an eye open ] Aren’t you gonna call him, luv?

Ren: He’s not going to like this.

Latios: That is irrelevant.

Kōtai: I have to agree.

Ren: Fine! I’m doing it.

[ Ren presses call and waits. ]

Steven: Hello Ren, got any good news for me?

Ren: Yes! I have a plan to get the Red Orb away from Maxie.

Steven: Excellent! I see you’ve been busy. Let’s hear this plan.

Ren: I’m going to sneak into Magma’s headquarters using a stolen uniform, try and find the sub and/or something that will enable the police to raid the place, and then kick Maxie’s ass a take the orb.

Steven: [ voice already a little strained from suppressed anxiety ] Please tell me that I come into this plan at some point.

Ren: Of course. You and Dizzy will be waiting outside in case things go badly.
Steven: So, in this scenario, you will be marching into the enemy base and taking out the region’s most dangerous criminal alone?

Ren: I’ll have Latios with me and my pokemon. All of them. And I think it would be best if you brought all of yours as well, just in case.

Steven: You mean—! [a breath for composure] Ren, that is extremely illegal.

Ren: Okay, but none of the battles we have with Magma are legal, or do you register the match to your nav before you fight six grunts at once? Besides I think saving the world from immanent disaster is slightly more important than obeying the letter of the law.

Steven: [grumbling] Point taken. [sigh] Is there any particular reason I can’t be the one to go in instead? I know I’m not supposed to pull rank since we are both guardians now, but I am the Champion.

Ren: I made a deal with Maxie. He agreed to battle me for control of the orbs if I came alone. So you and Dizzy have to make sure you stay out of sight.

Steven: This is a huge risk, Ren.

Ren: And we have to take it.

Steven: There has to be something else—

Ren: I’ve already talked it out with Latios. This is our best option. And I won’t lose to him and I won’t let him get the Blue Orb. You have to trust me.

Steven: …Okay. But I am going to need details.

Ren: Great! So do you remember that Magma grunt from Mt. Pyre?

---

**Scene 7:** [Ren is wearing Josh’s magma uniform as she rides Roma across the water towards Kagari island. It is morning and the sea is calm. As they near the island, Ren checks in with the others.]

Ren: [telepathy] Steven, are you and Dizzy in position?

Steven: Yes. You can head in… Be careful.

Ren: Roger.

[They are close to the rocky shore now, but the tide is high and the entrance is underwater.]

Ren: Josh said 200 feet from the dock, so it should be here.

[Roma dives, manipulating the water as she does so that Ren is surrounded by an air pocket. Ren doesn’t see it at first, but Roma swims right for the cave entrance. The tunnel is dark, but Ren can see light above as it opens up on the other side. They break the surface and find themselves in a]
small chamber. There is a dock floating in the water that leads to higher ground. Ren hops off as Roma pulls up alongside.

Ren: Okay, stay here and out of sight unless you hear otherwise.

Roma: I will. Good luck, Ren.

Ren gives her the thumbs up and heads for the back of the chamber. Sure enough there is a teleportation pad just in front of the wall. Next to it is a narrow glass pedestal with a sensor atop it. Ren places her hand on the pedestal and the pad glows. She steps onto and disappears. Ren re-materializes on the receiving pad at the end of a long highway. The ceiling is natural but the walls and floor are constructed. Both sides are lined with numbered rooms. Ren sends out Teka and the pikachu jumps to her shoulder before wriggling into her hood.

Ren: We’re in the living quarters. Warn me if it sounds like anyone is coming out.

Steven: Did you get in?

Ren: Yes.

Steven: Alright. Remember to keep me updated.

Ren: [ as she starts down the hallway ] I will. You just try and relax.

Steven: Even our best-case scenario makes me nervous.

Ren: It’ll be fine. [ grinning ] You forget I’m what all criminal organizations fear: a trainer and her pikachu.

[ She raises her fist to her hood and Teka taps it. ]

Steven: Did you really just call yourself Red?

Ren: Our names are a letter apart in English, I’m wearing his color, and I’m accompanied by his signature pokemon. It is the perfect luck charm for this particular situation and part of my cultural heritage so leave your sass at home.

Steven: Sorry. I’m sure we could use every scrap of luck we can muster.

[ At the end of the hallway there are several doors labeled living room and two teleportation pads. Before Ren can reach them, Teka tenses on her shoulder. ]

Teka: Go in there.

[ Ren ducks into one of the living rooms and not a moment later one of the rooms down the hall opens and a grunt steps out. Ren and Teka wait by the door for them to pass and teleport away. Once they are gone, Ren sighs with relief and looks around the room. Although she does not recognize it, it is the same room that Josh is always reading in. Ren pokes around for a minute or two while she waits for the grunt to get some distance before moving on. ]

---

Scene 8: [Meanwhile, in another part of the base, Zinnia knocks on a door labeled security then]
Grunt: [spinning around in her chair] What kept you— Azalea! What are you doing here?

Zinnia: I brought your coffee. [handing it off] Hartmann got called to help with the sub. [She glances up at one of the screens, which shows the sub, now fitted with a huge drill on the nose, being lowered into the water.] I thought this was a good a way to dodge work as any. [She pulls another chair out of the corner and pushes it up beside her co-worker.] That is if you don’t mind. [smiling] I promise not to distract you too much.

Grunt: Of course not. Stay as long as you want.

[The grunt stares at Zinnia as she reclines in her chair. Zinnia looks at the screens and then over at the grunt and smiles knowingly. The grunt flushes and looks away at the screens she is supposed to be watching.]

Grunt: Thanks for the coffee! [She sips it so that she doesn’t have to talk anymore.]

Aster settles down under Zinnia’s chair. Zinnia’s eyes rove over the screens and alight on a grunt walking down a hallway. As they get close to the camera, Zinnia can see a touch of scarring on their face.

Zinnia: So do you think this trainer with the other orb is going to show up?

Grunt: If she is, she better hurry. I can’t believe Maxie moved the launch up.

Zinnia: Eh, can’t be too careful. Everyone’s out to get us these days. [The grunt nods solemnly.] Did you know I heard Whenua speak?

Grunt: No way!

Zinnia: Yep. She actually talked to me this morning.

Grunt: That’s crazy! About what?

Zinnia: Well I was sitting next to her at breakfast and she turned to me—I swear this is true—and she looked me dead in the eye and said: “could I trouble you for the salt?”

Grunt: [laughing] What?! Oh man, you really had me there for a second.

Zinnia: Hey! It’s still a good story. I bet you don’t even know what her voice sounds like.

[The grunt laughs some more and Zinnia continues to make small talk as they both watch the screens. All the while Zinnia keeps track of Ren’s progress through the base. When she gets to a certain section Zinnia sits up and takes her feet off the console.]

Grunt: Did you see something?

Zinnia: I’m not sure. Run camera #20 back a bit.

[The grunt taps on her console and winds the video back until Ren is in the frame, then puts the image on the large screen to the side. Ren’s face is partially obscured, but the scarring is visible.]

Zinnia: It’s her.

Grunt: [frantically checking back to where Ren is currently.] How’d she get a uniform?!
Zinnia: I don’t know, stay on her and don’t put out the full alert yet. She doesn’t know we’ve spotted her. Send whoever’s closest.

[ The grunt types and taps the headset in her ear. While she is talking, Zinnia calls Maxie. ]

Zinnia: She’s here. How close are we to launch?

Maxie: 15 minutes. Contain her.

Zinnia: Roger.

---

Scene 9: [Ren is walking down a hall and spots a door labeled storage. She grabs the handle, barely able to wait for Teka to check it first. The pikachu gives her the signal and they go in. The room is not very large, but packed to the gills with neatly organized steel storage units.]

Ren: I found the storage.

Steven: Great. Lugia has sensed a bunch of wailmer on the eastern side of the island, so we are investigating.

Ren: Cool. Keep me posted.

[ Ren starts checking the labels, but doesn’t get far. ]

Teka: Someone’s coming.

[ Ren glances around but there is nowhere to hide. The door opens and a tall grunt steps through. Ren keeps checking the labels, hoping he won’t pay her any mind. ]

Grunt: What are you doing?

Ren: Looking for a new pair of gloves. Mine are acting up.

Grunt: They’re not in here.

Ren: Whoops, my bad.

[ She makes for the door. ]

Grunt: You’re Ren Kosugi.

Ren: [ she hesitates for a moment, but turns to face him ] Yes. Maxie wants to see me.

Grunt: We were informed. I’ll take you.

[ He opens the door and gestures for Ren to walk ahead of him. She glances at Teka as she steps out into the hall and the pikachu shakes her head. Ren whirls and rams the grunt in the gut with her elbow. He staggers but grabs Ren before she can run. She twists out of his hold and punches him in the face. He grabs her again and throws her into wall. She just barely manages to stay upright and ]
he grabs her again and she kicks him away. He staggers into the still open doorway of the storage room and reaches for a pokeball on his belt. Teka jumps out of Ren’s hood and grabs his head, pressing her cheek to his and electrocuting him before he can react. He falls back and the pikachu leaps clear to Ren’s shoulder. He doesn’t move and Ren stares.

Teka: I just paralyzed him. Let’s go.

Ren closes the door, shutting him in the storage room and looks around. Two more grunts (Hartmann and Brenton) appear from the teleport pads on one end of the hall and send out their pokemon (mightyena and golbat). Ren sends out Ao and Teka jumps off her shoulders. Ao uses charge beam on the pokemon while Teka hits their trainers with electro ball. They crumple and Ren and her pokemon bolt for the other end of the hall. She withdraws her pokemon and uses the next teleporter pad. She lands in yet another hall and sends Teka and Ao back out. A second later an alarm sounds and red lights start to flash.

Ren: I’m officially busted.

Steven: Just keep moving. We found some very large steel doors on the east side. They must have the sub in there.

Ren: Okay. Stay right there. I might need an extraction.

Ren is almost to the end of the hallway when two more grunts come out of the teleporter pads and send out their pokemon (linoone, duskull, koffing, medicham). Ren and Ao stop short and Ao hits all four pokemon with charge beam in rapid succession while Teka dodges around and uses nuzzle on the grunts. The linoone shakes off the attack and runs at Ao but Teka leaps onto its back and stops it with nuzzle. The next hallway is lined with offices, but before Ren can get to Maxie’s, she is confronted by the quintuplets and their mightyena. Ren sends out Ao. The manectric is rippling with stored electricity from all of the charge beams she has used, but the quintuplets and their mightyena seem unimpressed as they close in.

Quintuplet 1: Now it’s five to one.

Quintuplet 2: Your odds are even worse this time.

Quintuplet 3: No Champion to bail you out.

Quintuplet 4: You’re trapped in here.

Ren grabs the keystone in her pocket and holds it in front of her. Strands of light arc from her to Ao as the manectric’s mega stone responds. Ao is enveloped and emerges larger with longer fur and elongated red claws. She growls low and deep, raising the ruff along her back to double her size. The mightyena glance uncertainly back at their trainers.

Quintuplet 5: Even a mega evolution won’t be enough against all of us!

Quintuplets: Crunch!

Ren: Discharge!

All of Ao’s stored electricity discharges in a blinding flash, striking all five mightyena simultaneously. They fall in unison and their trainers gape.

Quintuplet 1: Y-you can’t—
Ao lunges forwards and the quintuplets yelp and scatter. Ren runs to Maxie’s door and opens it. His office is very neat, organized and surprisingly compact, but there is no one in it.

Ren: Maxie’s not in his office.

Steven: Of course not. Can you get to an exit?

More grunts are arriving and sending out their pokemon.

Ren: Not the one I came in. I’ll see if I can get to you.

Ao uses discharge and most of her targets go down in one hit, but a lombre, banette and nosepass keep coming. Ao finishes the lombre with a second hit, but the nosepass and banette manage to corner her in the confined space. The both get in an attack before she takes them out with a second discharge. Ao drops back to her normal form and Ren recalls her before using the next teleporter pad.

Scene 10: We see Ren running through another hallway on a screen in the security office, this time using Pohaku to clear a smattering of fire-types out of the way. The poor grunt in the office is talking into the mic, switching frantically between channels trying to coordinate a counter-attack as Ren dashes around the facility. Zinnia looks on with increasing admiration as Ren continues to mow through the grunts, but stiffens when Ren gets to the hall containing the labs.

Zinnia: [ into her nav ] She’s thrashing us. She’ll be in the wailmer bay shortly.

Maxie: I will leave Courtney to help with the containment effort. We are moments from launch.

We rejoin Ren as she emerges from a teleportation pad into a large and high ceilinged cavern. She is on a broad dock that take up two sides of the chamber, but the rest is water. There is a large number of wailmer resting there and the sub is sitting in the middle and humming with activity. The boarding ramp is being drawn away as Ren catches sight of it. Maxie is standing on the deck of the sub giving instructions. Ren sends out all of her pokemon including Latios, who immediately turns invisible.

Ren: I’m in bay and the sub is ready to launch. Maxie is aboard.

Steven: We’ll keep it here.

Ren runs to the railing while her pokemon circle in around her to defend her from the grunts closing in.

Ren: [ pulling off her hood and shouting across the distance ] I’m here, Maxie!

[ He turns and smiles. ]

Ren: I’m alone, just like you asked.

Maxie: So you are. I’m impressed.
Ren: You promised me a battle.

Maxie: And perhaps I will give you one in the future. For now you must excuse me. Once I have revived Groudon, we shall see if Kyogre can be of service to our cause. Enjoy your stay Ms. Kosugi.

[ Behind Ren, her pokemon are all engaged with Magma pokemon and the place is in chaos. Maxie strides towards the hatch as the engines become louder. ]

Ren: You’re a terrible host!

Maxie: And you are a terrible guest.

[ We see Maxie descend into the sub from a screen in the security office. Zinnia watches as Ren turns away to focus on her pokemon. Most of the grunts who were in the bay are out of pokemon and Teka is dashing around paralyzing them. Courtney, who has been waiting in the background, steps forward. She and Ren are talking and the bay doors being to open. Ren pays them no mind and Zinnia’s eyes narrow. ]

Zinnia: [ brushing the security grunt aside to take over the console ] This is Azalea to sub helmsman. Start the drill.

Helmsman: What?

Zinnia: Something’s not right. Ren has something up her sleeve. Start the drill! And make sure you book it out of there!

Helmsman: But we don’t have orders to—

Zinnia: DO IT NOW!

[ The doors are almost open and the sub lurches forward as it dips beneath the surface, slopping water over the dock. Courtney has sent out her weezing, who is battling Kata. The grumpig fells the weezing and starts battling a torkoal. Just as the sub exits the bay, there is a horrible sound and both trainers turn to look for a moment. ]

Latios: The sub rammed Lugia. They are gravely injured.

[ As Ren watches, the churning water begins to turn red. ]

Ren: I’ll be fine. Go!

[ Kata slams the torkoal into the wall with psychic and it groans, unable to rise. Kata huffs, nursing a burn on her side. Courtney sends out her pyroar. ]

Ren: Good job, Kata. Naihi, you’re up!

[ The absol leaps into battle, slicing up the pyroar with night slash. She dances out of the way as it uses flamethrower, taking only a glancing blow, and rakes the pyroar’s side with her claws. It makes one last ditch attempt with fire fang, but Naihi is faster. She leaps over its back and jabs its other side with her hind spurs. It keels over and Courtney withdraws it. She sends out her ninetails. Naihi rushes in again, but the ninetails is quite a bit faster than her teammate and torches Naihi before she can strike. Naihi goes tumbling but bounces back up. She catches the ninetails in the shoulder and it staggers, but it manages to get Naihi with will-o-wisp before it falls under a second critical hit. Naihi shudders, white pelt now marred by black in several places, and Courtney switches her ninetails for camerupt. ]
Ren: Come back Naihi.

Naihi: I'm fine! I can take her!

Ren: Don’t—

[ But Naihi is already leaping towards the camerupt. Before she can get close, it uses flame burst and Naihi is forced to turn aside to avoid the barrage. She is panting heavily by the time she stops and the others look on with worry. Most of them are similarly worn out from battling, most especially Ao, Pohaku, Tāraki, Kata and Kōtai. ]

Akahata: [ ruff on end ] Get out of there, Naihi!

Naihi: I can do this!

[ The absol just barely dodges a column of fire only to be unbalanced by magnitude. She falls and looks up to see the camerupt charged ready to use a lava plume attack. There is no way for her to get away. But just before she is hit, Akahata jumps in front and takes the attack for her. The mightyena shakes from absorbing the impact, but remains standing. Naihi stares at her, eyes wide and jaw slack in disbelief. ]

Akahata: [ turning to Naihi ] You have nothing to prove! Just listen for once and switch out!

Naihi: But—I—you—

[ Akahata takes a direct hit with flamethrower and goes tumbling. Her limp, smouldering form comes to a stop a little ways away and does not move. ]

Ren: AKA!!!

[ Naihi is still frozen, unable to process what is happening when Tāraki comes streaking past like a charging tauros, roaring at the top of his lungs in absolute fury. The camerupt tries to nail him with flamethrower as well, but he darts around it and slashes the camerupt across the face with leaf blade. Blood sprays from the wound and the camerupt stumbles. Meanwhile Naihi has scrambled up and run to Akahata. ]

Naihi: [ prodding her lightly with a paw ] Aka?

Ren: [ crashing down next to them ] Aka! Aka can you hear me?!

[ She puts her hand over Aka’s nose and mouth, feeling for breath. Tears are already running down her face. Next she checks for a pulse by placing to fingers just below Akahata’s wrist. The tears come faster and she wipes her eyes angrily. ]

Ren: Dammit Aka!

[ Ren puts both hands on Akahata’s rib cage and presses down rhythmically for ten beats before grabbing her snout and forcing air into her lungs. Meanwhile Tāraki slashes the camerupt again and again, then uppercuts it in the jaw when it tries to belch fire at him. Finally he slashes its exposed throat, spilling blood all over himself and their surroundings. The camerupt falls with a thud. It only twitches and wheezes a few times before falling still and quiet. When Tāraki looks up, Courtney has turned away from the carnage and is running for a teleportation pad. Tāraki almost goes after her, but looks down at the dead camerupt and lets out a sigh. He turns and goes to Ren’s side. All of Ren’s pokemon are gathered around her, watching as she tries to revive Akahata. As she blows into the mightyena’s lungs again, Naihi tears up. ]
Naihi: [leaping to her feet] Wake up Aka! If you’re in there you have to fight! We still need you! Come back! Please Aka!

[As Ren is pumping her lungs, Akahata coughs. It is weak, but she draws in a rattling breath and her ribcage begins to rise and fall slowly on its own. She opens an eye. Ren grabs her neck and sobs into her fur. A moment later she is sitting back up again, wiping away the tears and grabbing things out of her bag. She sprays Akahata down with a potion and then a burn heal. Aka closes her eye again, but keeps up her shallow breathing. A sharpedo surfaces from the blood-darkened water of the bay.]

Roma: Ren? REN!

Ren: I’m here!

Roma: [trying her best to see up over the dock] Latios sent for me. Are you okay? Is everyone alright?

Ren: Akahata’s badly wounded. We need to get to the Pokemon Center!

[There is a sudden groaning sound.]

Roma: They’re closing the doors! Hurry!

[Ren withdraws the rest of her pokemon and lifts the rather large mightyena like nothing. She runs to the edge of the dock and jumps off onto Roma’s waiting back. The sharpedo dives and speeds through the closing doors. Not long after they reach the surface outside, Latios comes up beside them and uses psychokinesis to move Ren and Akahata to his back. Ren withdraws Roma and Latios rockets away towards Lilycove.]

Latios: Lugia survived but will need time to recover. Latias and Steven are trying to track the sub. We will be at the Pokemon Center shortly.

[Ren can only nod dully as she clings to Akahata, shaking badly from the adrenaline. She closes her eyes and tries to concentrate on feeling the mightyena’s uneven breaths against her arm.]

---

**Scene 11:** [Ren is sleeping in a bunk in the pokemon center with her pokemon around her. We zoom in through her head and into her dream. She is floating beneath the surface of a warm, bright, clear ocean. She opens her eyes and sees Kyogre swimming towards her.]

Ren: I knew you would come.

[Kyogre opens their mouth and water flows over Ren. It feels especially cool and soothing on her scars.]

Ren: Thank you for healing me.

[Kyogre sings and Ren hears the sound deep in her bones. She looks at her arm and sees once again that her burns have disappeared, leaving only her childhood scar. Ren meets Kyogre’s eyes as]
ren: i'd rather stay as i am than revive you.

ren's pokemon appear in the water before her, all of them healthy and strong. suddenly fire rages around them and they shy away. they draw together, looking terrified, but kyogre swims up from beneath and passes between ren and the vision. once they have passed, all of ren's pokemon are safe once more only now kai, wally, steven, and even josh and zinnia stand among them. kyogre sings again as they swim around her and her loved ones and they all glow with a warm blue light.

ren: you're right. i do want to protect them. i'd do almost anything. but i can't trade their safety for the entire planet. it's not right.

the vision fades away, leaving only ren and kyogre in the empty sea. the god rumbles, shaking ren to her core.

ren: i know you don't understand. i wish you could. but life is meaningless to you. i'm not even sure you'd keep your promise.

ren and kyogre rise from the ocean and the sky turns dark and stormy. rain starts to fall in sheets and the wind rages around them. but there is no threat this time as ren watches the world be flooded. even though she is amidst the heart of the storm, nothing touches her. soon the storm calms and ren and kyogre sink down towards the water. the light is like nothing ren has ever seen and what remains of the landmass becomes lush and green. they sink back below the surface of the ocean and it is full of life. some species ren recognizes, but many others are strange to her.

ren: so there will be a new world?

kyogre sings in answer.

ren: it's beautiful, but i'm still rather attached to this one. i'm never going to revive you.

all of the life disappears, leaving the ocean empty once more. kyogre is swimming towards her.

ren: you'll awaken when this cycle is spent and re-make it then. i'm sorry.

kyogre dives, outline quickly fading into the blackness, leaving only its phosphorescent lines.

ren: wait! please! i-i have to do something! i have to stop maxie and groudon! i don't want anyone to die!

kyogre does not ascend, but they do not swim any deeper either. instead they begin to circle down below her.

ren: i know we're at kind of an impasse here, but i think we may have some common interests. you don't want groudon to wake alone do you?

kyogre continues their circling, slowly rising towards her.

ren: i thought so. maybe i can't give you what you want, but if you help me, i could at least prevent something you don't... you can help me, can't you?

kyogre is almost back up to where ren is.

ren: reaching out to them as they pass please help me stop groudon.
Kyogre stays just out of reach. They breach the surface and fall back towards Ren. Their massive bulk blots out the light and everything goes dark.

Scene 12: Ren gasps as she wakes. Her pokemon are all still sleeping soundly around her. She carefully pulls her bag over to herself and uncovers the Blue Orb inside. She stares at it.

Latios: Kyogre swam in your dreams.

Ren: [jumps] Yes.

Latios: [materializing in the air next to her] And you spoke with them?

Ren: [tense] Yes. They offered the same thing as before: to heal my scars… But they also offered to protect us this time.

Latios: It seems they are learning.

Ren: They are. I think they see all of my dreams. Or maybe they just saw everyone around me on Mt. Pyre.

Latios: Either is possible, I suppose.

Ren: I asked for their help. I know I can't revive them, but sometimes it’s tempting…

Latios: I am sorry for what happened to Akahata.

Ren: It’s not your fault. You did what you had to. [Ren tears up and Latios moves to touch her, but she recoils. Ren wipes her face.] I’ll be fine! [She wipes her face.] I’m not giving in.

Latios: I know.

Ren: And I won’t, no matter what happens…

[Ren begins to shake but remains quiet so as not to wake her pokemon. Latios drifts closer to her and gently places a paw on her shoulder. She does not pull away from the contact this time, instead crumpling in on herself as the feelings overwhelm her. Latios hugs her and she buries her face in his fur and sobs. Tāraki wakes and looks to see what is wrong.]

Latios: This is hard, but you are strong, Ren.

Ren: She—she almost—she was dead. Her heart stopped.

[Tāraki sides down off the top bunk opposite them. He is careful not to step on anyone as he crosses to Ren. He rubs his head against her back. She cries for a little longer before falling quiet.]

Ren: D-do you think I should go downstairs?

Latios: It is a secure ward. You would certainly be caught.

Ren: What if she wakes up and no one is there? I don’t want her to be alone.
Latios: I doubt that she will.

Tāraki: We’ll go first thing in the morning and we’ll all be there when she wakes up, I promise.

[ *Latios lets go of her and she hugs Tāraki instead.* ]

Ren: Okay.

---

**Scene 13:** [Josh is wearing one of his new outfits as he scrubs the wall of a hallway in the Team Magma hideout. He pushes the bucket along with his foot, seeming not to mind the mindless labor. Terra emerges from a room down the hall.]

Terra: Hey there Josh, you’re looking sharp today.

Josh: Thanks, so are you. [*He bites his lip.*] Of course you always look good.

Terra: [*smiling*] Thanks, I try… [*She watches him work for another moment.*] You know, I’ve got a minute free, let me help you.

Josh: [*offering her a brush*] Be my guest.

[*He pulls another brush out of the bucket and they clean the black marks off the wall together for a while in companionable silence.*]

Terra: Were you here when it happened?

Josh: No.

Terra: We were both lucky I think. Can you believe how many people got paralyzed by her pikachu?

Josh: Yeah. [*Terra shoots him a confused glance.*] I just mean I’ve met her before, you know, Ren and her pikachu. She’s really strong and that pikachu seemed pretty ruthless.

Terra: Oh. Yeah. I battled her once and she beat me in seconds. I never saw the pikachu though… I actually talked to her once. I was out of uniform working on the Rusturf Tunnel and she was trying to break up a fight between a protester and my construction buddy. I reported seeing her of course and I think she recognized me from Mt. Chimney, but she never turned me in. She seemed nice and reasonable, you know? I didn’t think she’d do something like this.

Josh: I think she just came to fight Maxie. She went right to his office and then the wailmer bay. [*shrugs*] Or that’s what I heard.

Terra: Yeah, I guess I heard that too… She did help with the tunnel. Maybe she thinks it’s right, what she’s doing.

Josh: Probably. I mean, that’s what the police think when they arrest us, isn’t it?

Terra: Hmm, that’s true. [*Her nav boops.*] Oop! That’ll be Whenua. It was nice talking to you. I’ll see you later, Josh.

[*She dumps her brush back in the bucket as she leaves and he waves. He smiles to himself and goes*]
back to scrubbing. A moment later Zinnia peeks her head around the corner. ]

Zinnia: Morning, Josh. What are you up to?

Josh: [ used to her popping up by now and so not reacting ] Nothing much, just cleanup duty.

Zinnia: You can’t fool me, kid. What’s with the nice outfit and sudden surge of confidence? Although, if I had to guess, I’d say the two were related. [ Josh squirms ] Yeah, I saw that little interaction just now. Spill.

Josh: Well, I got some new clothes and I’ve never had anything nice before. I sort of didn’t think I was… I’m not used to compliments and people have been saying I look good since I got these… It’s —nice.

Zinnia: Well you are cute, kid. And you’re filling out well. It’s just hard for most people to notice under all of those flour sacks you used to wear, not to mention the general shroud of surliness. Speaking of which, I got you a replacement uniform and this one is in your size .

Josh: Thanks.

[ She hands it to him and he puts it on the floor next to his bucket. He chews something over for a moment in silence as he continues to scrub the wall. ]

Josh: …So, do you think maybe she was flirting with me?

Zinnia: Who, Terra? Naw, she’s just a sweetheart.

Josh: [ a little defensive ] How do you know?

Zinnia: Well, first of all, let’s say you’re really not her type.

Josh: Oh. Lesbian?

Zinnia: Card-carrying. Besides, I’m pretty sure she’s with someone at the moment.

Josh: What? It’s not Whenua, is it?

Zinnia: No, they’re just partners.

Josh: Then who?

Zinnia: If I let you in on all of the gossip I pick up, we’d be here all day. You’ll figure it out eventually I’m sure.

[ He scrubs once or twice more and then puts his brush down. ]

Josh: I’m bad at this, aren’t I?

Zinnia: You’re just young. Most people aren’t so obvious about this kind of stuff. It takes experience to get good at it. Don’t sweat it, kid. You’ll get there.

Josh: So I should… practice?

Zinnia: Well yeah. How else do you get good at anything?

[ Just then another Magma grunt comes down the hallway. Josh and Zinnia move to the side to let
her pass. She gives Josh an appraising look and he winks at her. She smiles as she moves off. Josh 
blushes a little and a puppy-like grin fixes on his face. Zinnia looks over at him with an amused smirk. 

Zinnia: Careful now. We still need people to think we’re together.

Josh: [ summoning his courage ] I’ll just say you’re my side girl.

Zinnia: [ hearty laugh ] Good one, kid! [ She sighs and wipes her eyes before snapping back to her regular serious demeanor. ] But seriously, don’t say that in front of your bonehead friends or anyone else for that matter. You’ll blow our cover. Besides, if anything you’re my side boy. I’ve got a whole string of beautiful women in front of you.

[ His face falls in annoyance and he glares at her. ]

Chapter End Notes

All I can say is thank Arceus for Poke-Amie. This is the third time it saved Akahata's life. Poochyena are one of those first route pokemon that really aren't designed to make it this far, so we'll just have to see if Akahata can break the mold and make it to the Elite Four. I actually did take down the Quintuplets with mega Ao in a single hit just to be extra. It was so satisfying. What I didn't plan ahead of time was for Lugia to get impaled by a giant drill, but then I realized it was the only expedient way not to introduce a giant plot hole. Sorry Lugia! Good thing they are immortal and that the Eon Guardians were there to patch them up. My beta reader is still furious because Lugia is her favorite.

Not much else to say about this chapter. It was pretty heavy on the action. There definitely wasn't as much meat on it as I would like, so I'll probably swing back around later and take another crack at it. But for now I must move on. The good news is that the writing has been going well lately and I'm on schedule to finish in August.

Character Chart:

HUMANS:
Ren, our protagonist
Kai, Ren's friend who likes science
Wally, Ren's friend who likes the internet
Steven, the Hoenn League Champion
Azalea, Zinnia's Magma grunt alias
Tabitha, a Magma admin
Courtney, a Magma admin
Terra, a Magma grunt partnered with Whenua
Whenua, a Magma grunt partnered with Terra
Hartmann, a Magma grunt who is friends with Josh
Brenton, a Magma grunt who is friends with Josh
Quintuplets, all Magma grunt with Mightyena
Dizzy, Lugia's mouthpiece
Red, legendary Champion of the Sekiei (Indigo) League
TEAM REN:
Tāraki the Sceptile
Akahata the Mightyena
Ao the Manectric
Kata the Grumpig
Kōtai the Sandslash
Roma the Sharpedo
Pohaku the Armaldo
Naihi the Absol
Teka the Pikachu

OTHER POKEMON:
Aster, Zinia's Whismur
Fang, Josh's Mightyena
In which Ren gets another badge and tries to prevent apocalypse.

Scene 1: Akahata wakes on a hospital bed in the ICU of the Pokemon Center. She looks around and everyone is there.

Ren: Hey, she’s awake. She scooches her chair a little closer so that she is right next to her injured pokemon. You really scared us there, Aka.

Akahata: Scared myself too.

Ren: How do you feel?

Akahata: slowly lifting her head Everything hurts, so I guess I’m still alive.

Ren: Yeah. I’ll ask them to up your pain meds a bit when they come back. Ren shifts uncomfortably, biting her lip. I’m, uh—

Akahata: Don’t even try it. That was my call and I’m not sorry.

Ren: small smile Okay.

Täraki: I’m so glad you came back, Aka. You’re my oldest friend. I wouldn’t know what to do without you around.

Akahata: You’d be fine. I used to worry, but I don’t anymore. Did you take care of that camerupt?

Täraki: Permanently.

Akahata: Good. It’s tried to kill you before.

Ren: clearing her throat The doctors said you should be fine in a few days. You didn’t break anything and the rest of the damage shouldn’t be permanent.

Akahata: So what’s the plan?

Ren: Well, Steven and Latias followed the sub for a while and it didn’t go to Groudon’s chamber, so we’re thinking they either don’t know where it is or aren’t ready to break in. Steven thinks Lugia may have damaged the drill they put on it. We’ve lost track of the sub and Maxie. Lugia is out of commission for now, so we are going to train in the meantime.

Akahata: Alright. What time is it?

Ren: Almost noon.
Akahata: In that case, go get something to eat. [ Ren opens her mouth to argue. ] I know you’ve been here since you woke up and I’m sure you’re starving. Go eat. I’ll be fine.

Ren: Okay. Is anyone else hungry?

[ Everyone rises except Naihi. ]

Naihi: I’d like to stay if that’s okay with Akahata.

Akahata: Sure.

Ren: Alright then. Everyone else out.

[ They all pile out of the room, sending Akahata well wishes as they exit. Ren pauses for a moment as she closes the door, looking over Akahata and Naihi. Akahata blinks at her and Ren shuts the door. Naihi and Akahata are left alone. Naihi paces up to the chair Ren left empty and hops up. She settles down in it and sits quietly for a while before she speaks. Akahata glances at her then looks away and lays her head on her paws. ]

Naihi: I wanted to apologize, for everything. You were injured because of my stubbornness. I was wrong about you. I’m not stronger and I’m not better for this team. I should never have tried to make you feel lesser. There was no need. I lied when I told Ren I was okay with staying at the reserve. I’m not. And I was so afraid Ren would send me there, that I wouldn’t make it onto the primary roster if I didn’t prove I was strong. I thought because we were both dark-types that you were competition. I see now that thinking that way means I have no right to be here… And I will leave if that is what you wish. I am so sorry. [ She bows her head. ]

Akahata: [ She lifts her head again, but does not turn to look at Naihi. ] I forgive you. And I want you to stay. We need you.

Naihi: [ straightening up and cocking her head ] How can you forgive me so easily?

Akahata: I was never angry. It hurt, but in the grand scheme it was probably the wake-up call I needed. Besides you apologized, so I like to think you’ve learned something. Why hold a grudge for that?

Naihi: [ She blinks a few times, amazed. ] Thank you Akahata. I promise I will do better from now on to repay your generosity.

[ Akahata nods and lays her head back down. ]

Naihi: Should I leave you? Let you rest?

Akahata: No, you can stay.

[ Naihi turns in a circle and lays down in the chair. It is a little too small to accommodate her and one of her rear legs hangs off while her front paws rest on the edge of Akahata’s bed. She looks Akahata over. Her burned side is bandaged and she has an IV going into one of her legs. Her breathing slows, but she does not close her eyes. ]

Naihi: …Can I ask you something?

Akahata: [ without moving ] Shoot.

Naihi: All this time I’ve treated you poorly, but you almost gave your life for mine. Why?
Akahata: We need you. You’re our heaviest hitter and that includes Tāraki.

Naihi: I see, you truly are selfless.

[ Naihi looks away out the window and Akahata watches her. She lifts her head, takes a deep breath and sighs, finally turning her face to the absol. ]

Akahata: I wouldn’t say that. I knew that we needed you, but I also didn’t want you to die… [ Naihi looks questioningly into her face. ] I admire you, I have from the beginning.

Naihi: You admire me?

Akahata: Of course I do. You were so much that I wanted to be. You were confident and righteous and beautiful and sure of yourself, sure of everything.

Naihi: Being certain isn’t a virtue when one is wrong.

Akahata: But you always knew exactly what you wanted and you went after it. You weren’t afraid to try and to fail. You made me realize that I wanted to be like that and wasn’t. Maybe it seems silly with all the pokemon like Tāraki and Kōtai and Pohaku on the team who love battling, but you were the one who made me realize there was something more there, something I was missing.

Naihi: What do you mean?

Akahata: When I was a pup, I battled for a better life and to be accepted. I listened raptly to everything my parents told me and practiced relentlessly. But I didn’t make the cut and was tossed aside. In the wild, I battled to protect my siblings and to keep us together, but in the end I wasn’t strong enough to do that either. I could only save myself. The challenge and honor and everything else died for me then, and battling became survival. When I joined Ren, I thought battling was just a sport for humans. That they used our natural skills and tendencies for their own amusement and glory. That they could never really care about us more than as tools. But Ren proved me wrong. She showed me that battling could be a partnership and that a team could be a family. I became comfortable here and so I stayed, but I was never sure of my place. All this time I’ve just been going through the motions really. You made me see that. [ She sighs. ] And I guess I’m still not sure what I’m doing.

Naihi: Will you stay with Ren?

Akahata: I have to see her through this and we have to stop Magma. I know my way that far. And after? I’m still not sure, but I think I know now what to look for, so thank you for that.

Naihi: I’m sure you’ll find it.

[ Akahata shifts, groans and resettles herself. There is no truly comfortable way to lay with all of her injuries. ]

Naihi: Did you really have such a favorable first impression of me? All the others seem to feel that I’m an acquired taste.

Akahata: I did. I thought you were brave and strong and incredible. I still do.

Naihi: After all the stupid, awful things I’ve done?

Akahata: I’ll admit you’re not perfect and there’s some things that I don’t like, but no one is. And, well, [ shrugs ] we can’t always help who we’re drawn to.
Naihi: I’m sorry to have tarnished that image. Your good opinion is well worth having. I—I’m glad you’re not angry with me, even though I deserve it… [ She taps her claws nervously. ] Do you think we could practice together again, like we did at the beginning. Once you’ve recovered, of course.

Akahata: I’d like that.

Naihi: [ smiling ] Me too. It would be an honor.

---

**Scene 2:** [ Ren rides out onto Route 124 with Roma. They head southwest for a while before making landfall on a small deserted island with only one lonesome tree growing at its center. Dizzy is lying in the shade with his ninetales, xatu, nidoking and lantern. He gets up to greet her and Ren sends out her team. Dizzy starts off their joint practice by going over some exercises that he and Kaspa do before they train. Everyone participates in the warm up, except for Akahata, who is absent. Next, everyone pairs off for sparring. Once the pokemon are taken care of, Ren and Dizzy spar. His fighting style is a bizarre mix of disciplined martial arts and dirty street-fighting. He gets Ren quite a few times at first, but once she has a better handle on his style, she is able to counter. She even manages to throw him a few times. They take a breather And Dizzy talks for a while about his training style and Kaspa’s. He is even more hands on than Ren, it seems and gets up to demonstrate by sparring with his nidoking. Ren watches with some concern as he is almost jabbed by toxic spines a number of times, but Dizzy holds his own shockingly well against the hulking pokemon. Inspired, Ren and Tāraki spar for a while. When they take a break again, Ren texts Steven. ]

Ren: How was the League meeting? I’ve been training with Dizzy all day. You should join us if you can. He trains with Kaspa all the time and she must be every bit as intense as her reputation. They battle their own pokemon. It’s crazy.

Steven: Meeting went as well as can be expected. Almost everyone has transportation now. Wallace is acting a bit odd though. He’s agitated. There’s something he’s not telling me.

Ren: Have any idea what it is?

Steven: I get the feeling he met with the orb guardians.

Ren: What?

Steven: He’s a Lorekeeper and that’s the only thing he won’t talk to me about much. Anyway, he volunteered to oversee emergency weather preparations for the islands.

Ren: That’s good.

Steven: I wish I could come train with you, but there’s too much to take care of.

Ren: That’s okay. I need it more than you anyway, Mr. Champ.

Steven: I can’t keep up my normal practice schedule and watch the cavern and deal with all of this. And I should be training more not less! It’s driving me nuts.

Ren: Hang in there.

Steven: I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be unloading on you like this.
Ren: Yes you should! I asked you to. Remember?

Steven: You’re right.

Ren: Deep breaths. Hold it in for a while before you breathe out. It’ll help slow your heart rate.

[There is nothing for a minute or two. Ren watches Dizzy spar with Pohaku. His stamina is impressive but probably inevitable given who his teacher is. Pohaku throws him back onto the sand and immediately becomes flustered and apologetic. Dizzy smiles as he waves the armaldo off and get to his feet. He says something to Pohaku and the armaldo’s pink swimmers flush a darker shade. Ren’s nav boops.]

Steven: That was surprisingly effective.

Ren: Thanks!

Steven: Sorry.

Ren: Do you practice a martial art?

Steven: No. I dance.

Ren: Really?

Steven: Yeah. I started when I was 14? My father took me to Kalos for this big business trip and we got invited to a ball so I had to learn for that. And it was a lot of fun so I kept after it.

Ren: All ballroom or?

Steven: I’ve tried lots of different styles and enjoyed most of them.

Ren: I probably should have guessed you were a dancer. You have such great posture.

Steven: Thank you.

Ren: I bet you’re good at it too.

Steven: I am.

[Ren chuckles softly to herself.

Steven: Thank you for calming me down. I don’t know how you manage to be so calm.

Ren: I’m not. I’m so fucking stressed right now. I’ve never been this stressed in my life.

Steven: I’m so sorry. Let me know If there’s anything I can do.

Ren: Talking to you helps. It gives me something else to focus on.

Steven: I’ll keep that in mind.

Ren: You better.

Steven: Alright, I promise. I think I’ll go dance for a bit. I have some time.

Ren: Good plan. Later.
Steven: Later.

[ Ren smiles at her nav, but her reverie is soon interrupted by Dizzy plopping down next to her in the sand. He lights a cigarette and takes a long drag on it. ]

Ren: Why do you do that? And why the old kind?

Dizzy: [ He exhales through his nose, momentarily wreathing his face in smoke. ] Don’t you give me a hard time about it too. Kaspa is forever riding my ass, and Hibiki.

Ren: [ relenting ] As long as it’s downwind of me.

Dizzy: Of course. [ He takes another long drag and blows a smoke ring. ]

Ren: You must be close to them, to use their personal names.

Dizzy: Closest to family I’ve ever had. [ Another inhale and smoke ring. ] And to answer the previous questions, I used to roll and sell them as a kid. Some people still like the old style, but nobody manufactures them anymore. It kept me fed, so I got hooked on them. And I don’t normally smoke this much, but I was with Lugia when that sub hit and… [ He shudders and takes another drag. He lets it out very slowly this time. ] It was fucking horrible. My chest is all tight and it aches. This helps.

Ren: Hey, whatever you need to cope is fine.

Dizzy: [ grunts ] Well, I don’t recommend it for the uninitiated. There are far better crutches.

Ren: I’m sorry about what happened.

Dizzy: Thank you, but it’s alright. We’re in this together.

[ Dizzy’s ninetails comes over to sit between them. Ren scratches behind her ears and Dizzy strokes down her back and many tails. ]

---

**Scene 3:** [ Ren trains with Dizzy again the next few days. Her mom has sent Ren her old guards from her martial arts days so that Tāraki and Pohaku don’t have to worry about slicing her when they spar. Kata takes a lot of photos, some of which she is not allowed to post. She gets very chummy with Dizzy’s ninetails and informs Ren that his xatu is ‘hilarious’. Ren gets the distinct impression that it is in the same way she finds Naihi so amusing. Dizzy compliments Pohaku when the armaldo manages to throw him into the water, which turns pohaku into a blushing, stuttering mess. Teka and Dizzy’s lantern practice together a lot since they are both less experienced and have shared typing. Ao spends a lot of time testing everyone’s reflexes since she is the fastest. Kōtai manages to beat the snot out of Dizzy’s nidoking, which surprises everyone and incites a lot of cheering. The nidoking suddenly becomes more interested in sparring with Ren’s team. Naihi trains very hard, but when they take a break she seems distracted and stares out across the ocean towards Lillycove. Ren checks her nav and finds a message from Kai. ]

Kai: How goes training with the Lugia guy?
Ren: Tough but really good. His nidoking is a mountain variant. I asked. Did you get the other pics I sent?

Kai: Yep. I love his xatu’s pattern. He must have caught the lantern here. That variant is endemic to the underwater canyons near Sootopolis.

Ren: But he can talk to her already. It’s weird.

Kai: Also you can do the gym if you want. Don’t worry about it. I’m just sorry I can’t make it. Wally and I will do it together later once he’s un-grounded.

Ren: Thanks. How was the visit?

Kai: Fun. He got me hooked on this show and I’m trying to pace myself but it’s hard.

Ren: Haha!

Kai: Any more Kyogre dreams since the last one?

Ren: Nope. I really have no idea what they think or if they’ll help me.

Kai: Seems like they were at least interested. That’s good.

Ren: I guess.

Kai: How’s Akahata?

Ren: She’s recovering well. The doctors are happy.

Kai: That’s great!

[ There is a long pause in which Ren types nothing at all. She looks out at the calm emerald sea. Kyogre breaches the surface, huge bulk looming over the island. Ren starts and drops her nav, but when she blinks the vision is gone. She slumps and wipes a hand down her face. There are bags under her eyes and her color is not too good. When she picks up her nav, she sees that there is another message from Kai. ]

Kai: I got a hold of Zinnia’s number if you wanted to call her.

Ren: Thanks. I would actually.

Kai: Sending.

---

**Scene 4:** [ Ren stares at the contact Kai sent her for a bit, thinking things over, but decides to call. It almost goes to voicemail, but Zinnia picks up just in time. ]

Zinnia: Hey.

Ren: Hello Zinnia, my name is Ren Kosugi.
Zinnia: I know. Iriaka gave me your number and told me you might call. How can I help you?

Ren: Well, first I was wondering if you had any information on the climate gods that you’re willing to share.

Zinnia: Normally I’d give you the spiel about how there is only so much I can tell an outsider, that our legends are sacred and that which is withheld is withheld for a reason, but you’re an Orb Bearer now. So for everyone’s well being, I think it would be best for you to know what you’re up against.

Ren: Thank you. I really appreciate it.

Zinnia: [ laughs ] That’s sweet of you, spitfire, but I have to ask again that you don’t thank me yet. You’ll know the moment.

Ren: Alright. Do you know anything about the orbs or their guardians?

Zinnia: Very little. The orb guardians come from a small iwi and they have always been secretive. They are said to be the descendants of the hero Moana and have a representative on the native council. But even in the native community, few know that the orb guardians exist. They are not recognized by the government like Lorekeepers are. As for the orbs, all I can say is that they can be used to communicate with and revive the climate gods. I’m sure the guardians have told you as much and more besides.

Ren: They have. Can you tell me anything about Groudon and Kyogre?

Zinnia: They are said to be intelligent, but not feeling beings. They came before life and they will outlast it. They are forces of nature and on a much grander scale than a deity like Zapdos. Unlike some legendary pokemon in our world, their power has never been tempered or harnessed in all of recorded history.

Ren: [ sighs ] Doesn’t stop some fools from trying.

[ Zinnia laughs for a while at that, but Ren can’t bring herself to. She can see herself trying to bargain with Kyogre in her mind’s eye. Zinnia falls quiet. ]

Zinnia: I didn’t mean to make things seem hopeless. Maxie will never be able to control Groudon, but the climate gods are pokemon as well as forces of nature and while it may not be possible to master them, they can be defeated.

Ren: [ smiling a little ] Than—that’s good to know.


Ren: You’re quite the battler yourself.

Zinnia: Maybe we’ll have a match someday? After this is over?

Ren: I’d be honored.

[ There is silence for a while and both smile softly, though they can’t see each other. ]

Zinnia: You’re not alone. The League and Lorekeepers won’t sit idle by while our home is destroyed. When Groudon is awakened, I’ll be there.

Ren: That’s good to hear.
Zinnia: I can’t speak for the others, but I’m grateful that you would risk so much to help us.

Ren: It’s my home now too.

Zinnia: I suppose it is.

Ren: …Can you tell me anything about the third climate god, Rayquaza?

Zinnia: I’m Draconid. Of course I can.

Ren: Right. I did some research and they supposedly have the power to negate the other two. And it also seems like maybe they’re friendlier?

Zinnia: All of that is true. Rayquaza’s ability negates the effects of both Groudon and Kyogre’s abilities, rendering them far less powerful. And Rayquaza has been an ally of mankind and the Draconid people specifically since before we carried that name. We have dedicated ourselves to training dragon pokemon in gratitude for Atua Rayquaza’s help. They have saved us and the larger world from disaster many times.

Ren: Is there any way to ask for their help again?

Zinnia: They can be summoned at the Sky Pillar, a tower built in their honor on an island in the southern sea. But the summoning process is not simple, nor always successful I’m afraid.

Ren: Oh. I see.

Zinnia: But don’t worry about that. Reaching Rayquaza is my responsibility as the Draconid Lorekeeper and not yours. And I’m doing everything in my power to contact them, I promise.

Ren: Okay. Let me know if there’s anything I can do to help.

Zinnia: You are doing more than enough and I’m sure you’ll do more before this is over. Let me handle this.

Ren: Okay… I know you said not to thank you yet—

Zinnia: And I meant it.

Ren: Well, then, I’ll just say that I’m glad I got a hold of you and I’m really glad you were on Mt. Pyre that day.

Zinnia: Me too.

[Ren opens her mouth to say something else, but she hears a tone that means Zinnia is no longer connected. Ren stares down at her nav in confusion. Tāraki comes over to sit next to her.]

Tāraki: Who were you talking to?

Ren: Zinnia.

Tāraki: Ooh, dragon lady.

Ren: [wiping a hand down her face] Please don’t call her that.

Tāraki: Why not?
Ren: Cuz she calls me ‘spitfire’ which is way cooler and I feel like a total dork for calling her ‘dragon lady’ to her face. [ Tāraki laughs. ] Sure I was nearly delusional from exhaustion at the time, but still.

Tāraki: I’m sure you’ll think of something. Just make sure it’s not as cool as ‘tiger’.

Ren: [ grinning ] Will do.

Tāraki: So how’d it go? Is she gonna help us?

Ren: Yeah, she is.

Tāraki: Yay! More friends is always good.

[ Ren leans against her sceptile and he thrums deep in his chest. ]

Ren: It’s funny. She was… familiar.

Tāraki: Do you think we’ve met her before?

Ren: No, I meant like she already has a nickname for me. She talks like she knows me, like we’re friends already. It didn’t even seem odd until she hung up.

Tāraki: I think it’s good. I want to meet her team. I don’t know any dragon-types. I’d like to talk to some now that I’m part dragon.

Ren: Hm. We’re lucky I got to train with those Draconids for a while. It’s helped your dragon claw technique a lot. And dragon’s a good defensive type for you. Helps with the fire-types.

Tāraki: [ tentative ] Ren, are you okay with… [ He looks away and hunches lower, making himself small. ] I’m sorry about the camerupt. I know we’re not supposed to—supposed to kill.

Ren: [ wrapping an arm around him ] It’s okay, tiger. And Akahata was right about that camerupt. And you’re a pokemon, not a human. I know it’s a little different for you. [ Tāraki searches her face with his big golden eyes. ] I’m okay, really. I ate that numel back on Mt. Chiminy with the rest of you, didn’t I? [ She sighs. ] This was a trainer’s pokemon, but it wasn’t a normal battle. And she tried to kill us first. I’m not even sure Courtney’s upset about it, honestly. She doesn’t even name her pokemon, she mistreats them. They’re just weapons to her. [ Ren stops and looks down, wiping a tear away. ] I don’t know what I’m saying. I don’t know if that makes it better. I don’t want to think about it right now. I wish it didn’t happen, but I don’t blame you. And I’m still too angry about Akahata to blame myself for anything else. We’ve got bigger magikarp to fry right now. We have to stay strong.

Tāraki: [ butting his head into hers ] I love you, Ren.

Ren: [ nuzzling him back ] I love you too, tiger.

---

Scene 5: [ In another corner of the region, Zinnia sets down her nav on the bare limestone next to her and slaps both hands over her face with a groan. She is in Meteor Falls somewhere by the look of her surroundings. There is bare rock, running water and a few scraggly bushes nearby. Her
whismur watches impassively from a few feet away.

Aster: Had to slip up right at the end, huh.

Zinnia: I was so close to getting through that call.

Aster: It’s probably weirder that you just hung up. You could have recovered from there.

Zinnia: [slumping onto her back, face still covered] Not helping, flower… [letting her hands fall to reveal that her face is still a little pink] I should never have talked to her in the first place. What the hell was I thinking?

Aster: You have poor impulse control.

Zinnia: I know, I know.

Aster: And why not let her thank you? We have been keeping her safe, even if she doesn’t know.

Zinnia: Because of what I put her through, what I’m going to put her through.

Aster: Hm. I guess that will be a bit awkward to explain when you ask her out.

Zinnia: Aster!

Aster: You know I’m right.

Zinnia: How did I ever raise such a smug, salty child?

Aster: I wonder.

Zinnia: [deep sigh] I walked right into that. [She slams her fist into the ground beside her.] This is so inconvenient!

Aster: Personally, I think it’s good: motivates you to keep your promise.

Zinnia: Yeah? Well it fucks over my priority matrix!

[Aster snickers.]

Zinnia: I’m glad you can enjoy this.

Aster: I am happy. You care now; you care about the cost. That’s good.

Zinnia: I always cared.

Aster: It’s more personal now. [Zinnia groans.] I know that makes it harder, but that’s the way it should be.

Zinnia: What happens to her if I let Maxie revive Groudon? What if she goes into the chamber after him? What if she decides to set Kyogre loose? What am I supposed to do?

Aster: What will you do?

Zinnia: What I was always going to do. I can’t change things now. Well I mean I can, but I’m not going to. We have to summon Rayquaza or everyone dies. I had to take some risks. You know I didn’t want this!
Aster: I do and I’m with you. You don’t have to justify yourself to me. And you’re strong enough, I know you are. [ The whismur hops over to Zinnia and nuzzles her shoulder. Zinnia lifts her hand and scratches the whismur by the ear. ] I love you, mom.

Zinnia: I love you too, flower.

Aster: We’ll do this together. I’ll be with you until the end.

Zinnia: Longer than that, my daughter. [ She gives her whismur a kiss, then sighs, sinking limply against the stone beneath her. ] Why’d it have to be her? I felt bad enough throwing Stone under the bus.

Aster: Guess we better not fail.

Zinnia: [ sitting up, eyes burning ] We won’t.

---

**Scene 6:** [ A few days later, Ren and her team arrive at Shoal Cave. Roma swims around in the shallow water, weaving between the clamperl shell middens made by the snorunts who live there. The rest of the gang stays in the dry parts of the cave, collecting shells, licking salt or accepting challenges from wild pokemon. They all fan out, but stay within sight. Ren watches with satisfaction as Naihi remains by Akahata’s side for most of the day. Where the mightyena was once tense and quiet around her absol teammate, the two now converse easily, and are often close enough together to be almost touching. Naihi defers most challengers to Akahata, who seems to be enjoying herself. Kata nails Naihi with a snowball while Akahata is distracted. Naihi whips around in confusion to see Kata sitting with a snorunt across the water. Kata grins, holding her hands out in front of her to form another snowball out of the ice crystals the snorunt is feeding her. Naihi bounds forward to where the expanse of water narrows and she can leap across. Meanwhile, Akahata has finished her battle and sits back on her haunches to watch the ruckus unfold. Ren takes a seat by her mightyena and buries a hand in the ruff around her neck. ]

Ren: How are you feeling today?

Akahata: Very well, thank you. Still a little stiff in places, but the exercises helped a lot.

Ren: That’s good. Are you sure you’re ready to come back yet? You can always take some more time off if you want.

Akahata: No, I want to be here.

Ren: Okay then, I guess I won’t stop you. You do seem a lot better.

[ Kata and the wild snorunt are beating a hasty retreat as Naihi runs after them. ]

Ren: Are you sure you want to take on the gym though?

Akahata: Yes. I’ve only battled in one gym all this time. I’d like another shot at winning a badge.

Ren: I’m glad you and Naihi are getting along again.
Ren: So, what exactly went down between you two anyways, if you don’t mind my asking?

Akahata: She was… kind of a jerk to me but she apologized, so it’s resolved now.

Ren: Oh.

Akahata: And I admitted that I have feelings for her.

Ren: Really?

Akahata: It didn’t seem like that big a deal after everything.

Ren: [ ruffling the fur on Akahata’s shoulders ] Ahhh! I’m so proud of you! What did she say?

Akahata: She was surprised, which was kinda funny. Everyone else knew. I don’t know if she likes me back yet, but she wants to be friends at least.

Ren: Well that’s good! I’ve been planning to use you both for this gym since she joined the team.

Akahata: Do you want us to tag-team?

Ren: No, the Mossdeep Gym specializes in double battles. The Gym Leaders are identical twins and psychic, so it might be a challenge even with two dark-types.

Akahata: [ smiling ] We’ll see.

Ren: [ laughing ] We’re gonna crush it!

Naihi: I could use your help next time, if your willing. The grumpig doesn’t fight fair.

Kata: Hey Ren, this snorunt wants to train with us.

Ren: Um, did you explain to her that we are probably going to have to fight Groudon soon? Or a bunch of thugs and one very powerful fire-type specialist at the very least?

Kata: Yep! She said it seemed like a good way to get strong fast.

Ren: That’s, uh, I’m not sure if—

Kata: She also agreed to sit that part out if you’re not cool with it and train with us after that. Assuming we survive of course.

Ren: Okay… Then yeah, I guess. Why not?

Kata: Awesome! You’re on the team!
Scene 7: [ Pan through a hallway in the Magma base and stop at a door labeled “Maxie Matsuda”. We can hear yelling from within. Pan out to show Josh sitting in a chair next to the door. He is hunched over, head in hands, shaking, as the shouting match continues. Finally the yelling dies down and Tabitha emerges from the office and slams the door shut behind her. She looks over and sees Josh. ]

Tabitha: [ straightening up and adjusting her jacket ] Well good luck in there. I got him nice and warmed up for you. [ noticing Josh’s posture and cocking her head slightly ] Are you okay?

[ Josh lifts his head out of his hands and tries to discreetly wipe his face. ]

Josh: [ croaking ] Fine.

[ He does not look up at her, but it is obvious from the bit of his face she can see that he has been crying. ]

Tabitha: [ She sighs. ] Shit. [ She takes a deep breath and runs a hand through her short hair. ] I’m sorry, Josh. Maybe you should give it a few minutes before you go in there, okay? [ looking away ] Listen, you don’t have anything to worry about. The mission is the same as ever and everything’s going according to plan. Maxie and I may not always agree, but that doesn’t mean I’ll throw you all under the bus. [ Josh does not respond and Tabitha looks down at him again. ] You’ve put in a lot of good work and shown a lot of dedication. We aren’t going to forget that.

[ She pats him on the shoulder before turning and heading off down the hall. Josh just looks scared and guilty. He shudders and wipes his nose as soon as she is out of sight. ]

Scene 8: [ Ren, Akahata, Naihi, Kata and the snorunt (Tarahau) walk into the Mossdeep Gym. Beyond the lobby where the front desk is located, the floor drops away to show the river the gym is built over. There are four battle platforms and a number of smaller platforms between them suspended over dark, churning water. The gym leader platform is at the back and empty for the time being, but there is a pair of trainers waiting in the near right arena. There is another small platform in between, but the gap is still much too far to jump. However, Kata informs them that there are psychic boosters in place and easily bounces the distance to demonstrate. The snorunt follows after her and cackles with glee when she lands safely on the other side. Ren withdraws her two dark-types before taking a running start. She leaps and some invisible force carries her to the other side. Ren smiles and the three continue to the battle platform. Kata and Tarahau face off against a xatu and starmie. The snorunt is still inexperienced, so she focuses on distracting the xatu while Kata takes care of the starmie with charge beam. By the time the grumpig is ready to come to her teammate’s aid, the xatu’s wings are so weighed down with ice that Kata is able to easily one-shot it with power gem. Kata and Tarahau high-five each other and take a bow before moving on to the next platform. ]
The second battle is a girafarig and chimecho, which are a bit more challenging since Ren’s duo has no type advantage, but they still manage. Next they face a grumpig and a kirlia. Tarahau manages to trip up the grumpig by icing over the floor beneath its feet, which gives Kata the opportunity to duke it out with the kirlia. The grumpig charges Tarahau with zen headbutt, but slips and the snorunt latches onto its arm with a bite and Kata finishes it off. Finally they face a kadabra and a medicham. Kata parries the medicham’s attacks with psyshock while Tarahau breaks free of the kadabra’s psychic hold with bite and starts chasing after it, cackling wickedly. Once again the snorunt manages to latch on so that Kata has a clear shot when she is ready. Ren and her twopokemon leap the final gap to the leader platform with a cheer and laugh when they land, clearly enjoying themselves. Tate and Lisa appear from a teleportation pad at the far side of the platform. They walk up to greet Ren and she shakes both of their hands. They are nearly identical but not quite, with Tate’s face being slightly more masculine. When they are ready to battle, the trainers return to their squares and send out their pokemon. Akahata and Naihi pace forward to face Tate’s claydol and Lisa’s gardevoir. The absol and mightyena glance at each other before leaping into action. Naihi rakes the gardevoir with shadow claw while Akahata breaks the claydol’s defences with crunch. The claydol retaliates with earthquake to unsteady them and the gardevoir goes for a draining kiss on Naihi. The absol manages to dodge and the dark-types finish off their opponents simultaneously. The twins send out their signature solrock and lunatone. The solrock rises high in the air to use sunny day while the lunatone defends it with rock slide. Naihi cuts a path through the barrage with slash and slices the lunatone with night slash. It withstands the critical hit, but Akahata follows up with assurance and it goes down. The solrock uses solar beam on Akahata, but Naihi leaps up into the air and knocks it down with night slash. Akahata once again finishes it off with assurance and the battle is over. The twins withdraw their pokemon and bow, admitting defeat. Akahata and Naihi look at each other and smile.

Naihi: Tāraki was right about gym battles. What a glorious experience! You were wonderful Akahata.

Akahata: Thank you. I haven’t had that much fun in quite a while.

[ Naihi wags her rigid tail and smiles even wider. Tate and Lisa have come forward to talk to Ren. ]

Tate: You completely destroyed us.

Lisa: There was a combo I probably should have expected but didn’t.

Tate: Yeah, we thought because your mightyena was faster, you would go for sucher punch instead of assurance.

Lisa: But since your absol has super luck, it makes night slash almost certain to crit.

Tate: And having your mightyena hold back to combo on top of that—

Lisa: Butal. And our pokemon have pretty good defences.

Tate: We haven’t been taken down like that in a while.

Lisa: Do you mind if we show that battle video to our students?

Tate: We could really use it for our ‘maximizing you advantages’ unit.

Ren: Sure thing. Thank you.

Lisa: Not sure what else to say. You got anything, Tate?
Tate: Your battling style is pretty straightforward.

Lisa: But it’s difficult to counter that much raw power.

Tate: I wouldn’t call it raw.

Lisa: More like honed to a lethal point.

Tate: Anyway—

Tate & Lisa: Please accept the Mind Badge.

[ Ren takes it. ]

Lisa: I have a feeling we’ll be seeing each other again soon.

[ Tate goes ramrod straight and grabs his sister’s hand. She starts as if her had shocked her and their eyes lose focus. ]

Tate: Do you feel that?

Lisa: Do you think it’s—?

[ The earth begins to rumble and Ren looks around the gym. The other trainers and pokemon who were practicing look up at the domed ceiling shaking above them. ]

Tate & Lisa: [ voices somehow loud like a megaphone ] Everyone outside!

Tate & Lisa: [ to Ren ] This way.

[ Ren withdraws her pokemon and follows the twins through the teleporter and then out a back door. The twins climb up the hillside a ways, still holding hands, to get a better view. The ground stops rumbling and Ren catches up and turns to see what they are looking at. A pillar of green light is shining to the south across the sea, breaking through the cloud cover around it to penetrate deeper into the sky. ]

Tate & Lisa: The seal is undone.

Ren: [ telepathy ] Steven, are you seeing this?

Steven: Yes. I’m almost there.

Ren: Wait for me!

Steven: You know I can’t.

Ren: Fine. I’ll be there as soon as I can. Don’t do anything reckless!

Steven: Shouldn’t I be the one cautioning you?

Ren: [ to the twins ] Will you contact the rest of the League?

Lisa: [ on her nav ] Already on it.

Tate: Are you coming with us?

Ren: I have to go now and help Steven. [ running for the cliffs ] I’ll see you there!
Scene 9: Ren doesn’t slow as the edge of the cliffs comes nearer, instead speeding up and jumping clear off. Latios catches her in midair and they rocket away south towards the dimming green light. Ren picks up her nav and calls Dizzy, then Archie, and finally her friends and parents. Once all of that is done, she leans lower over Latios’s neck, willing him to go faster. She blinks into Steven’s eyes and sees him sneaking around a cavern away from a crowd of Magma grunts and the submarine behind them in the water. Ren blinks back to herself and waits for them to get closer. After a while, Latios angles down towards a small island that is just above the water when the tide is high. There is dark volcanic rock at the center with bits of grass and wildflowers growing in its crags. One side is soft sand that Ren hops off onto as they touch down. The other side is rocky and seems to drop off more precipitously into the depths. Ren sends her sharpedo into the water just offshore. She climbs aboard and the sharpedo dives under. There are lots of bizarrely deserted kelp beds along the sides of the island, but it doesn’t take long for the ocean floor to drop away. They soon find a giant hole drilled in the rock by the sub and pass through. They surface in a large cavern that contains air but is mostly open water rather than stone. The sub sits in the middle with a long ramp going from the deck to the solid rock at the edge of the chamber. Magma has set up a bunch of lights to illuminate the chamber. Five tunnels branch away from the main room, three of which are lit. There are a bunch of grunts on and near the sub, but Ren suspects many more of them have gone further in. Roma takes her to shore away from the others and Ren disembarks.

Roma: I’ll wait for you.

Ren: Thanks, Roma.

[ Ren waits to make sure the grunts are turned away, but no one is really looking at her dark corner of the chamber and she slips down the closest unlit tunnel. As soon as she is far enough away, she sends out Kata. The grumpig lights up her pearls and Ren pulls a potion out of her bag to spray her down. ]

Ren: Sorry about not getting you a break.

Kata: I’ll manage. So what’s the scoop?

Ren: Maxie will be headed to Groudon’s chamber if he isn’t there already, so we have to find it or Steven before Groudon gets revived.

Kata: And I’m the flashlight!

Ren: Let’s go.

[ Ren sends out Latios who goes ahead of them down the tunnel. It soon becomes too narrow for him to fly, so he folds his wings and walks. Even with everything going on, Kata and Ren have to chuckle at his shuffling gait, which makes the feathers on his shoulders ruffle in annoyance. The tunnel is winding and irregular and other tunnels branch off at regular intervals. Latios pauses now and then to get his bearings, but tries to lead them in Steven and Latias’s general direction. Eventually they cross paths with a lighted tunnel and Kata dims her pearls before they peak around the corner. They wait in the dark tunnel for some Magma grunts to pass and then creep down the lighted tunnel after them. Latios turns invisible, but there is not much he can do for the other two, so they stay close to the wall and walk as quietly as possible. Suddenly there is shouting from behind them and the grunts turn around to see what it is. One of them spots Ren and Kata. ]
Magma Grunt 1: Hey!

Magma Grunt 2: It's Kosugi!

Magma Grunt 3: Get her!

They all send out their pokemon and Ren sends out Tāraki to back up Kata. Rather than trying to defeat all of the combatants, Ren and her pokemon charge directly at the grunts, shove them aside and continue down the tunnel. The grunts and their pokemon give chase for a while and Kata fires off charge beams and power gems over her shoulder as they run.

Magma Grunt 3: Wait, leave her! Team Aqua’s here!

Tāraki: Whoohoo!

Kata: The cavalry's comin’!

As soon as they turn back and Kata stops attacking, Ren can hear the pandemonium of battle taking place back the way they came. Latios reappears and they continue on. Soon sounds of conflict seem to be coming from nearly every tunnel they come across. Latios keeps weaving from dark to lighted tunnel as they go deeper into the maze and the sounds of battle grow steadily louder. They stumble into another group of grunts and Tāraki tears into their pokemon with leaf blade, scattering them. Ren sends out Tarahau to back him up. She uses frost breath to freeze the floor and cackles as everyone trips and slides.

Kata: [ nailing the slipping pokemon one after another with charge beam ] Like magikarp in a barrel! Tara you da best!

The snorunt gracefully glides across the ice and body-checks an enemy lombre, cackling all the while. Ren slides across the ice rink and continues off down the tunnel, while Tāraki covers their backs. Ren checks on Steven for a moment to find him battling a bunch of grunts as well. They run into another group and defeat them in a similar manner. Although the encounter is more brief this time, Ren face looks tense as they skirt away down a cramped side tunnel. It’s very hard to tell at this point which direction the sounds of battle are coming from and how close. Ren runs out into a lighted tunnel to find Archie, Matt and some other Aqua grunts engaged with a bunch of Magma grunts. Ren has to duck under a stray brine attack that goes flying past its intended target.

Archie: Hey lass! There ya are!

[ Ren takes one look at him and bolts in the other direction. Tāraki has to block another attack for her as they run, but Latios leads them into cross tunnel away from the battle. Ren withdraws her tired pokemon as the tunnel narrows. It is dark, but there is light at the other end. ]

Scene 10: [ By the end of the tunnel, Ren has to turn sideways to fit through. The opening is particularly tight and the pitted rock snags on her clothes. She stumbles out into the light and checks herself over, but nothing is ripped. She senses someone else nearby and turns to see Josh staring at her. ]

Ren: [ relieved ] Josh! You have to help me!
Josh: [frowns darkly] You’re the reason Aqua is here, aren’t you?

Ren: Of course! Listen, I like them about as much as you do, but this madness has got to stop.

Josh: [leaning towards her, angry and defiant] I can’t believe you think I’d help you after the fucking mess you just made! [He points forcefully over her shoulder at an Aqua and Magma grunt tussling as they roll out of view around the corner]

Ren: [exasperated gesturing] You think I wanted this to happen?

Josh: Of course you do! You’ve been trying to stop us for months and now you found the perfect way to do it and—oh yeah, BONUS ROUND—[gesturing wildly] you get to tear the team apart at the same time! [He turns away from her, clutching at his hair. He comes back full circle, pointing an accusing finger in her face.] What the fuck did you do to Tabitha!?

Ren: [shoving his finger away] I didn’t do anything to her! She just came to her fucking senses, okay? So should you. Have you even seen what—!

Josh: That is taurosshit and you know it! You were at the Weather Institute. That’s when it started!

Ren: What started?

Josh: [grabbing his forehead as if he has a headache] Why do you have to do this?!

Ren: Well, if you would just listen to me—!

Josh: No! I’m done. I’m not going to help you destroy Magma!

Ren: This isn’t about Magma, you—you baka yarou! Don’t you have any idea—[She stops because he is turning away from her again, face set firmly, clearly not listening. Hot fury contorts her face and her hand flashes out to grab him.] Just—

[This time she is silenced because he catches her wrist. His face, which has turned back to her is full of animalistic rage. He cocks his other arm back, his free hand forming a fist as he readies a punch. Ren pales immediately. She cannot get away. She tries to think of a counter-move, but the blow never comes. His red face pales and falls, for a moment mirroring the shock and fear in hers. He lowers his fist and lets go of her, looking anguished and scared. Ren stares at him in confusion as tears start to trail down his face.]

Josh: [stammering] I—I’m s-sorry! [He covers his face with his hands and sobs.] I’m so s-sorry! [He crumples back against the wall, looking small.] I’m so sorry. [He keeps repeating between the sobs wracking his body. For a few moments, Ren can only stare in total confusion, but it is soon partially replaced by compassion. She reaches out to put a hand on his shoulder but pulls back, glancing down for a moment and biting her lip.]

[He can’t finish the sentence, words catching in his throat as his eyes squeeze shut. For another few seconds she still can’t puzzle out why he would feel so guilty. She scans his face and her eyes stop at

Ren: Josh? [No response. His sobs quiet a bit and his apologies slowly become inaudible.] Josh, it’s okay. [He shakes his head, sniffing loudly as he wipes his face with the back of his hand. Ren reaches out again and gently places a hand on his shoulder.] Josh, it’s okay. I’m okay. [He doesn’t respond and the tears continue to stream down his face. Ren cocks her head.] What’s the matter? You… You don’t have to be sorry. You didn’t do anything.

Josh: [Not looking at her.] But I—I was g-going t-to…

[He can’t finish the sentence, words catching in his throat as his eyes squeeze shut. For another few seconds she still can’t puzzle out why he would feel so guilty. She scans his face and her eyes stop at
the scar on his lip. Suddenly the confusion falls right off her face as realization dawns on her. Her face becomes pained with sympathy and for a moment she has no idea what to do, but she takes a deep breath and remembers what she was taught. She squeezes his shoulder and ducks her head to try and meet his eyes.

Ren: But you didn’t.

Josh: B-but—

Ren: [She cuts him off.] Josh, look at me. [Her hand moves up to gently cup his cheek. He almost flinches away but doesn’t. He still won’t look at her, letting out an embarrassingly snotty hiccup instead. She brings up her other hand to cradle his face and guides his eyes up to hers, but they snap closed.] Look at me, Josh. I’m okay.

Josh: [His eyes open and tears leak out. In a trembling whisper] I-I w-wanted t-to hit y-you.

Ren: But you didn’t.

Josh: [looking away again] B-but I almost—

Ren: It doesn’t matter.


Ren: Nope.

Josh: But I sh-shouldn’t w-want—want to—

Ren: You can’t control how you feel. All that matters is what you do. [She swipes her thumbs under his eyes, wiping away his tears. His eyes flick back up to hers and she maintains the contact smiling gently.] I really believe that. [He has to look away again after a bit, but his expression has softened. Her hands fall back down to his shoulders.] You stopped yourself. We’re both okay. That’s all that matters. [She pauses for a moment before slipping her hands under his arms and pulling him in for a hug. He goes stiff with shock but soon relaxes, wrapping his arms around her shoulders and burying his tearstained face in her neck.]

Josh: [muffled] I’m still sorry.

Ren: [She rests her head on his shoulder and sighs.] You know, I should really be the one apologizing to you… [He lifts his head slightly, surprised and listening. She looks thoughtful and uncertain.] All those times I threatened you. I should have known that—[flashback in her head to the Weather Institute when she slammed him up against a wall] The way you flinched… [face setting in determination] No. [She pulls away slightly, bringing her hands to hold his upper arms while his come to rest on her shoulders.] You know what? It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter what happened to you and whether or not I knew. I wasn’t treating you like a person. I was scared—I’m still scared—and I took it out on you. I used you. That wasn’t okay. I’m sorry.

Josh: [He takes a moment, then answers quietly, the trembling gone from his voice.] I know you weren’t actually going to hurt me then, at the Weather Institute.

Ren: [confused] But you acted so scared.

Josh: I was—I can’t help it—but there’s a difference. I don’t know how to explain. There’s a difference between… force and violence? Does that make any sense?—I-I don’t know. I knew you didn’t want to hurt me.
Ren: I’m glad. But I’m still sorry.

Josh: It’s okay. I’ve done some shitty stuff too, as you know.

Ren: [soft chuckle] Yeah… [She pulls away.] I’m sorry I tried to drag you into this again. I’m just so afraid. But that’s a reason, not an excuse. You should get out of here before the shit really hits the fan.

Josh: But you’re staying?

Ren: Of course.

Josh: Why ’of course’? Why do you have to do this? Let’s just go.

Ren: I can’t!

Josh: Why not? You don’t have to get involved in everything, you know. No one is making you. You should take care of yourself. No one else can.

Ren: No one else is gonna do this either!

Josh: What about the League?

Ren: They’re on their way.

Josh: Then what’s the problem?

Ren: What if they don’t get here in time? What if they need me—or just one more trainer—to help them?

Josh: Why is it your problem?

Ren: Don’t you get it? It’s everyone’s problem! I-I can’t run from this. If I run now, soon there may not be anywhere to run. Me, my pokemon, my parents, my friends… the entire region, maybe the entire world could get burned up. Everyone is in danger. I just—I have to do what I can.

Josh: [He looks away, face tight. After a pause he sighs and looks at her again.] Okay, b-but I’ll come with you.

Ren: What!? [The shock is evident on her face.] You don’t have to—

Josh: If you’re right, then there’s nowhere else for me to go, is there?

[Ren beams, cracking a huge smile. She jumps up and throws her arms around his neck, hugging him again. He staggers but manages to catch her, holding her tight. She takes a slow, deep breath, then lets go, pushing back off of him. He sets her down and almost the second her feet touch the ground, she grabs his hand]

Ren: Let’s go!

[Before he can respond, she is pulling him along, breaking into a run.]

Josh: [stumbling along behind her] Arceus, Ren, slow down!
Scene 11: [ Ren does not slow down and Josh manages to find his feet after a few strides. Ren sends out Akahata and Naihi and Josh sends out his mightyena and crobat. The pokemon eye each other, then their trainer’s joined hands and they shrug. A pair of Magma grunts appear out of a side tunnel and Ren’s pokemon rush forward to take care of them. ]

Josh: Wait! Don’t hurt them!

[ Everyone freezes and Hartmann and Brenton stare at Josh in confusion. ]

Hartmann: Josh, what are you—

Josh: [gripping Ren’s hand tighter] We’re going to get Maxie.

Hartmann: That’s that Kosugi chick.

Brenton: What about the mission?

Josh: It’s screwed! The whole thing is screwed! Get yourselves out before the whole place blows up! [Josh pulls Ren forward and shoves past them.] Take anyone you can find with you and just get out!

[Hartmann and Brenton are a bit too stunned to do anything, But Akahata and Naihi stay behind to make sure until Ren and Josh are well clear. ]

Hartmann: Josh!

Brenton: Wait! Get back here!

[ Ren and Josh continue running around the corner and away out of sight. They come to a T and find several of Magma grunts waiting for them. Before Josh can raise any objections, the Magma pokemon have engaged Akahata and Naihi. ]

Josh: Stop! We don’t wanna fight you!

[ His protests fall on deaf ears and moments later he sends his pokemon into battle as well. The mele is particularly hectic in the confined space and a linoone slips past Akahata to launch itself at Ren’s head. Ren’s ears pop as it is knocked aside by a concussive sound wave inches from her nose. She turns to see a familiar taillow swooping towards her. ]

Ren: Maia!

Maia: Are you okay, Ren?

Ren: Yeah! Had to save my ass one last time, I see. How goes training?

Maia: [slapping a makuhita across the face with wing attack] Great!

[Winona and her shiny swellow have caught up and dive into the fray as well. A moment later an ursaring comes charging up from behind the Magma grunts and bowls all but one of them over. ]

Ren: Kenta?

Kenta: Hey, little cub. How—
Senri: **Ren!**

[ Ren barely has time to let go of Josh’s hand before her father sweeps her up in a bear hug. ]


Senri: There you are! Thank Arceus! Are you okay?

Ren: Yeah.

[ Meanwhile Kenta and the rest have made pretty short work of the Magma grunts and their pokemon. One edges away from the carnage and almost trips over Josh, but he catches her. ]

Josh: Whenua? Whenua, you have to get out of here.

Whenua: Can’t. Gotta find Terra first. We got separated.

[ Just then a whole new pile of Magma grunts and pokemon appear around the corner. ]

Ren: Otōsan, I have to go. I have to stop Maxie.

Senri: Okay, but be careful. We’ll take care of these guys.

Kenta: Punch that Maxie asshole right in the face for me!

[ Senri sends out his vigoroth and orders him into battle beside his ursaring, Winona’s swellow and Maia. Ren grabs Josh’s hand again as she runs and Whenua follows after them. She glances at their joined hands and rolls her eyes. ]

---

**Scene 12:** [ Meanwhile, in another part of the tunnels, Dizzy rounds a corner right into Wallace. Dizzy stumbles back, hand over his nose. Wallace’s huntail swims up and snarls in Dizzy’s face and Dizzy’s nidoking growls in response. Pixie curves around her trainer’s heels, regarding Wallace with curiosity. ]

Wallace: Ow! [ looking Dizzy up and down in confusion ] Who are you?


[ Dizzy’s nidoking relaxes only to start back to attention a moment later along with his ninetails. Dizzy points over Wallace’s shoulder and he turns to see several Magma grunts and their pokemon (muk, weezing, numel, nuzleaf). ]

Wallace: Aqua jet, Rimu!

Dizzy: [ in Kantonese ] Megahorn!

[ The two groups battle back and forth for a few moments. Both Wallace and Dizzy’s pokemon take down several foes each but are eventually overwhelmed. Dizzy’s nidoking and Wallace’s huntail go down in almost the same moment, leaving a very drained weezing and a healthy mightyena on the field. The mightyena sees its opening and lunges for Wallace. Dizzy sees this out of the corner of his eye and gets between them. He punches the mightyena in the gut, fist glowing a lurid lime green. ]
The mightyena goes sailing into the far wall and crumples to the floor. It tries to get up but shudders and stays down. The Magama grunts take one look at Dizzy, withdraw their pokemon and run back the way they came. Wallace gapes for a moment in total confusion and Dizzy turns to check on him.

Wallace: Alright, who the hell are you and what the fuck was that?!

Dizzy: Eh? Ah, er, hello, I am Dizzy. It is nice to meet you? Um… Kuso!

Wallace: You just used a pokemon move. How—

[ Dizzy puts a finger to his lips and grabs Wallace’s hand. Dizzy’s ninetails darts off down a tunnel and Dizzy follows her, dragging Wallace behind him. They stop as they come to a cross tunnel and Dizzy and his ninetails flatten themselves against the wall. ]

Wallace: I’m not gonna let this go, you know. How did you—

[ Dizzy throws his free hand over Wallace’s mouth which has the added effect of flattening him against the wall as well. A moment later a bunch of Magma grunts run past down the tunnel. Wallace swats Dizzy’s hand away and Dizzy peers around the corner. After he has made sure it is clear, they dart through the cross tunnel and continue on. ]

Wallace: What in Arceus’s name is going on? Do you even know where we’re going?

[ Dizzy turns to Wallace, looking rather sheepish and frazzled. ]

Wallace: Why are you here? Do you even speak Anglic? Hoennen?

[ Dizzy mutters a few more curses in Kantonese before looking to his ninetails. ]

Dizzy: [ in Kantonese ] Pixie, could you talk to him for me? I can’t remember a word of Anglic right now.

[ The ninetails turns her attention to Wallace as they start down the tunnel again. ]

Pixie: [ telempathy ] Sorry for the confusion. His name is Diomedes Alkaev and I’m Pixie. We are servants of Lord Lugia. We’re here to help.

Wallace: O-kay. Why did he say he was dizzy? Did he hit his head or something?

Pixie: [ giggling ] No, he meant he prefers to be called Dizzy.

Wallace: Oh. How the hell did he use a pokemon move?

Pixie: I’m not allowed to explain about that. Also, if anyone asks, you didn’t see him do it.

Wallace: Great.

[ They come to another wider tunnel and peer around the corner to see there are about half a dozen Magma grunts and their pokemon. There is no good way to sneak by. Dizzy grumbles, weighing their options. Wallace groans and wrenches his hand from Dizzy’s grasp. ]

Wallace: This is taking too long. Is Groudon that way?

Dizzy: [ nods ] Uh, hai.
Wallace: Peretau, surf!

Water erupts from nowhere around Peretau and he spirals gracefully around the corner and down the tunnel towards the unsuspecting Magma grunts. They are all swept away in the torrent and pushed down a side tunnel. Dizzy’s eyebrows shoot up as he watches. Wallace starts running after his milotic, but then turns back for a second.

Wallace: Aren’t you coming?

Dizzy and Pixie share a glance before following after him.

---

**Scene 13:** Ren, Josh, Akahata, Naihi, Fang and Shade dash through the maze, shoving Magma grunts aside as they go and dodging Aqua grunts here and there. Whenua sticks close behind them, checking down every tunnel for her partner. They spill out into a small chamber to find an Aqua grunt and her sharpedo pinned down by a group of Magma grunts. Ren opens her mouth but someone else yells out the Aqua grunt’s name first.

Terra: running in from another tunnel

Moana: Terra!

Terra: shoving her teammates aside Lay off her!

Magma Grunt 1: But she’s Aqua.

Magma Grunt 2: grabbing Terra’s shoulder before she can get through Looks like we have a mole.

Terra: What? No!

Whenua: stepping forward Paws off, Jean.

Grunt 2: Grabbing Terra by both arms Not you too.

He jerks his chin at his swallot and all of the Magma pokemon move between the grunts and Whenua. She sends out her sandslash and Ren and Josh’s pokemon move forward. Moana seizes the opportunity of everyone looking away from her to punch the guy holding Terra in the head. He goes down and chaos erupts as both people and pokemon start battling one another. Ren ducks around the pokemon to help out Terra and Moana, who are outnumbered. A grunt throws a punch at her, but she trips him easily and throws him to the ground. The whole thing is over in a minute or so and the Magma grunts beat a hasty retreat. Terra and Moana check on each other immediately.

Moana: brushing Terra’s hair out of her face I looked everywhere for you! Are you alright?

Terra: touching Moana’s I’m fine. What about you?

Moana: Fine! I was so worried.

Terra: pressing her forehead against Moana’s I’m so glad you’re okay.
Moana puts her arms around Terra’s waist and pulls her flush. Terra wraps her arms around Moana’s neck and kisses her. Josh and Ren look away, waiting for them to be finished while Whenua just smirks. Eventually the two remember they are not alone and break apart. Terra sees Whenua watching her and blanches.

Terra: Um, uh, I can explain!

Whenua: [waving her off] I already knew. [looking Moana up and down] She’s hot. [thumbs up] Nice.

[Terra and Moana both flush and Moana grins.]

Ren: Hey, Moana!

Moana: Ren!

Ren: You all should get out of here.

Moana: What about you?

Ren: I have to stop Maxie.

[Terra and Moana glance at each other.]

Moana: You shouldn’t have to do this yourself.

Ren: Oh, I, uh—

Moana: Wanna team up again? For old times’ sake?

Ren: [She holds her breath for a moment.] Okay.

Terra: I’m coming too. Whenua, are you—?

Whenua: No way I’m leaving you alone with these people. [glancing around] No offense.

Terra: [hugging her] Ohhhh.

Ren: Alright, let’s move.

[Ren heads for a tunnel and Terra sends out a camerupt.]

Ren: Oh hey, she evolved!

Terra: Yeah!

Moana: [proud grin] We’ve been training together.

Terra: I guess Ėhe was the challenge Ember needed.

Whenua: You named your sharpedo Ėhe?

Moana: Yep!

[Whenua starts laughing and Terra looks at her.]

Terra: Wait, it’s Hoenn right? What’s it mean?
Scene 14: [ In the central chamber of the island, Archie is battling Maxie and Steven is battling Courtney, Blaise and Gloria. Groudon crouches in a pit behind them, motionless and gray as the surrounding stone. Archie’s mega Sharpedo goes down as Ren and company pour into the chamber. He wobbles and falls to his knees from exhaustion. ]

Archie: Dammit.

Ren: Steven!

[ Ren runs to his side and Josh trails after her, but his eyes stay fixed on Maxie. Akahata and Naihi run forward to defend Steven’s worn out Archeops, Cradily and Armaldo. The opposing Magma Pokemon pause their assault. ]

Steven: I’m fine, just a little worn down. Are you okay?

Ren: Yeah. Sorry we took so long.

Maxie: [ pacing between them and Groudon ] Ms. Kosugi, I can’t tell you how pleased I am that you made it here. [ pulling the red orb from his pocket ] It seems fitting that you witness Groudon’s revival.

Tabitha: [ bursting in with Wallace and Dizzy on her heels ] Wait, Maxie! Stop! Don’t do it!

Maxie: When we are so close? Be reasonable, Tabitha.

Tabitha: Listen to me! We started this to help people, that’s always been our goal, but if you set that thing loose people will die! It could be the end of the world! The Maxie I know takes care of people! He would never risk everyone’s lives for some project! It’s that thing. It’s been talking to you, putting ideas in your head. Don’t listen to it!

[ Maxie regards Tabitha coolly for a moment. Courtney tenses and Blaise and Gloria glance between them, looking bewildered. ]

Maxie: I see that you have been compromised. Regardless, I thank you for your loyal service up to this point.

Ren: Maxie dont—!

[ Maxie holds the Red Orb aloft and Ren and Steven run at him. The Pokemon battle erupts anew as the Magma contingent and their Pokemon attempt to block them. The orb glows and the island rumbles. It doesn’t shake like an earthquake, but resonates through everything like the base at a concert. It grows more intense until the thin coating of stone surrounding Groudon cracks and red light pours out. Ren throws Blaise when he comes into grab her while Steven grapples much less successfully with Courtney. Wallace has his Milotic douse the Magma Pokemon. Groudon stands up, cracking the rest of its shell off and sending bits of rock flying in every direction. Latias shields everyone from the barrage, dropping her invisibility, and Latios appears at her side. Groudon roars and the island shakes in earnest, unbalancing everyone. All stop what they are doing to look up at the giant Pokemon. It regards them impassively as the ground continues to rumble. ]
Josh: Uh, Ren, what do we do now?

Ren: [turning to him] Get out.

Josh: But—

Ren: You can’t help with this! Just go! Get everyone out! [Josh waivers, looking torn.] Please.

[Josh turns and runs back the way they came along with Whenua, Terra and Moana. When Ren turns back to Maxie, he is holding the glowing orb aloft and Groudon is looking down at him. They are too late to stop the revival. All anyone can do is watch.]

Maxie: Groudon, as wielder of the Red Orb, I command you to go to the surface where we will begin our work and create new land together!

[Groudon rumbles and leans down, touching their gigantic foreclaws to the floor. The vibration shakes the cavern, but all goes still and quiet after. Groudon takes a closer look at Maxie, turning their head to study him with one eye. Groudon blinks once, then leans in and carefully takes the Red orb and Maxie’s hand in their teeth. Maxie’s wrist hisses as it is severed and Maxie screams. He stumbles back and Tabitha runs forward to catch him while the rest of the group recoil. Groudon swallows orb and severed hand together as they sit back up.]

Courtney: Maxie?

Tabitha: It’s cauterized but we have to get him out of here!

Courtney: But—

Tabitha: Groudon has the orb already. We’re done.

[Ren keeps her eyes on Groudon as she reaches for her belt and sends out the rest of her pokemon. Courtney ducks over to Maxie’s side and slips under his arm to support him. Together she and Tabitha are able to carry him towards the door and Blaise and Gloria follow. Steven comes up to Ren’s side as Groudon inspects the ceiling above them. The Eon Guardians float above them and try to get the climate pokemon’s attention by reaching out with their psychic power.]

Latias: Groudon, lord of earth and fire, the guardians of the cycle seek audience with you.

[There is a pause, but after a few moments Groudon turns their attention to the guardians.]

Latios: It is not yet time for you to wake. This revival was a mistake made by the humans and should not be. Sleep again until the proper time has come.

[Groudon’s voice booms through the confined space, causing the island to shake once more. Ren and Steven can discern meaning through their connection to the guardians, but for Wallace there is nothing but a roar.]

Groudon: There are no accidents. What is is what must be.

Latias: But your sibling remains dormant. You must not wake without them.

Groudon: Kyogre is here. I sense their presence. And we are not joined as you. If they do not wake to interfere, so much the better. I shall shape this world as I see fit.

[Groudon stomps and the humans and pokemon teeter as the ground shakes. Lava begins to issue forth, slowly filling the pit Groudon stands in. Archie takes one look at this and runs.]
Latias: Stop this! It is not time!

[Groudon ignores them and Latios fires a luster purge at Groudon’s face. The climate pokemon pauses and shakes their head.]

Groudon: You dare to interfere, Guardians of the Eons? Your bond with the humans clouds your judgement. You cannot and must not stop what is coming. It is part of the cycle. You know your true duty and mine. Go now. Protect what you can while I remake the world.

[Groudon strikes out lazily at the guardians with a wave of their arm. Lava flies at them but is stopped by Latias’s protect, which the humans crouch beneath.]

Steven: [to Wallace] Get out of here. You have to get everyone out.

Wallace: And leave you here?

[Groudon throws lava at them again, this time with more purpose, and Latias blocks it.]

Steven: You’ll never be able to fight it in here, not with its ability. And Latias can’t protect all of us and fight at the same time. Go!

[A third attack and deflection. This time Latios strikes back hard and Groudon recoils.]

Dizzy: [in Kantonese] I can’t help here. I must get back to Lugia.

Ren: Go, we’ll handle this.

[Dizzy reaches for Wallace, but the gym leader shies away from him, unwilling to leave. But after another exchange between the legendary pokemon, Dizzy is through being polite and practically shoves Wallace away from the scene. Tāraki takes a few steps forward, but can’t get close enough for a leaf blade with all of the glowing lava now surrounding Groudon. He launches a mega drain instead and red energy flows from Groudon into the sceptile. Steven’s pokemon launch a barrage of rocks, which causes Groudon to hunch over. The climate titan lashes out again, but Latias protects everyone. All of the pokemon attack at once and Groudon recoils. This time when Groudon straightens up, the climate pokemon releases a sustained blast of fire from its massive jaws aimed right at Latias. She throws up a protect, but cannot hold it forever. The barrier breaks and she is thrown back into the far wall. Latios retaliates with a dragon pulse, but Groudon fires at him next, sending him tumbling into the wall next to his sister. Next, Groudon knocks the other pokemon back with precipice blades. None of them are killed, but they struggle to rise and Ren and Steven withdraw them. The Eon Guardians stagger upright, white feathers singed with black. As the four of them face down Groudon, Ren shoves a hand into her bag to grab the Blue Orb. Groudon opens its maw and aims a torrent of lava at them. Steven whirls and wraps himself around Ren, shielding her body with his. She throws her free hand out as if to stop the blaze and the lava crashes harmlessly off a blue barrier that appears out of nowhere. After a moment, Steven looks around to see why they weren’t incinerated. Groudon rumbles and turns away. Steven lets go of Ren but almost immediately has to grab her shoulder as Groudon roars and the whole chamber begins to shake violently. Ren keeps her left hand aloft, trying to keep the shield in place while her other hand stays in her bag, gripping the orb. The top of the chamber blows off and water rains down as the floor, except for the shielded part the four are standing on, turns to lava. Soon lava surrounds them, buoying them upward. As they emerge onto the surface, the lava solidifies, forming a new roof for the chamber below. Groudon dives into the sea and begins swimming west. Ren lowers her arm and the blue shield flickers out of existence. ]
Scene 15: Ren and Steven stare at Groudon’s retreating form for a few moments, trying to process the fact that they are still alive. Latios and Latias are sitting on the ground next to them, also alive and relatively unharmed. Ren is first to break the silence.

Ren: So, you’re the noble self-sacrificing type, huh?

Steven: I’m as surprised as you. I guess maybe Latias was right about me having a hero complex.

Latias: I’m always right.

Ren: Sorry for ruining your heroic sacrifice.

Steven: I’m glad you did. I’m not… really sure what good throwing my body in front of you would have done in that particular scenario… It was kind of idiotic… now that I’ve had a moment to think about it.

Ren: Thanks anyway…

[They let go of each other and look up at the sky then, which looks like it is burning away. The sun seems closer somehow and everything is red and orange and yellow like fire. One of the pokeballs on Ren’s belt wobbles and Tāraki pops out. He sees that Ren is alive and lifts her off her feet in a crushing hug. Ren hugs him back, shaking a little. Steven sends out his metagross and the two start talking telepathically.]

Tāraki: You’re okay?

Ren: Kyogre decided to help us, or at least that they didn’t want me dead? I’m not sure.

Latios: I am glad that the orb has such useful powers. We will need them to go after Groudon.

Wallace: STEVEN!

[They all turn to see Wallace and his milotic rushing towards them across the water. He dismounts before his pokemon even comes to a halt and stumbles on the sand. He catches himself and jogs up to them. Behind him, Brenton slumps off the milotic and onto the sand, looking rather sick.]

Wallace: You’re alright?

Steven: Yep!

Wallace: Arceus and Giratina! Don’t fucking scare me like that!

Steven: Sorry. We can discuss this later. Groudon just took off into the ocean. Any idea wh—

Wallace: It’s headed for Sootopolis obviously!

Steven: But why—

Wallace: It’s going to try to get to the Cave of Origin! I’ll explain more later! [gesturing at the sky] Look, the drought has already started. Put out a wave on the emergency frequency. Tell everyone to get inside. I’ll try and slow it down! Meet you at the shrine!
He vaults back aboard his milotic and races west after Groudon, sending out his other pokemon to help. Brenton just sits there half in the water, coughing.

Ren: Wow, I never thought I’d hear someone talk to you like that.

Steven: [amused chuckle] Wallace and I have a very special relationship.

Ren opens her nav to try and call her father, but can’t get a steady signal. She looks up to see Steven typing furiously on his nav. A moment later she gets an emergency notification.

Ren: How did you do that? I can’t get a signal.

Steven: [smiling] I have a special model.

A giant nidoking erupts from the water with Dizzy on its back and dragging a Magma grunt in its jaws. It swims to shore and Hartmann coughs up water as he is dropped on the sand.

Brenton: Hart!

Brenton stumbles over to help his friend as Dizzy vaults off his nidoking. Dizzy shakes out his hair as he walks up to them.


Ren: [in Kantonese] It’s headed for Sootopolis, a big island due west. Wallace is trying to slow it down.

Dizzy: [very alarmed] By himself?! Is he crazy?!

Dizzy whistles loud and piercing and Lugia appears above them. Wind whips around as they land. Their chest has a huge angry red scar and is slightly dented. Dizzy runs up a wing and onto their shoulders before they take off again and rush west after Wallace and Groudon. Dozens of people on pokemon are starting to gather around the island, most of them on the back of a wailord. There are also a bunch of sharpedo and other water-types and even a few linoone. A lapras comes up to shore and Josh jumps off its back.

Josh: Ren! Ren are you okay?!

Ren: Yeah, I’m fine.

Josh fidgets, looking like he desperately wants to hug her and/or cry, but does neither. A middle aged blonde woman steps down off the lapras and strokes it’s neck followed by a younger woman with flowers in her hair. Ren recognizes them as Glacia and Phoebe of the Elite Four. Josh notices Harmann and Brenton on the beach and goes to check on them. A salamence flies by overhead, circling once before flying on towards Sootopolis. A man with a red mohawk arrives on a sharpedo followed by Archie on his walerian, Shelly on her tentacruel, and Matt on his sharpedo. Ren looks around anxiously for her father as more people gather. The wailord comes as close to shore as it can and Ren spots a familiar white beanie.

Ren: [running for the water] Kai!

He slides off the wailord and swims ashore. She meets him almost knee deep in the surf and hugs him even though he is soaked.

Ren: You’re here!
Kai: Sorry we were a little late for the fight.

Senri: [ splashing up to them ] Just in time for the rescue though! [ He hugs them both tightly for a moment. ] I don’t know how we would have gotten everyone out in time without your wailord.

Ren: [ glancing at the huge pokémon ] That’s Mako?

Kai: Yeah, he just evolved.

[ The wailord slaps a giant fin on the ocean surface in greeting. ]

Ren: How’d you get here so fast?

Kai: We flew on Wally’s altaria.

[ Wally waves from his perch on Mako’s head. ]

Senri: The coast guard should be here any minute.

Ren: We have try and stop Groudon before they gets to Sootopolis. Wallace and Dizzy went after it, but they probably need help. The coast guard should probably stay here and deal with this. I don’t think boats will be much use against Groudon.

Steven: [ from just beyond the waterline ] I agree. [ typing on his nav ] I’ll let them know.

Archie: We’ll keep this rabble here until the authorities show.

Senri: Ren, I think you and Steven should go ahead to Sootopolis.

Ren & Steven: But—

Senri: If we can’t beat it, we’ll need you two rested and ready to battle. You and your teams are spent right now. Let us wear it down for you. Then you might have a chance.

Latiost: He has a point.

Latias: Agreed.

Ren: Okay.

Glacia: I agree with Senri.

Phoebe: We should probably get moving before Wallace gets roasted.

Sydney: Pheebs is right. Drake already went after him.

Steven: Alright. All of you get going. We’ll touch base when Groudon gets closer to the island. Thank you, Senri. Call if you need us.

[ Winona touches down on her altaria, Flannery on her charizard, and the twins on their xatu. ]

Flannery: What’s going on?

[ Senri jogs over to explain and soon they are all taking off after Groudon. Winona lends Senri her pidgeot. As Ren watches them go, she hears the submarine surface nearby. The hatch opens and Courtney pops her head out. She ducks back down and there is some muffled arguing. Tabitha climbs out and hauls Maxie up. The gangplank extends so that they can walk to shore. Tabitha ]
supports her boss as he shuffles across.]

Maxie: [looking up at the sky] I don’t understand. This is so much worse than any of our models predicted.

Ren: [charging at him] You **fucking** asshole!

[Ren goes to slug him in the face but Steven catches her arm.]

Ren: Let go!

Steven: He’s injured!

Ren: [trying to yank her arm free] So? He deserves it!

Steven: Ren!

[She yanks free and almost gets Maxie this time, but Steven grabs her under both arms and pulls her back. She probably could get away, but she doesn’t want to hurt Steven so she just flails aimlessly, hoping he’ll let go.]

Ren: Look what you did! We’re all going to burn to a crisp because of you! You gave it the orb! Just handed it to that monster!

Maxie: I— I’m sorry.

Ren: Fuck you!

[She growls unable to express how angry she is. Tāraki is looming over Steven’s shoulder now and he lets her go. She turns away from Maxie and Tabitha, face red and eyes welling.]

Steven: I share her sentiments, but we’ll leave it to the courts to decide what to do with you. In the meantime, you will accompany us back to Sootopolis and turn over any knowledge or data you have.

[Maxie and Tabitha nod. Ren is walking away from them and Kai goes to check on her.]

Kai: Are you okay?

Ren: Yeah, I just promised Kenta I’d punch him. You and Wally should come with us.

Kai: Okay. I’ll unload Mako first.

[Kai goes back to his wailord to help the people who have yet to disembark. Josh approaches Ren cautiously while Steven talks to Archie, Shelly, Maxie and Tabitha.]

Josh: So you’re going to Sootopolis?

Ren: Yeah.

Josh: And you’re going to fight Groudon? Again?


Josh: I’ll, uh, I’ll come with you.
Ren: [smiling a little] Aren't you full of surprises.

Josh: I just figure… [he points up at the rather terrifying and apocalyptic sky] you're probably right about the end of the world thing and I don't want the world to end.

Ren: Me too.

Chapter End Notes

Tate and Lisa's gym was the easiest, as it always is. I have no idea why they don't have more pokemon, so I gave them more in this version. I actually mega evolved Naihi for the gym battle so that she would be faster than Akahata and they could do the Night Slash/Accuracy combo, but since that was the only time I did it, I decided to leave that out. Mega Absol mostly gets a boost in special attack and Super Luck is the absolute shit, especially with a Razor Claw equipped, so mega evolving her seemed silly. I was tempted to skip over the gym scene altogether since nothing happened gameplay-wise, but left it in since it is important for Akahata and Naihi's relationship.

How did you all feel about the character stuff in this chapter? There were a few scenes that I've been waiting ages to get to. I hope they went well. In the end I decided to cut the battle with Maxie altogether. It seemed unnecessary and also I would have had to stop it before he was defeated anyway because of the orb stuff. And there was already so much action in this chapter. I wanted to break up a little so that it wouldn't be a slog. Ultimately I prefer the shenanigans/character interactions to another battle, but I may revisit it. Also Whenua finally spoke. It's a miracle.

In other news, I've been working on another nuzlocke and I am super excited about it! It is a Sun & Moon dual nuzlocke comic with my friend who will be doing the art. If you want to know more, you can check it out on tumblr: https://ngpnuzlocke.tumblr.com. The good news is that The Night Grows Pale is even better than Running Hot and I'm finally making a comic, which I've wanted to do for years. The bad news is that since I'll be working on that, Running Hot is probably never going to make the jump to comic, which is too bad. However, am finishing it and the last chapter will be up by August 16th. I have also been entertaining the idea of re-writing Running Hot once it's completed in regular prose since I know that script format is not everyone's cup of tea. What do people think of that as an idea? I did the first chapter and you can read it here: https://rhnuzlocke.tumblr.com/post/161181668071/re-write

Thank you for reading! It really means a lot to me. Feedback is always appreciated! Have a great weekend!

Character Chart:

HUMANS:
Ren, our protagonist
Kai, Ren's friend who likes science
Wally, Ren's friend who likes the internet
Steven, the Hoenn League Champion
Josh, a Magma grunt who Ren has saved twice
Azalea, Zinnia's Magma grunt alias
Maxie, leader of Team Magma and bearer of the Red Orb
Tabitha, a Magma admin
Courtney, a Magma admin
Hartmann, a Magma grunt partnered with Brenton and friends with Josh
Brenton, a Magma grunt partnered with Hartmann and friends with Josh
Whenua, a Magma grunt partnered with Terra
Terra, a Magma grunt partnered with Whenua
Moana, an Aqua grunt who is secretly dating Terra
Archie, leader of Team Aqua and kind of a dick
Senri, Ren's dad and the Petalburg Gym Leader
Tate & Lisa, identical twin Gym Leaders with psychic abilities
Dizzy, Lugia's mouthpiece and friend of Kaspa
Kaspa, the current Sekiei (Indigo) League Champion and Ho-oh's Chosen

TEAM REN:
Tāraki the Sceptile
Akahata the Mightyena
Ao the Manectric
Kata the Grumpig
Kōtai the Sandslash
Roma the Sharpedo
Pohaku the Armaldo
Naihi the Absol
Teka the Pikachu
Tarahau, the Snorunt

OTHER POKEMON:
Aster, Zinnia's Whismur
Fang, Josh's Mightyena
Shade, Josh's Crobat
Kenta, Senri's Usaring
Maia, Ren's former Taillow
Ember, Terra's Camerupt
Ehe, Moana's Sharpedo
Makō, Kai's Wailord


Get Some Shelter

Chapter Summary

In which Ren and company fight a god.

Chapter Notes

Since the whole League is in this chapter and some of them have never appeared before, I thought I would include the little character blurbs I have for each of them in my own notes. You can skip to the end notes and read them to get up to speed or let everything be a surprise and read them after the chapter for your own amusement. Should be fun either way. It's up to you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Scene 1: [Far away to the south, Zinnia is standing at the summit of the Sky Pillar with her hands together. She is chanting and her keystone is glowing dully on her anklet. Her whismur watches from nearby, ears erect and listening. The sky above them is red and roiling and the sunlight beaming down on them is intense, throwing everything around them into blindingly harsh relief. Sweat is already dripping from both of them, but Zinnia does not allow her concentration to waiver until her task is complete. She looks up, trying in vain to shield her eyes from the harsh rays with a hand. Aster hops up to Zinnia, ears swiveling around to catch any sound. There is none. They stand in silence for a while longer, waiting for something they already know won’t come.]

Zinnia: It didn’t work, Aster. They didn’t come. Why didn’t it work? [She falls to her knees, fighting back tears. Why—why didn’t—[A half-formed sob stops her short and she is quiet for a moment. Her eyes are welling and her hands are balled into fists so tight that her knuckles show white.] I unleashed Groudon and Rayquaza didn’t come. I failed. After everything I failed again. Everyone’s going to die. Lord Arceus, what have I done?

Aster: [slapping Zinnia’s arm with a ear] Stop that! Guilt won’t help anything and it certainly won’t save the world.

Zinnia: What am I going to do, Aster?

Aster: We could always help the Mossdeep Space Center with their plan, like you were before.

Zinnia: No. I’ll never do that. It’s clearer to me now than it ever was before. Some sacrifices aren’t worth making. All this time I thought the ends justified the means. No matter how much I dressed it up for myself, that’s what I truly believed.

Aster: I tried to tell you. You wouldn’t listen.

Zinnia: I’m so sorry, Aster. I was too afraid of failing. I couldn’t accept what happened. But I was wrong. It’s so obvious now that I was wrong.
Aster: How can you be so sure? You had me convinced for a while there. And I don’t want to accept this either.

Zinnia: I know you can’t see it, but you can feel it can’t you? What’s happening to the world because of what I’ve done. I should never have disturbed that monster. I should have let them sleep until their time had come. Now everyone must suffer the consequences. What the government wants to do is the same thing, but on an even grander scale. So no, I won’t let them sacrifice the next world for this one. I’m going to stop them. If we can’t save this world without destroying another, then it isn’t worth saving. All creation is equal. All things have a beginning and all things have an end.

Aster: Is that it then?

Zinnia: No, Aster. As long as I live I will fight for this world and all realms of existence. Something is preventing our prayers from reaching Atua Rayquaza. We have to find another way to amplify the signal. And I think I may have idea how. But in the meantime, I’ll try and help clean up the mess I just made.

Aster: And save your girlfriend.

Zinnia: That too.

[ Zinnia sends out her salamence and they plunge off the tower and head north as fast as wind and wing beats will carry them. ]

Scene 2: [ Ren is riding Latios west towards Sootopolis. Josh is seated behind her and clinging to her middle. His face is tucked into her shoulder so that he doesn’t have to see the ocean streaking by below them. Steven is nearby on Latios, Kai and Wally are following behind them on the latter’s altaria, and Tabitha and Maxie are riding Steven’s aerodactyl. Between the grim situation and being almost painfully squeezed by the terrified Magma grunt behind her, Ren is enjoying this flight a great deal less than previous ones. Her tinted goggles help quite a lot with the harsh light and the wind helps with the unbearable heat, but the whole experience is still very uncomfortable. Ren scans the horizon and spots a dot of gold approaching from 2o’clock. The air around it seems bizarrely clear and as it grows larger, Ren can see that it is a huge red bird. ]

Ren: [ nudging Josh with an elbow ] Josh! Josh, look up! [ He groans and she elbows him harder. ] Open your eyes for a second! [ He turns his head a little and cracks one eye. Ren points. ] Look over there!

[ Josh spots Ho-Oh and lifts his head completely, opening both eyes wide in wonder. Kai is also pointing with his right arm while the left remains wrapped around Wally’s waist. All of them watch for a few moments before Ho-Oh banks just to the north of them, heading for the battle with Groudon. Its white belly flashes blindingly and a silver shaft gleams on its back as its rider thrusts a burning sword aloft. Ren squints so as not be be hurt by the glittering of its golden tail and is soon rewarded by the rainbow that follows. For just an instant, the full spectrum hangs in the air before it is burned away by the sun. They all watch as Ho-Oh grows further again and are thus taken by surprise when a shadow passes over. Ren looks up to see a salamence cruising north with a caped rider on its back. There is a flash and in another moment it has mega evolved. As Ren peers towards its destination, she can just make out the forms of many flying pokemon and crashing water around a glowing red figure that winks in and out of the waves. Ren turns away and concentrates on the
horizon ahead of them. Josh looks on a little longer before pressing his head into her shoulder again, but at least his grip has loosened a little. The group flies on to Sootopolis and touches down near the Pokemon Center. Josh goes behind it to change into his civilian clothes before following the rest of them in. Maxie is escorted to a human hospital and Tabitha goes with him. The Eon Guardians elect not to conceal themselves any longer. The nurses are a bit awed and flustered at first, but they are professionals and take Latios and Latias to the back along with Ren, Steven and Josh’s pokemon to get medical attention. Steven negotiates with the nurses for a while and manages to get the rest of his team and Ren’s sent in. There are quite a number of trainers taking shelter inside the Pokemon Center and it doesn’t take long for the ones who were hanging out upstairs to gather in the lobby to oggle Steven. This affords Ren some small amount of privacy to meet with her team in the corner. She elects to have Roma, Teka and Tarahau stay behind despite the latter’s willingness to participate. Kai and Wally stay by Ren on the couch. Kai is glancing at his friend quite a bit, but Wally is far less short of breath than when he came in. They are all sporting impressive sunburns given the relatively short period of exposure, although Wally’s is the most severe by far. Kai and Steven, being darker skinned, fared better. Ren keeps glancing at the window, but the shades are down to keep the harsh light out and she can’t see much.

Scene 3: Meanwhile the battle with Groudon draws ever closer to the island. Although it is too buoyant to sink, Groudon keeps diving under for as long as it can to evade the onslaught. Wallace’s water types can’t do much even in their element because their moves lose most of their power due to Groudon’s ability. However, his wailord makes an excellent mobile platform and the pokemon that can’t fly or swim attack Groudon from its back. The rest of the Hoenn League has arrived by this point. Asuna is on a charizard like her granddaughter, Wattson is on his magnezone, Roxanne is on her aerodactyl, and Brawly is on Wallace’s gyarados. The pokemon attack in waves to maximise the amount of damage. The Sekiei League Champion has unsurprisingly become the ringleader for these efforts and signals the pokemon and their trainers with her sword. Ho-Oh burns Groudon at every pass with their sacred fire, which seems to be doing the most damage of anything. Lugia switches between extrasensory and aeroblast, which slows Groudon considerably. But despite this impressive onslaught, Groudon plows onward, fighting their way closer to Sootopolis.

Scene 4: Ren Wally and Steven are all napping on the couches in the Pokemon Center, exhausted. Kai and Josh sit in armchairs, keeping an eye on them and awkwardly not talking. Steven’s nav buzzes and he wakes up and answers it. He gets Ren up and Kai gets Wally up and they all head outside. The sunlight is still incredibly intense, but the sky has settled to a harsh, clear blue. Compounding the brightness is the fact that most of Sootopolis’s buildings are white, reflecting the sun back at them from every direction. Everyone puts on goggles or sunglasses to see and the Eon Guardians fly over them to provide some shade. They hike through city as briskly as possible in the grueling heat and wait beneath the huge tree in front of the entrance to the Cave of Origin. The League starts arriving shortly after and soon most of them are there beneath the tree looking embattled and exhausted. Zinnia is there too with her whismur and there are two others, a woman and a man, who Ren does not recognize. Based on their tattoos and garb, it seems safe to assume they are Lorekeepers as well. Ren runs up to her father and they hug again. Kai and Wally stay close to Ren, a little awed by being in the presence of the entire Hoenn League, while Josh sinks
back against the trunk of the tree, trying his best to be invisible. Even beneath the tree it is still terribly hot and dry. Wally begins to cough and Kai sends out his castform. She shifts into sunny form immediately and Kai orders her to use rain dance. It takes more than the usual effort, but she is able to create a raincloud over the tree and cool everyone off a little as the last few arrive.]

Glacia: [ withdrawing her lapras ] Oh thank Arceus! Who has the castform?

Lugia and Dizzy emerge from the water of Sootopolis’s bay and Dizzy dismounts before Lugia sinks back down out of sight. Kaspa flies in on Ho-Oh and hops down off the enormous bird pokemon. One always expects a person of such legendary stature to be tall somehow, but it soon becomes clear that Kaspa is one of the shortest people in the gathered crowd. She is in a traditional Johto robe matching Ho-Oh’s colors and her dark curly hair is tied back from her face with a strip of cloth. One hand rests on the hilt of her sword, now sheathed at her cloth belt, and everyone parts for her as she strides up to Ren and Steven.]

Kaspa: [ in Kantonese ] We managed to weaken Groudon, but not defeat them. They are under the island seeking some source of power according to this city’s Gym Leader. The longer we leave them be, the more time they will have to recover and the greater the chance they will undergo primal reversion. We must get down there and finish it. Are you ready to face them?

Ren: Yes.

Kaspa: [ smiling ] That’s my girl. Look how tall you’ve grown.

[ Ren smiles back, biting her lower lip. ]

Kaspa: So how do we get down into the cavern? Does anyone here know?


Wallace: [ stepping forward ] I can undo the seal, but we can’t all go down there. It will fill with lava just like Groudon’s tomb did. And even without that, in a contained space the heat of them would burn us all to a crisp. We wouldn’t be able to get near them.

Steven: There has to be something—

Wallace: There is, but you aren’t going to like it.

Steven: Alright, what is it?

Wallace: We can’t face Groudon now, but Ren can. She has the Blue Orb. Kyogre protected her. She’s the only one that may be able to survive down there.

[ Steven and Senri bristle at Ren’s sides and a murmur runs through the assembled. ]

Zinnia: So you are proposing we send the least experienced trainer here to face Groudon alone?

Latios: I will go with her.

Latias: As will I. We may be able to resist Groudon’s power for a time.

Latios: Certainly longer than a human.

Latias: And if we die so be it. It is our duty.
Zinnia: Would she be able to use her pokemon, or only you two?

[ Ren reaches into her bag and holds the orb as everyone talks.]

Steven: Ren was able to shield all four of us from Groudon. Why can’t we both go in?

Wallace: Just after they woke up, sure, but what if they undergo primal reversion? There’s no way to know if she’ll be able to protect you again or if you being there will even help her chances. You may be a liability if she has to protect you and fight at the same time.

Senri: I’m not sending my daughter in there alone!

Flannery: She’s too young!

Wallace: You are twenty, Flannery! Sod off!

Wattson: I have to agree though. Can’t someone else take the orb?

Wallace: No!

Steven: It’s bound to her. No one else can use it.

Asuna: Age doesn’t matter. Most of you have said I’m too old for this fight, but I’m still here.

Drake: You are too old.

Asuna: Don’t start with me, Drake!

[ Drake opens his mouth to object, but Glacia puts a hand on his shoulder.]

Glacia: Not now.

[ Drake grumbles but stay quiet and Asuna glares daggers at him.]

Asuna: My point is, is she strong? Most of you have faced her right?

Tate & Lisa: She fought us this morning.

Tate: She is very strong.

Lisa: And she has a deep connection with her pokemon.

Winona: I have one of her former pokemon on my team. I can say with certainty that she is exceptional.

Sidney: That’s great and all, but she doesn’t even have her final badge yet. And her powerhouse is a grass-type. That thing is part fire, isn’t it? Not for or against here, just saying.

Phoebe: Strategy is more important anyway. I took the Championship from you with a type-disadvantage.

Sidney: True. And I guess we are kinda beat for options at this point.

Zinnia: There are always options!

Wallace: Enlighten us then!
Brawly: Like, what are we still even arguing this for? It’s her call. I totally get that no one is digging this situation, but it’s really that simple. Ren, what are you gonna do?

Ren: I’m going to fight Groudon.

Senri: And I’m coming! I don’t care what—

Ren: What about okasan? Is she going to lose both of us at once?

Senri: She would want me to—

Ren: She wouldn’t want you dead! No way am I watching you be burned up for no—!

Kaspa: ENOUGH! [ Everyone falls silent. ] I did not understand all of what was said, but arguing helps nothing. Every moment we delay, Groudon grows stronger. Whatever can be done to stop it, we must do. All depend on it.

[ Everyone looks around at each other, still not quite ready to accept what is happening, except for Ren, who nods. ]

Steven: But, how do we even know this will work?

Ren: [ pulling her hand out of her bag and stepping forward ] It will work. Kyogre wouldn’t have protected us if they weren’t ready to fight. As long as I’m touching the orb, they can channel some of their power through me. I can share that with my pokemon and Latios because we’re bonded. And Latios should be able to share with Latias, but I don’t know if she can share with you.

Steven: We’re bonded, just like you and Latios. If he can share with you then—

Ren: Even if Latias can share with you, will it be enough? Will you be able to share with your pokemon? That’s a lot of degrees of separation. Wallace is right: you might wind up being more of a hindrance down there than help. An what if I don’t make it? Everyone will need you. You’re the Champion.

Steven: Kaspa can—

Ren: Please just stay here. You can watch me with the sight sharing and help that way. And then everyone can know what’s happening down there.

Zinnia: There has to be something we can do.

Ren: You all did a lot already. You weakened Groudon. I just have to finish them off. [ forced grin ] Should be easy.

[ Ren can feel everyone’s eyes on her and she looks down. The silence buzzes with static tension and the patter of raindrops falling through the leaves. Steven takes a deep breath and puts his hand on Ren’s shoulder. ]

Steven: You can do it. I know you can.

[ Ren smiles up at him but before she can say anything, Tabitha tromps up to the crowd carrying some kind of red suit and helmet. ]

Tabitha: [ to Ren ] Are you going after Groudon? You have the Blue Orb, right?

Ren: Yes.
Tabitha: Maxie wanted me to give this to you. It’s a magma suit. We designed it so that Maxie could travel with Groudon without being burned. And we modified the breastplate when he got the Red Orb, so the Blue Orb should fit inside as well. That way you can be in contact with it, but still have your hands free. There’s a setting in the glove for a keystone as well. It will be a little big for you, but it should still work.

Ren: Thank you Tabitha.

Tabitha: It’s the least we could do. Let me help you put it on.

[There are murmurs in the crowd as she puts the magma suit on. Senri looks desperately unhappy and Kaspa is speaking quietly to him in Kantonese. Tabitha explains how to use the communicator and other features of the suit as she helps Ren get it on. It has its own internal environment and compact gas tanks on the back in case the air gets bad. The Blue Orb shines through its holder on her chest. It feels cool as it rests against the skin of her collarbone. Once the whole suit is on and fitted, Ren moves her pokeballs to her belt and Steven hands her Latias’s ball just in case.]

Steven: [in Ren’s head] I’ll be with you too, okay?

[Ren nods and smiles a little.]

Zinnia: Good luck in there, spitfire.

Ren: Thanks.

Senri: [hugging Ren] Be careful down there. Your mother and I will be rooting for you.

Ren: I’ll kick their ass. Don’t worry.

[Senri tears up but lets go of her. Behind them, Wallace is standing in front of the entrance to the Cave of Origin and murmuring to himself. Kaspa steps towards Ren and bows.]

Kaspa: [in Kantonese] Thank you for agreeing to do this. All of our hearts go with you. [putting her hands on Ren’s shoulders] And the blessing of Ho-Oh is upon you.

[Kaspa’s hands burst into multicolored flames. They spread across Rens shoulders and down her arms and blaze out brightly from her hands for a moment. The next they are gone and leave no mark behind. There is a rumble and the great stone double doors sealing the entrance to the Cave of Origin swing open. Kaspa steps aside and so do the others, leaving the path to the doors clear. Ren takes a deep breath and strides towards it.]

Kai: Wait!

[Ren stops and turns and Kai practically tackles her with a hug. She hugs him back, fingers digging in and face pressed into his neck. He holds her tightly, even with the suit in the way.]

Kai: I’m not gonna stop you, just promise me you’ll come back, okay? You’re my best friend. I don’t know what I’d do without you.

Ren: I’ll come back, I promise. And we’re level seven friends now, so I have to keep it.

[Kai squeezes her harder before letting go and she laughs a little. Wally is hovering by Kai’s shoulder and Ren pulls him in for a quick hug too.]

Ren: Take care of him for me.
Wally: Yes, ma’am.

[ Ren waves to everyone and meets Josh’s eyes across the crowd. He looks scared and horribly worried and she gives him the thumbs up. She meets Steven’s eyes one last time before she turns back to the entrance. Tabitha hands her the helmet and she puts it on. It snaps into place and seals with a whoosh and a click. Ren walks into the cave with the Eon Guardians following at her shoulders and disappears from view. ]

---

**Scene 5:** [ There are no lights inside the Cave of Origin and it quickly becomes too dark to see. Ren taps the side of her helmet to turn on the headlamp. The cave slopes down and away to the left. Ren follows it, glancing occasionally at the Eon Guardians in her peripheral and listening to her own breathing, which she tries to keep steady. The earth rumbles and Ren pauses while it shakes, heart hammering faster. It stops and she continues down. The cave continues to spiral down and Ren quickly loses all sense of orientation. She gravitates to the outside wall, feeling exposed somehow walking through in the middle, and runs her hand lightly along the rock. She is forced to stop as the cave shakes again, this time more violently than before. As the rumbling dies down again Ren hears other sounds and then zubats, sableyes, whismurs, geodudes and a mawile rush past her up the tunnel towards the exit. ]

Steven: [ telepathically ] Are you alright?

Ren: Yeah. Are you feeling that on the surface?

Steven: Yes.

Ren: Okay. I’ll try and move a bit faster. [ She starts walking again. ]

Steven: Be careful.

Ren: Haha, it’s always safety first with this girl.

[ Before Steven can respond, a voice crackles in Ren’s ear. ]

Wallace: Hi Ren, this is Wallace. How does it look down there?

Ren: Not much yet. There a bunch of wild pokemon headed your way though… How deep does this cave go?

Wallace: Very deep. Just stick to the central spiral and you should come to the main chamber at the bottom. That’s where Groudon will be.

Ren: Okay.

[ Ren continues down and after a while the cave shakes a third time. This time it is enough to make Ren lean against the wall for support and cause a crack to appear in the wall opposite her. It lasts longer than the previous tremors and as soon as it dies down a little, Ren hurries onward. Even more pokemon flee past her this time and the Eon Gaurdians are forced to tuck in their wings to avoid being buffeted. Ren breaks into a jog, only pausing for a fourth tremor. Even with the suit on, she can feel the pressure increasing as she descends. She is almost running by the time the cave levels out and broadens. She trips as a fifth tremor rumbles through the rock, cracking it in several ]
places that she can see and even more that she can hear. Latios catches her before she can fall on her face. She looks down the wide tunnel and notices eerie red light at the other end. She takes a deep breath and strides forward again at a more measured pace. The tunnel opens up into a huge cathedral-like chamber. The floor slopes down towards the back and glowing orange lava pools up from beneath. The dim glow plays oddly over the dark volcanic rock and the lighter limestone that has since pushed itself through the cracks and formed great columns, stalactites and stalagmites. The shadows shift slightly as even more magma bubbles up. With a last great rumble, Groudon erupts from the floor, lead by their massive claws. Ren staggers and becomes momentarily disoriented by the sudden shift in light and darkness as Groudon pulls their entire body into the chamber. Ren manages to stay standing and the light settles back down to a more even glow as the magma flows off Groudon onto the floor. Ren and the Eon Guardians shrink back from the heat, but they are safe from the lava by the entrance. Ren is struck anew by the sheer size of the climate titan as they straighten up to their full height, which is easily two stories.

Ren: I’m at the bottom and I found Groudon.

Wallace: Good, Have they reverted yet?

Ren: No, they just got here.

Groudon’s head sways slowly back and forth for a moment as they reorient themselves. They turn away from Ren and lumber towards a hole in the back wall that is quickly filling with lava. It looks like Groudon will be able to fit but barely. Latios and Latias are swooping forward and calling out to Groudon, but the climate titan ignores them.

Ren: And now they’re leaving. They’re going deeper in.

Wallace: You’ll have to follow them. That’s where the thermal wellspring is.

Ren: Okay. Shit. There’s a lot of lava in the way. How much heat can this suit take?

Tabitha: It should be fine for a limited period.

Ren takes a step forward, trying to gauge the distance and not think about how crazy this is.

Roxanne: But you may not be able to move in there. Molten rock is quite viscous. Is there any way around?

Ren: I don’t think so and it’s filling up pretty quick… Um… Ren looks up at the Eon Guardians swooping around Groudon and firing psychic attacks at them. She reaches out with her mind.

Ren: Latios, can you get me over there?

He flies back to her and hoists her under the arms.

Wallace: What’s going on?

Ren: I’m gonna try and jump on Groudon’s back and hitch a ride. At this rate Latios and Latias aren’t going to fit through.

Wallace: [through lots of static] What did… you’re breaking… tell me you aren’t…

He fizzes out completely as Latios drops Ren onto Groudon’s back. It is surprisingly smooth and Ren slides for a moment, but she catches herself on the edge of one of their plates and hangs on. Ren withdraws Latios and Latias as Groudon ducks through the hole. Lava sloshes around them and the
heat coming through the suit is almost unbearable. Ren squeezes her eyes closed, hanging on as tight as she can. In another moment a blessed coolness spreads out from her chest to the rest of her body. She feels a familiar sensation like being underwater and opens her eyes. There is a slight blue glow radiating from her hands pushing back against Groudon’s heat. The climate titan roars, suddenly stung by her presence. She looks around and sees bare rock to her left, high enough that it has not been overwhelmed by the lava currently flooding the lower parts of the chamber. Ren leaps off Groudon’s back onto the raised floor. She rolls on the landing and scrambles up, expecting Groudon to come after her. They spare her only a passing glance before wading into the center of the chamber. Ren sends the Eon Guardians back out. They flinch away from the heat for a moment, but Ren reaches out to them with her mind and the faint blue energy that surrounds her spreads to them. They relax a little as cool relief pours over them.

Steven: [ telempathy ] Ren! Ren are you okay?!

Ren: Yeah, we’re okay. Kyogre’s making sure we don’t combust.

Steven: What happened? The communicator’s not working and you all disappeared for a moment.

Ren: I had to withdraw Latios and Latias for a bit.

Steven: Is that primal reversion?

Tāraki: Sorry!

Ren: You promised to stay in you ball!

Tāraki: Behind him, Groudon is glowing brighter and brighter and Ren has no time to argue with her starter.

Ren: Everyone get behind me!

Tāraki: Tāraki ducks behind Ren but takes hold of her shoulders. The Eon Guardians fall back as well and Groudon appears to crystalize into a gigantic ruby in front of them. The climate titan grows larger, nearly doubling in size before the outside layer shatters, sending shards of red crystal cascading across the chamber. Ren throws up a blue shield, which the crystals bounce harmlessly off of. Groudon straightens up and solidifies once more, glow fading back to a level one could look upon directly. They are so tall that they almost reach the ceiling. Their underbelly is black like pumice rather than a dusty brown and their spikes are now made of obsidian rather than bone. Glowing lava shines through the gaps between their red plates flowing and bubbling in their core. The Eon Guardians float up again and Tāraki steps forward to face Groudon. The climate god fixes their scorching eyes on Ren from a good fifty feet up and roars their defiance. Ren clenches her right hand, pressing on the keystone fixed to her palm. Wind whips around her and Latios, so strong that it lifts her off her feet for a moment. Latios mega evolves as she touches back down. The bottom edge of Latios’s mark and her red lantern eyes shine through Ren’s visor as she shifts into a fighting stance.
Scene 6: [ On the surface, everyone is gathered under the tree. Dizzy and Ren’s friends stay near the trunk. Kai offers encouragement to his castform, who is floating in the branches casting rain dance every few minutes to keep the scorching dry heat at bay. Wallace is in the middle of the crowd with Steven, Tabitha, Senri and Kaspa closest to him. He is holding Steven’s nav in his hand and straining to make out the crackling distorted voice coming through the speaker. ]

Ren: [ through lots of static ] …jump on Groudon… Latios and Latias…

Wallace: [ with rising concern ] What did you say? You’re breaking up. Please tell me you aren’t going to actually jump on Groudon’s back?!! [ He waits for a beat, but there is only static ] Ren! Ren! [ still nothing ] I’ve lost her. Steven, what’s going on down there? Can you still reach her?

Steven: [ clutching at his head, looking more scared and desperate by the second ] No. She’s gone. All three of them are gone! There—there’s just nothing… [ He trails off and his breathing becomes uneven as casts his consciousness into the darkness below them. ]

Wallace: [ putting his hand on Steven’s shoulder ] Whoa! Deep breaths. Just give it a moment maybe she—

[ He is interrupted by a horde of pokemon pouring out of the Cave of origin and flooding the tiny spit of land they are all on. Many members of the League send out their pokemon to stop the group of humans from being pushed off the island by the terrified wilds. A mawile slips past Flannery’s charizard and Senri’s ursaring, weaving around people’s legs. It runs into Josh, clearly blind and disoriented, and falls on its face. Josh yelps as it scrambles up, using his legs as support, but holds still as it ducks between him and the tree to hide. It cowers there, shaking like a leaf and gripping his leg as tightly as it can. It does not move as the stampede of wild pokemon dissipates. Josh tries to nudge the mawile away, but it continues to cling to him. He rummages in his bag for a moment before pulling out a pokeball. He taps the mawile with it and the pokemon flows inside with a flash of red light. ]

Steven: Wait… Latias is back. [ His face remains tense for another moment before falling in relief. ] She’s okay. She made it into the wellspring chamber. [ Steven straightens again, but his eyes are glazed over, clearly looking at what is happening below rather than his own surroundings. ] Kyogre is helping them, but Groudon is undergoing primal reversion… [ muttering ] That sceptile…

[ Suddenly the sky above them begins to change again, burning brighter than ever before. Even in the shade it becomes difficult to see there is so much light. The heat comes right on its heels and Paki’s raincloud evaporates in seconds. The castform shifts into something similar to sunny form, but ringed by fire rather than orange orbs. Kai snaps a picture, but feels Wally’s hand on his arm and looks over. Wally has collapsed back against the tree and is clutching Kai for support. ]

Kai: Wally? Can you breathe?

[ Wally’s chest is jumping unevenly and he makes no sound. When he looks up at Kai, his eyes are wide with panic. ]

Kai: Don’t panic! Use your inhaler!

[ Wally’s other hand is already scrambling for it and in another moment he has it over his nose. ]

Kai: [ grabbing Wally’s sides and lowering him to the ground ] Sit, shallow breaths, you’ll be okay.
Wally keeps trying to breathe with his inhaler, but not much seems to be going in. Kai tries to stay calm, but Wally's panic starts spreading to him as the already pale boy gradually loses all remaining color.

Dizzy: [standing over them] What wrong?

Kai: He has weak lungs. Sudden changes can trigger him and they just shut down. It’s too hot! He can’t— Paki! Paki use rain dance!

The castform tries with all her might, but she cannot summon a single drop. Dizzy has turned away from them and Lugia surfaces in front of him. The legendary raises their wings, but the water around them remains motionless. Dizzy goes back to Kai and Wally.

Dizzy: To water, now.

He lifts Wally and Kai runs with him to the water’s edge. Dizzy lowers Wally in and Kai hops in after him without a thought. Dizzy holds Wally under the arms to keep his head above water and Lugia forms a ball of air around them and sinks with them below the surface. Dizzy ducks his head under to make sure they are okay before crawling back out and into the shade again. Beneath the surface, Lugia has the two trainers floating in a steady bubble of air between their wings. Kai cradles Wally against him, arms over Wally’s chest as the air cools, willing some of it to make it into the boy’s lungs. Wally takes one breath and then another.


Wally glances over his shoulder at Kai.

Slow. You’ll catch up…

Wally’s breaths begin to even out a little and Kai leans into his back.

Arceus, you scared me.

Meanwhile, Steven tenses suddenly and blinks. He grabs the keystone on his lapel and closes his eyes, concentrating. Wallace picks up right away what is happening.

Wallace: [sharply] Steven, what are you doing? [Steven doesn’t answer, but starts to glow faintly.] Are you trying to mega evolve Latias? [becoming more concerned and frantic as Steven continues to ignore him] Are you crazy?! They must be at least a thousand feet underground! No one’s ever mega evolved a pokemon at that distance before! [No response.] We have no idea what that will do to you! [grabbing Steven’s lapels] Steven stop—!

Steven opens his eyes, reaches out and cups Wallace’s face, a fond smile on his own. He pulls the frozen Wallace in close and places a slow, gentle kiss on his forehead. Wallace’s eyes flutter closed and his hands fall flat on Steven’s chest as a breeze begins to swirl around them. They pull back at the same time, familiarity breeding synchronicity. Everyone is moving back now to give Steven some space. Wallace steps back as Steven places his hand once more on the keystone over his heart and the wind whipping around him intensifies. He closes his eyes and begins to glow brighter, Latias’s mark appearing on his forehead. He is almost lifted off his feet as the light from his keystone becomes blinding, but it is over in a moment. He settles down to almost normal, but Latias’s mark remains and his eyes glow gold, no longer seeing the League gathered around him, but rather the beginning of the battle taking place far below.

Wallace: [muttering to himself] You had better come back, you over-dramatic asshole.

Scene 7: Ren looks to her left as Latias is consumed by white light and emerges in her mega form.
For an instant, Ren wants to ask Steven what is happening, but she can feel him and Latias there with her and there is no more need for words. Energy floods into her from the orb on her chest as Groudon powers up an attack and Ren makes the snap decision to do something crazy. She reaches out to Tāraki with that energy and activates his mega stone. The sceptile mimics her stance and begins to mega evolve as Groudon launches a massive lava plume attack on them. Latias blocks the attack with protect, giving Tāraki the chance to finish his mega evolution. He runs forward, leaps up and slashes Groudon across the chest with leaf blade as Latios hits them in the side with luster purge and Latias nails them in the face with mist ball. Groudon reels back, but retaliates with precipice blades. The Eon Guardians manage to dodge the sharp rocks that stab up from the floor and even strike the ceiling in places, but Tāraki holds his ground and shatters the one headed for Ren with dragon claw. The sceptile launches himself at Groudon again, but the climate titan swats him away with a paw. Tāraki lands on one of the crumbling pillars and ricochets back off, using the added height to reach Groudon’s head and slash them across the jaw. Groudon hits Tāraki with lava plume, and he is blasted away but lands on his feet in front of Ren once more. Ren and Tāraki shake it off and put up their fists. Meanwhile the Eon Guardians are swooping around the chamber trying to keep Groudon distracted and disoriented. Latios is hitting Groudon in the head, shoulders and chest with dragon pulse while Latias uses psychic to pummel them across the back with one of their own rocks. Lava roils around Groudon as they roar, forcing the Guardians back for a moment with another lava plume. Ren and Tāraki cross their arms, shielding themselves from the blaze with Kyogre’s energy. Groudon falls still in the lull and closes their eyes, resting. Energy flows into them from below, healing their wounds. Tāraki launches a mega drain to siphon off some of that power and shudders with energy. He roars, invigorated, and charges Groudon. He slices the climate titan across the chest before leaping back off them to solid ground. He runs at them a second time, but Groudon opens their eyes and releases a sustained blast of fire. Once again Tāraki cannot dodge without exposing Ren, so he holds his ground. Latios tries to turn Groudon away by striking them across the brow, but the god remains rooted to the spot and Latias intervenes with a protect. Tāraki falls to one knee and drops his mega form. He is alive, but severely weakened. Ren sends out Kōtai and Pohaku and they move in front of Tāraki. Kōtai tenses, claws out and ready and Pohaku roars, swimmers fully splayed and rattling. Tāraki glances back at Ren and she holds up his ball, willing him to tap out. He holds her gaze for a moment and nods. She withdraws him and just then the chamber shakes violently and the floor cracks from Groudon’s earthquake.

Kōtai: Two can play at that game, ya overgrown krookodile!

[ The ground rumbles again as Kōtai retaliates with his own earthquake. The mass of dirt and rock strikes Groudon in the stomach, smothering the lava and flames in its path. Pohaku takes advantage of the passage created by Kōtai’s attack and dashes across the land bridge to score Groudon’s belly with crush claw, while the Eon guardians dragon pulse Groudon’s chest. Groudon reels from the combined attack and uses precipice blades. Kōtai manages to parry with crush claw but the other three take a direct hit. Kōtai and Ren move together arms outstretched as they shove Groudon back with a wall of earth, giving the others a chance to recover. Pohaku once again uses the cover of earthquake to close with Groudon and delivers a punishing one-two combo with stone edge. Groudon destroys the earth around them with lava plume and Ren focuses all of her energy on keeping Pohaku shielded so that he isn’t incinerated. However, this means that both Eon Guardians and Kōtai take the blow. Pohaku rolls out of the rubble, having curled himself into a ball. He pops back to his feet and checks on Kōtai, who is shaking out his black scales. Groudon rests again and Latias briefly uses recover on herself before flying over to Latios and using heal pulse on him. Ren reaches for Kōtai and Pohaku’s pokeballs, but the sandslash interrupts her.

Kōtai: We can’t let it rest or we’re done for, luv.

[ Pohaku nods vigorously in agreement, claws flashing and tail lashing in anticipation.]
Ren: Try that earthquake/stone edge combo again but get Pohaku some more lift!

Pohaku rushes forward and the stone floor shakes as Kōtai unleashes another earthquake attack just ahead of his teammate. Pohaku jumps on the wave of earth just as Kōtai forces it upward with a slash of his claw. Pohaku’s defences hold and he is launched into the air. He does a summersault and comes down Groudon’s head with stone edge. The force is enough to knock Groudon down to all fours and Kōtai hits them with another earthquake. Pohaku jumps clear and rolls back to the relative safety of the rock platform.

Pohaku: Woohoo! Did you see me? I was just like Tāraki! We have to do that again!

Ren: Another time, Po!

Pohaku and Kōtai tap claws as Ren withdraws them and sends out Kata and Ao. The Eon Guardians have recovered and take to the air again as Groudon opens their eyes. Ren needs no words to have all three psychic types attack simultaneously. With their combined power they throw Groudon against the back wall of the chamber and hold them there while Ao fires off hidden powers as rapidly as possible. Groudon thrashes in their grasp, roaring and shaking the chamber violently with each strike of their tail. With the last of their energy Kata and the Eon Guardians lift Groudon to the ceiling and then smash them down into the floor. Groudon uses lava plume while still in the air, softening their landing and sending lava splattering in every direction. Ren shields her team and the lava splashes off the barrier, cooling and solidifying on the floor around them. Ren pants inside her suit and her limbs tremble. Kata fires off power gem, Ao hidden power, and the Eon Guardians dragon pulse. Groudon blocks some of the onslaught by surrounding themselves with precipice blades. The cavern shakes as Groudon prepares an earthquake and Ren withdraws her pokemon while the Eon Guardians lift her into the air to avoid the attack. It just misses them and the moment Ren touches back down she sends out Akahata and Naihi. Groudon uses precipice blades in a straight line this time, aimed right at Ren and her pokemon. Akahata and Naihi both leap clear while Latios and Latias block it from hitting Ren. Groudon is surrounded by lava once more and they belch a column of fire right at Ren. Latios cannot block again so soon but Ren catches the attack in her outstretched hands. Her arms burn with multicolored fire for a moment and she pulls the rest of groudon’s attack towards her before casting it away to either side. Ren takes a step forward and strikes out with Kygore’s power, creating a path of cooled stone that her dark-types dash across. Naihi runs up the rubble, leaping from stone to stone until she is high enough to reach Groudon’s shoulder. Her aim is true as ever and she slashes right into the seam. Groudon staggers to the side, bringing him within range of Akahata. She clamps down on Groudon’s arm as dark energy from Naihi’s successful hit pours into her. She discharges into Groudon just as Latios and Latias attack Groudon’s other side. The climate titan thrashes, trying to fling them away. Akahata holds fast, but Naihi goes sailing. Just before she collides with the back wall, she twists in the air and lands on her feet. She launches back off, charging another night slash. She hits Groudon across the eye and they turn their head to find her and they stagger forward. Meanwhile Akahata has scrambled up Groudon’s arm and she sinks her teeth into their neck, head wreathed in dark energy. Akahata is little bigger than a mouse in comparison to the ancient climate god, but threads of darkness radiate from her bite, rapidly spreading across Groudon’s head, neck and shoulders. Groudon bellows in pain, then sways and falls with a thunderous crash. Naihi is already clear, but Akahata has no choice but to ride the titan down to the waiting lava below. She springs away and some of the lava hits her, but she is still protected by a faint blue aura and it does not burn her. The magma around Groudon begins to cool and the lava glowing within them starts to dim. Groudon rumbles and their eyes follow the Eon Guardians as they swoop forward, but the climate titan does not move. The Eon Guardians force Groudon’s jaws open as Ren strides forward. She hesitates for a moment before climbing past Groudon’s sharp teeth and into their mouth. She glows bright blue and light pours out of her eyes as she thrusts her arm down Groudon’s throat, extinguishing the remaining fire there. She pulls her arm back out, clutching the Red Orb in her hand. She backs out of Groudon’s mouth
as the climate titan begins to shift back. The god’s exterior crumbles away until the red plates of their normal form are revealed once more. Those too begin to dull slightly as Ren watches. Ren takes an ultra ball off her belt and tosses it at the climate pokemon. They flow inside in a flash of red light. The ball rocks from side to side, once, twice, three times, and is still. Ren falls to her knees, suddenly overwhelmed by exhaustion as her blue aura flickers out. Latias falls beside her and drops back to her normal form, followed quickly by Latios. Ren reaches out for Latias, feeling her and Steven’s absence keenly. Now that they are no longer connected, she cannot tell if they are okay.

Ren: We did it. Steven, are you—are you there?

There is no response, but Ren has no time to worry about it because the ceiling above them cracks and buckles, sending bits of stone crashing down around them. Ren shields her head with her arm and when she looks up, Latias is shuffling over to her brother. She presses a paw to his shoulder, uses the last of her strength to heal him and then collapses.

Ren: Latias?

The cavern rumbles again as the earth settles around them. Ren withdraws Latias and scrambles forward to retrieve Groudon’s pokeball.

Akahata: Ren, we have to get out of here.

Naihi: Hurry!

Ren stumbles to her feet and trips almost immediately but Latios catches her. He dips down so that she can climb on and they take off back the way they came. Ren withdraws Akahata and Naihi as Latios gains speed. They fly up the spiral tunnel as the entire cave shakes. The rock cracks all around them and Latios rolls and dips to dodge falling stalactites in the confined space. Ren clings to him, trying to push whatever strength she has left into him. They can see light ahead when a rock clips his wing and the both go tumbling. Ren is up first and pulls Latios to his feet. They run out through the doors and into the light and collapse on the ground in front of the waiting crowd.

Scene 8: Ren is only out long enough to not remember hitting the ground. When she comes to, she is being turned over. Tabitha takes off her helmet and Ren is able to see more clearly. The sky above her is a shade of blue she has never seen before, deep and clear and profoundly beautiful. Something sparkles in the air like raindrops, but nothing hits her face. After a few moments, she notices Zinnia leaning over her. The Lorekeeper smiles when Ren blinks at her. Most of the rest of the League is hovering nearby, but Ren doesn’t see Steven or her friends. A tear lands on her face and she realizes it is her father’s and that he is holding her.

Ren: [tired and quiet] Hey otōsan. I’m okay, really.

[He squeezes her tighter and she groans.]

Kenta: Let go of her, you bee-brain. She can’t breathe.

[Senri loosens his hold just a little.]

Ren: Thanks Kenta. [The ursaring rumbles.] Help me sit up. [Senri props her up and after a deep breath or two she leans out of his grip to sit up on her own.] Did you call okasan? You have to let
her know I’m okay.

Senri pulls out his nav and Ren sends out her pokemon. They are bruised and battered and tired like her, but all okay. Ren tears up a little as they crowd around her and nuzzle her. She holds out a hand for Tāraki and he pulls her up onto her feet and into a hug. She hugs him and laughs and touches all of them to make sure they are okay. Senri steps into the press of bodies to hand off his nav to Ren and she talks to her mother for a while to reassure her. Tabitha helps Ren back out of the magma suit and she shrugs it off with relief. Kai and Wally float out of the water and Lugia places them gently on the grass with their psychic powers. Kai touches down with Wally in a princess carry and it takes him a few moments to notice because he is staring at the crowd trying to spot Ren. When she sees him and Wally, he suddenly realizes he is carrying Wally and goes bright red. Wally taps Kai’s shoulder to be set down. Kai puts him down and they both run to Ren and hug her. Kai is crying a little and she ruffles his hair. Latios floats up and Ren suddenly remembers Latias and lets her out. She is breathing but doesn’t have the energy to stand. Zinnia steps up to spray her and Latios down with a potion. Ren casts her eyes around wildly for Steven and spots him standing under the tree, supported by Wallace. He looks rather pale but clearly still alive. Ren’s whole face lights up and she runs to him. Wallace gets out of the way just in time as she jumps into Steven’s arms. He stumbles back a few steps but manages to catch her and holds her tight. Her arms wrap around his neck and his around her waist. She presses her cheek into his and laughs as he struggles to hold her a few inches off the ground.]

Ren: [whispering into his ear] Thank you.

[He moves his arms down to her thighs and hoists her up so that her legs bracket his waist. He locks his arms under her so that he can hold her up. Her head is above his now but she leans down to rest her forehead on his, laughing again and he laughs too.]

Steven: You did it.

Ren: Not without you. I can’t believe—how did you even do that?

Steven: I’m probably lucky it didn’t kill me.

Ren: [pressing her face harder into his and smiling, no real reproach in her voice] Idiot. I told you not to do anything reckless.

Steven: Well I learned from the best.

Ren: [laughing] Shut up!

[She kisses him on the nose and he starts giggling and spins her around, holding her tight. She lifts her head and laughs louder, hanging tight onto him as well. Soon he begins to teeter and she yelps, still laughing.]

Ren: Ahh! Put me down!

Wallace: This is very sweet and all, but—

[The warning comes a little too late and Steven falls over. Ren lands on top of him and rolls off. They lay next to each other on the ground, him groaning and holding his stomach, her clutching at her elbow with her face screwed up in pain.]

Wallace: Are you two okay?

Steven: Still alive. [He turns his head to look at Ren.]
Ren: [looking at Steven] Yeah, still alive. Chikuso, does it hurt though.

Steven starts to laugh again but ends up coughing weakly.

Wallace: Pain is temporary. Here, let me help you up.

He offers his hand to Ren and she takes it with her good arm. He pulls her up and Steven raises his hand to be pulled up.

Wallace: Oh, no. You just sit down there for a while and rest. Remember how you almost died? You should. It was about five minutes ago.

Steven grunts but does as he is told, resting his head back against the grass and closing his eyes. Kapsa steps forward to congratulate Ren and soon the others are following her example. The entire Hoenn League is shaking her hand or clapping her on the back. Finally the two Lorekeepers she doesn’t know come forward and then Zinna, last in line.

Zinnia: Well done in there, spitfire.

Ren: [offering her hand] Thanks for the help.

Zinnia: [taking her hand] How do you feel?

Ren: Physically? Everything hurts and I have never been more tired, but I’m so damn happy to still be breathing that it doesn’t even matter.

Zinnia: [She smiles for a moment, but it falters and she looks seriously into Ren’s face.] Now I really owe you.

Ren: Don’t worry about—

Zinnia: [taking Ren’s hand in both of hers] I’ll pay you back, I promise you that.

Ren: [flushing a little under the intensity of Zinnia’s gaze] You don’t have to… [She trails off because she spots Josh over Zinnia’s shoulder walking away.] Excuse me a moment.

Zinnia lets her go and Ren wiggles her way through the crowd.

Ren: Josh!

He stops and turns back as she jogs up to him.

Josh: [fidgeting] I j-just, um… yeah.

Ren: Okay. [hugging him] Thank you for helping me and sticking with me. It was really brave.

Josh: [technically hugging her back] I didn’t really—

Ren: It doesn’t matter. I asked you to question everything you believed in and you did. I know changing how you feel about yourself won’t be as easy, but you’ll always be brave to me.

[Josh hugs her tightly for a minute and then lets her go. Ren gives him one final squeeze and her hands drift a little low as she releases him. Josh’s eyebrows shoot up, but he doesn’t say anything. He turns and walks off.]
Ren: [grinning and waving after him] Good luck out there!

[Ren walks back to everyone, shuffling a little as she feels her fatigue anew. Steven is sitting up now but leaning against the trunk of the tree. She plops down next to him and they just rest for a while and enjoy the beautiful afternoon. After a while the others insist on carting them off to the hospital. The sunset from Ren’s room is as vivid as she has ever seen. Kai and Wally and all of her pokemon watch it with her. They all stay until the nurse comes in to fetch Wally back to his own room and kick Kai out. The night sky is also clearer than she has ever seen it, even out in the wilderness with her pokemon. The stars seem endless and fascinating. Ren falls asleep watching a meteor shower.]

---

Scene 9: [It is a bright, clear evening, though not as striking as the one before it. Sootopolis bay is still mirror of the sky, reflecting the first few starts as they emerge. Roma swims silently through it, cutting the surface like a blade. She pulls up to the island in the middle of the bay and Ren disembarks. The small, domed island is just barely large enough to accommodate the gym and an elegant manor house. Ren walks up to the house and stops at the door. She looks up at the fancy molding around the doorway and then down at her outfit. It is a little nicer than what she wears most of the time, but maybe not quite fancy enough for the occasion. She shrugs and sends out Tāraki before knocking on the door. Wallace opens it and true to her fears he is impeccably dressed.]

Wallace: Welcome! [waving her inside] Come in. [calling down the hall] The guest of honor is here! [leading her and Tāraki down the hall] Any idea where Senri is?

Ren: Oh, no, I haven’t—

[Ren is cut off by raucous applause and cheers as they enter a large parlor. Ren freezes in the doorway and flushes at the overwhelmingly warm greeting. Most of the Hoenn League and their pokemon are already there, sitting on couches and chairs or scattered about the room. The coffee table in the middle is full of drinks as are the side tables. Wallace strides past her and picks his drink up off the table. The others follow his example and everyone raises their glasses high.]

Wallace: To Ren!

All: To Ren!

[Steven catches her eye and smiles at her over the rim of his glass and Ren goes a deeper shade of red.]

Wallace: And to not being dead yet!

[That gets a couple chuckles and they all drink.]

Wallace: [to Ren] Can I get you anything?

Ren: Do you have plum wine?

Wallace: Somewhere, I’m sure. Just give me a moment.

[Wallace disappears down a flight of narrow stairs in the back corner. Ren glances around and is somewhat comforted to find that besides Steven, who is practically always in a suit anyway, no one
else is particularly dressed up. There is an empty space on the couch next to Steven and Ren takes it. Meanwhile Tāraki goes to drink from the huge bowl of sangria set out for the pokemon. He slides in next to Roxanne’s kabutops and strikes up a conversation. Steven’s excadrill shuffles over and joins in. Winona withdraws the shiny swallow perched on her shoulder and sends out Māia. The taillow spots her former teammate right away and flies over to him, landing on top of his head. After the initial fright, Tāraki is quite pleased to see her and his tail sways back and forth, almost tripping a passing shiftry.]

Steven: How are you?

Ren: Okay, I guess… [ Ren glances around again, but no one is looking at her, instead talking amongst themselves ] A lot better actually. This is just a little weird. How are you?

Steven: Much recovered. And don’t worry about them. We’re all trainers here, so we’re all more than a little eccentric.

Roxanne: Truer words were never spoken. [ She perches on the coffee table in front of them. ] And I’m including myself, obviously. I can’t believe you two got to see the inside of the Cave of Origin. What was it like, geologically I mean? Wallace won’t tell me a single thing and I’ve been grilling him for years.

Steven: [ face lighting up ] It was incredible, like no place I’ve ever seen. I can say for certain that Rosenthal’s hypothesis is true.

Roxanne: What?!

Steven: It’s obviously a lava tube but an ancient one. There is limestone coming through every crack.

Roxanne: So it must have sunk at some point.

Steven: [ nodding vigorously ] For millennia! [ motioning with his hands ] Then the whole island got pushed back up again and the new volcano erupted right over top of it! And this cave survived!

Roxanne: No!

Steven: Yes!

Roxanne: You have to talk to Wallace again. We need samples. We need them!

Steven: Believe me, I’m working on it.

Roxanne: [ gasp ] What about all of those quakes yesterday?! Do you think…?

Steven: No! No. It’s damaged sure, but not collapsed.

[ Roxanne slumps in relief and Ren smiles as she watches the two of them yammer back and forth. Māia flies over and lands on Ren’s shoulder. ]

Ren: Hey Māia!

Māia: [ rubbing against Ren’s cheek ] I’m so happy you’re okay! I fought Groudon too with Winona before they got to Sootopolis! Boomburst-ed ’em right in the face for ya!

Ren: Hell yeah!

[ Ren holds up her fist and Māia bumps it with her foot. Wallace returns with a glass of plum wine ]
Wallace: [ holding up a hand to silence them ] Upp-up-up, no. This is a party and we are celebrating and we will not be discussing anything to do with my position as Lorekeeper at any point this evening and that is final. [ They both scowl but say nothing. Wallace hands Ren her drink. ] I’m sorry about them, they are absolutely incorrigible on this particular subject.

[ He seems about to join them when the doorbell rings and he sweeps out of the room again. He returns with Senri, Kaspa and Dizzy and their ursaring, umbreon and ninetails respectively. Everyone who is sitting stands up to greet the Sekiei Champion. ]

Senri: Sorry we’re late.

Kaspa: Thank you all. Please be at ease.

[ Everyone goes back to what they were doing. Kaspa and her umbreon claim an armchair while Senri goes to sit next to his daughter on the couch. Kenta gives Ren a nuzzle before joining Tāraki. Dizzy sort of stands in the corner near the doorway looking as though he would rather not be present. ]

Wallace: I’d like to take this moment to remind everyone that you may only have one pokemon out at a time and if I see Jeffrey even for an instant, you are getting thrown out of here faster than if you teleported.

[ Ren turns, eyebrows raised, wondering who that comment was directed at. ]

Steven: [ explaining ] Jeffrey is Pheebs’s sableye. He ate some of Wallace’s contest jewelry. Twice now as a matter of fact. I think Wallace might actually kill him and Pheebs if he ever does it again.

Roxanne: Honestly she’s lucky he lets her come to these things at all anymore.

Steven: Certainly she’s not invited more than is necessary.

Senri: [ putting an arm around his daughter and giving her a squeeze ] Happy birthday, kiddo.

[ Māia flaps a few times, buffeting Ren, before switching shoulders so that she can have more space. ]

Ren: Oh, uh, thanks. I sort of forgot.

Senri: Did you call your mother?

Ren: Yeah, of course.

Steven: Arceus, I completely forgot.

Ren: That’s okay—

Roxanne: [ hissing ] Senri! Why didn’t you say anything!

Senri: What?

Roxanne: [ slapping his knee ] You know I love you but you are completely impossible sometimes. [ She gives him one last censuring look before shifting her attention back to Ren and smiling. ] Happy birthday.
Ren: Thank you.

Roxanne: Give my best to Asuka next time you talk to her. I’m sure you already know this, but she is such an amazing writer. I just finished her book and to be perfectly honest it’s not my genre, but I was completely blown away. I want to read the one she’s working on now so badly. Maybe she’ll let me at it sometime.

Ren: Probably not until the first draft is finished, but it couldn’t hurt to drop some hints.

[Wallace comes back and hands Senri a drink before plopping down in the armchair to Steven’s right.]

Ren: Thanks for having us all over. Your house is very nice.

Wallace: Thank you. My mentor Juan—[gesturing with his margarita] he’s right over there—built it and the gym. There was just a little cottage on this island when he became Gym Leader. Of course, I have added on a little. Sorry if I caught you off guard with the toast. I figured it would be better to make it brief and get it out of the way.

Ren: That’s okay. Better actually.

Wallace: Has Steven been behaving? Other than his rock talk, I mean.

Ren: Very much so. The charm offensive is at a minimum.

Wallace: [laughing] That’s a nice word for it. I keep forgetting you’ve already spent a lot of time with our League Champion.

Ren: Yep. It’s been an experience.

Wallace: Well, as his friend let me just apologize for how much he has flirted with you.

Ren: What?

Steven: I didn’t—

Wallace: [rolling his eyes] Please darling, you flirt with everyone. [to Ren] Anyway, he doesn’t mean to. It’s like a nervous tick. He can’t help himself.

[Ren is trying to smile and trying not to blush and failing spectacularly at both. To top it off she can feel her father staring at her and Steven and she tries to sink into the couch.]

Wallace: [with a haughty smirk] Fortunately, some of us have a resistance to his charms.

Steven: [sipping his drink] Seemed to work on you just fine in university.

Wallace: [face dropping into annoyance] Below the belt, Steven.

Steven: I think that was more than fair, Rire.

Ren: [realization dawning] Wait, you’re Rire?

Wallace: Rire is my first name. I prefer to go by my last name, but Steven started calling me ‘Rire’ while we were dating and could never seem to break the habit. So I still call him ‘darling’ out of spite.
A lot of things are starting to sink into place for Ren and her brain is pretty much in full panic mode, which shows on her face. Fortunately Tāraki comes over to deliver her.

Tāraki: Hey Ren, Steven’s excadrill was saying we should maybe let Kōtai and his sandslash hang out for a while. I’ve already had a bunch of that great juice stuff and the kabutops showed me this awesome slicing technique, so I don’t really mind.

Ren: Okay. Sure thing.

Tāraki waves goodbye to Māia as Ren withdraws him and sends out Kōtai. The sandslash looks a little puzzled until he sees Steven sending out his sandslash and he perks up. Kōtai winks at his trainer before shuffling over to talk to her. Tate and Lisa enter the room, clearly let in by someone else. Wallace gets up to greet them and Tate gives him a hug.

Wallace: So glad you could make it. How are things? Have your students stopped misgendering you yet?

Tate: Yes. Or at least out loud.

Wallace: Well that’s something, I guess. Wallace’s milotic slithers into the room followed by a politoed. And that will be the food. Excuse me for a minute. Steven, come help me with this.

Steven grumbles and gets up.

Senri: I’ll give you a hand too.

Dizzy approaches him and starts a conversation, which Ren thinks is a little odd, especially when his ninetails, who she assumed was translating, gets up and goes to sit with Kaspa’s umbreon and the two continue speaking as if nothing happened. Ren decides she needs another drink and gets up. The twins take her place on the couch and start gabbing with Roxanne as Ren pours herself some more plum wine from the bottle Wallace left out for her. Pheebs and Sidney join her by the liquor cabinet, still in the midst of their own conversation and pour themselves shots. Ren watches them shotgun whatever it is and doesn’t notice Flannery walking up on her other side.

Flannery: Hey Ren.

Ren: Hi.

Flannery: [ looking a little nervous ] I’m sorry about what I said yesterday. I didn’t mean—I wasn’t thinking—I just…

Ren: It’s totally fine. Brawly said it best: none of us were digging that situation. But it all worked out in the end, so let’s not worry about it anymore.

Flannery raises her glass and Flannery smiles as she clinks hers against it.

Flannery: Happy birthday.

Ren: Thank you.

Sidney: Yeah, happy birthday. Which one is it?

Ren: My nineteenth.

Pheebs: Damn. You’re like an ovum.
Sidney: [grinning] Hey, you’re only a year younger than Flan. [smirking even wider] Fancy that.

Flannery: [flushing bright red] I have to use the restroom.

[She puts down her drink and flees.]

Ren: [watching her go, concerned] Is she okay?

Phoebe: Flannery? Oh yeah, she’s fine. She just had a major crush on you after that gym battle.

[Ren turns back to Phoebe and Sidney, eyes widening. They both do another shot and Sidney sways a little as he slams his glass back down on the table. He is clearly quite inebriated already, but Phoebe shows little evidence of being anything more than tipsy.]

Phoebe: [shrugging] She was trying to be subtle about it in the chat but—

Sidney: It was hilarious.

Phoebe: Completely transparent.

Sidney: And then Senri came on.

Phoebe: [cackling] And he was like: “just to clarify, you are interested in dating my daughter?”

Sidney: So Flan is scared shitless, right? And most of us have commented by this point, so we’re all culpable. Shit is very tense.

Phoebe: But Flannery is Asuna’s granddaughter, so she does the only honorable thing and admits to it.

Sidney: Even I am flipping my shit at this point.

Phoebe: [very matter of fact] You flip at everything. You’re the designated drama queen of this League.

Sidney: True.

Phoebe: [turning back to Ren] So then your father is just like: “well she’s never had an actual boyfriend or anything before, so she could easily be gay, but she hasn’t told me so I don’t actually know.” No “my daughter is off limits” or threats or any of that papa ursaring bullshit. Just: “my daughter hasn’t discussed her orientation with me, so by all means give it a go and see what happens.”

[Sidney is dying laughing and Phoebe chuckles quietly, clearly amused but in a more understated way. Ren has no idea how to respond except that she is blushing crimson.]

Glacia: [drifting into the circle] Ren’s lucky if you ask me. How is it Senri’s business anyway? When I was her age, my father was forever trying to scare off anyone who showed even the slightest interest. And did that stop me from getting embarrassing amounts of ass?

Phoebe: We all know the answer to that.

Glacia: No it didn’t. I would have been much better off if we could have just had a frank discussion on the subject instead of him insisting that I could never have sex with anyone ever.

[Phoebe is nodding.]
Glacia: [sarcastic] And yet, miracle of miracles, I was capable of making my own decisions and made it through just fine anyway.

Phoebe: So yeah, Ren, your dad is pretty chill. He’s not on that often, but it’s usually a good time.

Roxanne: [walking over] Pheebs, are you talking about the chat? The first rule of the chat is that you do not talk about the chat!

Phoebe: You’re the reason she already knows about it in the first place.

Roxanne: [whining] That was an accident!

Sidney: Oh! Tell us about that time that you were dating like five dudes at once and then they all wanted to take you to prom.

Phoebe: Classic Glacia.

[Ren looks as though her soul has flown out of her body and into another plane of existence as the others continue to talk around her.]

Glacia: [wistful] Hmm. I don’t really have the energy for that kind of thing anymore, but it was fun. Anyway, where to begin? First there was Chad, or maybe it was Scott first? Who can remember these things? I started going with them around the same time so it doesn’t really—

Roxanne: Not another one of your sexcapades, Glacia.

Glacia: They asked about it! You are free to listen and enjoy or not as you please.

Roxanne: But consider that Ren may not want to listen.

Glacia: Oh I’m sorry, dear. [pating Ren on the shoulder] You do look a little green around the gills. I apologize, I wasn’t paying attention.

Ren: [squeaking] It’s fine.

Roxanne: Come, let’s wander over here for a bit. Sidney won’t be satisfied until he gets the rest of it out of her.

[Ren waves as Roxanne leads her away and catches sight of Sidney mouthing “thank you”. Roxanne walks over to join Brawly, who is leaning back against the wall with his hariyama.]

Brawly: Yo Ren! How’s it?

Ren: Pretty good.

Brawly: Does the grass dude still surf?

Ren: Every chance he gets.

Brawly: Awesome!

Ren: We actually found a pretty good spot north of Lilycove.

Brawly: Wailmer Bay, right? I’m a born and bred Dewford dude myself, but I’ll admit there’s some pretty nice waves to be had up there.
They talk for a while and Roxanne brings Winona over to join in. Steven Wallace and Senri come back with the food, having taken rather a long time in the kitchen.

Steven: [ placing a large tray of fruit on the table ] I still don’t understand why why there aren’t any cherries. Everyone likes cherries and you know they’re my favorite.

Wallace: I’m saving you from yourself. You’ll thank me in the morning.

After a bit, Ren and company wander over to the central coffee table to get food. Ren, Steven and Senri get into a discussion with Kaspa in Kantonese while Wallace splits his attention between the twins, Dizzy’s ninetails, and keeping half an eye on everything. Pretty soon everyone is in the middle of the room, eating and talking and laughing. Everyone is also drinking, except maybe Wallace and Dizzy, who mostly sticks to the corner with Wallace’s milotic. Sidney is predictably the first to give up on the vertical plane and lays down across Glacia, Phoebe and Steven on the couch. Ren is perched on the arm of the couch next to Steven and leaning back against him for support while Kaspa continues to talk to her and Senri, who has dragged a chair over to sit next to her. Flannery is sitting on the floor in front of the couch and she slumps over the coffee table with a big, exaggerated sigh.

Flannery: [ groaning ] Women are just so pretty, you know?

Sidney: Steven! Show us your tattoo!

Steven: Why is it every time we get drunk together, you try and get me to take my clothes off?

Sidney: You know I’m not trying to get in your pants, man. Just under your shirt.

Steven: Mmhm.

Sidney: I wanna see it for the artistry! You’re all about looks so it has to be bitchin’. [ appealing to the rest of the assembled ] Like there is no way Steven’s tat is ugly. We all agree on this. Wallace has seen it. It’s bitchin’, right?

Wallace: Just accept the homoerotic subtext of this desire and move on. You’ll feel better.

Sidney: Alright. [ he takes a deep breath, then chants ] Take off your shirt! Take off your shirt! Take off your shirt!

Phoebe: [ joining in ] Take it off! Take it off! Take it off!

Steven: [ shoving her ] Knock it off! I’m not showing you all my tattoo.

Sidney: [ whining ] Whyyy noooot!

Phoebe: I can’t believe the man who took my title won’t even do me the slightest favor. I mentored you for a year.

Steven: First of all, you were required to. And second of all, you so completely did not.

Sidney: Come on , Steven.

Steven: It’s personal.

Phoebe: After all we’ve been through together?
Steven: Don’t start, or I’ll go there and you know where there is.

Phoebe: You’ve known me long enough that you should know you can’t shame me.

Sidney: Yeah, give it up. There is no shaming the Pheebs.

Steven: I am not taking my shirt off with the Sekiei League Champion sitting right there!

[ Steven snaps his mouth shut, suddenly realizing that said Champion probably heard him. Fortunately for Steven, Kaspa is currently glaring at Wallace, who looks truly uncomfortable for the first time. Dizzy’s ninetails is pointedly looking away from him, slender snout in the air. Meanwhile, Sidney and Phoebe continue to badger Steven, undeterred, and Ren decides to intervene. ]

Ren: Lay off him! [a little quieter] I want to see it as much as the next person, [vehemently] but it’s not cool to force him.

Steven: [laughing] Are you defending my honor right now?

Ren: [defiant] So what if I am?

Phoebe: [flatly] Steven’s the Champion.

Sidney: What are you gonna do?

Ren: Need I remind you all that I just defeated Groudon? I’ll take any of you! I’ll take you right now!

Sidney: [sitting up] Whoa! Them’s fightin’ words!

Flannery: Oh Arceus, I love you.

Lisa: [patting her on the back] That was audible, Flannery.

Flannery: You mean I thought so loud that you heard it?

Lisa: No, I meant it came out of your mouth.

Flannery: [staring into the abyss] Yep. That is my life.

[Lisa and Roxanne coax Flannery off the coffee table and she leans back against the couch between them. Her head lolls on Roxanne’s shoulder and she falls asleep. Glacia has vacated the couch in favor of an armchair where she sits talking to Juan, also in an armchair. Meanwhile Ren and Steven are still debating Phoebe and Sidney across the couch with Māia gesturing threateningly from Ren’s shoulder for emphasis. Brawly and Winona are sitting in front of the coffee table discussing something wind and wave related judging from the way Brawly is moving his hands. Wallace is back in his original chair across from them and deep in conversation with Tate. Kaspa and Senri have gone more or less quiet and are half listening. Kaspa looks over the gathering and gives a rare, soft smile.]

Kaspa: This is a good party. [She squints and looks around again.] Wait… Where is Dizzy?
Scene 10: [ A little later into the evening, the argument has quieted down and the room is calm. Wallace does another scan to make sure that nothing is amiss and notices that both his milotic and Dizzy are gone. He grumbles and heads off to the west wing of the house. They are not in any of the adjoining parlors, but he finds both of them when he opens the door to the rear aquarium room. They seem to be talking quietly to each other, silhouetted against the light of the large cylindrical aquarium set into the back wall. The room is a full two stories tall with stone floors and the tank extends from floor to ceiling. ]

Wallace: There you are, weird guy.

[ The other two turn to look at him and Dizzy smiles. ]

Dizzy: [ dipping his head ] Konbanwa. [ in Kantonese ] Peretau was showing me the tank. I hope that’s alright with you. Your feebas are so beautiful.

Wallace: [ He blinks blankly at Dizzy before turning to his milotic. ] What are you two doing back here?

Peretau: He wanted to see the children. He likes water pokemon and he’s never seen feebas or a milotic before. He thinks the children are pretty.

Wallace: How the heck do you know all of this?

Peretau: He told me.

Wallace: You mean you know Kantonese or whatever the hell he’s speaking? When did that happen?

Peretau: Of course not. I can just understand him when he speaks, like I understand you.

Wallace: [ eyes narrowing ] And you don’t find that the least bit strange or suspicious?

Peretau: [ with a unconcerned toss of his fin ] Perhaps it is a blessing of Lord Lugia. I didn’t ask.

Wallace: [ crossing his arms ] Hmm.

Dizzy: [ pointing excitedly to a feebas with heart-shaped markings ] This one is so cute! Look! She has little hearts all over her!

[ Wallace of course has no idea what Dizzy is saying except that he seems very excited. He looks to his milotic for some kind of translation. ]

Peretau: He likes Manawa.

[ Dizzy has his face pressed up against the glass and the feebas eye him as they go by. He speaks soothingly to them in more unintelligible Kantonese. Wallace’s expression softens ever so slightly as he watches this. Most people don’t appreciate feebas. He sighs. ]

Wallace: Does he want to meet them?

[ Peretau relays the invitation to Dizzy who nods vigorously, smiling broadly at Wallace again. ]

Dizzy: Hai!

Wallace: [ uncrossing his arms and waving around the side of the tank ] Come on then.
He walks around to a floating, glass staircase that spirals up behind the tank. They climb to a glass platform at the top that wraps around the edge of the tank. Wallace sits down on the edge and dangles his feet in the water. Dizzy crouches next to him and peers down into the tank. The feebas swim up to the top to greet them. Each pops its head out of the water or jumps out for a moment before diving back down. Dizzy actually giggles when the feebas with the heart markings splashes him in the face. He shakes the water off like a dog and Wallace leans away, looking a little disgusted. Peretau slithers up the steps and onto the platform behind them.

Dizzy: [ in Kantonese ] May I swim with them?

Peretau nods, but Dizzy jerks his head at Wallace, so the milotic repeats the question to him.

Wallace: Sure.

Dizzy pulls off his socks and dips his feet in. He scoots up to the edge and slides quietly in, sinking to near the bottom. Wallace watches as the feebas swirl around him. A bubble rises now and then as he swims in place. After several minutes that seem like an eternity, he surfaces with a gasp.

Wallace: You sure can hold your breath.

Dizzy: [ in Kantonese ] They have such good manners. You raised them very well.

Just then one of them nibbles his callused foot and he laughs and splutters as his mouth sinks below the surface for a moment. His head pops back above the water.

Dizzy: [ joking ] I take it back.

Wallace: [ frowning down at the feebas swimming tight circles around Dizzy and muttering ] Stop flirting with him.

Peretau: Oh, let her do what she likes.

Dizzy sinks back down into the tank.

Peretau: Besides, he’s not so bad.

Wallace: [ looking over at his milotic ] His ninetails wouldn’t tell me anything. She almost got me in trouble with the Sekiei Champion. [ watching Dizzy again ] What do you like about him so much anyway?

Peretau: He’s polite, he has excellent taste, and he smells good.

Wallace turns his head slowly back to his milotic.

Wallace: [ incredulous ] What?

Peretau: He smells like the ocean. It’s nice.

Wallace is about to say something else when Dizzy surfaces again and grins at Wallace. The feebas circles him. Wallace looks him up and down.

Wallace: Manawa likes you.

Dizzy: [ in Kantonese ] Are you coming in?

Once again Wallace doesn’t understand a word, but as Dizzy drifts backwards to give Wallace
more space, his meaning is obvious. Wallace glances from his rather pleased looking milotic to Dizzy’s hopeful smile and shrugs. He takes off his shirt and Dizzy sinks almost to his eyes, which fails to hide the look on his face. Wallace rolls his eyes and slips into the water. Dizzy surfaces for a deep breath before following him down. The feebas are all gathered around Wallace. Dizzy spreads eagles and Manawa zips around his arms and legs before brushing up against his chest. Dizzy puffs out his cheeks and blows a big bubble. He smiles as the feebas swim through it. Wallace’s face twitches as he tries not to smile. He spreads his arms and the feebas line up on either side of him. He tilts his arms this way and that and the feebas stay in line with them. He makes a circle with his arms and the feebas form a circle around him. He whirls his arms and forms a circle in the other direction and the feebas spin like a wheel. Dizzy goes wide-eyed and Wallace can’t help but show off just a little bit more. He raises his arms and the feebas swim down. He lowers his arms to about forty-five degrees and the feebas swim beneath him and push him up, spiraling as they head for the surface. Dizzy surfaces a moment later.

Dizzy: [appreciative murmur] Suteki.

[Wallace can sense praise even in another language and smiles. He takes a few deep breaths and dives back down. Dizzy follows him but we stay up on the surface where Peretau is watching them. Wallace shows off a bit more of his routine and Peretau dives in to join them, slopping water over the sides of the already full tank. He swirls in a graceful arc around his trainer before spiraling back to the surface. Wallace hitches a ride back up and onto the platform. Dizzy follows him and hauls himself out of the water with a great deal less grace. Wallace rings out his hair while Dizzy looks back down into the tank. Manawa jumps out of the water and into Dizzy’s lap. He is startled but manages to catch her and laughs.]

Dizzy: [cooing fondly in Kantonese] What are you doing? You are so cute! You know you can’t stay out here.

Wallace: Would you like to keep her?

Dizzy: [looking up at Wallace] Eh?

Wallace: She’s never taken to anyone like this.

Peretau: Would you take her on as your pokemon?

Dizzy: [in Kantonese] You’d let me do that?

Peretau: Of course. We have seen that you are a good trainer and she likes you. She’s very picky.

Dizzy: [in Kantonese] I would be honored. [bowing to Wallace and Peretau]

Arigatōgozaimashita! [to the feebas] Would you like to come with us? [She wiggles her fins.] Wa–i! I’ll call you Opal.

Peretau: [as Dizzy places the feebas in the tank] Oh, I like it. It suits her.

Dizzy: [looking back up at Wallace, his expression suddenly intense] Would you like to meet Lord Lugia?

Wallace: [inadvertently shying away from the intense eye-contact] What’s he saying now?

Peretau: He wants to know if we would like to meet Lugia.

[The three of them go out a side door and walk to the edge of the island near the house. Dizzy turns back to Wallace and his milotic for a moment and says something before he dives into the bay and]
disappears from sight. They wait for a few minutes before the water starts to glow. Wallace gapes as the massive pokemon rises from the water right in front of him. Dizzy slides down off of Lugia’s snout and onto the grass. Wallace’s eyes unfocus as he is enveloped by the god’s vast consciousness.

Dizzy: Wallace, may I introduce Lord Lugia. Kamisama, this is Wallace.

Lugia: Good to meet you, Lorekeeper of the Sootopolins. We thank you for your help today.

Wallace: …How?

Lugia: [ easily anticipating all of Wallace’s questions before he can ask them ] I am translating for him. He is able to speak to pokemon by his own power. It is a passive psychic ability. He is able to use the moves of pokemon that he is soul-bonded with because I gifted him with the move assist. His natural abilities allow him to choose which move he wants to use rather than being subject to chance.

Wallace: [ surprised ] Oh… [ looking rather sheepish ] Thank you for telling me.

Lugia: Guard the knowledge well, Lorekeeper.

[ Wallace looks very sheepish and his milotic laughs at him, covering it with his tail fin. Dizzy is all smiles as he places a hand on Lugia’s neck. ]

Scene 11: [ It is very late as the rest of the guests leave the party. Senri, Winona, Brawly, Juan and Glacia are nowhere to be seen, having already turned in for the night. The twins take off on their Xatu as Wallace shakes Ren’s hand. She is last to step out the door into the night, but finds Steven there waiting up for her. ]

Steven: [ pressing a small silver paper box into her hand with a winning smile ] Happy birthday.

Ren: [ She looks down at it, a little to surprised to say anything at first. ] Thank you.

[ When she looks up, Steven is sending out his skarmory. He turns to mount up, but pauses and turns back to her. ]

Steven: I’m not sure when we’ll see each other next now that Groudon is taken care of, but I may still text you in the meantime, if that’s alright.

Ren: Of course it is. I’ll miss you.

Steven: I’ll miss you too.

[ He holds out a hand for her to shake, but she ignores it, hugging him instead. He hugs her back, letting out a contented sigh. They release each other and he hops up into his waiting skarmory’s saddle. Ren waves as he takes off. Once he is gone, Ren looks down at her gift, considering it for a moment before stowing it in her bag. Roma has appeared and Ren steps onto her back. The sharpedo takes her towards the pokemon center, but they do not get far before Ren changes her mind and taps the sharpedo’s fin, directing her to the center of the city instead. They pull up to the spit of land in front of the Cave of Origin and Ren disembarks. She walks under the tree. It is quite dark beneath, but little flecks of moonlight still shine through the branches. ]
Ren: Latios?

[ *The Eon Guardian appears in front of her.* ]

Ren: I thought I sensed you over here.

[ *He nods.* ]

Ren: How come you haven’t gone back to Southern Island?

Latios: Latias and I have been repairing the Cave of Origin and helping the pokemon who live there.

Ren: So it didn’t collapse?

Latios: No. It is a sacred place, ages older than my sibling and I. The climate titans have emerged through it many times and will again one day. How does Groudon take to captivity?

Ren: We’re keeping them in the PSS for now just to be safe. I don’t think they can wake when they are just data.

Latios: That will have to do for now. But you do understand that we must return them to the earth. When Latias and I have recovered, we will call on you and Steven to entomb them once more.

[ *Ren nods but says nothing for a time.* ]

Ren: So what happens from here?

Latios: That is up to you. What I asked of you is finished.

[ *Ren looks down a little sadly, turning her head so that the unscarred side is facing Latios.* ]

Latios: You can always reach out to me with your mind. That will never fade.

Ren: [ *looking back up at him and smiling* ] I guess you did say at the beginning that we would be bonded forever.

Latios: And I meant it. Even if there is peace for the rest of your lifetime, we will always be connected.

Ren: That’s good. I would have missed you otherwise.

Latios: I do hope there is peace, even if it means I may not see you, but I suspect that I will need your strength again one day. Latias and I were speaking with Naihi in the Pokemon Center, and it does seem as if something still looms in the distance. But do not worry about it now. It may be long into the future. Now is the time to focus on your own goals. Are you still going to become Champion?

Ren: Yeah. It might upset Steven—I know he likes being Champion—but that’s a risk I’m willing to take.

[ *Latios smiles, a very rare expression for him and Latias glides up to them from wherever she was hiding.* ]

Latias: I think he’s excited. The threat of him actually being dethroned has never been more real. He is never really happy unless there is some challenge to face.

Latios: Hmm. Hopefully the two of you will grow out of that one day.
Ren laughs at their bickering and Latias joins in. Latios hold his head above them haughtily, but his scowl gradually gives way to a softer expression. The trio say their goodbyes and Ren hugs the other two tight before heading off to sleep.

Scene 12: Ren is getting brunch with Kai and Wally in a diner. Ren slumps over the table as they wait for the food. Kai and Wally laugh and ask her about the party the night before. She is a little reluctant to say anything, but once the food comes, she perks up a bit and starts talking. She blushes retelling the episode with Flannery and blanches remembering that her father was there for certain parts of the evening. She learned a little more about some people’s history than she ever wanted to and a lot about the internal politics of the League. But it was really cool to get to know the Sekiei Champion a little and fun to spend some time with Steven and the others when there wasn’t a crisis or gym battle hanging over them. Wally eats it all up and manages to weasel a little more out of Ren than he probably should. Kai mostly listens quietly, but is probably almost as desperate at Wally to get every detail. There is a lot that Ren hasn’t processed and she gets a little overwhelmed talking about it, but by the end she is describing something fondly and smiling wistfully out the window.

Later, the three trainers head out of Sootopolis on Kai’s wailord. Once they are out on the open sea, they send out all of their pokemon. Makō is easily large enough to accommodate them all. They sail around exploring the reefs and tiny islands around Sootopolis. They stop for lunch on an one of the little islands and Wally battles another trainer who happens by. After they eat, Kai and Wally train their teams together, but Ren and her pokemon are pretty worn out and take it easy. Tarahau and Teka, who did not just fight a god, join in the practice. Ren just lays back in the sand for a while, relaxing in the gentle warmth. The weather has been something else since Groudon was revived. Ren closes her eyes and suddenly remembers her gift. She reaches for her bag and pulls it out. She turns it over, wondering what is inside for a moment before tearing off the silver wrapping paper and opening the black box underneath. There is a dawn stone inside and Ren smiles. She gets up calls Tarahau over and the snorunt is overjoyed when Ren presents the dawn stone. Tarahau seizes it with her dark claws and swallows it whole. She starts vibrating and Ren gets slightly alarmed, but she is enveloped by white light a moment later and evolves. Tarahau looks over her new form and sways with delight. Kata already has her camera out and asks the froslass to give her a turn. She obliges, twirling around in the air with her new pale cloak glimmering in the sun. Ren snaps a picture too and sends it to Steven. Most of the pokemon gather around to admire the froslass and Tarahau drinks in the attention with glee. After a while she wants to try out her moves in her new form and Kata decides to tutor her. They work out for a while, with the grumpig helping the froslass channel energy through her crystals. But true to form, the two lose interest after a while and decide to try and scare as many of the others as possible. With Tarahau’s new ghost-typing and surprisingly huge and terrifying jaws, this proves to be easier than anticipated and the two pranksters laugh their heads off. The only ones who are spared are Akahata and Naihi, who spend the entire day together talking and wading in the surf and napping in the warm sand. By sunset, Kai wants to head back, but Wally challenges him to a one-on-one battle and he eventually relents. Everyone else clears space as Jay and Kihei face off against each other. Both mega evolve and the rest have to shield their eyes from the blowing sand. Both pokemon get a major speed and attack boost and it is almost difficult to follow the match. Kihei has the type advantage, but Jay gets faster and faster the longer...
they spar. Jay almost takes the victory, but Kihei hits her with a psycho cut and she goes down. Tāraki cheers, bouncing up and down in excitement and wants to battle both of them. Kai and Wally look about ready to keel over and Ren says there is no way she has the energy. They all watch the sunset as Makō sails them back to Sootopolis.

Scene 13: [ About a week later, Ren returns to the island in the center of Sootopolis bay for her final badge and Kai and Wally come along to get their seventh badges. The Sootopolis Gym is an enormous greenhouse that takes up most of the island. Inside, a deep pool runs around the perimeter. Across a footbridge, the landscaping slopes upward to the top where water is pumped up and runs down the side in three main streams. There are numerous waterfalls and shallow pools between the mangrove trees and other vegetation that serve as natural filtration. A lengthy glass staircase leads to the top of the hill, periodically interrupted by battle arenas. The central stream fills these with water so that the water-types that train there can be in their element, but each battlefield is also dotted with platforms for pokemon that cannot swim. Kai and Wally both take two trainer battles each to warm up and get used to the unusual setup, but Ren forgoes them. Eventually they make it to the leader platform at the top where Wallace is waiting for them. Kai goes first and he and Wallace go outside to battle so that Kai’s wailord can participate. Kai battles Wallace’s seaking, gyarados, seadra, and corsola with Zack, Lily, Dusty and Makō. They stay outside for Wally’s battle as well and this time Wallace uses his own wailord, relicanth, huntaill and tentacruel against Wally’s magnezone, roselia, azumarill and gallade. Wallace hands over their badges and the group heads back inside for the final match. Ren and Wallace shake hands before taking opposite sides of the battlefield while Kai and Wally take their seats in the modest stands at the back. Wallace sends out his gorebyss first and Ren sends out Tāraki.

Wallace: Water pulse!
Ren: Leaf blade, Tāraki! No mercy!
[ Wallace is clearly hoping to confuse the sceptile, but Tāraki powers through the attack and slashes at the gorebyss with his arm leaves. However the water pulse does cause enough distortion to make Tāraki misjudge and the gorebyss dodges him, diving back underwater. ]

Wallace: Psychic!
[ Tāraki waits for the gorebyss to get in range, but just as he swings, she uses psychic on his foot to pull him off balance and he falls into the water. ]

Wallace: And whirlpool!
[ Tāraki is pretty used to the water and a good swimmer, so he doesn’t panic as many pokemon might when the whirlpool drags him away from the platform and pulls him down. ]

Ren: Mega drain!
[ Tāraki takes a final gulp of air before going under and uses mega drain. The strength of the whirlpool disintegrates as energy flows from the gorebyss into the sceptile. Tāraki launches off the bottom and back onto a platform. ]

Wallace: Hang in there, Mātā! Draining kiss!
Ren: Leaf blade!

[ The gorebyss reclaims some of its energy but not enough and this time Tāraki hits home. The gorebyss falls back into the water with a splash and Wallace withdraws it. He sends out a walrein, which swims forward and leaps up onto a platform. ]

Ren: Alright Tāraki, let’s let Ao handle this one.

[ Tāraki bounds from platform to platform back to Ren’s side and she sends out Ao. The walrein bellows a challenge at the manectric as the two square off. ]

Wallace: Aurora beam!

Ren: Charge beam!

[ The beams meet in the air and explode into a burst of snow. Ao dashes through the cloud to catch her opponent off guard only to find the walrein has slipped away. A second later he lunges out of the water behind her and body slams the manectric off the platform. She flies across the short expanse of water and hits the next platform. She bounces and rolls but her claws dig in and she just barely manages to stop herself from sliding off. She looks up to see the walrein charging another aurora beam between its jaws. Just as it fires, sparks flicker across its pelt and it flinches, causing the attack to go wide. Ao wastes no time in retaliating with another charge beam. ]

Wallace: She’s weakened. Brine, Ngongo!

Ren: Discharge!

[ The walrein is slowed by paralysis and Ao is able to dive out of range of the torrent, dashing across the platforms to behind the walrein before discharging into it. The boosted electric attack is more than even something as tanky as the walrein can handle and it slumps. Wallace withdraws it and sends out a whiscash. It looks like a normal water-type to Ren, but she remembers Kai talking about them when they were in Fallarbor. ]

Ren: Ao, come back. Tāraki you’re up again.

[ Wallace’s face tightens a little as the sceptile and manectric swap places on the field. ]

Ren: Mega drain!

Wallace: Berry, Poharu!

[ Ren sees that there is a pouch strapped to the whiscash’s belly and it eats the rindo berry inside as Tāraki uses mega drain. Tāraki’s attack does far less than it would have, although the whiscash still droops a little. ]

Ren: Leaf blade!

Wallace: Belch!

[ Tāraki steaks across the arena at full speed only to have the whiscash belch a huge cloud of toxic gas into his face as he closes. Tāraki staggers, tumbles and falls in again. ]

Wallace: Future sight!

[ The whiscash glows purple and Tāraki launches back out of the water, punching it from beneath. Its water sphere bursts and it gets a worrying amount of air before Wallace withdraws it and sends
out a starmie. Tāraki is dripping and panting from exhaustion.

Ren: Ao.

[ The manectric nods and bounds back onto the field while Tāraki summons his energy to gracefully retreat. ]

Wallace: Light screen, Ārahi!

Ren: Charge beam!

[ Ao’s attack gets filtered through the starmie’s shimmering barrier and does very little damage, but sparks gather in her fur. ]

Wallace: Cosmic power!

Ren: Charge beam again!

[ Usually the second charge beam would do more, but the starmie glimmers, boosting it magical defenses even further and the attack still does very little. ]

Wallace: Hydro pump!

Ren: Thunder wave!

[ Ao dodges the attack but just barely and now all of the platforms on Ren’s side of the field are wet. The starmie shudders with paralysis, but even with the handicap it is still fast and almost gets Ao a second time as she bounds away. ]

Ren: Another charge beam or two! We have to break that barrier!

Wallace: Psychic!

[ Ao gets in a charge beam before the starmie can grab her with psychic energy, but there is no escaping its hold. It slams her back down on the platform and starts to raise her up again only to have paralysis stop it. Ao fires a fourth charge beam before her paws even hit the ground and the starmie flinches. ]

Wallace: Recover.

[ Healing energy flows into the starmie, but Ao is now rippling with sparks. She is about to discharge, when a purple beam fires out of the ceiling and knocks her flat. Both trainers watch for a second, wondering if the future sight was enough to finish Ao, but in another moment Ren knows it’s not. She clenches her fists and Ao raises her head. Ao howls and discharges into the starmie and it falls on its back, ruby dimming. Wallace withdraws it and sends out his milotic. ]

Ren: Nicely done, Ao. Come on back.

[ Ren hesitates for a moment and reaches for Akahata’s ball on her belt, but Tāraki grabs her shoulder. His bright golden eyes meet Ren’s muted green and she nods. The sceptile grins as he steps forward to challenge Wallace’s milotic and Ren tenses. Tāraki won’t be able to take many hits after that poison attack and certainly no super-effective ones. ]

Wallace: Twister!

Ren: Leaf blade!
The glowing whirlwind picks up water as it zigzags towards Tāraki but the sceptile dodges around it leaping around the arena to where the milotic is waiting for him. Peretau dodges Tāraki’s swing, wraps his tail around the sceptile’s foot and whips him towards the water.

Ren: Slam!

As Tāraki’s right foot starts to slide, he digs in with the other and spins. His tail goes over the milotic’s head, but he succeeds in gaining enough momentum to pull Peretau back onto the platform. Tāraki hauls back, leaves glowing, but Peretau slithers around the other way and wraps Tāraki’s arms tight to his torso.

Ren: Mega drain!

Peretau is already charging an attack but stops in favor of disentangling himself as Tāraki drains his energy. The milotic uncoils rapidly, elongating his tail with water. The added length helps him spin Tāraki like a top and fling him into the air. Peretau charges again and Tāraki whips his tail around to correct his tumble. The ice beam grazes his tail but Tāraki lands on his feet in a crouch.

Wallace: Surf!

Ren: Leaf blade!

The milotic pulls all the water to his end of the arena and then hurls it at Tāraki in a massive wave. Tāraki launches forward to meet it, slicing through the wave with his right and slashing the milotic with his left. The milotic flinches but takes the hit and straightens up, towering over Tāraki. The sceptile spins and slams Peretau with his tail. The milotic hits the water with a huge splash and sinks. Tāraki roars and Wallace withdraws his milotic. Kai and Wally cheer and Ao howls. Wallace sighs and watches as Tāraki skips back to Ren and hugs her. He waits until they are done to approach.

Wallace: [holding out a badge] Here is the Rain Badge and that completes your set.

Ren: [taking the badge] You really made us earn it. That was some gambit.

Wallace: Well, I was almost the Champion, you know.

Ren: Is that why you tease Steven?

Wallace: That and some other things. But mostly I just pretend to be bitter. I think being a Gym Leader is a bit more my style. [spreading his arms grandly] So, what do you think?

[Ren has another brief look around the gym. Kai and Wally are waiting in the stands for her to be done. They are no longer alone either. Some of Wallace’s students are there watching while others work in the pools nearby.]

Ren: It’s really beautiful and it must be fantastic to train water-types here. I also can’t help but notice there is not a single male trainer here.

Wallace: Ah yes, I think we have my flamboyance to thank for that. It doesn’t trouble me though. We’re all one big, gay family here. Except for Heather, our token straight girl and resident black sheep.

Heather: [distant] Up yours, Wallace!

Ren laughs.

Wallace: Are you heading right to Victory Road after this?

Ren: No, I’m gonna go home for a bit and rest.

Wallace: Well let me know when you’re in Ever Grande so I can clear my schedule. I have a feeling Steven will need a shoulder to cry on.

[ The both grin. Ren offers her hand and he takes it gladly. Ren heads out with her friends into yet another absurdly gorgeous afternoon. ]

Chapter End Notes

So much happened in this chapter and there were so many characters. I hope it went okay for you readers and enjoyed Steven Stone the magical girl. I also had way too much fun writing that party scene, so no regrets.

In game I only used Akahata and Naihi for Groudon which is why they get the epic take-down in the story. I used Ao for all of the trainers in the Sootopolis Gym and mega evolved Taraki for Wallace and wasted him.

Character Chart:

THE HOENN LEAGUE:
Roxanne Harlow, Rustboro Gym Leader and fossil nerd. Likes to teach. Pretty tight with Steven, Senri and Asuka. 34.
Brawly Costa, Dewford Gym Leader, surfer dude and feminist. Chill ally and genuine good guy. 32 but looks so much younger.
Wattson Tolbert, Mauville Gym leader and everyone’s grandpa. A genius and really ahead of his time so far as tech goes, but a little behind on social issues. 73.
Flannery Moore, Co-leader of the Lavaridge Gym. Comes from a long line of fire-type trainers. League baby and very gay. Tries her best. 20.
Asuna Moore, Co-leader of the Lavaridge Gym and very very intense. Will probably live forever and never fully retire. She has a ton of grandkids but only Flannery is allowed to call her “gran”. Champion before Drake and would gleefully sell his soul for a corn chip. 80.
Senri Kosugi, Petalburg Gym Leader and Ren’s father. Indigo League Victor and one of Kaspa’s favorites. Great gym leader and teacher, meh father. 44.
Winona Wiater, Fortree Gym Leader. A little distant, but very passionate. Trained under Hayato(Falkner). Has actual amnesia, not the movie kind, and remembers almost nothing before the accident. 38
Tate & Lisa Hashimoto, Mossdeep Gym Leaders and identical twins. Tate came out as trans after Wallace became a Gym Leader. The twins have a psychic link with each other and occasionally get premonitions etc. 36.
Rire Wallace – Sootopolis Gym leader, Lorekeeper, former contest star, and gay icon. Mr. Responsible is always 100% on top of his shit. Prettier than you. Very tight with the twins and goes way back with Steven. 30.
Juan Pan, Former Sootopolis Gym leader and contest star. Wallace’s mentor. Silver fox
Sidney Sullivan, Elite Four member. He’ll kick your ass, he’ll kick anyone’s ass, he’ll kick his own ass. Hangs out with Pheebs too much and gets into more trouble than he would on his own. Kind of lonely. Just here to have a good time. Defeated Glacia to become League Champion for a few years. Has had a bit of a thing for Pheebs ever since she beat him. 45.

Phoebe “Pheebs” Kurosawa, Elite Four member. Total weirdo and resident cloud cuckoolander. Has no brain-mouth filter. Agathe’s granddaughter. Defeated Sidney despite the type disadvantage with a spectacular gambit to become League Champion, but was defeated within the year by Steven. Oddly enough this doesn’t seem to bother her. 33.

Glacia Mendoza, Elite Four member. Thin veneer of stateliness hides total party animal. Got frankly embarrassing amounts of ass as a young woman and still gets plenty. Has calmed down only somewhat. Defeated Drake to become League Champion, surprising no one. 56.

Drake Nathan, Elite Four member. Too old for this shit. Awkward, intense war vet grampa. Pokemon are better than people, and dragon-types are better than all other pokemon. Hates Glacia the least and Asuna the most. Was Champion for a very long time, but his record has since been broken by Kaspa. 75.

Steven Stone, The Champion, sharp-dressed man and total rock nerd. Low-key flirty all the time. Seriously needs to delegate. 25.

OTHER HUMANS:
Ren, our protagonist
Kai, Ren's friend who likes science
Wally, Ren's other friend who likes the internet
Josh, a Magma grunt who Ren has saved twice
Zinnia, Draconid Lorekeeper desperate to summon Rayquaza
Maxie, leader of Team Magma now missing a hand
Tabitha, a Magma admin and the more intelligent of the two
Asuka, Ren's mom and a writer
Dizzy, Lugia's mouthpiece and friend of Kaspa
Kaspa, the current Sekiei (Indigo) League Champion and Ho-oh's Chosen

TEAM REN:
Tāraki, the Sceptile
Akahata, the Mightyena
Ao, the Manectric
Kata, the Grumpig
Kōtai, the Sandslash
Roma, the Sharpedo
Pohaku, the Armaldo
Naihi, the Absol
Teka, the Pikachu
Tarahau, the Snorunt

TEAM KAI:
Jay, the Blaziken
Dusty, the Breloom
Makō, the Wailord
Ruby, the Swellow
Lily, the Lileep
Paki, The Castform
Zach, the Pikachu

TEAM WALLY:
Kihei, the shiny Gallade
Kana, the Delcatty
Aroha, the Roselia
Atiru, the Altaria
Ume, the Magnezone
Hōpua, the Azumarill

OTHER POKEMON:
Aster, Zinia's Whismur
Kenta, Senri's Usaring
Maia, Ren's former Taillow
There Ain't No Stopping Me

Chapter Summary

In which Ren and her team take some time off before challenging the League.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Scene 1: [ Maxie is sleeping in a hospital bed. It is nighttime but there is moonlight streaming in from the open window. He has his own room and the door is locked from the outside. There are cameras in the hall outside but none inside. The room goes dark for a moment as a figure swings in through the window and lands in a crouch on the floor. Maxie opens his eyes and sees a blurred shadow rising in the corner. He grabs for his glasses and almost knocks them off his bedside table. ]

Maxie: [ sliding his glasses on ] Who’s there?

[ Zinnia steps forward into the light. She is wearing casual clothes, but Maxie recognizes her face. ]

Maxie: Azalea?

Zinnia: Yep, it’s your faithful former servant paying you a visit.

[ Maxie relaxes just a little, then glances at the clock. ]

Maxie: In the dead of night. Why are you here, Azalea?

Zinnia: Always business. You know, I kind of like that about you. It made everything that much more efficient. [ pulling up a chair ] How’s the arm?

Maxie: It hurts no matter how many drugs they give me, but I suppose it’s what I deserve.

Zinnia: Aww, you’ll be all-right. [ She cackles. ]

Maxie: That’s exactly what Archie said.

Zinnia: Ye-ouch, that smarts. They let him in here?

Maxie: Yes. He came during normal visiting hours.

Zinnia: Did he just want to gloat or does he still care about you after all these years?

Maxie: Both, I think. He’s always had a peculiar way of showing it.

[ Zinnia’s eyes fall on a plastic pirate hook on the bedside table and she snickers. ]

Zinnia: He’s such an asshole. What did you ever see in him?

Maxie: How do you know about that?

Zinnia: Don’t ask questions you don’t want to know the answer to. Any idea where he lives these
days? I have to pay him a visit next.

[Maxie remains silent, regarding her carefully with his lips drawn in a thin line.]

Zinnia: Suit yourself, you’re under no obligation to help me anymore. I’ll find him either way. [she chuckles] You’re remarkably loyal for a militant, lying megalomaniac.

Maxie: Azalea—

Zinnia: Enough with that name. Surely you’ve realized by now I’m not who you thought I was.

Maxie: Yes.

Zinnia: Good. I’m here for your keystone, Maxie.

[His remaining hand flies protectively to his glasses.]

Zinnia: They overlooked it. I thought is much. Very lucky, but you can bet the prison guards won’t. Besides, I’m sure they’ve confiscated your pokemon by now. Why hang onto it?

Maxie: I gave my pokemon to Courtney.

Zinnia: Now that pisses me off. She may be loyal to you, but she’s no suitable custodian. The feds would have found homes for them. You aren’t getting out of this, Maxie.

Maxie: [turning away] I know.

Zinnia: Very well, your keystone please.

Maxie: Do I have a choice?

Zinnia: Certainly. You can hand it over willingly, or you can arm wrestle me for it.

[Maxie glares at her.]

Zinnia: [grinning] I’ll let you pick which arm.

[He does not respond and she sighs.]

Zinnia: I’ll wind up with it either way, but you know I could have just nabbed it while you were asleep. I’m sitting here asking you for it to give you one last chance to save the world. Isn’t that what you’ve always wanted?

Maxie: Why?

Zinnia: I feel a bit bad about using you to awaken Groudon. You did get your hand bitten off after all. Of course I agree with you that you deserve it but…[She shrugs.] I just thought I’d give you the choice of helping me this time. It seemed only fair.

[Maxie sits back a little and the moonlight glints off his lenses. He sits in silence for another few seconds before taking them off and popping the keystone out of the side. He puts his glasses back on and clenches the keystone in his hand.]

Maxie: You need it to save the world?

Zinnia: This one and the next.
Maxie: [holding the keystone out to her] I hope you have a better plan this time.

Zinnia: [taking it] I do.

[ Zinnia gets up, strides over to the window, and puts a foot up on the sill, then pauses. ]

Zinnia: Thank you.

[ She jumps out and disappears. Maxie can hear a few soft wingbeats. He sighs and lays back down. He watches the window for quite a while before he has calmed enough to take his glasses back off and sleep. ]

---

**Scene 2:** [It is morning and the ocean around Sootopolis is calm. Kai and Wally are up on Mako’s back and waving down at Ren who is on her sharpedo. The wailord turns to go north and Ren stops waving to direct Roma south. They spend most of the day traveling, which is a lot of work for Roma, so they stop for snack breaks and trainer battles. Tarahau is loving her new form and takes great delight in alternately charming or terrifying her opponents. She takes most of the matches, eager to catch up to her teammates, and the rest go to Teka. She is still at a much lower level than the rest, but her smarts and type advantage make things pretty easy. They stop for the night on one of the southern isles. It is pretty small and there are no people there. It reminds Tāraki of his home and he goes exploring only to return for dinner with three treekoss. They are also tropic variants, but have a different pattern than him since they are from a different island. Ren and her pokemon share dinner with the treekoss and they clamber all over Tāraki. Kata takes lots of pictures and entertains everyone by juggling increasingly ridiculous objects until she is juggling the treekoss and then finally Tāraki, Pohaku and Tarahau. She winds up dropping her teammates, but they are very good sports about it. In the morning, the treekoss gather some fruit for their visitors and share a last meal before Ren and her pokemon go on their way. Tāraki is very excited about meeting the treekoss and wants to visit home, so they take a detour even further south. They pass on of the inhabited islands which the map says contains an non-traditional gym. Tāraki’s home island also has no humans and is very densely forested, but Tāraki more or less remembers his way around and finds a few treecko without much trouble. They are a bit weary at first since they rarely see humans, but one of them remembers Tāraki and they all get very excited. A few more appear and even a grovyle after a while. They all head for the beach, with most of the treecko riding on Tāraki’s back. The grovyle catches a fish while Tāraki has Ren get his surfboard out. All are very skeptical at first, but after Tāraki successfully rides a wave in, two are brave enough to paddle back out with him. The surf is thankfully pretty tame and Tāraki and the treekoss have a lot of fun splashing around and riding in. Pohaku has tried the board before and isn’t a huge fan, but he is an excellent swimmer and does a little body-surfing. The grovyle declines to join in but graciously allows Ren to cook her fish on Kata’s recommendation and they all eat together. They all say their goodbyes the next day and Ren heads back north a bit and east. They pass the Sky Pillar in the distance and Ren stares at it in wonder. It is so much taller than she thought it would be and so narrow like a spire. She looks it up on her nav and is informed that it is not open to the public, so she and Roma sail on. They reach Pacifidlog Town near nightfall. It is a collection of houses, general store and a Pokemon Center on floating platforms anchored to a corsola reef below. There are floating bridges between the platforms that sink and sway slightly as Ren walks over them. Ren explores the town a little more the next morning and she and Roma go for a dive to check out the reef. Slateport is quite far, but thanks
to the strong currents they make it before nightfall. Ren gets a drink at the Seashore house, which is far quieter when it is not tournament night. The next day Ren makes the far shorter journey from Slateport around the horn to the mouth of Big Loop Estuary, then hikes through the woods back to Littleroot. Her mother is there when she gets home and almost squeezes her to death. Ren apologizes but her mother is just happy she is home. They catch up while making dinner, which Kata helps with while the rest hang out. Senri is home in time for dinner and they have a family meal together for the first time in months. After dinner, Kenta regales Ren’s team with tales from his Johto gym circuit days and bid for the championship. Ren’s room is pretty crowded that night since all but Roma stay out of their balls. Ren falls asleep listening to her snoring pokemon.

Scene 3: Ren walks into the reserve where Akahata, Naihi, Ao and Kōtai are already waiting for her and sends out the rest of her pokemon. They are happy to see each other and Ren and a big group cuddle puddle ensues. Teka and Roma stay on the outside, the former so as not to be squished and the later so as not to soak them all. Once that is over with they all huddle in a circle around Ren to hear what she has to say. Tāraki is front and center and Kōtai and Pohaku to his left. Akahata sits down with both Naihi and Ao close enough to touch her on either side. Teka sits politely to the side while Roma and Tarahau float overhead. Kata snaps a quick picture and then lays down next to Pohaku.

Ren: So Oro should be calling pretty soon to check in. I’ve been texting Angela and she arranged to meet up with him today. After that we’ll give Mele and then Ahi a call. But before that does anyone want to take a trip up Route 102 with me tomorrow? I’m gonna see if I can track down Ikki.

Tāraki: Ooh, yay!

Akahata: I would like to go.

Ao: Me too. It would be wonderful to see her again.

Naihi: I must admit I’m curious to meet her. I have heard much about her.

Kōtai: I hope she’s found herself a mate.

Kata: And I’ll take the photos!

Ren: Okay, guess that’s settled. The rest of you didn’t get a chance to know Ikki anyway. But while we wait for Oro to call, maybe we should talk about the championship. [Tāraki gasps and bounces up and down.] I think I’ll spend two weeks here, but then we’re off to train on Victory Road. With any luck, Kai and Wally will get their final badge and tag along.

Pohaku: Oh yay! It was so fun traveling with them before.

Ren: But before we leave, we have to decide who’s going to take on the Elite Four and Steven. I’ll try and get in a little training time with all of you once we’re here, but there’s no swapping out on Victory Road and I’ll have to focus on just the six of you who decide to come if we wanna win this thing. We’ll go in capture order. Thoughts, Tāraki?

Tāraki: WE’RE GONNA BE CHAMPIONS!! WHOOOO!!! I’m gonna fight Besemer! Or maybe Ptîolometra or Gilchrist! I could totally take Komatsu or Tungsten! But I’ll leave off Alwyn, Escutcheon, and the three flying-types if you need me to.
Ren: Thanks, tiger. How about you, Akahata?

Aakahata: Well, I never thought I’d make it this far. I was always counting on being boxed or released or killed. But now that I’m here, I want to see how much further I can go. Battling has changed for me. It’s gone from something I needed to do to something I love. I want to be the strongest that I can be. I want to take on the championship, Ren.

Ren: Aw, come here. [ Akahata trots up and Ren gives her a big hug. ] I was a little afraid you’d sit it out. I’m so happy you’ll be with me. I’ve always pictured it that way. [ Akahata nuzzles into her and Ren wipes her eyes with a sniff. ] Okay! Not crying! Um, Ao, you next.

[Akahata goes back to sit by Naihi.]

Ao: I want to go to. I want to be a champion and I know I can do it!

Ren: Ohmygosh! You’ve come so far. [ sniff ] I’m so proud. [ She wipes her nose. ] Kata?

Kata: Well, it sounds like a great time, but honestly I’d probably be just as happy to document it with my camera. It’s your call.

Ren: Alright. Kōtai?

Kōtai: It would be an honor and a privilege, luv. I’d like nothing better than to take the championship with you. I can hardly wait to show those League pokemon how it’s done!

Ren: Understood. Roma? I’m guessing you’re not really up for this.

Roma: If you want to go on another sea voyage, count me in. This past week was fun. But otherwise I’m out.

Ren: Thanks for carting us all around. You’ve been a real asset to the team. Pohaku, are you up for finishing the League?

Pohaku: [ wriggling in excitement ] YES! Oh Arceus I’m so excited! I can’t believe we’re going to do it! I wanna fight Escutcheon! He’s the coolest and I wanna show him how strong I’ve gotten!

Ren: [ laughing ] Alright. What about you, Naihi? Are you going to stick around now that the danger has passed?

Naihi: As I have said before, I think there is a danger still to come, but either way I would like to fight in the championship. I love battling and I quite like having a trainer and a little glory wouldn’t be so bad.

Ren: Glad to hear it. How about you, Teka? Either way I still owe you a thunderstone.

Teka: I would rather not battle this Elite Four if it’s all the same to you. However, I’d be happy to consult with you on strategy.

Ren: That would be great.

Teka: As to the matter of the thunderstone: I don’t think I want one anymore. When I asked you for one, I assumed I needed to become a decent battler to have the life I wanted and that I had to evolve to be strong enough. But I think I am strong enough with this light ball, and I think I may be able to find my place with my other skills.

Ren: Well, you’ll always have a place here. You helped me through a lot of tough situations.
Teka: Not really what I had in mind when I signed up, but things have worked out for me.

Ren: I’m glad you don’t hate me for it. I did try to explain things.

Teka: It wasn’t your fault. It’s just that my original plan was to ditch the minute I evolved.

[ Everyone stares at the pikachu in shock. ]

Tāraki: Wow, Jay was right. I thought she was just being paranoid.

Teka: But then being a trainer pokemon turned out to be kind of fun. It was interesting to have more complex problems to solve and it felt nice to be useful and I sort of wanted to keep an eye on Zach, so I stayed. [ She sighs. ] Hm, being honest is different. I hope I didn’t offend you all.

Ren: Haha, not really. Just not quite what I was expecting from this conversation either. Wow. I’m very glad you decided to stay. Okay. Tarahau, what would you like to do?

Tarahau: I’d like to battle in the championships, but I know I’m not as experienced as the others, so I understand if you don’t pick me. And win or lose, I’m sure I’ll get more intense battle opportunities.

Ren: Great. I guess that’s decided then. The championship team will be Tāraki, Akahata, Ao, Kōtai, Pohaku and Naihi!

[ The pokemon cheer. ]

Ren: That worked out well.

---

**Scene 4:** [ They don’t have to wait much longer before Ren’s nav rings. Ren answers, pulls out her collapsible screen, and sits down with her pokemon so that they can see. ]

Ren: Hi Angela.

Angela: Hi Ren. I’ve got Hauoro here with me.

Ren: Thank you so much for arranging this.

Angela: No problem! Here he is.

[ Angela hands off her device to Hauoro and the exploud’s face suddenly takes up the screen. ]

Hauoro: Hello Ren and everyone. I was so happy to hear that you were all safe.

Ren: Yep. No more casualties if you can believe it. How are things over there?

Hauoro: Mostly good, though not always easy of course. I’m beginning to understand Kauri, that construction worker you befriended.

Ren: Rosalie’s fiance?

Hauoro: Yes, the breeder we stayed with. Anyway, he always makes a point to communicate with us
when things change. Usually we need a pokemon to translate, but that gets tiresome, so I asked him to battle with me to form the bond. He’s not a trainer, but his mate helped and it’s starting to work.

Ren: That’s great!

Hauoro: [ he nods ] I think it will make things much smoother. There are still conflicts now and then, but at the moment the humans of the city have a lot of goodwill towards us. We took a lot of people into the caves when that terrible heat wave happened.

Ao: That’s wonderful, Oro.

Ren: I am so impressed by your leadership skills!

Kata: A+ big guy!

Hauoro: Thank you. [ peering at his screen ] Is Mele there?

Ren: No. He retired from battling to be an actor.

Ao: He’s going to make movies one day!

Hauoro: [ confused ] Is that anything like the news? I sort of know what that is.

Ren: Kind of, but instead of telling you what’s happened recently, movies tell stories.

Hauoro: Oh. Well that sounds very interesting and it seems like something Mele is already good at. Will he get to sing?

Ren: Hopefully.

Hauoro: Maybe I should see one.

Pohaku: You should! We did and it was so nice!

Ren: We’re all gonna go to the premiere when Mele gets a part. You can come too if you want.

Hauoro: I’d love that. I miss him.

Ren: I’ll talk to Angela again when we’re done and see if I can put you in contact in the meantime.

Hauoro: That would be wonderful.

[ They all talk for a while longer and then Ren talks to Angela before they hang up. She calls Mele next since they are all thinking about him and his manager answers. She seems very happy and sets up her device so that Mele can talk to them. ]

Mele: Hello everyone!

Ao: Mele! I’m going to Ever Grande! I’m going to fight the Champion!

Mele: And you’re going to win! Ren, you have to tell me the dates so I can be there.

Ao: You don’t have to come if you’re busy. I know you’re cheering for me.

Mele: No, I have to be there. I wouldn’t miss it for anything.

[ Ao’s tail thumps on the ground behind her and Akahata smiles. Ao leans in and taps her nose on
Ren: [ as Ao pulls away ] So Mele, tell us about this big news.

Mele: I landed a part!

Ren: [ thrusting both fists in the air ] Yes! What part! What part!

Mele: A lead part! In a musical!

Ren: Lord Ho-Oh fly over! Congratulations!

Ao: I told you you could do it!

Mele: And it’s the same studio that made the movie we all saw together. Apparently it’s a remake of an animated film from a long time ago that they wanted to remake with pokemon actors, just like The Pyroar King.

Ren: Holyshit that is so huge!

Mele: Mira’s still freaking out a little, she’s worked with the studio before, but for much smaller roles. She’s such a wonderful coach. We did lots of battles right away so that we could talk and as soon as we could understand each other she started teaching me about acting and took me around some sets so I could see what it would be like. There is so much going on. You wouldn’t believe how many people it takes to make a movie.

Ren: Are you nervous?

Mele: I’m too excited to be nervous! I met my co-star and she’s nice. She’s a persian. She’s had some roles before, so she’ll help show me the ropes. I’m meeting my counterpart for the human dub tomorrow, so that should be fun. Mira knows her.

Ren: Her? I guess it is pretty common for women to voice male roles, actually.

Mele: I think they’re swapping the genders for the human dub because that’s how it was in the original. The persian said she’s played “male” roles before. And it’s not like humans can tell anyway. I can’t even tell without scent, at least for most species so… [ He shrugs. ] I think we’re meant to follow the original, but us pokemon actors get a lot of freedom to interpret since the director and people can’t actually understand what we’re saying. Once everyone is cast and has had some time to go over the script, all of the pokemon actors will have a meet and greet and figure those sorts of things out. Apparently the humans think it’s to make sure we’ll get along. Isn’t that funny?

Ren: Really?

Mele: Well non-trainers mostly think of pokemon like animals, so it follows. I mean, obviously they know we’re not or they could never make these sorts of films, but if you’ve never talked to a pokemon, I guess you wouldn’t have much of an idea what we’re like.

Ren: You’re always so understanding.

Mele: Thank you. I could talk about this stuff all day, but I want to hear about you all. Tell me about Groudon and Magma and the Gyms. I watched the news with Mira, but it’s not even close to enough.

[ They all tell Mele about their adventures, with Ao, Ren and Kata doing most of the talking. They ]
Mele: Ao, before you go, I just want you to know that I'll be thinking of you during every song I sing. You are my muse, now and forever.

Ao: [face flushed and tail wagging] I’ll see you soon at the championship!

[ They “touch noses” again before Mele leaves. Ren congratulates Mira and thanks her before hanging up and calling Panahi’s coordinator. They pick up and Ren barely gets a word in edgewise before Panahi crashes into frame. They are in a dressing room and the pelipper sends several makeup items flying as she lands. ]

Ren: Hi Avery! Thanks for—

Panahi: Ren! I thought I heard your voice! Are you alright?

Ren: Yep! Everyone’s A-OK!

Panahi: They said you survived but you know how lax they are about reporting pokemon deaths on the news.

Avery: [scooting their chair back a little to give Panahi some room] I told you she texted that they were all fine.

Panahi: I wanted to hear it from her!

Ren: So you two are talking. That’s great!

Panahi: Of course we are! And we finished our first routine together. We’re entering a contest next week.

Ren: Oh! Which hall?

Avery: Slateport.

Panahi: I can hardly wait! Look! [She steps to the side and gestures to her coordinator with a wing] Just look at my stunning child! We are going to wipe the floor with the other contestants, I guarantee it.

[The coordinator flushes and covers their face. ]

Avery: [groaning in embarrassment] Mooommm!

Panahi: They call me mom too. Isn’t that sweet? [to her coordinator] Now darling, you’ll have to get over that. You are a glorious specimen to behold and you have to own it.

Avery: [smiling] Yes, mom.

Ren: You’re looking very fine yourself Panahi.

Panahi: Oh honey, you should see me in my full regalia. I’m so beautiful I can’t even tell you!

Ren: I believe it.

[Kata whistles and Panahi winks at her.]
Panahi: Now, I don’t want you coming to every contest I enter, and not this first one to spare Avery here, but might you all drop by for the finals?

Avery: If we make the finals.

Panahi: We are making the finals!

Ren: Of course we’ll be there.

Panahi: Excellent! I can’t wait for you all to see our show. But anyway, let’s get down to it, shall we? Give me all the juicy gossip. How are things going with Steven?

Ren: [flushing and groaning in embarrassment] Mooommm!

---

**Scene 5:** [Ren is out walking along Route 102 with Täraki, Akahata, Ao, Kōtai, Kata and Naihi. They check one pond and then another, searching for any sign of Ikki. Akahata keeps pausing to scent the air and leads them all onto a third pond. There are quite a few masquerain flitting around, but Akahata spots a familiar plume of red and her tail starts to wag.]

Akahata: Hey Ikki!

[The masquerain whirls around in the air, false eyes raised in surprise.]

Ikki: [pink face flushing brilliantly] AKAAAA!

[She zips over to her friend and butts heads with the mightyena. The rest of the group has caught up by this point. Ikki looks up to see them and her wings beat even faster.]

Ikki: Ao! Ren! You all came! You’re all okay! [crying] I was so worried! After that horrible day I didn’t know what to think. What happened?

Ren: Well, surprise surprise, I couldn’t stay out of trouble. I managed to steer clear of Magma for all of a week after you retired. But then we teamed up with Latios and Latias and Steven, busted up Magma and defeated Groudon.

Ikki: Oh my gosh! That’s a lot to take in. You’ll have to tell me all of that again but slower and with more detail.

Ren: First you have to tell us what you’ve been up to. Did you find a mate?

Ikki: I did!

[Akahata grins broader than she has in a long time and Ikki does a little twirl in the air she is so full of happy, nervous energy.]

Ren: That’s my girl!

Ikki: At first the other masquerain were very rude, but then I befriended some taillow, so they started respecting me a bit more.

Ao: How did you do that, Ikki?
Ikki: I told them I was good friends with the flock hero. Maia still has quite the rep around these parts. Now the taillow bring me news. Putenga is doing well by the way. From what I’ve heard, she’s queen of Petalburg Wood now.

Ren: I believe it. We’ll have to stop by and see her too sometime. But back to your story.

Ikki: Well, the other masquerain were being nicer, but mostly ignoring me. Then one day a swellow attacked and I fought it off—Well, pummeled her really. But you were right Aka: as soon as they saw how strong I was, they all respected me a lot more and the way I looked didn’t matter as much anymore.

Tāraki: Good. I’m glad you got what you wanted Ikki.

Kata: They better all be treating you like a queen to apologize.

Ikki: Some of them are. Anyway, the masquerain I saved from the taillow was the one that ended up asking me for an egg. It took him almost a week cuz he was scared and thought for sure I’d turn him down, but I was so happy!

Ren: Awwww!

Kōtai: So you got any little surskit running around yet?

Ikki: Nope. And I’ve only laid one egg so far. I decided to wait on having more because I don’t know how great of a mother I’ll be.

Kōtai: Nonsense. You’re going to be a wonderful mother.

Ren: I agree. You’re sweet and caring and thoughtful. You’ll do great!

[ Ikki looks them all over as they nod in agreement and she starts tearing up again. ]

Ikki: I’m just so glad you’re all here.

[ She flutters down to nuzzle Akahata again and the mightyena’s tail wags fiercely. Naihi chuckles softly, covering her mouth with a paw. Ikki looks up at her and tilts her head. ]

Ikki: Oh, who’s this?

Naihi: My name is Naihi. I joined the team after you retired. Aka has told me much about you. I am honored to finally meet you.

[ Naihi gives a deep bow and Akahata smiles at her, tail wagging again. Ikki looks between them and her eyes get a mischievous glint. ]

Ikki: It’s good to meet you too. Aka, you should have introduced me to your new mate.

Akahata: [flushing] Teammate! Yes— sorry! She’s been with me—us!—for a while now. We, uh, battled the Mossdeep Gym Leaders and Groudon together.

Naihi: [smiling broadly] Yes, we make a very good pair.

[ Akahata gapes at her, looking about ready to combust. ]

Ikki: [smiling] I just hope you know what an amazing catch your battle partner is.
Naihi: I do.

[ Akahata is glowing red and utterly speechless. Kata is furiously snapping photos and Ren has her hands over her mouth so as not to squee in delight. Tāraki is snickering while Kōtai and Ao just grin. Ikki giggles. ]

Kōtai: So do we get to meet this mate and see this egg?

Ikki: Oh yes of course! He’s guarding the egg right now. Just let me zip over there for a bit and then I’ll come back for you all. He’s a little shy.

Ren: Alright, we’ll wait.

[ Ikki zips off and Ren and the others look out over the pond after her. It really is a pretty one with reeds by the edge and blooming waterlilies further out. Ikki returns after a bit and leads them around the pond. Naihi brushes up against Akahata’s side as they trot behind Ikki, making her flush again. Ikki’s mate is a ninja variant, so he has a helmet like her but no plume. He seems pretty nervous, but Ren breaks out some food and he relaxes a bit after a while. Eventually Ikki coaxes him away from the egg so they all can see it. Ren and Kōtai use their skills learned from Rosalie to inspect it and Kata takes photos. Ao and Akahata talk more with Ikki and tell her all about their adventures. Eventually dusk approaches and they all head home, waving to Ikki as they leave. It is dark by the time they get back and Ren’s mother is making dinner. Ren washes her hands and helps out. ]

Scene 6: [ Over the next week Ren splits her time between hanging out with her mother and training with her team. Ren and her mother cook together, re-wallpaper the living room, repair the front door, clean all of the linens, and attend to other chores around the house. Ren also spends some time in her mother’s study with her every day, reading over her manuscript, making notes and discussing points of translation. She texts Kai and Wally a bit, but both of them are pretty slow to respond and Wally uses even more ridiculous emojis than usual, which makes Ren think things must be going well. Ren and her team spend some time training by themselves in the woods, but the bulk of their practice takes place at her father’s gym. Teka and Tarahau have battles with Seri’s students who are a little closer to their level. The rest of the team does more sparing with each other and Senri’s pokemon. Only two of his students have their seventh badge and stand any chance at all, but they are happy for the experience. Senri has a lot of responsibilities, but sets aside a little time each day to practice with his daughter. Finally they decided to have a real match with their full league teams. Naihi takes the field first against Senri’s ambipom. It opens with a low sweep, but naihi leaps high, in one of her forward tumbles and slashes it across the crown of its head with her tail. The ambipom dodges her second attack and uses nasty plot, glowing as an excess of energy flows into it. It dodges her again, hopping expertly from one tail to another and uses round. The attack hits her like a hammer, but Naihi digs in her claws and holds her ground. She ends the battle with a single night slash to the ambipom’s gut. Senri’s exploud takes its place and Naihi switches out with Pohaku. The exploud picks up the round, amping up its power. Pohaku takes the hit, amor rattling and retaliates with a brine directly in the exploud’s gaping mouth. Before it can spit up the water and attack again, Pohaku closes and delivers a one-two combo with x-scissor. The exploud tries one more time to use round, but the armaldo hits its enormous jaw closed with a stone edge from below, knocking it flat. Next Kōtai faces off against Senri’s strongest slaking. He delivers a brick break to its shoulder before diving underground with dig to avoid its retaliate. Kōtai pops back up and brick breaks its other shoulder before dodging again with dig. Try as they might, Senri and his slaking
cannot counter this strategy, even when they switch up the timing of attacks. Kōtai gets in a few more hits before finishing the match without a scratch. He is ready to take on Senri’s kangaskhan as well, but he bows out to let Ao have a go. Senri uses his recently acquired keystone to mega evolve his kangaskhan and Ren mega evolves Ao. The now two kangaskhan come after Ao with dizzy punch, but she uses her dazzling speed to zigzag away. She paralyzes the baby kangaskhan with thunder wave and uses charge beam on the mother. Her special defence is formidable and she plows right through to sock Ao with a sucker punch. Ao is shaken, but manages to get away again, making sure to get some distance before her next charge beam. Meanwhile Senri fights through the paralysis and the two kangaskhan work in perfect sync to corner the manectric. They swing at her with mega punch, but she leaps high and uses discharge. They both stagger and fall back to their normal forms. Senri sends in his Blissey and Ao switches with Akahata. The blissey launches an egg bomb but Akahata dodges around it to land a thunder fang, paralyzing it. The blissey uses defence curl but Akahata cuts through it with crunch. However, the blissey can still take quite a lot of punishment and continues launching egg bombs every time she can break through the paralysis. Akahata takes a solid hit but stays light on her feet, darting in and chipping away at the blissey’s defences with crunch after crunch until it finally falls. At last Tāraki and Kenta face off. The sceptile opens with dragon claw, but the ursaring counters with play rough, shredding right through the dragon energy to punch Tāraki right in the chest. Tāraki staggers back but stays on his feet and uses x-scissor to shove Kenta back when he comes in with hammer arm. Tāraki gains some energy back with mega drain but Kenta is barely affected and charges after Tāraki. The sceptile counters the ursaring’s repeated thrash with leaf blade, but is unable to gain the upper hand until the inevitable paralysis sets in. Tāraki shoves Kenta back, but energy pours into the ursaring as his guts ability activates. Tāraki gets in one more leaf blade while Kenta charges, but when the ursaring unleashes giga impact, there is nothing the sceptile can do. Kenta barrels into Tāraki with overwhelming force and a blinding flash and Tāraki goes tumbling. He tries to rise, but can’t. Tāraki bows his head and Kenta accepts the victory with a stiff nod, barely able to stand himself. Senri has no pokemon left and Ren still has at least Kōtai who is ready to battle, so Senri concedes the victory to his daughter. They tend to their pokemon and Tāraki chatters excitedly to Kenta. The ursaring pats his shoulder and promising him a rematch one day.

Scene 7: [ Ren knocks on the Scott’s door and is greeted by Wally’s mother. She only has to make conversation with his parents for a few minutes before Wally appears and whisks her away upstairs to his room. Kai is already there sitting on Wally’s bed. Three of his walls are indeed covered with anime posters, but many are classics that even Ren recognizes and the rest seem quite respectable. The last wall is a bookcase split between pokemon books, manga and american comics. Ren claims the reading chair next to the bookcase but Wally forgoes the office chair in front of his desk and impressively large computer screen in favor of sitting next to Kai on the bed. ]

Ren: [ trying not to smile too wide ] So, tell me all about the trip and the gym.

Wally: The trip was fun!

Kai: I’m sorry it took so long. I know you don’t like swimming.

Wally: No, it was cool. It was nice to have some time to relax and I like seeing all of those tiny islands. I really needed the break after Sootopolis.

Kai: I’m just happy you weren’t bored half to death.
Wally: I got to battle plenty of trainers and we practiced together like every night. I had a great time. Quit worrying.

Kai: Okay.

Ren: Let me guess, you stopped to collect data the whole way there.

Kai: Yeah. I decided to finally use my diving certification. Wally’s azumarill helped a lot actually. Thanks for that.

Wally: No problem. He had a good time.

Ren: So how are the mega forms coming? Is it easier now?

Wally: We are so much better now! You have to fight us! We used them at the gym and destroyed Tate and Lisa! It was so awesome!

Kai: Wally was really amazing. He came up with this whole strategy and—

Wally: You were amazing too! Kai is like the best “hobby” trainer in the region, right?

Ren: I don’t think you can even call yourself a hobby trainer at this point. You have eight badges.

Kai: I guess so, yeah.

Ren: Have you thought about the taking on the Elite Four?

Wally: Oh Lord Arceus, I am beyond pumped! I can’t wait to do victory road! When are we leaving?

Ren: At the end of the week.

Wally: Hell yeah!

[ Wally starts coughing and Kai rubs his back as he pulls out his inhaler. ]

Ren: What about you, Kai?

Kai: I’m not going any time soon. I’m not really ready and I have some things I want to do first. Actually, I have some pretty cool news about my research.

Wally: [ wheezing ] Pretty cool?

Kai: Okay, very cool. Some people in my dad’s lab reported seeing species that have never been documented in Hoenn before. So my dad called up a bunch of his friends and had them do observations, then compared those with all the data I’ve been collecting and it’s starting to look like there may be a huge shift happening. Of course we’ve been keeping much closer tabs on the area around the lab and something is definitely happening and it started right after Groudon was awakened. We have no idea if that’s what caused it, but it seems like there must be a connection. So everyone is super excited and we’re gearing up for a big survey campaign. And because all of my data was collected so recently, it going to be the perfect reference for figuring out what’s going on!

Ren: My Gods!

Wally: He’s going to be in ridiculously high demand now. Once this gets published, you’ll be able to get into any school you want!
Kai: I just really want to get back out there. Some of the stuff people are reporting is crazy. Like major shifts in migration patterns, species’ ranges shifting! We could see some whole new variants emerge. It’s so exciting!

[ *Kai throws himself back on the pillows and the other two giggle.* ]

Ren: That is so awesome for you. And having actually experienced Groudon for myself, I don’t doubt that they could have altered the climate in just a few hours.

Wally: and the way the sky looked after… I didn’t just imagine that, right?

Kai: No, there has to be a connection. We’re gonna need scientists from all different fields working on this.

Wally: And thanks to you there’s the perfect snapshot of just before everything changed.

[ *Kai smiles and looks fit to burst with excitement. Wally grins at him and then scooches over a bit and leans back against Kai’s shoulder. Kai’s eyebrows shoot up in surprise and he colors a little but doesn’t object. Instead he carefully pulls his arm out so it isn’t trapped between them and lays it on the pillows behind Wally’s shoulders. That makes Wally flush and Ren smiles at them, trying not seem too excited. Soon she drifts off into her own thoughts and the smile fades.* ]

Ren: Things are changing for us too aren’t they. Kai, you have all of this upheaval to study. And Wally you have eight badges and an altaria that can fly you anywhere. And I’m going for the title. Win or lose there’s no going back to being a normal trainer.

Wally: Change is good. I needed change. I’ve gotten so much stronger. Even with that close call, I know I can do so much more than I could when I started. I don’t have to settle for being a pokemon trainer. I can be one of the best there is. I don’t think I can beat you now, so I’m not gonna be Champion, but maybe someday.

Kai: It’s a lot and kind of scary, everything’s happening so fast, but it’s exhilarating too. We’ve got to spend some time together before you two take off.

Ren: We will. Wally and I can train when we get to Ever Grande.

Wally: Yeah!

[ *Kai smiles broadly and Ren can see his toes wiggling in his socks. Suddenly the giddy look falls off his face.* ]

Kai: Oh no. A week isn’t much time to finish Eureka Seven.

Wally: We can totally make it to the end. Sleep is for the weak!

Kai: I don’t know if I can pull another all-nighter.

Wally: We don’t have to do that, just a few late nights.

Kai: I don’t know…

Wally: Come on! Where’s your sense of adventure? You want to finish it right.

Kai: Yeah, but—

[ *He is cut off by laughter as Wally tickles him. Kai squirms and rolls away.* ]
Kai: No fair! I can’t tickle you back!

Wally: Too bad!

[Wally corners Kai against the wall and tickles him more. Kai laughs and wriggles trying to slide away but Wally keeps after him. Kai finally pulls a pillow down to shield himself. Ren hops up from her chair and grabs the pillow behind her.]

Ren: [throwing the pillow at them] Pillow fight!

[Wally stops trying to tickle Kai and grabs a pillow as well. Ren jumps onto the bed and they all try to push each other off. Ren manages to drive Kai off first and tries to keep him there. Wally comes to his aid and she turns on him. He laughs as Ren drives him relentlessly towards the edge until he starts coughing. Kai snatches him up, but staggers trips and falls on his back with Wally on top of him. That makes both boys wheeze and Wally has to take a few breaths on his inhaler before he can pick himself up and off of Kai.]

Kai: [rubbing the back of his head] I’m so sorry, Wally. That was a lot easier last time.

Wally: Adrenaline! I thought you did science.

Ren: Yeah. Besides, I could pick him up. He’s tiny.

[Before Wally can object Ren has hopped off the bed and sweeps Wally up in a princess carry. She sways a little from the strain but stays upright.]

Wally: Ren!

[She puts Wally down and shakes out her arms. She rolls her shoulders and neck until it gives a click. Kai stands up and Ren’s eyes give an evil gleam.]

Ren: Kai’s turn!

Kai: I don’t think—oof!

[Ren grabs him around the middle and lifts him off his feet.]

Wally: Oh my gosh Ren! You don’t have to be the best at everything!

Ren: [wheezing] Yes I do! [putting Kai down] I’m gonna be the very best, like no one ever was!

[Kai and Wally share a glance and tackle her to the floor. She yelps and all three of them laugh.]

Scene 8: [Ren, Kai and Wally do spend a lot of time together over the next few days. They hang out at each other’s houses or in the woods and watch anime at Wally’s place, although Ren mostly leaves that for just Kai and Wally to do in the evenings. Their pokemon hang out as well and just relax a little. They have all gotten pretty friendly by this point and the three starter are almost always together and wander off on their own sometimes. Soon the week is up and Ren and Wally say their goodbyes. Roma takes them across the straight to Slateport and from there they catch a ferry to Sootopolis and another to Ever Grande. It is fairly large but mountainous and sparsely populated. A huge falls plummets into the bay from the cliffs above and there is large glass elevator to carry]
visitors up to the only small city on the island. Most of the ferry passengers use the elevator, but Ren
and Wally scale the waterfall with their sharpedo and azumarill as is tradition for anyone seeking to
challenge the Elite Four. They are soaked to the bone, but greeted enthusiastically at the Pokemon
Center by other trainers. They stay the night and the next day set off down victory road. The first day
is mostly hiking up to the island’s central mountain and on the second day they plunge inside. A sign
by the entrance warns trainers of powerful wild pokemon and the many other dangers of straying
from the marked route. Like many of Hoenn’s mountains, this one is an ancient and long-dead
volcano. The system of caves beneath it is one of the largest in the world and goes very deep into the
earth. Tunnels snake along in every direction, in some places opening up into huge caverns. This
underground section of Victory Road is well worn, curated, and lit at all hours of the day and night.
Rangers patrol it at regular intervals, often accompanied by pokemon with a good sense of smell to
track down lost trainers. Ren and Wally find plenty of battle opportunities as they make their way
through, not only from other trainers, but wild pokemon as well. They are far bolder than in most
places and many have grown impressively strong from regular battles with trainers. Some approach
with respect, while others wait in ambush. Akahata, Ao, and Naihi soon become the designated
golbat guards since they have a nasty tendency to drop from the ceiling and poison trainer pokemon.
Kōtai and Hopua take turns dissuading the numerous lairon while Tāraki and Aroha, who is now a
roserade, handle the gravelers. Kihei takes on the hariyamas, Pohaku the medicamhs, Kana the
loundred, Ume the mawile, and Atiru handles the stealthy sableye. Despite these trials, both trainers
and pokemon enjoy their trip and their battling skills steadily increase from the intense regimen.
They camp just far enough from the path for it to be dark and sleep with all of their pokemon out of
their balls to be safe. They run into Vito Winstrate whose family Ren stayed with and Ren challenges
him to a battle. She beats him just like she beat the rest of his family all those months ago and every
other trainer they have run into so far. They share a meal and Ren convinces him to give his family a
call.]

---

**Scene 9:** The next day they run into Ty and Gabby in one of the huge caverns. Ty is panning his
camera around getting some landscape shots while Gabby sits on the floor nearby sorting through
her sound equipment, which she has laid out around her. Ty spots Wally and Ren through the
camera before looking up. His face lights up and he taps excitedly on Gabby’s shoulder. He signs to
her as Ren and Wally get closer and she stands up and smooths out her clothes.

Gabby: Hey there Ren, fancy meeting you here. And is that Wally from last time?

[ Ty signs “I told you we would catch her if we just hung out here long enough.” Gabby signs back:
“shut up! They can both understand sign, remember?” ]

Ren: [ signing along ] Hoping for another interview?

Gabby: You caught us. Those two episodes with you have blown up since the Groudon incident. It’s
really boosted our profile and we thought: what better way to strike when the iron is hot than getting
another interview before you challenge the Elite Four?

[ Ty signs: “pretty please! It would make our careers.” and bats his eyelashes. Gabby signs:
“you’re shameless.” and he replies: “I’m excited!” ]

Ren: I’ll battle you again. Tāraki and I could use the exercise.

Gabby: Thank you so much. We really appreciate it. How about you Wally? We’d love to have you
and your shiny gallade on again.

Wally: S-sure.

Gabby: Thanks! You two are the best! Just give us a moment to set up.

[ Gabby signs: “you’re a genius. I love you” to Ty as she goes to get her earpieces and he signs: “I love you” back. Wally slaps his hands over his mouth so as not to squee but his face gets rather red. Gabby hands them each and earpiece, and the duo sends out their pokemon. Nell is now an exploud and AC/DC has evolved into a magnezone. ]

Ren: They both evolved!

[ Ty signs: “awesome, right?” and Ren signs: “awesome!” back. ]

Gabby: AC/DC evolved just a few weeks ago.

Wally: Kai and I watched the episode on our way to Mossdeep. It’s my favorite.

Gabby: Mine too. The big dork over here cried and I got to film it.

[ Ty signs: “I was so happy I didn’t even think about us having to invent signs again. We’re still getting the hang of it, but now they can carry me up to get aerial shots and it’s so cool.” ]

Ren: That’s so great! One more question before we start though: would you like Wally and I to mega evolve our pokemon? It could be cool, but the battle will probably be over faster.

Gabby: Oh, that’s a tough call. What do you think, Ty?

[ Ty signs: “we should go for it.” Gabby smiles and turns back to them. ]

Gabby: Alright, let’s do this! [ Ty adjust his camera and Gabby gets in position. ] Hey there double battle fans! It’s your Dual Pulse hosts Gabby and as always Ty behind the lens. In case you weren’t watching the last episodes, Ty and I have been scouting out the talent in that hallowed place of challenge, Victory Road. Today we are joined once again by [ stepping aside to reveal them ] Ren Kosugi and Wally Scott! Ren has eight badges and is on her way to fight the Elite Four and maybe even the Champion.

Ren: You bet!

Gabby: And what about you, Wally?

Wally: I have eight badges too, but Ren is my pal, so I’m gonna let her be Champion for at least a few months before taking the title.

Gabby: Whoa! I think Ty and I are in for a beatdown but we’ll do our best! Everyone ready?

[ Täraki, Kihei, Nell and AC/DC step forward while their trainers clear the field. Ren and Wally look at each other and touch their keystones, Ren’s in her glove and Wally’s set in his pendant. Täraki and Kihei are consumed by light and mega evolve. ]

Gabby: A double battle with double mega evolution. We’re at the highest levels now folks!

Ty: Barrier!

Gabby: Howl!
Ren: Leaf Blade!

Wally: Close Combat!

[ The magnezone projects a barrier in front of them while the exploud powers up. Tāraki and Kihei smash through it in perfect sync and lay into the exploud and magnezone respectively. The magnezone flinches from the onslaught but the exploud retaliates with a hyper voice that knocks both Kihei and Tāraki back. The magnezone discharges to hit both of them, but much to everyone’s surprise, Tāraki absorbs all of it with his tail. Ren’s eyes light up and she has Tāraki switch targets while Kihei goes after the exploud with another close combat. Tāraki dodges around the magnezone’s flash cannon and chips away at it with leaf blade only to be knocked aside along with Kihei by another hyper voice from the exploud. The magnezone takes the opportunity to nail Tāraki with a flash cannon but Kihei comes to his aid and finishes off the Magnezone with a final close combat. By this point Kihei is quite vulnerable and the exploud aims a stomp at him. Tāraki catches the blow with an x-scissor and then retaliates with dragon claw. The exploud goes down and Tāraki and Kihei return to their normal forms. ]

Gabby: What a battle! I can’t believe we got to see two mega evolutions with our own eyes! And mega sceptile’s ability is lightning rod! Jot down that piece of trivia! I’m really proud of how well we held out, but there’s just no topping these two trainers! The whole world better tune in for this Championship!

[ They all heal their pokemon and Gabby interviews Ren and Wally. She asks about his necklace and he tells the story, which Gabby loves. Ren and Wally go on their way but they look back and see Ty and Gabby hugging and jumping up and down. Wally dances from foot to foot with excitement as they round the bend out of sight. He pulls out his nav and starts texting rapidly. ]

Ren: Are you texting Kai?

Wally: I have to tell someone! Ahhh! Did you see them together? It was sooo cute!

Ren: Haha, yeah.

Wally: I wonder if they’re a couple? They’re never like that on the show.

Ren: Well couple or not, they spend a lot of time together. They must be very close.

Wally: I wanted to ask but it seemed too personal.

Ren: Probably best. You had an easier time with the interview this time around. Actually your confidence has gone through the roof in general. You may want to reign it in a little.

Wally: No!

Ren: So are you going to ask Kai out?

Wally: Oh, um, I don’t know. We’re pretty close now, but I still can’t tell if he likes me or is just super nice. Arceus, I really hope he likes me back. He’s so cute and so smart and he doesn’t treat me like I’m made of glass. I was so worried things would change after Groudon because I scared the shit out of him, but it didn’t. Well, he did second guess me a little at the beginning but I told him that it bothered me and he listened. He’s there to help me if I need it but he doesn’t hover and he lets me decide what I can do. I can’t believe how great he is. I love the sound of his voice and how excited he gets about science and that face he makes…

[ Wally gives a dreamy sigh and Ren laughs. ]
Ren: Well that’s good because there’s no shutting him up once he gets going.

Wally: He’s perfect!

Ren: No one’s perfect, but I’ll admit he’s pretty great… He might have a thing for you, you know.

Wally: Really?

Ren: Not a hundred percent here, but I was watching the two of you together and it seems like there’s something there. What I can say from experience is that if you wait for him to make a move, you could be waiting a long time. He’s not as brave as you are.

[ Wally considers that for a while, staring off into the distance. ]

Ren: [ patting Wally on the back ] No rush, man. I really hope it works out though. You two are adorable.

Wally: [ coming back to Earth ] Wait, does that mean you ship us?

Ren: Oh, uh, I don’t know if—

Wally: You totally do!

[ They continue to debate as they and their pokemon disappear around another corner. ]

Scene 10: [ Ren and Wally only have to spend one more night in the cave before Victory Road leads them back out into the light of day. They both gape at the sight that greets them. They emerge onto the face of the mountain to find a second waterfall cascading down. But unlike the one they climbed to get to this point, at this elevation the falls is split into many separate streams that pour over the cliffs and rush through small canyons. Between the many streams of water that part and knit back together are islands of green dotted with flowers. There are plants bursting from every scrap of soil and moss growing over the rocks, watered by a fine mist the falls create. A path dotted by narrow bridges wends through this unusual landscape to the high plain beyond. An updraft from the falls teases Ren and Wally’s hair as they step out and look around. Wally has to button his cardigan as they go over the first bridge to prevent it from blowing around. On the far side is a small flat area covered in red spider lilies. Wally stops halfway through and turns back to face Ren. ]

Wally: Hey Ren. You want to have one last battle before the Elite Four?

Ren: [ grinning ] Sure. Winner takes the championship?

Wally: [ he grins back, eyes alight ] Sounds fair… Here I come!

[ Ren sends out Pohaku and Wally sends in his azumarill. ]

Wally: Aqua Jet, Hopua!

Ren: Counter with Aqua tail, Pohaku!

[ The azumarill rockets forward covered with water and water erupts around Pohaku’s tail as well as he swings around and bats the azumarill. Water explodes from the collision and the azurill is... ]
knocked back but lands on his feet. Phaku shakes himself off.

Ren: Iron tail!

Wally: Parry with iron tail!

Both of their tails gleam like metal and they meet in the middle. Phaku has the superior weight and after a few clashes he manages to send the azumarill tumbling.

Wally: Aqua tail!

Ren: Receive with x-scissor!

The azumarill launches into the air and spins like a wheel, cloaked in water again. Pokahu crosses his claws above him to block, but the azumarill keeps up his spin until he knocks Pohaku’s arms out of the way and strikes him over the head. Pohaku staggers forward.

Wally: Play rough!

The azumarill lays into Pohaku’s back with glowing pink paws and the armaldo cries out, trying unsuccessfully to shake the azumarill off.

Ren: Stone edge!

Stones erupt around Pohaku, punting the azumarill off.

Wally: Aqua jet!

Pohaku is weakened and pinned against his own rocks. The azumarill slams into him, shattering the rocks and knocking Pohaku flat. The azumarill gets up but Pohaku groans and stays down.

Ren: Sorry about that Po. Nice battle. She withdraws him and sends out Ao. Alright Ao, charge beam!

Wally: Aqua jet one more time!

The azumarill rushes forward again but not fast enough and Ao shoots him down. Wally withdraws him and sends out his altaria.

Wally: Dragon Dance, Atiru!

Ao fires off another charge beam as the altaria charges up, glowing light sky blue. He absorbs the hit and beats his wings, taking to the air.

Ren: Keep up the charge beams!

Wally: Dragon pulse!

The altaria rolls and dodges Ao’s attack as he swoops in and delivers his own. Ao shudders as she takes the hit, but waits longer on the next pass and dodges before hitting the altaria with another charge beam.

Wally: Sky attack!

Ren: Discharge!
The altaria climbs up out of Ao’s range and she waits, barely able to hold onto the excess charge flashing over her pelt. Atiru plummets towards her, surrounded in blinding light and Ao arches upward, releasing all of her energy in a flash just as bright. Both trainers have to cover their eyes and when they look up again both pokemon are on the ground, unable to battle. Ren and Wally withdraw their pokemon and send out Kōtai and Kana respectively.

Wally: Sing!
Ren: Earthquake!

The delcatty starts to sing but the sandslash bowls her over with a wave of earth before she can get more than a few notes out. The delcatty gets back to her feet as Kōtai shakes the drowsiness from his head.

Ren: Brick break!
Wally: Disarming voice, Kana! Don’t let him in close!

Kōtai rushes at the delcatty, and she hits him head on with the pink sound waves. He barrels through the attack and she only just manages to dodge as he swings his claws at her. She bounds away until there is enough distance to turn and let loose again. This time Kōtai dodges and gets close enough to strike her in the side. She rolls away and bounces back up. Kōtai looks up at her with dreamy eyes and his stance relaxes.

Wally: Yes! Feint attack, Kana! Reel him in!
Ren: Kōtai, listen to me: she got you with cute charm. This isn’t real.

The delcatty disappears in a puff of blackness and reappears right next to Kōtai. She knocks the sandslash flat before darting away. Kōtai gazes after her, even more dazed than before.

Wally: Disarming voice!
Ren: Think about Alwyn! Block with earthquake!

Kōtai snaps back as Kana fires pink soundwaves at him once more. He raises his arms and blocks the attack with a wall of earth.

Ren: Woo! Now brick break!

The dirt wall falls and Kōtai runs at the delcatty again. Kana uses disarming voice again but it mostly glaces off his scales as Kōtai ducks. He slides the rest of the way in and socks Kana in the belly. She falls over in defeat.

Wally: We almost had him! Great job, Kana.

He recalls her and sends out his roserade. Kōtai prepares a shadow claw but Aroha lands a giga drain before she can reach him and drains the rest of his energy. Ren withdraws him and sends out Naihi.

Wally: Petal blizzard!
Ren: Mega Horn!

The roserade surrounds Naihi in a storm of petals, completely blocking her from view for a moment before she slices out of it. She launches at Aroha, but is only lands a glancing blow as she is...
knocked aside by the hail of petals. ]

Ren: Night slash! Make it count!

Wally: Sludge bomb!

[ Naihi bounces back to her feet but the roserade nails her in the face and twirls to the side so that absol misses her completely. ]

Wally: Petal Blizzard again!

Ren: Megahorn!

[ Naihi wipes off the gunk to find a flurry of petals headed her way. This time she leaps up, only caught by the tail end of them as she lands. Aroha cannot turn her attack around fast enough and Naihi slashes her across the chest. The absol stand proudly over her fallen foe for a moment before she shakes from poisoning. She hobbles back to Ren for and antidote whole Wally sprays down his roserade with a potion. Next they send out their mightyena and magnezone. ]

Ren: Crunch, Akahata! Break down their defences!

Wally: Ume, thunder wave!

[ Akahata’s jaws charge with dark energy as she runs forward. She leaps up onto the magnezone and clamps down on their antenna. They retaliate by sending a charge through her. Sparks ripple across her as she leaps clear, but her paws glow faintly. ]

Wally: [ face hardening ] Flash cannon!

[ Akahata dodges the attack with spectacular speed and latches onto one of Ume’s u-magnets this time. They spin like a top to throw her off, but the damage is done. ]

Wally: Thunderbolt!

[ Akahata can’t move for a second and takes the hit but the next moment she dashes forward and crunches Ume’s other u-magnet. ]

Ren: Almost there, Aka! Assurance!

[ The magnezone charges again but before they can fire Akahata leaps up and rams her shoulder onto the magnezone’s central eye. They screech and drift down to the ground as Akahata hops off. Wally withdraws them, takes a deep breath and sends out his final pokemon. The gallade squares off with Akahata. ]

Wally: Leaf blade!

Ren: Thunder fang!

[ Akahata dodges Kihei’s first strike with her boosted speed, but he manages to sidestep her and slash the mightyena across the back. She teeters and falls. Ren withdraws her and sends out Tāraki. Ren and The four friends look at each other and nod. Ren and Wally touch their keystones and lights arcs from them to their pokemon. The wind generated makes the flowers dance and pushes the mist back. Both emerge at the same time, Kihei tossing his cloak and Tāraki thrashing his tail. ]

Ren: X-scissor!
Wally: Psycho cut!

[ The two leap forward to meet each other in a blur and trade blows until Tāraki catches Kihei in the shoulder. ]

Ren: Dragon claw!

[ Tāraki’s claws glow and elongate and he slashes at Kihei. The gallade parry’s twice before taking a glancing blow across the chin. ]

Wally: Close combat!

[ The gallade soon overcomes Tāraki and punches him in the chest, knocking him back. ]

Ren: Leaf blade!

[ Tāraki spins before the Gallade can close again and knocks him away with his tail. Kihei somersaults back to his feet. ]

Wally: Psycho cut!

[ The megas charge each other, Tāraki’s arm glowing green and Kihei’s glowing purple. They meet in the middle and sparks fly as the two edges grind against each other. Finally Tāraki knocks Kihei back and slashes the gallade across the chest. He staggers and goes to one knee, dropping his mega form. Ren and Tāraki roar and Wally and Kihei look up at them as Tāraki drops back to his normal form. Wally hangs his head and sighs before picking himself up. He is breathing pretty heavy, but tries to control it. ]

Wally: You beat me… Arghhh!!! [ The yell sends his lungs over the edge and he has to take a few breaths from his inhaler before he can talk again. ] …hah …hah. I really thought I had you there for a second, but is wasn’t enough…

Ren: Me too. When did you get so strong? Holy shit. I really am gonna have to watch my back.

Wally: I’ll stick to my promise and let you have a few months first. Would want to drag you away from Steven.

Ren: [ whining ] Stooopp!

Wally: [ He takes another steadying breath and smiles. ] Thank you for never holding back when you battle me. I feel like I’ve been able to take another step forward thanks to you and Kihei and the others. I’m not the same person you met back in Petalburg and I’ll be forever grateful for that.

Ren: I’m just glad I got to see you grow. Promise me you won’t ever hold back either. I want you to come challenge me again when you’re ready. Don’t worry about me and Steven.

Wally: Alright.

[ Ren offers her hand and they shake on it. Together the four of them head out of the field of flowers and on through the rivulets and waterfalls to the plateau. The final stretch of the road to the Hoenn League building is lined by great wooden gates. Each pair of pillars was carved by one of Hoenn’s iwis with designs that evoke the legendary pokemon whose lore they keep and the heros of their past. The first gate depicts Latios and Latias and Ren smiles fondly up at them as she passes through. The second gate has Jirachi, which Ren is not familiar with. The third depicts the three Regis and the next Regigigas. The penultimate gate belongs to the Orb Guardians iwi and shows Groudon and ]
Kyogre. The final gate was carved by the Draconids and one column is entwined by Rayquaza while the other depicts their summoning and the hero who would ride Rayquaza into the sky. Ren turns her head as they pass through to look a little longer before finally fixing her eyes on the Hoenn League. The entrance painted red and three-tiered with traditional tile roofs. Ren and Wally march up to the great double doors and push them open together.

Scene 11: [ The next day Ren, Wally Tāraki and Ao are waiting in the corner outside the arena. People are arriving and queuing up to buying tickets on one side while others take their pokemon to be healed on the other side. Ren’s parents arrive with Kenta, Roxanne, Winona and Maia. Ren waves to them and they come over. ]

Ren: Hey, how was the trip?

Asuka: Very nice. I haven’t flown in a long time.

Ren: Thanks for giving them a ride.

Roxanne: No problem. I wanted to come anyway.

Winona: Maia simply couldn’t pass up the chance to see her friends battle again.

Maia: I didn’t want to watch on a screen. Not when I can fly here myself. I’m so excited! There’s no way you’ll lose!

[ Ren and Winona both smile. ]

Ren: [ pulling tickets out of her pocket ] I have passes for all of you.

[ She hands them out. ]

Asuka: Well this is rather familiar. I’m so happy and proud that I’ll get to watch another Championship from the challenger’s box.

Ren: Aw, okasan.

[ They hug. ]

Asuka: Are you ready, Ren?

Ren: I am.

[ Her mother lets go and her father steps forward to give her a much shorter hug. ]

Senri: I’m sure it will be quite a different experience from the stands. I always knew I’d watch you do this one day, even when you were small. Get out there and show then what you’re made of.

Ren: I will.

Kenta: You’ve come such a long way little cub. Never stop moving forward no matter where it takes
Ren tears up a little and throws her arms around the ursaring, pressing her face into his fur to cover it. He squeezes her tight and lets go. When Ren looks up she sees Panahi, Mele and their new guardians milling around the lobby and she waves them over. Ren takes care of introductions while Ao jumps forward to touch noses with Mele. He purrs loudly and her tail wags from side to side. Mele’s new handler smiles down at them.

Ren: You two were so great in the contest. You blew everyone else away! What a debut!

Panahi: Of course we did!

Wally: I liked that water pulse/echoed voice combo you did.

Avery: Thank you! I was a little worried we wouldn’t pull if off.

Ren: So when’s the next contest?

Panahi: Super rank isn’t for a few weeks but the normal rank in Fallarbor is short a few entries, so we’ll be doing that as well.

Ren: That’s great! So Mele, how do you like the movie business?

Mele: Good so far, but we haven’t filmed or rehearsed together yet. The meet-up was fun though. Such a diverse group. We decided I’d play a male in the pokemon version. Oh, and I like the songs!

Mira: He’s such a pleasure to work with. Thank you for helping me get back into the business. I can’t tell you what it means to me.

Ren: No problem. I’m really happy I found someone who could take Mele where he wanted to go.

Mele strokes Mira’s calf with his tail and just then Kai and the Birches arrive. Kai spots Ren and her entourage and bounds over. Everyone parts to let him through and Ren huds him.

Kai: I can’t believe this is happening! I mean, I knew it was, but part of me still can’t process it.

Ren: Same.

Kai: You’re gonna do great.

They grin at each other and then Ren turns to the Birches.

Ren: Thanks for coming.

Prof. Birch: Of course.

Asuka: People are starting to head in. Perhaps we should as well.

The group heads in the side entrance to the stadium except for Kai and Wally who hang back with Ren.

Kai: I watched the Dual Pulse episode. You two were awesome! I’d sort of like to be on it some time. Ty and Gabby seem nice.

Wally: We could do it together! Maybe when I’m getting ready to take on the League?
Kai: That would be awesome! I don’t know if I could actually bring myself to approach them without backup.

Wally: Then I’ll be your backup!

Moana: Hey Ren!

[Ren blinks away from her smirking at Wally and Kai to see Moana and Terra walking up. They are in casual clothes for the first time that Ren has ever seen.]

Ren: Hey! Did you come to watch?

Moana: Sure did!

Terra: You’re sort of the one who got us together and we never really got to thank you.

Moana: We were both thinking about how we didn’t get to help much during the whole Groudon thing so we wanted to come out and support you.

Terra: And I really wanted to thank you for what you did at the Rusturf Tunnel.

Moana: It made us see things differently.

Terra: I think it made a lot of people see things differently.

Ren: Thank you. And thank you for coming. I’ve actually got a few more tickets if you want to sit in the challenger’s box. It should be a better view than general admission.

Terra: Isn’t that for friends and family?

Ren: Well, I’d like to be friends.

Moana: We are friends!

Ren: Can I have your numbers then? I’m curious to know what you’ve been up to since Team Magma was disbanded.

Moana: Sure!

[Ren hands over her nav and they punch in their info. Ren passes them the tickets as they hand it back.]

Ren: Terra, have you seen Josh at all since the cavern?

Terra: I haven’t, sorry. He’s probably alright though. He had Azalea looking after him.

Ren: Okay. I’d love to chat some more, but I should probably go get ready. Oh, these are my friends Kai and Wally. Guys, this is Terra and Moana.

Wally: Hi.

Kai: Nice to meet you.

Terra: You’re that guy with the blaziken, right? From the Weather Institute?

Kai: Oh, um, yeah.
Terra: And on Mt. Pyre, you were the one with a shiny gallade?

Wally: Yep.

Terra: Nice to meet you both again I guess. [ She laughs nervously and Moana takes her shoulder. ]

Wally: [ offering his hand ] …Uh, truce?

Terra: [ shaking his hand ] Truce.

Ren: Good, now that’s all in the past. There’s no fighting in my friend group.

Kai: [ muttering ] Unless you pick the fights.

Ren: [ louder ] Unless I pick the fights! Now go and enjoy your double date. Should be a good show.

[ Kai looks a bit puzzled, Wally flushes, Terra smiles and Moana gives Ren a big thumbs up and a wink as they all head for the doors. ]

Terra: [ as they walk away ] I’m really glad I don’t have to fight you two again.

[ Ren is about to leave herself when she sees Zinnia heading towards her. She straightens up and smiles. ]

Ren: Zinnia, you came!

Zinnia: I wouldn’t miss this for the world. I’m a huge fan of your work.

Ren: [ flushing ] Oh, uh, thank y—

Zinnia: [ wagging a finger and grinning ] Ah-ah, none of that, remember?

Ren: [ smiling ] Right. Then I’ll just say, I’m glad you came. [ offering the last ticket ] Would you like to sit in my box?

Zinnia: Why, I’d be absolutely honored.

Intercom: Last call! Everyone please find your seats. Last call!

Zinnia: That’s my cue. I’d wish you luck, but I know you don’t need any.

Ren: Good, because I’m pretty sure I’ve used it up.

Zinnia: [ taking Ren’s shoulder and looking right in her eyes ] Knock ’em dead, spitfire!

---

**Scene 12:** [ Ren strides into the arena flanked by her team and they are greeted with thunderous applause. Ren looks around at the sea of faces in the stands. The stadium is packed to its limit. Ren has never seen such a large crowd in all the championship battles she has watched. Ren finds her parents and friends in the challenger’s box and sees them all cheering for her. She squares her shoulders and stands tall. Behind her Tāraki flexes, Kōtai rattles his scales, Pohaku splays his ]
swimmers, Naihi swings her horn, Akahata raises her ruff, and Ao shoots sparks into the air. On the other side, Sidney and his team are already waiting for them. He is a little more dressed up than the last time they met, but still a bit off-kilter. He is wearing purple slacks and a black jacket with yellow pinstripe lapels and nothing under it. His half mohawk is gelled up instead of hanging limply on the top of his head. He grins crookedly at her and jerks his head at his shiftry, which moves forward into the ring. Ren nods to Naihi and she leaps forward, bright pelt shimmering and dark claws glinting. The shiftry shakes his mane and bugles out a challenge. Naihi responds by raising her head and letting out one of her unearthly, wavering howls. The shiftry disappears into a cloud of blackness only to reappear right next to the absol. He jabs her in the side before she can react. It doesn’t do much damage but surprise makes her stagger. The shiftry goes for a low sweep to knock her off her feet, but Naihi jumps just in time. She comes down like an anvil on the shiftry with megahorn and flattens him. Sidney blinks in shock and withdraws him, sending out a scrafty in his place. Ren looks thoughtful for a moment, but Naihi glances back at her and winks. Ren nods and the two pokemon run at each other. The scrafty’s fists glow a deep purple and the absol’s horn glows lime green. Naihi blocks two jabs only to be caught a third. She shudders a little from the poison, but is not as overcome as her opponent expects. She uses the opening to ram him in the gut with the tip of her horn. He is thrust into the air and rolls on the landing, bouncing back up just as Naihi closes quarters with him. The scrafty whirls, getting a rust colored fist up just in time to block. He swings his other arm like an axe, trying to land a brick break, but Naihi dances away. The scrafty closes again, swinging rapidly and only just missing once before slamming Naihi’s head almost to the ground. He catches her horn in his other hand as she lifts her head and grins, readying a punch. Naihi surges forward, swinging her head with all her might. The scrafty crumples around her horn before he can strike and is lifted clean off his feet once more. He lands on his back and Sidney withdraws him. Naihi lets out a victory cry before shuddering from the poison. Ren calls her and she trots back in to receive an antidote. Tāraki takes her place opposite Sidney’s sharpedo. The combatants surge forward with blinding speed, the sharpedo going for a poison fang and the sceptile charging a leaf blade. The exchange is over in an instant and they stop on opposite sides of the arena. One of Tāraki’s leaves was sliced in half and he shivers from the poison, but it is the sharpedo who collapses. Sidney sends out his cacturne next and sand whips up around them as it enters the ring. Tāraki slashes at it with x-scissor, but it blocks with spikey shield. Tāraki yanks the thorns out of his arm and uses earthquake to get under the cacturne’s guard. The cacturne cartwheels away and retaliates with payback. Tāraki staggers and the cacturne comes in to finish him off with needle arm. Tāraki catches it with dragon claw and doesn’t flinch despite the thorns stabbing into his hands. This time the cacturne cannot use spikey shield and Tāraki slices it in the chest with x-scissor. It falls and Sidney withdraws it, motioning his mandibuzz in. Tāraki taps out to have his hands and arms looked at and Pohaku takes his place. The mandibuzz swoops upward, but before she can get too high, Pohaku uses stone edge. A single jagged pillar of rock shoots up hits the mandibuzz in the wing, spinning her around. Pohaku sends another stone edge after her, but the mandibuzz uses tailwind, righting herself and gaining enough altitude to escape. The mandibuzz fires bones at him from the air as she swoops rapidly around the ring, but Pohaku knocks them back with iron tail. Next she tries a feint attack and scores her claws across the back of Pohaku’s neck, but he manages to extend an aqua tail long enough to soak her. She dips in the air and the armaldo finishes her with a final stone edge. Sidney’s last pokemon is an absol and he strides calmly into the ring. He is a forest variant with shorter claws and a broader horn than Naihi. Pohaku rushes in for an x-scissor, but the absol ducks under it and nails him in the gut with a sucker punch. The absol darts around back but Pohaku levels and iron tail at him. The absol dodges by jumping up high with an aerial ace and catches the armaldo across the face on his way down. Pohaku slices at the absol, but he springs away. However, he does not get far as Pohaku hems him in with aqua tail. He turns and receives Pohaku’s x-scissor with slash. Pohaku uses his superior weight to press the absol back and the moment he stumbles, the armaldo swings again and this time hits home. The absol falls and Pohaku roars, swimmers fluttering. The crowd erupts out of their seats and Ren hollers praise at Pohaku. He flushes and bounces back to her. Sidney sighs and shrugs before pacing into the middle
Scene 13: There is an hour long recess between the Elite Four battles and Ren gets her pokemon healed. The audience is allowed to leave the stadium and get food and refreshments or just mill about. Some people go out to sightsee along the many loop trails surrounding the League complex. Ren rendezvous with her group of spectators who are all hanging out together and seem to be getting along. They are all in the midst of congratulating her when the general public catches sight of her and Ren makes herself scarce. When the break is over, Ren and her team enter the stadium once more. This time it is Phoebe and her ghost-types that greet Ren and her team. She has fresh flowers pinned in her short hair and is wearing a flowing, flower print skirt and strapless top. Phoebe sends in dusknoir to start and Naihi steps forward to face it. Naihi runs forward, horn shrouded in dark energy and the dusknoir meets her with an ice punch. The layer of ice provides some protection from the super effective move and frost creeps down Naihi’s horn. She cannot move for a moment and the dusknoir takes the opportunity to use hex. Normally this would do very little, but the dancing lights enter Naihi’s frosted horn her body shakes. The dusknoir hurls back for a thunder punch but the absol meets its fist with her claws and the dusknoir shies away from the lavender flames that jump from her. Naihi uses the opening to slice the dusknoir with night slash and it falls. Chandelure goes in next and fires a flamethrower at Naihi. The absol dives under the torrent of flames before thrusting her horn up into it. When the chandelure stops, the frost on Naihi’s horn is gone. The chandelure switches to energy ball, which Naihi deflects with megahorn before leaping up and switching to night slash. She hits the chandelure right between the eyes and it goes down. Phoebe sends in her drifblim and Ren calls Naihi back, swapping Akahata out instead. The drifblim unleashes an icy wind and blows it around Akahata, boxing her in. Then it charges her with acrobatics. Akahata twists in the air and catches one of its tassels. She sends a current of electricity through it and yanks it down. Paralysis prevents it from rising and Akahata finishes it off with a crunch. Phoebe withdraws it and sends in mismagius. It thunderbolts Akahata and telltale sparks indicate she is paralyzed by the hit. Ren and Akahata grins as Akahata’s paws glow. The mismagius uses power gem, but Akahata dodges it easily with her boosted speed and dashes for the mismagius. The mismagius tries to hit her with another power gem, but the mightyena dodges around it and sinks her teeth into the mismagius’s cloak. The mismagius’s eyes flutter closed and Akahata tosses her to the ground. Phoebe’s banette floats into the ring, zipper like teeth exposed in an unsettling grin. It uses feint attack to get behind Akahata and slash her flank, but dances back out of Akahata’s reach before she can land a crunch. It uses will-o-wisp and Akahata is forced to stop in her tracks and roll to put out the flames. She is barely on her feet when the banette warps in for another feint attack and scratches Akahata’s back. The mightyena lunges and misses again as it dances away. The next time it goes for Akahata’s rump, but when the mightyena feels the sting of claws, she kicks out and trips the banette. Before it can recover, Akahata has it in her teeth and defeats it with a pulse of dark energy. Akahata snorts and walks out of the ring. Naihi nuzzles her as she goes back in. Phoebe’s infamous sableye darts forward and hisses, gem eye-guards flashing as it cocks its head at an odd angle. It stands to reveal the gem on its chest and fires a beam of light from it at Naihi. The absol dodges and rushes in for a night slash. The sableye goes to all fours and outspeeds Naihi with fake out, slashing her foreleg and making her flinch. It then uses the opening for foul play. Naihi’s energy flows into the sableye and it slashes frantically at her, darting from one place to the next while dark energy radiates from its claws and ghostly light leaks from its eyes. Naihi cannot buck the
creature off, but when it dashes behind her she strikes out with her hind spurs. Naihi whirs as it rolls away and then pounces, slashing it right across the eye. It hisses and writhes on the ground before loping back and jumping into Phoebe’s arms. Naihi runs back to Ren and butts heads with Akahata. Ren hugs them both before walking out to meet Phoebe. She cradles her sableye in one arm and shakes Ren’s hand with the other. When Ren goes to apologize to the sniffing sableye, he makes a grab for Ren’s keystone. Phoebe pulls him back, laughing and walks out of the arena, waving over her shoulder.

Scene 14: Glacia is dressed far more formally than her coworkers in a lupine purple gown, kitten heels and white lace gloves. She also has a matching lace choker and her long blonde hair is braided and pinned in a bun at the back of her head. Glacia gesture grandly and her vanilluxe floats forward. Ren gives Pohaku a high five and he lumbers forward. The vanilluxe smiles and waves its staw at the crowd before firing an ice beam at Pohaku. The armaldo shield himself with his arms and takes the attack. His claws are fused together for a moment in a block of ice, but her wrenches them apart and shatters it and the crowd cheers. He runs at the vanilluxe before it can charge again and swings a gleaming iron tail at it. The vanilluxe floats just out of his reach and ice beams him in the foot. He stumps it off before it can get too stuck, tucks into a ball and rolls away. Before the vanilluxe can react, Pohaku pops up behind it and slams it into the ground with iron tail. Glacia withdraws it and Pohaku displays for the crowd before swapping places with Kōtai. The sandslash squares off with a massive beartic, rattling his scales as the beartic roars. The beartic summons a hail of giant icicles rains down towards Kōtai. The sandslash throws his claws together over his head, creating a mound of earth to shield himself. As soon as the icicles hit, he runs up the mound and uses the added height to leap over the beartic’s head. He throws his full weight and momentum into a brick break to the beartic’s crown. It falls to all fours and Kōtai lands behind it. He smashes both its hind legs with brick break and it collapses with a groan. Glacial sends in her abomasnow next. Kōtai rushes it, claws glowing rusty red but it knocks him back with a blizzard. Kōtai stabs his claws into the ground and sends a shockwave of earth towards the abomasnow. It’s keeping its feet and doesn’t let up until Kōtai is buried in snow. The sandslash shivers and Ren calls him back. Ren sends in Ao and Glacia smiles and her abomasnow flexes confidently. It lifts one foot high and slams it down, sending a ripple of earth towards Ao. Before it can hit, Ren activates her keystone and lifts it high. Light arcs from it to the mega stone on Ao’s collar. The manectric is encased in a ball of light and wind that defects the earthquake attack and Ao emerges in her mega form. Her eyes gleam red and her fur stands on end as she rushes forward. The abamasnow raises its other foot to summon another earthquake, but it is too slow and flames explode out from Ao with a deafening boom. The abomasnow is blown back and tumbles to a halt, putting out the flames. Glacia takes a moment to consider before sending out her walrein. Ren and Ao grin in unison and Ao fires off a charge beam. The manectric has little power left after overheat and the attack does very little to phase the walrein, but sparks jump across Ao’s coat as she bolts around the arena, pursued by the walrein’s blizzard attack. Eventually the walrein tires and Ao pauses to zap him with another charge beam. He retaliates with a shorter blast of blizzard, but Ao is already away. She darts around using the whole arena and pausing only to get off charge beams. The Walrein tries to get her with blizzard every time she stops, but she is too fast for him. She streaks across the field, her mega form like shaft of lightning as she charges up. Finally Glacia sends her Walrein after Ao with a surf. The walrein rides the wave and manages to trap Ao in a circle of water for a moment. She aims a charge beam at him and he dives onto her with a body slam. The manectric crumples under him and and for a moment everyone holds their breath. Then electricity arcs over the walrein’s body and he slumps Ao wiggles out from under his limp form and shakes herself off. The crowd cheers and Glacia withdraws her
pokemon. Glalie floats into the ring next and gnashes it giant teeth as Ao squares off with it. Ao charges, pelt once again leaping with stored charge, and it fires a giant icicle at her. Ao releases a blast of flames once more and the icicle is melted before it can hit. The flash is blinding and for a moment neither pokemon is visible. When the dust clears the glalie is on the ground, clearly incapacitated. Ao drops back to her normal form, exhausted. Ren calls her back as Glacia recalls her glalie and her froslass swoops into the ring. Ren looks at her three remaining pokemon and asks Akahata to step forward. The mightyena raises her ruff and bares her fangs at her opponent and the froslass bares its own impressive teeth, disappearing into a shroud of lavender mist until only its gleaming dentition is visible. Akahata waits patiently for the froslass to reappear and it does so just behind her. It sucks out Akahata’s energy with a draining kiss but Akahata is able to catch part of its cloak in her jaws and electrocutes it. The froslass shudders with paralysis as it rises and Akahata backs up to keep it in view. The ice crystals in its head glow and it begins to hail in the stadium. The awning protects the audience and Glacia opens a parasol to keep the hail off her. Ren throws her arms over her head but Akahata has no choice but to simply endure the pelting ice. The froslass starts summoning a blizzard, but it fails as the pokemon is gripped by paralysis. Akahata is already rushing in, dark energy trailing from her mouth as she charges a crunch. She leaps up and catches the froslass before it can get away. It sinks slowly to the ground and bows its head. Glacia recalls her froslass and dips her head to Ren and Akahata, then leaves the arena.

Scene 15: [ Ren and her team face down Drake and his dragons for the final Elite Four battle. Drake frowns beneath his mustache and sailor hat and nods stiffly at Ren before waving in his altaria. Ao dashes forward to meet it, not pausing for theatrics. Drake almost smiles as his altaria takes to the air and he orders her to use aerial ace. Instead of dodging, Ao jumps into the hit, maximizing the contact. The altaria swoops away, but telltale sparks hop across its clouds. The altaria wheels in the air and unleashes a moonblast. Ao meets it the air with a charge beam, but the altaria’s attack is stronger. The altaria grows, preparing a dragon pulse, but Ao is faster and zaps it again with charge beam. The altaria falters and slips in the air before climbing higher. It unleashes another moonblast, but this time Ao dodges and hits the it with another charge beam. The alaria convulses and falls. Drake sends in his kingdra. Ao is in rough shape, but charged and ready. The kingdra fires an ice beam at her feet, but Ao leaps clear and lets loose a hidden power. The dragon-type move knocks the kingdra back and its water sphere wavers for a moment, but it lets out a dragon pulse as Ao runs closer and she goes tumbling. The kingra amasses water for a surf but Ao raises her head and discharges. The kindra slumps and Ao lays her head back down in exhaustion. Ren calls her back and Drake sends in his dragalge. Pohaku steps into the ring opposite, claws at the ready. The dragalge opens with a hydro pump and Pohaku defects some of it with aqua tail. He runs at the dragalge powering right through its sludge wave to slam it with iron tail. Its water sphere partially collapses and before it can reform, Pohaku socks the dragalge in the back with a stone spike. The water sphere falls apart completely and Drake withdraws his dragalge. Pohaku swaps out with Kōtai as a haxorus takes the field. It charges the sandslash, mouth blades glowing but Kōtai trips it up with and earthquake. While it is trying to regain its footing, Kōtail bounces it over the head with a smackdown. The haxorus shakes it off and slashes at Kōtai with Dragon claw. Kōtai curls into a ball and is knocked away. He pops back up and brandishes his claws at the haxorus in challenge. The haxorus swings its blade at Kōtai and he meets it with his claws. They dual back and forth for a moment before the haxorus shoves Kōtai back. But the sandslash latches on to the haxorus’s face and it stumbles back in surprise. It tries to shake Kōtai off, but he holds on until it swings its head upwards before letting go. Kōtai somersaults gracefully in the air and comes down
on the haxorus with a brick break. Kōtai snorts and Drake sends in his flygon. Ren calls Kōtai back as it launches into the air and Tāraki takes his place. The flygon aims a dragon pulse at Tāraki, but he crouches, dodging the attack. The flygon comes in closer for its next hit and Tāraki jumps up, dodging a second dragon pulse and raking the flygon’s shoulder with dragon claw. Tāraki lands and rolls back to his feet as the flygon wheels around. It comes in low again, but this time opens it mouth and unleashes a torrent of flame. Tāraki protects himself with his arms as the flygon roasts him. He trembles from the strain, but just as the flygon passes over, Tāraki thrusts an arm up and rakes the flygon’s belly with another dragon claw. It crashes to the floor and Tāraki roars his victory. Drake withdraws his flygon and his salamence slithers forward. Ren almost calls Tāraki back, but he meets her eyes with that signature daring and she nods. They face down Drake and his salamence together. The dragon opens its wings and rushes forward on a sudden burst of energy. Tāraki jumps to the side just in time and grabs the salamence by the tail. He is yanked forward a ways but digs in his heels and brings the salamence to a halt as the light of her dragon rush fades. Tāraki pulls with all of his might and bears the dragon to the ground. Before she can get her wings he jumps on her back and slashes her with dragon claw. She withes, bellowing, and Tāraki falls off. The salamence pounces on him and bashes her skull against his. Tāraki’s head falls back and his eyelids flutter closed. The salamence looms over him, wings up and huge paw pressing down on his chest. Her tail lashes and she Opens her jaws, dark energy massing as she readies a crunch. Tāraki’s golden eyes snap open and he slashes her across the face with leaf blade. The salamence staggers back off of him and Tāraki comes up swinging, catching her across the chest and then shoulder. She hisses in defiance, more dark energy spilling from her mouth as she draws back to strike him, and Tāraki slices one last leaf blade across her foreleg. She falls and tries to rise but stumbles. Drake walks onto the field and his salamence looks back at him and bows her head. Tāraki roars and the crowd erupts into raucous cheers. Ren runs out onto the field and hugs Tāraki as Drake tenders to his salamence. When he has finished, he turns to Ren. She offers her hand, but does not take it, instead bowing to her and Tāraki before walking away with his salamence.

---

Scene 16: Ren is waiting in the wings with her pokemon for the final battle. Two employees are standing in front of the double doors to the stadium, waiting for their cue. Ren turns back to her team and beckons them in for a final huddle. Those of them who can put their arms around each other. They look around the circle and smile.

Ren: Okay team, we don’t know which pokemon Steven is going to choose for this battle, but no matter what, I’m pretty sure all of you are going to have to battle. We’ll be as smart as we can, but not all of you will have an advantage. And no matter what, Steven’s team is tough and we’re going to have to give it our all. Are you ready to be champions?

All: Hell yes!

Ren: Alright then, let’s kick some ass!

They all turn towards the doors and the speakers in the stadium boom to life.

Announcer: Ladies and gentlemen, the challenger has made it through the Elite Four and will now face the reigning Champion. Should she lose this final battle, she will receive the title of Victor to acknowledge her victory over the Elite Four as well as a cash prize. Should she win, she will receive the title of Champion and all the honors and responsibilities that go along with it. Now, please welcome your current League Champion, Steven Stone!
The crowd erupts into cheers and Ren can even hear some shrieks as Steven walks out of the doors on the opposite side of the stadium followed by his team.

Announcer: Bessemer the metagross!

Bessemer floats up off the ground and spins rapidly letting out a resonant, metallic groan.

Announcer: Damascus the skarmory!

Damascus beats his wings creating a powerful wind that lifts him off his feet. He raises his wings and touches back down. He then shakes them so that the lights glitters off of them and calls out with a ringing note.

Announcer: Gilchrist the aggron!

Gilchrist stomps and bellows, shaking the entire stadium.

Announcer: Tungsten the steelix!

Tungsten rises to her full height, draws her head back and strikes at the air like a cobra, tail whipping around behind her.

Announcer: Escutcheon the armaldo!

Escutcheon roars and splays his swimmers flushing them with color.

Announcer: And Ptilometra the cradily!

Ptilometra writhes and energy pulses from the tip of each of her fronds. Once the cheers died down a little, the announcer’s voice rings out again and the employees waiting with Ren grab the door handles in preparation.

Announcer: And now, please welcome the challenger, Ren Kosugi!

The employees pull open the doors and Ren walks through followed by her team. They are greeted by roars from the crowd and Ren waves to her box as her pokemon spread out behind her.

Announcer: Tāraki the sceptile!

Tāraki does a lightning fast one-two slice with his leaves, then roars at the top of his voice, shaking his tail so that every frond quivers.

Announcer: Akahata the mightyena!

Akahata raises her ruff, barks and snarls out a challenge.

Announcer: Ao the manectric!

Ao holds her tail high and shoots sparks from her glimmering pelt as raises her head and howls. Ren can hear Mele caterwaul in answer from the stands.

Announcer: Kōtai the sandslash!

Kōtai strikes his obsidian claws together hard enough to make sparks, then rattles his scales and flexes for the crowd.
Announcer: Pohaku the armaldo!

[Pohaku stomps, lashes his tail, and brandishes his sickle like-claws, swimmers splayed and pulsing pink.]

Announcer: And Naihi the absol!

[Naihi kicks up her hind spurs, slashes with her front claws and then stabs upward with her horn, letting out a long ghostly howl that echoes through the stadium. The cheers and chanting continue for a while until the announcer's voice booms over the speaker once more.]

Announcer: Champion and challenger, shake hands.

[Ren and Steven walk forward, leaving their teams behind in their squares, and meet in the center of the ring. They smile at each other and Steven offers his hand, which Ren takes.]

Steven: I knew it wouldn’t be long before I met you here. The others were no match.

Ren: That ought to shut them up at the next party.

Steven: [He laughs.] Maybe. Now we’ll just have to see if you can beat me. I’m a little scared to be honest, but also excited. I’m sure I’ll never have another battle as good no matter what happens.

Ren: Same. That’s part of why I came.

Steven: Then know I’m going to fight you for this. I could probably use a vacation, but I have too much of my ego locked up in this Champion thing to let it go so easily.

Ren: And I’ll do my best to take it. As your friend I feel like I should maybe force the vacation issue for your health.

Steven: [squeezing her hand in his and smiling] Good. I want you to show me how far you’ve come and everything you’ve learned.

[Ren lets go of his hand only to grab his arm and he grabs hers]

Ren: [staring into his turquoise blue eyes] Let’s give them a battle to remember.

Steven: [staring back into her jade green eyes] One for the history books.

[They squeeze each others arms for another moment longer before forcing themselves to let go. They walk back to their respective sides of the arena and turn to face each other again. Steven locks eyes with his skarmory and he flies forward into the ring, completing a circle before landing gracefully in front of his trainer. Ren looks to Ao and the manectric nods and paces into the ring.]

Announcer: The Champion has chosen skarmory and the challenger has chosen manectric. Let the battle begin!

Steven: Toxic, Damascus!

Ren: Charge beam!

[Ao strikes first and smiles as attack hits only to flinch a moment later as bubbling purple ooze soaks her fur.]

Steven: Aerial ace!
The skarmory rockets up into the air with a single downward stroke, flips in the air and dives at Ao. The hit is too swift and precise to dodge, though Ao tries, and the skarmory slashes her across the back with his talons as he goes by.

Ren: Just another charge beam or two, Ao!

Steven: Spikes!

Ao fires another charge beam but Damascus rolls in the air and it misses. A hail of sharp rocks rains from his wings as he passes over Ao and wheels around the rest of Ren’s side of the field.

Steven: Steel wing!

Ren: Take his side of the field!

Ao leaps to the side just in time to dodge the skarmory's attack, but grimaces as the sharp pebbles stab at her paws. She grits her teeth and bounds out of the spikes onto Steven’s side. She turns as Damascus comes at her and hits him with another charge beam. He powers through the attack and slashes her across the shoulder with a gleaming wing. Ao digs in and takes the hit, retaliating with a third charge beam that goes wide as she shivers from the poison.

Steven: Finish her with aerial ace!

Ren: Wait for him!

Ao holds her ground as the skarmory climbs up high and then dives at her. Sparks leap over her and Ao raises her muzzle and howls. The stored electricity discharges into the skarmory in a bolt of lightning that cracks the air and momentarily blinds everyone. When Ren opens her eyes, both pokemon are on the ground, but Ao staggers to her feet and Ren and Mele cheer. In another second the whole stadium is cheering.

Announcer: as Steven withdraws Damascus] Steven’s skarmory is unable to battle giving Ren’s manectric the win, but it looks like she may have to tap out for an antidote.

Ao hobbles back to Ren, careful to avoid the sharp rocks scattered everywhere. A medic comes out to treat Ao and Steven’s aggron takes the field. Kotai steps forward, glancing at Ren to confirm before bounding into the ring.

Steven: Earthquake!

Ren: Plow the field, Kotai!

Gilchrist turns and slams his tail down. A shockwave of earth radiates from the point of impact, gaining speed and height as it nears Kotai. But just before it hits, Kotai crosses his claws and forces them apart. The ground in front of him rips up in neat rows, slicing through the wave of earth and covering up the spikes that litter the field. The wave hits Kotai, but its momentum is greatly lessened and the sandslash stays rooted to the spot. His own move stops three-quarters of the way across the field.

Ren: Now show him a real earthquake!

Kotai: My pleasure, luv.

Kotai slams his claws on the ground and the already tilled earth cracks, ripping across the field to right beneath the aggron faster than he can react. Gilchrist falls partially in and thus cannot get
away when Kōtai directs a wave of earth at him. Gilchrist weathers the blow.

Steven: Stone edge!

Ren: Pinball, Kōtai!

[ Gilchrist summons a column of jagged rocks beneath Kōtai. The sandslash rolls into a defensive ball and is launched skyward by the hit. The aggron looks up but loses sight of him in the sun’s glare. ]

Ren: Brick break!

[ Kōtai uncurls and comes down on the aggron claws first with a brick break. Gilchrist, still pinned by Kōtai’s earthquake, is unable to evade and falls. ]

Announcer: [ as Steven withdraws Gilchrist ] The Champion’s aggron is unable to battle!

[ Steven’s cradily pulls herself forward, fixing one of her glowing yellow eyes on Kōtai and waving her pulsating fronds menacingly. ]

Ren: Brick break again!

Steven: Root him, Ptilometra.

[ Kōtai dashes in and slams the cradily across her base, but her root like legs lash out and wrap around him. ]

Steven: Giga drain!

[ Kōtai’s claws glow rusty red in preparation for another brick break but the cradily drains the rest of his energy and he slumps in her grasp. Ren withdraws him and Ptilometra’s fronds wave in satisfaction. ]

Announcer: The challenger’s sandslash is unable to battle!

Ren: Alright, Po, you’re up. Cut her down with x-scissor!

Steven: Outlast him with giga drain!

[ Pohaku charges onto the field, claws glowing and the cradily digs in. She bows and receives the x-scissor with her head, rooted to the spot with her legs. One leg erupts from the soil and wraps around Pohaku’s foot, trapping him as she drains his energy. He takes another swing at her but she tightens her grip and sways just out of reach. ]

Ren: Iron tail!

[ Pohaku twists and smacks the cradily across her base with his tail. She uses giga drain again, but it is not enough to bring him down or recover fully from the damage she has taken. Pohaku slaps her across the face with another iron tail and she slumps, root-like leg falling away from his foot. Pohaku trills and displays with his swimmers as Steven withdraws her. ]

Announcer: The Champion’s cradily is unable to battle!

Steven: Ptilometra wore him down. Finish him off, Escutcheon!

[ Steven’s armaldo lumbers out onto the field and squares off with Pohaku. He is a duller, studier
variant with thicker armor. Ren looks a bit uneasy, but Pohaku wiggles in excitement.

Escutcheon: Show me what you got, little bro.

Ren: Stone edge!

[ Pohaku slices a diagonal with his left arm and a jagged rock bursts from the ground and follows, striking the other armaldo across the jaw. Escutcheon’s head swings back to center, but before he can recover, Pohaku has repeated the move with his right. Escutcheon reels again, but shakes his head and recovers. Pohaku gapes in shock for a moment and Escutcheon jabs at him. A rock juts from the ground and slams Pohaku in the chest, pushing him back. Pohaku slumps over the rock and Escutcheon grins. The rock crumbles and instead of falling, Pohaku stands and thrusts his claw into the air. A rock stabs up right in front of Escutcheon and strikes the bottom of his jaw. He staggers back and falls. ]

Announcer: The champion’s armaldo is unable to battle and from the look of things the challenger’s armaldo is not fit to take on another opponent.

[ Steven withdraws Escutcheon and Pohaku lumbers back to Ren. Steven looks up at his steelix and she slithers forward. Ren looks to Tāraki and he grins before marching into the ring. Steven waits knowingly as Ren and Tāraki match stances. Ren crosses her hands in front of her, touching the keystone in her glove. Light arcs from her hands to the keystone in Tāraki’s anklet and back again. Ren glows and light engulfs Tāraki. Wind bursts out from him and he emerges taller with longer legs, huge tail, and a bright crest on his head. The crowd cheers wildly. ]

Steven: Iron tail!

[ Ren no longer has any need for verbal commands. Tāraki shoots forward, arm leaves glowing. Tungsten lashes out at him with her tail but he leaps over it easily and slashes her middle as he goes by. ]

Steven: Wrap him!

[ Tungsten slithers to the side as Tāraki darts at her again and coils around him as he slashes her. She groans but coils tighter, squeezing him. ]

Steven: Ice fang!

[ Ren and Tāraki shield themselves with an arm and the steelix’s frozen teeth sink into Tāraki’s arm. The cold spreads rapidly from the bite and Tāraki bellows in pain, arm frozen in place as Tungsten draws back. Ren lets out a cry of her own and cradles her arm. Tungsten strikes again, but Ren and Tāraki punch upward, forcing her jaws shut. The steelix’s head wobbles unsteadily and her grip loosens. With a roar, Ren and Tāraki slash her once more with their good arm and she falls away, head hitting the ground with a heavy thud. Tāraki staggers but stays on his feet, letting out one final roar before dropping back to his normal form. ]

Announcer: [ As Tāraki walks back to Ren ] The champion’s steelix and the challenger’s sceptile are unable to battle!

[ Ren gives Tāraki a high five and medic comes to treat his frozen arm. Ren looks back across the field as Bessemer strides out onto it and Naihi walks out to meet them. Steven puts a hand over the keystone pinned to his breast and light shoots out from it into the mega stone on Bessemer’s arm. The metagross rises off the ground as they are consumed by light. Bessemer emerges from the transformation with and enormous spike on their chin and twice as many legs. They float well above
the ground and let out a metallic rumble that shakes the air.

Ren: Night slash!

Steven: Giga impact.

Naihi runs forward and Bessemer flies across the battlefield at her, white light illuminating the metagross like a comet. Darkness trails from Naihi’s horn as she pours all of her energy into it. She leaps up and meets Bessemer head on, a blade of dark energy slicing through the metagross’s overwhelming light. Naihi is thrown back by the impact and Bessemer crashes to the ground, sending earth spraying in every direction. Naihi hits the ground, skids and rolls to a stop right in front of her trainer. Re looks down at her limp form.

Announcer: The challenger’s absol is unable to battle!

Ren looks up as Bessemer rises dirt falling off them and Akahata is already sprinting into the ring, dark energy spilling from her jaws.

Ren: Assurance!

Akahata leaps onto Bessemer and sinks her teeth into the x between their eyes. Strands of black zigzag out from the point of contact, branching out to a hundred different points. Most of Bessemer’s face is enveloped in blackness and they cry out like a wrought iron gate swinging on its hinges. Akahata jumps off as Bessemer sinks to the ground and drops to their normal form. Akahata howls.

Announcer: The Champion’s metagross is unable to battle! Challenger Ren Kosugi wins!

The audience roars. Everyone is jumping out of their seats and hollering and banging on the stands. Steven looks a bit unsteady on his feet and bows his head for a moment before straightening up and looking at the sky. Akahata is racing back to check on Naihi and Ren is already on her knees with a hand on Naihi’s ribcage. Akahata licks Naihi’s face and the absol cracks an eye open and smiles. Akahata’s tail wags and she presses her forehead to Naihi’s. The medic that was tending Tāraki’s arm comes over to check on Naihi and scans her carefully with a medical device.

Medic: Two cracked ribs and some deep bruising, but she’ll be alright.

Naihi: [ sitting up a little ] You go ahead, Ren. I’ll be fine.

Ren gets up and finds her box. Kai has lifted Wally off his feet in a crushing hug and Terra and Moana are jumping up and down. Panahi is waving her wings and honking and Mele is caterwauling. Maia is fluttering around in excitement while Zinnia and Ren’s parents shout and applaud. Ren waves to them and turns to see Steven stroking Bessemer. Two medics are checking them over. Steven turns around and takes a few steps towards Ren. She goes to meet him and behind her Akahata lays down under Naihi’s head so that she has something to rest on.

Steven: Is she—?

Ren: Fine. What about Bessemer?

Steven: Mostly just hurt their pride and mine. Congratulations, Ren, You’re the new Champion of Hoenn.

Ren: Thank you.
Steven: We should take our bows and then you must come with me.

Ren: Okay.

[Naihi is already staggering to her feet supported by Akahata. The rest of Ren’s team is battered but feeling much better after the medical attention. The medics clear the field and Ren’s pokemon line up beside her and Steven’s line up beside him. Steven glances at Ren, cuing her to take the bow first, but she grabs his hand. He smiles just a little and they all take the bow together, then turn and bow to the other side of the stadium. Ren waves to her friends again and Steven withdraws all of his pokemon. Ren follows suit by withdrawing all of hers and Steven leads her by the hand out of the stadium. The deafening cheers from the crowd continue until the doors shut behind them.]

___

**Scene 17:** [Steven leads Ren down a long hall to a great steel door. He presses the hand not in hers to a panel beside it and the door slides open. As soon as they enter, the door slides shut behind them. A dimly lit tunnel slopes down into the rock and Steven leads her to the end. It opens up into a round domed chamber. The only light emanates from what looks like a perfectly smooth ball of opal at its center. The stone rests on a pedestal and Ren can just make out six pokeball slots around the rim. Steven lets go of her hand as they approach it.]

Steven: This is where we maintain the records of pokemon and their trainers who have prevailed through the harshest of battles. It is here that League Champions are honored. Place your pokemon on the pedestal.

[Ren pulls her pokeballs one by one off her belt and places them in the slots. Steven stands next to her and she turns to face him. Both of their faces are half in shadow.]

Steven: Ren Kosugi, as the victor of this battle, you have earned the title of Hoenn League Champion. Do you accept that title and all of the rights and responsibilities that follow?

Ren: I do.

Steven: And do you promise to protect the people and pokemon of Hoenn to the best of your abilities?

Ren: I do.

[Steven taps the top of the stone and it pulses.]

Steven: Then the title is yours until your defeat or your death. Touch your hand to the stone.

[Ren turns and places her hand over the stone and more light spills from it, casting a warm uneven glow over the chamber. The walls are studded with crystals which shimmer in the wavering light. Ren’s keystone flares to life on top of the orb and brighter stands of light arc out from it to her pokeballs and the button on each of them glows. Energy buzzes up her arm and into her chest and one more strand of light connects her keystone to Steven’s. He starts as energy flows into him as well and he places a hand over his keystone. Ren looks at him questioningly but he nods to something above them and she looks up. An image of Tāraki is splashed across the ceiling. He winks at her and slices at the air with his signature one-two combo. Next Akahata appears. She raises her ruff and snarls, charging and delivering a crunch before relaxing and smiling down at her trainer. Ao bounds into view, sparks trailing from her bright pelt as she dashes to and fro. Kōtai rolls in and...]

pops up. He flexes and brandishes his obsidian claws before saluting her and disappearing once more. Pokaku displays for her, claws splayed, tail lashing and swimmers pulsating, before he covers his mouth with his claws to hide his giggling. Finally Naihi stands tall and proud before her, chest puffed and horn and claws gleaming. All six of them stand together and then fade. Ren removes her hand from the stone.]

Ren: Whoa. [She looks over at Steven who is still clutching at his chest.] Are you alright?

Steven: [letting his hand fall and blinking] Sorry, yes. I, uh, never thought I’d feel that again.

Ren: What was that?

Steven: I wish I knew. The keystones react to it, so it must be related somehow, like a mega stone, but you don’t need a keystone to use it. I was actually the first Hoenn Champion with a keystone and all of the past champions and their pokemon have been recorded here. I asked Pheebs what it was like, but she was very vague and we can’t discuss it outside of this chamber.

Ren: So when you were in my place, did your keystone touch Phoebe or?

Steven: No. And I’ve never seen or read anything about keystone’s linking. There’s still a lot we don’t know about mega evolution.

[He looks thoughtful and his eyes drift into the middle distance as Ren scans his face.]

Ren: You’re alright though?

Steven: [He blinks back to her and smiles.] I’ve never been more proud and more angry with myself at the same time. But I could probably use the lesson in humility. Thank you, Ren.

Ren: You’re welcome.

[They are both quiet for a moment and Ren glances away.]

Ren: So what happens now?

Steven: We walk out of here and greet your adoring public. Lot’s of outlets will want an interview or a soundbite, but there’s no formal press conference and you can participate as much as you like. You’re the Champion now, so everything is on your terms.

Ren: [grinning] I like the sound of that.

Steven: And I will mentor you for a year. Your job is extremely important and there is a lot to learn.

Ren: Right.

Steven: Don’t worry. I promise to be a good mentor since I know well the pain of having a very lax former Champion to look after me.

Ren: Thank you, Steven.

Steven: Alright then, let’s go.

[Ren gathers up her pokemon and they head back up into the League complex. A huge throng of people and reporters are waiting in the entrance hall. Ren sends out her pokemon and they are all good as new after their time in the pedestal. Ren and her pokemon answer questions, pose for photos and sign things with Steven standing by Ren’s shoulder all the while. Tāraki and Pohaku
bask in the attention and the others all enjoy it except for Akahata, but she endures to humor Naihi. Soon Ren gets tired and anxious to see her family. Steven holds the crowd back while Ren leaves and walks out onto the plateau with her pokemon. She finds everyone except for Zinnia at a lookout facing the sea. They all pile around, hugging her except for Winona, Mira and Avery, who hang back and Mele, who makes a beeline for Ao. Mele rubs up against Ao and she licks at his face. Maia dips and swoops all around, chattering excitedly and Tāraki chatters back. Panahi dips her head to Kōtai and he nods and winks back. Soon everyone is talking and laughing and socializing. Pan out to see the Eon Guardians watching from the air. Latios smiles and Latias gives his shoulder a playful cuff before speeding away. Latios gives Ren one last look and follows.

Chapter End Notes

The End!
JK I'm doing the Delta Episode obviously. I've been laying the groundwork this entire time and I love it so it's happening. It will be in 3 chapters and then chapter 24 will be an epilogue of sorts.
I really pushed myself getting this chapter out but I really want to stay on schedule and so far it's working. Not sure why I care about the deadline so much, but whatever works. The next chapter should be shorter and a little easier to write so it might be done sooner. No promises though.
I changed up the league battles a lot to make them more interesting, but some stuff is lifted directly from my playthrough. I gave Ao overheat because I had nothing for Glacia. She took out a glalie, charged on the walrein, dodging 2 blizzard attacks in the process, and then used overheat to take down the second glalie. I gambled with Steven's metagross, hoping Naihi could maybe score a critical 1-hit-KO with her absurdly high attack. She got the crit but it wasn't quite enough and Steven used giga impact first move because he does not fuck around. Naihi pulled through because of Poke-Amie and I sent Akahata in while the metagross recharged and Akahata finished it off.
Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed this chapter. So much battling. Next chapter will be much lower key. Get hype for more League shenanigans. Thank you all for reading and commenting! I love you!

Character Chart:
HUMANS:
Ren, our protagonist
Kai, Ren's friend who likes science
Wally, Ren's other friend who likes the internet
Steven, the Hoenn League Champion who is low-key flirty all the time
Josh, a Magma grunt who Ren has saved twice
Azalea, Zinnia's Magma grunt alias who is helping Josh keep Ren alive
Maxie, leader of Team Magma and now missing a hand
Tabitha, a Magma admin and the more intelligent of the two
Courtney, a Magma admin and the more unhinged of the two
Hartmann, a Magma grunt partnered with Brenton and friends with Josh
Brenton, a Magma grunt partnered with Hartmann and friends with Josh
Terra, a Magma grunt partnered with Whenua
Moana, an Aqua grunt who is secretly dating Terra
Senri, Ren's dad and the Petalburg Gym Leader
Asuka, Ren's mom and a writer
Angela, a grad student in Prof. Birch's lab
Rosalie, Wally's cousin who breeds flower pokemon
Kauri, Rosalie's fiance who works construction on the Rusturf Tunnel
Mira, a coach/agent for pokemon in show business who adopted Mele Avery, a new contestant who took Panahi on as their partner

TEAM REN:
Taraki the Sceptile
Akahata the Mightyena
Ao the Manectric
Kata the Grumpig
Kōtai the Sandslash
Roma the Sharpedo
Pohaku the Armaldo
Naihi the Absol
Teka the Pikachu
Tarahau, the Froslass

FORMER TEAM REN:
Ikki the Masquerain
Panahi the Pelipper
Maia the Taillow
Mele the Delcatty
Hauoro the Exploud
Putenga the Breloom

TEAM KAI:
Jay, the Blaziken
Dusty, the Breloom
Makō, the Wailord
Ruby, the Swellow
Lily, the Lileep
Zach, the Pikachu

TEAM WALLY:
Kihei, the shiny Gallade
Kana, the Delcatty
Aroha, the Roselia
Atiru, the Altaria
Ume, the Magnezone
Hōpua, the Azumarill

TEAM STEVEN:
Bessemer, the shiny Metagross
Damascus, the Skarmory
Gilchrist, the Aggron
Tungsten, the Steelix
Escutcheon, the Armaldo
Ptilometra, the Cradily
I Can't Get No

Chapter Summary

In which Ren can’t catch a break.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Scene 1: [ Ren wakes in her room in Littleroot. Her floor is covered in sleeping pokemon and she picks her way carefully to the door so as not to wake them. She can hear her parents’ talking downstairs and she immediately notices distress in her mother’s voice and stops to listen. ]

Asuka: We’ve had these tickets for months, Senri.

Senri: I know, and it’s not that I don’t want to go. There’s just no way I can make it. I’ve been missing far too much work with everything that’s been going on.

[ Asuka is silent and after a pause, Senri speaks again. ]

Senri: I’m sorry, my dear.

[ Things fall quiet again or at least she thinks they do. She can’t hear anything past the roaring in her ears. She puts a hand over her mouth to stop herself from screaming and uses the other to steady herself as she slumps back against the wall. She isn’t sure how long she sits in the hall in her pajamas fuming, but she comes too when she hears the front door open. ]

Asuka: Have a good day at work.

[ A few seconds later Ren hears the front door close and then her mother start washing the dishes. Ren knows what that means and wipes the angry tears out of her eyes before heading downstairs. Asuka tries to discreetly wipe her eyes as Ren comes up behind her and Ren’s stomach lurches. ]

Ren: Ohayou, okasan.

Asuka: [ a little shaky ] Ohayou, Ren-chan. [ brightly ] You’re late getting up. You must be tired after everything. Do you want some breakfast?

Ren: [ She swallows thickly before replying. ] I’ll go with you, okasan.

[ Asuka wilts a little and does not turn around. ]

Asuka: So you heard that?

[ Ren nods even though her mother still won’t look at her. ]

Asuka: That is very sweet of you, Ren-chan, but I don’t think I will attend. [ straightening up and grabbing another dish to wash ] You can have the tickets. You could take Kai.

Ren: [ putting her hand on her mother’s shoulder ] Please go with me.
Asuka: I’m not… [ She stops washing the dish and dries her hands ] I don’t think I can.

[ Ren digs her fingers into Asuka’s shoulder without meaning to and then lets her go. ]

Asuka: [ turning around ] Please take the tickets. We paid good money for them and someone should be able to enjoy them.

[ Ren hugs her mother and Asuka hugs her back, stroking her daughter’s back. ]

Asuka: I’ll be alright, Ren-chan.

Ren: You can change your mind any time, okay?

Asuka: [ letting go ] Thank you. Here, let me get them for you.

[ Asuka bustles over to the other side of the kitchen and pulls the tickets out of a drawer. She hands them to her daughter and Ren looks down at them. They say: “Litlenoid Meteor Shower Viewing at the Mossdeep Space Center: Admit One” and there is cute a litleo chibi on each. ]

Asuka: Are you hungry, Ren-chan?

[ The truth is that Ren is anything but hungry at the moment, but she looks over at the breakfast her mother as already made and nods. ]

Ren: Yeah.

---

**Scene 2:** [ Ren eats breakfast and talks to her mother about other things. Ren’s pokemon wander downstairs and Ren washes the rest of the dishes. When Asuka goes to her office to write, Ren and her pokemon leave for Kai’s house. Tāraki and the others wait with Kai’s pokemon who are already out in the yard while Ren goes inside. She makes small talk with Kai and his mother for a while until Kai notices how distressed she is and the two of them go outside. ]

Kai: What happened? What’s wrong?

Ren: It’d just—I, uh… [ Ren takes a deep breath and sighs. ] I overheard my parents having an argument this morning. Well not an argument exactly. You know how Mossdeep Space Center is hosting a viewing of the Litlenoid Meteor Shower?

Kai: Yeah. Cosmo and Keanu are going to speak at it.

Ren: Yeah well, okasan really wanted to see it and otosan got tickets to go see it with her. It was kind of a big deal cuz he’s mostly too busy for us and— [ Ren has to stop and calm down a bit. ] So okasan was really excited to go and then otosan just bailed on her. [ gesturing wildly ] He’s the one who bought the fucking tickets in the first place! [ pulling at her hair ] He always does this! It makes me SO ANGRY!

[ Ren hauls off and kicks a stick in the yard. It snaps and half and the pieces go whizzing off in different directions. Her face is flushed and her breathing is erratic. Kai takes a step towards her. ]

Kai: I’m sorry. That’s really shitty.
Ren: Sorry. I just needed to vent. Maybe we should get out of here.

Kai: Want to go for a walk?

Ren: Yeah. [She whistles to her pokemon.] We’re going for a walk. You’re welcome to come.

[Jay and Tāraki jump up right away and the others follow at a more leisurely pace as they head for Route 101.]

Ren: I tried to get her to go with me instead, but she wouldn’t budge. She even gave me the tickets.

[Ren sniffs and wipes her nose. Tāraki butts his head against hers and she strokes him as he passes her to take the lead.]

Ren: I just don’t understand how he can hurt her like that. I know he loves us but he…[Growls.]

Kai: That doesn’t make it okay.

Ren: [yelling] Thank you! [clears her throat] But really, thank you. I was only ever able to talk to my therapist about this stuff before. She always said I had a right to be angry, but it helps to hear it from someone else too.

Kai: Of course. My dad is really busy too, but he always makes time for us.

[Ren looks away and they both fall quiet. Jay and Tāraki are walking a ways ahead of them gabbing jovially. The rest of the pokemon trail behind. Pohaku is very curious about everything and Dusty does his best to explain. Ruby perches on Lily as the cradily crawls along. Zach, who is now a raichu edges up to Ao.]

Zach: Excuse me, Ao, but I was wondering how Teka is doing.

Ao: She’s well. She’s a lot more comfortable with all of us now. I guess it has been a while since you’ve seen her. I’ll talk to Ren and see if we can fix that.

Zach: Oh, thank you so much.

Ao: No problem, Zach. I’m sure Teka would love to see you, especially since you evolved.

[Ao smiles and Zach’s tail waves back and forth with happy nervous energy. Ao looks off into the distance.]

Ao: I miss Mele. Maybe we can visit him on set sometime.

Akahata: So he finally got to you, huh?

Ao: [coloring] Yeah. [wistful smile] I didn’t think I’d ever feel this way about a male.

Naihi: Oh, do you prefer females?

Ao: Yes. Lots of the males in my pack were interested in me, but I never found them appealing. All the previous loves in my life have been female.

[Ao and Akahata share an awkward glance and smile. Naihi watches them carefully before straightening up.]

Naihi: It seems as though there is still much for me to catch up on. [Both Akahata and Ao color a
Aka, would you be willing to show me that pool you spoke about?

Akahata: Sure. It isn’t too far. [ to Ao and the rest ] Um, we’ll catch up with you later.

[ Akahata and Naihi split off into the woods. Meanwhile, Ren and Kai are talking again. ]

Ren: I just hate how powerless it makes me feel. I saved the world! I’m the Hoenn League Champion for Arceus’s sake! But there’s nothing I can do about this.

[ Ren droops and looks down. Kai looks sympathetic and then thoughtful for a moment. ]

Kai: You could always fire him. [ Ren looks at him incredulously. ] You’re the head of the League now. And if you fired him, then he’d have to spend more time at home.

[ Ren laughs and gives Kai a playful shove. ]

Kai: I’m just saying it’s a possibility.

[ Tāraki and Jay have stopped ahead of them and Ren and Kai stop too. ]

Kai: What’s up?

Jay: This is where we had our first battle.

Tāraki: And we want a re-match! Just me versus Jay.

Jay: But with our mega forms this time.

Ren: You up for it, Kai?

Kai: Yeah.

Ren: Let’s do it!

Tāraki: Whoo!

[ The other pokemon form a ring around the battlefield while Ren and Kai take their places on either side. They sync up their breathing with Tāraki and Jay before activating their keystones. They mega evolve at the same time in a burst of light and wind. Tāraki is faster and slashes Jay with a dragon claw. Jay takes the hit but then knocks him back with a blaze kick. Before he has time to recover, she glows brightly and launches at him. Tāraki just barely manages to dodge the brave bird and Jay stumbles to a stop. Tāraki slashes across her back with another dragon claw and she almost falls. Tāraki goes for another hit but Jay’s ability has made her faster and she nails Tāraki in the jaw with a sky uppercut. He stumbles back and she goes for a low sweep, knocking him clean off his feet. She jumps up and comes down on him with a blaze kick, but he catches her and flings her away. They recover at the same time. Jay charges another brave bird and Tāraki pushes all of his power into a dragon claw. They run at each other and the light from the collision almost blinds everyone. Miraculously, Tāraki withstands the hit by using his dragon claw as a shield. He trembles from the strain, but manages to throw his arms apart, catching Jay across the shoulder. She stumbles and falls to one knee, clutching her shoulder. A moment later, she drops back to her normal form and Kai droops with her. Tāraki drops his mega form a few seconds later and Ren slumps as well. The four of them just pant for a minute. ]

Ren: Whoo, you almost had us there.

Kai: You two are so tough, it’s crazy. [ deep breath ] But I guess I should expect that from the
Ren: Damn right. [ *deep sigh* ] I don’t think I’m going to get tired of hearing that anytime soon.

Kai: [ *smiles* ] And she’s back.

Ren: [ *soft smile* ] Thank you.

Kai: Anytime. [ *He straightens up and his back gives an audible crack.* ] Maybe not *any* time.

[ Ren chuckles and hugs him. They get out potions and spray their starters down. ]

Kai: So, what should we do now?

Ren: I don’t know. I don’t want to go home.

Kai: Want to go to Wally’s?

Ren: Yeah.

---

**Scene 3:** [ *Meanwhile Akahata and Naihi are walking quietly through the woods together. Most of the wild pokemon move off at the sight of them, although a few are curious to see an absol. Akahata hops over a stream and Naihi turns to see it running into an estuary. She pauses for a moment to take in the sight and Akahata wait for her. Naihi clears the stream with a graceful bound and they continue on their way.* ]

Naihi: Were you and Ikki ever a pair?

Akahata: No. We were very close though. But she wanted eggs and I never really felt that way about her.

Naihi: What about you and Ao?

Akahata: She was into me for a long time, probably since the beginning, but it took me a while to notice. I assumed it was an admiration crush, but it went well beyond that. We never spoke about it outright, but I think she knew I didn’t feel the same way about her. I’ve always thought of her as a sister.

[ *They emerge from the woods into a clearing with a deep, round pool. It is as still and clear as the day Ren and Kai first met there.* ]

Naihi: But that is not how you think of me?

Akahata: [ *sitting down by the edge of the pool* ] No.

Naihi: [ *sitting next to her* ] Akahata, I’m so grateful to you for giving me a second chance and for everything you’ve taught me. I find it hard to imagine myself without you there beside me.

Akahata: [ *a little sarcastic but tail wagging* ] That’s a nice change.

Naihi: I can never apologize enough for what I did. I can’t believe how blind I was. I—
Akahata: You already have. You showed me what my life could be. I’m happier now than I’ve ever been. That’s enough.

Naihi: I am glad you think so and grateful that I could do something in return for all you’ve done for me.

Akahata: It wasn’t—

Naihi: It was something Aka! You have made me so much more that I was when we first met. Over the past few months, you showed me all kinds of things I had never known before: loyalty and kindness and selflessness. I am a better teammate and friend because of you, not to mention a better battler. I cared about the world before, but never anyone. Now I do. I care about them for who they are instead of what they are. And I am more whole for that. It means more to me than my original quest ever did. So you see, I could never repay you if I tried every day until I die.

Akahata: [flushing] I think you may be giving me a little too much credit.

Naihi: The others helped too, but you were the wake-up call I needed. [placing her paw over Akahata’s] I love you. [Akahata looks at her and he tail goes still in shock.] I want to spend the rest of my days at your side giving you all I can give.

[ Akahata’s tail wags furiously and she has to swallow hard before she can respond. ]

Akahata: I love you too and… I’d like that.

[ She touches noses with Naihi and the absol nuzzles her in return. After a bit Akahata rests her forehead against Naihi’s, tail still wagging. ]

Akahata: You’re so dramatic.

[ They both laugh, first quietly and then louder until they scatter the birds from the surrounding trees. Pan up and out as Nahi shifts to lean on Akahata. ]

---

**Scene 4:** [ Ren and Kai arrive at Wally’s house in Petalburg and knock on the door. Wally answers it and blinks in surprise. ]

Wally: H-hey. What are you guys doing here?

Ren: I had a bad morning.

Wally: Oh no. What happened?

Ren: I’ll tell you about it later.

Kai: Sorry to surprise you like this.

Wally: That’s okay. Come in. [holding the door open for them] I was just watching some TV. My parents are at work.

[ They walk down the hall to the living room where a large screen is playing the news. ]
Ren: You’re watching the news?

Wally: Yep. They’ve been talking about you all morning. Check it out.

[Ren catches sight of herself on the screen as she sits down on the couch And Kai and Wally sit down on either side of her.]

Wally: Apparently so many people were watching the livestream in Johto that it crashed for a bit. People even had viewing parties and stuff. Look.

[On screen Ren sees people gathered at the small temple in her hometown, lighting incense and leaving offerings. They even play a clip of some of her old school friends being interviewed, but she can’t hear what they are saying because the Anglic-speaking newscaster is talking over it.]

Wally: They’ve been playing clips of the championship battles and the interviews after. They played your Dual Pulse episodes twice. I wouldn’t be surprised if you get a request for your gym battle videos.

[Next the news switches over to discussing Ren’s run-ins with Magma. The trio continues to watch quietly as Wally’s pokemon slip outside to join the others. The segment moves on to talking about Ren’s involvement in the Rusturf Tunnel deal. Hauoro and Kauri talk about Ren for a bit and there is even a clip of Terra, who seems to still be working construction. Ren stares at the screen, face slipping into a more and more perturbed expression as time goes on. Kai glances over at her.]

Kai: Are you okay?

Ren: Yeah, this is just mega surreal. I guess I should have expected it but…

Wally: I bet. It’s a little weird for me and they’ve barely even mentioned me.

[Ren sinks back into the couch with a sigh and stares up at the ceiling as the news continues to drone on in the background. Kai and Wally look at her and then at each other.]

Wally: You want to watch anime instead?

Ren: Yes please.

[Wally puts on Cardcaptor Sakura, which Ren watched reruns of as a child. They watch a few episodes and Ren smiles again. They take a break for lunch and Ren tells Wally about her parents while he gets out food and Kai goes to let the pokemon in.]

Ren: [as they clean up after] You know, I think maybe you two should take the meteor shower tickets.

Wally: What?

Kai: But what about you and your mom? She might change her mind.

Ren: I doubt it and I don’t really want to go without her. If she does change her mind, I’m pretty sure I could replace them. Cosmo really owes me for the life saving and, uh… some other stuff. I’m sure he could get us in.

Wally: Are you sure—

Ren: Positive. [pulling the tickets out of her pocket] Please take them. I don’t really want to look at them. You’d be doing me a favor.
Ren: Think of it as a thank you for sticking around through all of my shit.

Kai: You don’t need to thank us.

Ren: I want to. [ waving the tickets at Wally ] Come on, this is like a once in a lifetime chance. It’s supposed to be spectacular.

Wally: [ blushing deeply and unable to look at anyone ] So, um, Kai, will you go with me?

Kai: Yeah, of course. I actually really wanted to go.

Ren: So, do you have any video games?

Wally: Yeah, they’re all up in my room though.

Ren: You two go ahead. I better take this.

[ Wally and Kai head upstairs while Ren walks outside and accepts the call. ]

Ren: Moshimoshi.

Dizzy: Good morning, Ren. Is this a good time?

[ Ren’s eyebrows raise at the Anglic and she responds in kind, though a bit slower than she would normally. ]

Ren: As good a time as any, I suppose. What can I help you with?

Dizzy: I was wishing—hoping? You may agree to learn—help me to learn Anglic, if you can spare the time.

Ren: I guess. I mean, I may be busy, but I’m sure we can arrange something. You know, that wasn’t so bad. I thought you didn’t know much Anglic.

Dizzy: Still true and none to read or to write. I have no skill in language, but I learned a little as a child. I have been staying with Kaspa since we returned. Valiance is fluent and has been helping me.

Ren: She lives at the Champion palace too?

Dizzy: From time to time, yes.

Ren: Wow. It must be one big family there.

Dizzy: [ grunts ] Kaspa has many spouses for an unmarried woman.

Ren: [ laughs ] Why did I never read that in the tabloids? [ Dizzy is silent on the other end. ] Anyway, why the sudden interest, if you don’t mind me asking?
Dizzy: I want to be able to speak to Wallace without a translator.

Ren: Oh, are you planning on visiting?

Dizzy: Yes. I was invited to your, ehhh… party?

Ren: The coronation ball?

Dizzy: Hai— er, yes. Wallace will be there, so I want to be able to speak some Anglic to him.

Ren: Ohhh . OH! Do you, um, like him?

Dizzy: I would like to know him? He is, errrr, very beautiful. I did not make great impression, I think. But I hear he likes men, so maybe some small chance? I will try my best. I have been training the feebas he gave to me. We hope that she will evolve before the ball to show to him.

Ren: Awww! That’s so sweet! I will absolutely help you! As soon as I have my schedule worked out a little better, I’ll send you some times we can practice together.

Dizzy: Dōmo arigatōgozaimasu.

Ren: You are welcome.

Dizzy: Ah, hai, thank you.

Ren: Aw man, I am killing it today.

Dizzy: Eh?

Ren: Sorry. Talk to you soon, Dizzy.

Dizzy: Goodbye.

[ Ren hangs up her nav and hugs Tāraki, who is hanging out with Jay and Kihei nearby. She talks to them for a bit, and then looks up at Wally’s window. She asks Kihei a question and he nods. Ren waves to the pokemon as she goes back inside. ]

Scene 5: [ Far away in Slateport, Archie is doing pushups in his apartment living room. He is wearing sweatpants but no shirt and his anchor pendant clinks against the floor every time he lowers himself. Beyond him, a cloth hammock hangs on the small balcony, swaying gently in the sea breeze. Archie finishes his set and wipes his brow with a towel while he recovers on the floor. He gets up, slinging the towel over his shoulder and turns his TV on. He is stretching when he hears a creak. He turns to see Zinnia sitting in the hammock on his balcony. Archie starts and Zinnia grins wickedly at him. He looks around and walks slowly over to the open doorway. He leans against the jamb, trying to look relaxed, but crosses his arms over his chest. ]

Archie: Who are you?

Zinnia: Never you mind, Archer. All you need to know is I’m here for your keystone.

Archie: And you expect me to just give it to you?
Zinnia: It’s for a good cause.

Archie: And what cause is that, exactly?

Zinnia: [ big smile ] Why, saving the world of course.

Archie: I can’t tell if you’re joking or just nuts, but I’m not interested. Why don’t you go sneak into Steven Stone’s home and see if he’ll go for it?

Zinnia: Oh I might, but I’m gonna need yours as well. We can do this the easy way or the hard way, Archer. Your choice.

Archie: [ straightening up and looming over her ] You think you can intimidate me, short stack?

Zinnia: Heavens no, machismo. But I’m confident I could take you in a fight.

Archie: [ cocking back a fist ] We’ll see about that.

Zinnia: Are you sure you want to do this? You’d be much better off just handing it over. Ask your buddy, Maxie.

Archie: [ taking a step forward and yelling, face turning red ] WHAT DID YOU DO TO HIM?

Zinnia: [ unflinching ] Nothing. He knew better than to pick a fight from a hospital bed.

[ Archie roars and charges her in a blind rage. Zinnia sidesteps, pulling the hammock with her. Unbenounced to Archie, she had already unhooked one side and was holding the chain in her hand to keep it up. Archie trips right into the railing, but comes after her the moment he rights himself. She is in the corner of the balcony with the folded hammock behind her. She ducks under his swing and darts around him, wrapping his legs as he turns. He can’t walk but has her pinned in the corner. Before he can hit her, she jabs him in the nose, breaking it with an audible crack. He grabs it as blood starts to trickle out. She runs around him again, this time wrapping his chest and arms before jumping over the balcony railing. The hammock snaps taught and Archie is slammed against the railing by the counterweight. He struggles, but Zinnia has already hooked the chain around one of the beams beneath the balcony. She climbs back up over the rail and dusts off her hands. ]

Zinnia: That was fun.

Archie: [ writhing in his bonds but unable to turn away from the railing ] You’ll pay for this! And if you laid a hand on Maxie, I’ll kill you! I’ll—

[ Zinnia yanks on his necklace, choking the rest of his words. She lets go just long enough to let him get a breath before reaching around to grab the anchor. The chain is too strong for her to snap off, so she holds it tight against his throat while she pulls out a knife and sets to prying the keystone out of it. ]

Zinnia: I can’t believe you still care about him too. There must have been more there than I thought. My assumption was always that all those months at sea together made him lower his standards.

[ Archie growls and tries to shake her. She kneels him in the spine and he slumps. ]

Zinnia: Easy, big guy. I’m almost done.

[ The keystone pops out and she lets go of Archie’s chain. He gasps raggedly and coughs. She holds the keystone up to the light and turns it to make sure it is whole. ]
Zinnia: It’s all coming clear now. I always wondered how an engineer and a sailor became two of the biggest activists in the region. Who would have thought Magma and Aqua were born of a tragic love story?

Archie: [coughing] Shut up.

Zinnia: [stowing her knife and keystone] Sorry about the rough treatment, Archer, but you didn’t leave me much choice. [climbing up on the railing] This is for the best, I promise. You might even get it back someday. And if not… [she shrugs] maybe you can take comfort in the knowledge you helped save the world. That is what you wanted, right?

[Zinnia jumps off the balcony and lands on her noivern’s back. Archie slumps against the railing as she sails away and finds that his bonds have loosened ever so slightly. He heaves mightily against them again and then rests for a moment before making himself as small as possible and wriggling free. He strings his hammock back up and lays down in it, looking out over the sea.]

---

**Scene 6:** [That night Ren is climbing into bed when she gets a notification on her nav. It is a text from an unknown number. Her pokemon are all settling down for the night as well. Akahata and Naihi are curled up together and Tāraki has made himself a nest out of boughs by the foot of her bed. Ren makes herself a little more comfortable before investigating.]

Text: Hello Ren. This is Josh. I found your number in my back pocket so I figured it was ok to text you. Let me kno if it’s not. I just wanted to congratulate you on becoming champion. I watched it on tv with Hart & Brent. It was really amazing and kinda terrifying. Thanks for never using your full strength on me. And also for saving the world. I never thanked you for that right?

Josh: And thanks for giving me ur number. It was rly nice of u.

[Ren chuckles a little at the awkwardness of the messages, but she smiles from ear to ear as she types up a response.]

Ren: Thanks and you’re welcome. I was sort of hoping you’d get up the nerve sooner so I could invite you to the championship.

Josh: Srry

Ren: Nbd. You’re not too late for my coronation ball though. Want to come? I’ll buy you a suit if you need one. I’m salaried now ;)

Josh: You’d use ur plus 1 on me??? But you have friends and stuff

Ren: I’m the champ. I can invite as many people as I want.

Josh: Right

Ren: Hart and Brent can come too if they promise to behave.

Josh: I think that would be too much for me, but thnx for offering.

Ren: Alright. But there is free food. Just something to consider.
Ren: How are you doing? I take it you, H&B escaped the law?

Josh: Yep. We got an apartment in Lilycove. It’s a bit cramped with all the pokemon, but not bad. I need another job before I can get my own place.

Ren: Any ideas what you want to do?

Josh: U sort of inspired me to try being a serious trainer. I’ve always liked training and I might be good at it. Idk. Fang thinks we could.

Ren: You’re a really solid trainer. You should totally go for it. You could get your first 2-3 badges easy with just fang and shade.

Josh: I caught a mawile while u were fighting groudon and she agreed to stick around. So that’s half a team to start.

Ren: That’s great! What’s her name?

Josh: Poppy

Ren: Cute! Maybe I can meet her sometime. And it’d be nice to say hi to fang and shade when I don’t have to fight them. Anything else going on?

Josh: I called my sister. We’ve hardly spoken in years and then I couldn’t call when Magma went undercover. I’m going to visit her soon.

Ren: I hope that goes well. I’m glad you got back in touch. Hart and Brent aren’t your brothers, right?

Josh: No. I have 4 brothers but idk where they are. We got split up when they took us away from our parents.

Ren: I’m so sorry.

Josh: It was probably for the best. They’re all older and were already starting to act like him. Also it’s easier to get adopted that way. That’s why they split me & Hannah up in the end.

Ren: So did you get adopted?

Josh: No. Just foster care.

Ren: Sorry. I don’t mean to pry.

Josh: It’s fine.

Ren: So what’s your sister like?

Josh: I don’t really know anymore. We were pretty close when we were young, but we never got to see each other after the orphanage.

[ There is a pause and then a bunch of messages start coming one right after another. ]

Josh: She used to call me all the time like it was her job to look after me even though she’s only a year older. We both had a hard time making friends so we talked to each other as much as they let us.
Josh: She used to collect stuff. Nothing valuable just little things. And when we talked she would tell me about the stuff she found and sometimes I would send her a button or smtn in the mail.

Josh: She’s rly smart. She used to read to me every night at the orphanage so I wouldn’t have nightmares. Sometimes she did it over the phone but we both got in trouble so she stopped.

Josh: She always asked if I was hungry or if they were letting me watch my cartoons.

Josh: And she would help me come up with ways to get back at the other foster kids when they bullied me. She’s sort of the reason I made friends with Hart & Brent.

Josh: But once I had them and she had her friends we didn’t need each other as much. A lot of time passed and we drifted apart.

Josh: I’m a little scared to meet her again. I don’t know what to say.

Ren: Just start by catching up. I’m sure you’ll find something in common. And you can tell her about all your crazy adventures if she’s not a snitch.

Josh: She’d nvr. She knos what it’s like. But I’m afraid she’ll blame herself for the things I did.

Ren: You could tell her you’re buddies with the Champion and leave out the criminal activity.

Josh: Ur terrible. You’d probably deny it just to make me look like an asshole.

Ren: I’d totally back you up! Here, you can have some pics to prove it.

[ She sends over the portraits she had taken with her pokemon back in Mauville along with a link to Kata’s instagram. ]

Ren: Just don’t leak those to the press… Or maybe do. I look great.

[ There is a long pause, probably while he looks at the photos and Ren decides she should probably dial back the flippancy a bit. ]

Ren: On a more serious note, I don’t think you need to worry. You did do some shitty things but you did a lot of good too. I might not be alive if it weren’t for you.

[ There is another long pause and Ren starts to type more when she gets a response. ]

Josh: Y r u so nice to me?

Ren: I want to be friends.

Josh: But why? You kno the bad stuff. And ur Champion now. U could be friends with whoever you want.

Ren: Call it a hunch but I think you may be a really decent person under there. Plus you can’t deny we had some real bonding moments too. I’m invested now whether I want to be or not.

Ren: And you’ve never done anything to hurt me. Just the opposite.

Ren: Maybe I still feel a bit guilty for the shitty stuff I did. Idk. I just want to give this a shot.

Josh: Ok. [ several seconds later ] Thanks.
Ren: No problem.

Josh: Maybe you'll be less scary as a friend.

Ren: I hope so but no promises!

Josh: Arceus. What did I sign up for?

---

**Scene 7:** [Steven is waiting in a comfortable armchair outside a private dressing room in a fancy department store. There are mirrors on every surface of the small, round room except the entrance and a curtain at the back. Steven is reading something on his nav and scrolls idly. ]

Ren: [from behind the curtain] Is there some reason this had to be in the morning? It seems like a weird time to be at a department store.

Steven: There are fewer people here in the mornings so you get better service. Also, we need to get a few hours of dance in later and you are not going to want to try things on after.

Ren: So are these the kinds of responsibilities I can look forward to performing for my successor?

Steven: Only if you’re as multi-talented and fabulously generous as I am.

[Ren cackles and Steven smiles to himself. Ren emerges from behind the curtain a few moments later wearing a slinky green dress. ]

Ren: How’s this?

[She gives him a turn and the hem swishes pleasingly. Steven regards her carefully before offering an opinion. ]

Steven: Lovely, but still not quite right. It would be nice to have some green to bring out your eyes and match Tāraki, but this is a bit much I think.

Ren: Yeah, this kind of makes me look like a serperior. [she sighs] I wonder how many dresses I’m going to have to try on. How many have I tried on already?

Steven: Eight. Want to try a suit? You’d look good in a suit.

Ren: Naw, then I’d have to wear a tie. Bluh.

Steven: Suit yourself.

Ren: [exaggerated gasp] A pun?!

Steven: One cannot live with Bes for so long without slip ping up now and then.

[Ren chuckles as she turns again, watching herself in the mirror this time. ]

Ren: I like the bounce this has to it, but maybe something with a wider skirt. This is hugging me too tight. [heading back in the dressing room] I want to be able to fit my spandex under here.
Steven: Under a gown?

Ren: Yeah! I love skirts and whatever, but I don’t want to have to think about how I sit and stuff. Plus they’re comfy and I’m used to them. This is going to be weird enough as it is.

Steven: I can’t deny there is a kind of logic to that, even if it offends my sensibilities somewhat.

Ren: Gee, thanks.

Steven: In seriousness, we are shopping for you, so it’s what you want that matters. I’m just here for aesthetic purposes.

Ren: [laughing] You are good at that. But I value your opinion. You know what you’re talking about.

[Ren comes out again and turns around so that Steven can zip her the rest of the way up. This dress is strapless and has a fitted bodice. Ren adjusts it while Steven takes a step back to get a better look.]

Ren: [regarding herself in one of the mirrors] Wow, it created a bust where none previously existed. Magic. [Steven chuckles and she turns this way and that.] This is nice, but I am absolutely gonna stuff my face, so it’s out.

Steven: Well, you have plenty of options. Seems you look good in just about everything.

Ren: It’s the androgyny. I can rock whatever I want.

Steven: Mmhm. I’m glad you’re being so cooperative. It’s not what I expected.

Ren: Oh? Why’s that?

Steven: I’ve just never seen you in anything formal. I guess I assumed you were somewhat adverse to fashion. But now that I think about it, that’s not very fair. I didn’t dress like this out in the wilderness either.

Ren: It’s not something I care about overmuch, but dressing up is fun now and again. [She twirls around to see how the skirt moves.] Should we do something about my hair?

Steven: You could go short if you want a change.

Ren: That would help even things out. [looking at herself in the mirror and touching the scars on her face] But I guess I'm always going to be a little off kilter.

Steven: Own it the way you always have. That fire of yours will shine through anything.

[Ren meets Steven’s eyes in the mirror and smiles brightly, coloring just a little.]

Ren: I think I'll keep it like this. Maybe just pin up the long side to make it a bit more formal.

[She gathers up her long hair and waits for him to unzip the dress. She turns to face him again, holding her hair up at the back of her head.]

Steven: I like it.

[They are smiling at each other when the saleswoman returns with some more dresses and Ren drops her hair. The saleswoman pretends not to have seen anything.]
Saleswoman: [ showing the dresses to Ren and Steven ] I have a few more I think you may like. Remember, if there’s a fit issue, we have some wonderful tailors on staff.

Steven: Try the blue one next.

Ren: Okay. [ taking it from the saleswoman ] Thank you.

[ Ren heads back behind the curtain to change. ]

Saleswoman: You’re welcome. [ hanging up the other dresses ] How did things go while I was away?

Steven: All excellent selections, but none we loved.

Saleswoman: Hopefully one of these is right.

[ They wait patiently for Ren to reemerge. She steps out from behind the curtain wearing a blue dress with an asymmetrical hem. It is sleeveless with a scoop neck in the front but is open in the back. The dress is red at the bottom and fades into the blue above like a sunset. Ren spins and the fabric flutters. ]

Ren: [ admiring her reflection ] I like this one. [ turning back to Steven ] What do you think?

Steven: You’re beautiful, Ren. I think our work here is done.

[ Ren flushes deeply and smiles despite herself, clasping her hands behind her back and swaying giddly. Steven smiles back for a moment before he notices the saleswoman looking at them. ]

Steven: We’ll take it. Thank you so much for your help.

---

**Scene 8:** [ Steven’s aerodactyl touches down in Littleroot and Ren slides down off its back. Ren thanks Steven and waves as he takes off again. She drifts dreamily over to the Birch’s door and knocks. Much to her surprise, Wally’s gallade opens it. ]

Ren: Kihei? What are you… [ Ren looks past him and sees Prof. Birch and his wife talking to a police officer in the living room ] What happened? Are they—

Kihei: [ telempathy ] They are alright. Courtney from Team Magma attacked them. Jay and I got back in time to chase her off, but she took both of their keystones. Why don’t you come upstairs.

[ Ren follows the gallade quickly up to Kai’s room. Jay is standing guard at the door but lets her in. Kai and Wally are sitting on Kai’s bed with Wally’s delcatty laying across their laps. ]

Ren: Hey, are you two okay?

Wally: Yeah.

Ren: What happened? Did Courtney really…

Kai: The keystones are gone. It’s all my fault.
Wally: No it’s not!

Kai: I should have just stood up to her. I—

Wally: [putting his hand on Kai’s arm] You were trying to make sure I didn’t get hurt. [looking away] I put us both in danger.

Kai: If it weren’t for you, who knows what would have happened. [putting his hand over Wally’s] It’s okay…

[They notice Ren looking confused and Wally explains.]

Wally: All the pokemon went down to the water. It was just the two of us here. And when Courtney broke in and tried to grab my necklace, I just kind of snapped. [rubbing the back of his head] I threw her into a wall with that technique you showed me, but that just made her mad. She blocked us in with her pokemon.

Kai: But you also contacted Kihei, so our pokemon were already on their way back. And Atiru got here first.

Wally: Yeah, but he couldn’t fight all her pokemon by himself or even get inside. So she had us both pinned, and Kai did the only sensible thing and tossed her his keystone and talked me into giving up mine before she killed us.

Kai: Then the rest of our pokemon got back.

Wally: But she wouldn’t have left without the keystones and she had a lot of pokemon with her, more than six. And she flew off on this huge crobat. It was odd…

Ren: I’ve never seen her use a crobat. Maxie had a giant one but… She has his pokemon! But why didn’t she just take his keystone? Why does she need two?

Kai: She kept yelling about azaleas and “making her pay” but she wasn’t making any sense. Maybe she thinks she can have a stronger mega if she has more stones? I don’t know.

Ren: [growling] I’m going to get your keystones back and put Courtney in a cell right beside Maxie!

Wally: Can’t the police—

Ren: I’m Champion now! It’s my responsibility to make sure no one that crazy is running around with a keystone and a bunch of powerful pokemon.

Kai: Do the police get to help at least?

Ren: Of course. But I’m tagging along when they find her. [She takes a deep breath and lets out a sigh to calm down.] I’m really sorry about this. I’m sorry I wasn’t here.

Kai: We’ll be okay.

Wally: Don’t worry about it. None of us saw this coming.

[Ren comes over to sit in Kai’s desk chair and Wally strokes his delcatty, who starts purring again. They all just sit in silence for a while.]

Kai: So, how was your day?
Scene 9: [ Ren is walking through the Petalburg Woods with Tāraki, Akahata, Naihi, Ao, Kata and Kōtai. They are all following a shroomish that looks a lot like Putenga once did. They emerge into a clearing where a breloom is sparring with three shroomish. The breloom calls a halt and turns to face Ren and company. ]

Putenga: Ren! You all finally decided to stop by, huh?

Ren: I’m sorry we didn’t come sooner. I’ve been really busy.

Putenga: I believe that. So, did you all save the world?

Tāraki: Sure did! We beat Groudon and we’re League Champions! [ chest puffed out and arms crossed ] How’s that for “hyperactive idiot”?

Putenga: [ grinning ] Not bad. [ more genuine ] I was really hoping to hear that. Congratulations.

Ren: Thanks, Tenga. So what have you been up to?

Putenga: Oh, you know: deposing a tyrant, setting up a new world order, ruling the forest…

Ren: Wow, you’ve been busy too. Tell us all about it.

Putenga: Well, first you all need a little background. When I was growing up here, a big battle broke out between the vigoroths, poochyenas and mightyenas. Usually they’re all pretty solitary and nobody really knows how it started, but there were skirmishes for days and it sort of turned into this one big free-for-all. Other Pokémon go caught in the crossfire and it was a huge mess. But sometime during it, one vigoroth battled enough to evolve. Soon he got the other vigoroths to listen to him and they all banded together to drive the poochyena out. It was sort of nice for a while, especially for the pikachu and zigzagoon, but the slaking totally shifted the balance of the forest and things started changing fast. First we were overrun by zigzagoons because they didn’t have to worry about mightyenas. And they’re generalists, so they were eating up everyone’s food. So the slaking started helping all the slakoths train and evolve and suddenly we were overrun with vigoroths. They drove the zigzagoons back a bit which was good, but vigoroth are way more interested in eating shroomish, so you can picture how that went.

Ren: Yikes! I’m so sorry.

Putenga: Well, they never got me cuz I wasn’t stupid. But things were pretty bad. The slaking was stronger than everyone and he made everyone pay tribute and kept all the slakoths and vigoroths dominant.

Ren: So you came back to fix things?

Putenga: I really liked being a battler and I wanted to go all the way to the Elite Four with you, but this was always sort of in the back of my mind. First I wanted to make sure I could do it, so I fought a slaking in your father’s gym. Once I knew I could do something, I wasn’t sure if I wanted to come back here. But after Oro helped all those whismur in Mt. Rose, I realized that this was my responsibility.

Tāraki: So was the slaking tough?
Putenga: [laughing] No! I floored that pathetic sloth in about a minute flat right in front of all his minions. Then I flattened a bunch of vigoroth too because they didn’t like that. No one crosses me anymore, I can tell you.

Ren: So are things back to normal?

Putenga: As normal as it’s gonna get with me running the place. Some of the poochyenas came back and most of the vigoroths can stay. Things are settling back out again. [gesturing to the shroomish] But these three are my apprentices and we’re going to make sure nothing like that ever happens again.

Ren: That’s really awesome Putenga.

Putenga: Yeah. Thank you for making it possible.

[Ren hugs her former breloom and she taps Ren’s shoulders with her short arms.]

Putenga: So, would any of you be interested in showing the shroomish here some moves?

Tāraki: Hell yeah!

[The gang spends the rest of the day in the woods with Putenga. They train with the shroomish a bit and one evolves to the delight of all. They visit the moss rock and the shroomish glen, which is now the base of operations, and Putenga sends them off with a bunch of nuts and berries.]

---

**Scene 10:** [Ren’s Coronation Ball is held in Mauville City rooftop park a few weeks after her championship match. There are long banquet tables full of food, a dance floor set up on one side and live music provided by a human and pokemon band. The entire Hoenn League is in attendance as well as politicians, Lorekeepers, League benefactors and several foreign Champions. Ren arrives with Kai, Wally and her parents. She is wearing the dress she picked out with Steven and has the long side of her hair braided into a bun at the back of head. The short side has grown out to cheek length and she has it tucked behind her ear, leaving her scar exposed. Tāraki has silver cuffs at his wrists and ankles to match the ones Ren is wearing as well as a plate necklace. His scales have been polished to a shine and Jay and Kihei’s feathers are perfectly preened. Ren's parents soon split off and the rest follow her to the food. Kai and Wally are both tuxedos and Kai has gotten a shorter haircut while Wally's shock of green hair remains as fluffy and unruly as ever. Tāraki and kenta find the fruit platter and dig in while Jay and Kihei pick at the array of roasted nuts and meats. Wally studiously avoids making eye contact with anyone while he puts a few things on his plate next to Ren, who is gleefully piling on everything in sight. Kai stands by fiddling nervously with his tie.]

Ren: Kai, you look really good. Stop fighting with that and eat something. You'll feel better.

Kai: I don’t think I did this right. It looks crooked.

[Wally puts his plate down and comes to Kai’s rescue.]

Wally: [gently pushing Kai’s hands aside] Let me. It’s easier to do on someone else.

[Kai flushes a little and swallows as Wally undoes his tie. Ren is watching at first but soon becomes distracted by the food and sways happily in place. Wally finishes and his fingers linger for a moment]
Kai: [looking down] How did you learn to tie it so well?

Wally: I watched a bunch of tutorials.

Kai: Well thank you.

Wally: [smiling] Sure.

They all eat for a bit and a few people stop by to talk to Ren, but mostly the trio just people watches from the corner. Kenta spies Kaspa’s typhlosion and another Champion’s chesnaught and he and the other pokemon go over to say hi, leaving their trainers alone. Ren leads her friends over to the champagne since they seem intimidated by the bar. Kai and Wally start talking more after they have drunk a little. Ren gets Kai to tell a story and pretty soon he has Wally in stitches. Kai smiles, looking a great deal more relaxed as Wally pulls out his inhaler to recover. Wally glances at the dance floor once he can breath well again, but doesn’t say anything. At this point, Ren decides she has greased the wheels enough and should maybe give Wally some time alone with Kai.

Ren: I should probably go introduce myself to some of these people.

Kai: O-okay.

Wally: Right. Go get ’em.

Ren: Have fun you two.

Ren walks off not knowing where to start, but soon spots Terra and Moana not far off and heads for them. Terra is in a long red dress with lots of fluttering trim made to look like fire. Moana's dress is shorter and a deep sea blue.

Ren: Terra! Moana!

[They both smile as Ren comes over to them. Terra looks super happy and Moana seems a bit nervous.]

Terra: Hey Ren! Thanks so much for inviting us.

Ren: Sure thing. So how do you like my party?

Terra: I’s great! We were just talking to the Sinnoh Champion. She’s so nice. I want to see if I can find Mr. Stone and thank him for everything.

Ren: I could introduce you if you want. He’s much warmer in person. How are you holding up, Moana?

Moana: I feel like I'm gonna break something. This is so much fancier than I imagined.

Ren: Don’t worry. You could totally knock over a tray of champagne glasses and be fine this is all on the government’s dime.

Moana: I'll keep that in mind.

Terra: [leaning in and cupping a hand to her mouth] She’s scared of all the rich people.

Moana: I am not.
Terra: You so are. [grinning] It's cute.

Ren: I love the subtle look you two have going on.

Terra: Thanks! I was a little afraid to wear it, but Moana told me I should just do it.

Moana: And I'm regretting it just a little. [glancing nervously around] I didn’t think all the police chiefs would be here.

Terra: Relax, they have no idea who I am. [playful] You’re not gonna turn me in are you?

Moana: No. You look so hot though. How long is this thing?

[Terra laughs.]

Ren: Should I leave you two alone?

Moana: Naw, I’ll behave since it’s your big night and all.

Terra: What if I don't?

[Terra kisses her on the neck and Moana flushes deeply and splutters.]

Terra: She acts all cool but she's easy to fluster.

Moana: She just knows exactly how to rile me up.

Terra: How’s being the center of attention?

Ren: Not my favorite but possible. Did you try the food yet?

Terra: I don’t know what half of it is but it's good. Except for the caviar. [She pulls a face.]

Moana: I liked it. They even have the sustainably sourced kind.

Terra: Then you better load up here because that shit costs a fortune.

Ren: Go ahead and swipe a can. I’ll cover for you.

Moana: Ahh! You’re the best! Let’s do it! You in Ter?

Terra: Of course!

[The three of them make for the least busy table of hors d’oeuvres and Ren and Terra block Moana from view as she swipes two cans from the stack.]

Ren: Where did you put it?

Moana: This dress has pockets.

Ren: Awesome!

Moana: Right?

[She puts her hands in her pockets and sways happily while the other two look on with envy. Something across the room catches Moana’s attention and she stops swaying.]
Moana: Hey Ren, I’ve got a question: are your other two friends a thing?

Ren: Not yet but I’m doing my best. We’re not really sure if Kai’s straight or not.

Terra: So Wally needs some help with him, huh?

Ren: Yeah. They’re both pretty shy so it’s tough.

Terra: I have an idea. We’ll catch up with you later, Ren. Come on, Mo.

Ren: Wait, I’ll take you over to Mr. Stone first, give Wally a few more minutes to get up the nerve.

---

Scene 11: [ Meanwhile, in another corner of the venue, Wallace is talking to the other Lorekeepers, including Zinnia. The other male Lorekeeper is in a suit as are most of the men at the party, but Wallace has selected a less traditional outfit. He is wearing a fitted, sleeveless bodice embroidered with pearls and a pair of flowing pants. A long diaphanous scarf and matching ribbon hanging from the bun at the top of his head help give the impression of running water as they move with him. Zinnia is in a strapless dress trimmed with red and has a coil of damascus steel running up her calf from her ankle. It has holes at regular intervals along its length and her keystone fitted into the top hole. Her hair is down rather than in its customary ponytail and she is wearing her Lorekeeper cape over her shoulders. Wallace spots Steven going by and excuses himself to go talk to him. ]

Wallace: Darling, do you see Ren anywhere?

Steven: Not at the moment. Do you need her for something?

Wallace: We should start introducing her to some people. Thus far she’s only been hanging out with her friends and now I’ve lost track of her.

Steven: Oh, give her a moment to enjoy herself. We still have plenty of time for that.

Wallace: Not for all of them. You know how much the defence minister hates these things.

[ Pan over to Flannery, who is lurking in a nearby corner next to a pile of champagne glasses. She is nursing a drink and looking rather down. Wattson comes up beside her, smiling jovially as always. ]

Wattson: How are you, Flannery my dear?

Flannery: Alright, I guess. How are the grandkids?

Wattson: I just gave little Tommy an electrike for his birthday. I think he’ll make a great trainer one day. But how’s your life? Do you have a boyfriend yet?

Flannery: [ tired sigh ] No, Watt. I don’t.

Wattson: Why not? A lovely, accomplished young woman like you should have no trouble.

Flannery: We’ve talked about this. I don’t want a boyfriend. I’m gay.

Wattson: Maybe you just haven’t found the right one yet.
Flannery: I’m never going to find the right one. I—

Wattson: Don’t say that! You know when I was your age—

[ Flannery groans and wipes her hands down her face as Wattson continues to blither. Suddenly Asuna appears behind them and grabs Wattson’s shoulder. He stops mid-sentence, turning to look at her. ]

Asuna: I’m only going to say this once, so you had better pay attention this time. She is never going to have a boyfriend because she is a lesbian. She. Dates. Women. It’s something someone with a genius level IQ should be able to understand.

[ She releases her grip on his shoulder and stalks off. They look after her for a moment before Wattson turns back to Flannery. ]

Wattson: I’m sorry.

Flannery: Thank you.

[ An awkward silence stretches between them. ]

Wattson: …So, do you have a girlfriend?

Flannery: [ gazing dejectedly into her glass ] No…

[ Suddenly Phoebe and Sidney appear out of a puff of lavender smoke on either side of her. Flannery jumps a bit and Wattson barely even has time to act startled as Phoebe shoulders her way between them. She and the sableye on her shoulder are in matching flower crowns, bracelets and anklets and both lack footwear. Remarkably Sidney is in a 3-piece suit, though an odd one with yellow striped lapels to match the vest and cropped sleeves and pants. ]

Phoebe: [ with two sardines held between her nose and upper lip in imitation of a mustache ] Cheer up, Flan!

Sidney: [ barely intelligible through the dozen or so carrot sticks shoved in his mouth to make it look as though he has a bunch of orange pegs for teeth ] Yeah, it’s a party.

[ Flannery endeavours mightily not to laugh for a second or two before breaking down while Wattson decides this is not his scene and wanders off. ]

Flannery: [ gasping ] Oh gods, stop!

Phoebe: [ scrunching her face even more to keep the slippery fish in place ] Stop what?

Sidney: [ tapping a carrot stick ] I brushed these before I got here, I swear.

[ Flannery laughs even louder, which makes Wallace notice what is going on. His eyes widen in horror and then narrow in irritation. He marches over and smacks Sidney in the back of the head which sends carrot pieces spewing everywhere. Phoebe’s sableye snatches the sardines out of the air as they fall from her face and eats them. ]

Wallace: What are you two doing? This is honestly the one night you have to behave!

Sidney: [ spitting out the rest of the carrots ] Aw, lighten up, Wallace. We were just trying to cheer Flan up.
Phoebe: We’re being good League mentors.

Wallace: What if one of the sponsors sees you? You’re going to make me go as gray as Steven.

Steven: Hey, I resemble that remark.

[ Flannery laughs. ]

Wallace: All I ask is that you act remotely civilized for another hour or two. It’s not an unreasonable request. Keep an eye on them, Steven. I’ll go find our wayward Champion.

Phoebe: [ as Wallace walks away ] Hey that’s right. You’re not our boss anymore. We don’t have to listen to you.

Steven: [ tired ] You never did anyway.

Sidney: Hey Steven, I think I saw some cherries over there.

Steven: [ suddenly alert ] Where?

[ Sidney points away down the buffet table and Steven takes off without a word. The other three cackle. ]

Flannery: Thanks guys.

Phoebe: No problem.

Flannery: Maybe we could find a Wallace approved way to have fun?

Sidney: Shots!

Flannery: [ whining ] Not again.

---

**Scene 12: [ Wallace finds Ren with her friends and calls her away from them. She says her goodbyes and walks over. ]**

Ren: Hey Wallace, what’s up?

Wallace: Ren, why are you hiding over here? The whole point of this party is for you to smooze.

[ Ren whines. Behind her Terra and Moana drag Kai and Wally onto the dance floor. ]

Wallace: You at least have to meet the prime minister. You’ll have meetings with him anyway.

Ren: Fine, fine. [ She looks around. ] Is that him?

Wallace: [ looking where she is pointing ] Ren, that is a buffet table.

Ren: But how can we be sure unless we question it?

Wallace: Very funny. We’ll get Steven and then he’ll introduce you to some of the people you need to know.
Ren grudgingly follows Wallace, glancing around for some kind of escape. Terra and Moana are now dancing with each other, leaving Kai and Wally to dance together. Kai has no idea what he’s doing, but Wally has consumed enough media that he at least knows where his hands are supposed to go. Both of them are blushing as Kai tentatively endeavors to copy the others around them and they sway together. Ren gives Terra and Moana the thumbs up and almost walks right into Wallace as he stops in his tracks.

Wallace: [ muttering under his breath ] Shit.

Ren follows his gaze and sees Dizzy a little ways off. He is looking over everyone’s heads, searching for someone. Wallace starts to head in a different direction and Ren grins, recognizing her chance.

Ren: [ waving ] Hey Dizzy! Over here!

Wallace: [ hissing ] Please don’t— oh gods…

Dizzy spots them easily since Wallace is so tall and stands out in a crowd. He hurries over and Wallace tries to pretend like wasn’t about to bolt.

Ren: Thank you so much for coming.

Dizzy: Good evening Ren and Wallace.

Wallace: Good evening.

Dizzy: I was hoping to find you here.

Wallace: Oh, uh, do you speak Anglic?

Dizzy: Not well, but I have been working to speak better. I wanted to be able to talk with you this time. I was very out of practice and afraid to say wrong things.

Wallace: Well, it was very kind of you to go through all of that trouble.

Dizzy: Trouble here means hardship?

Ren: More or less. He is thanking you for the effort you put in.

Dizzy: I understand. There is no need for thanks. It is not trouble when goal is worth effort. [ Wallace has no response to that and Ren winks at Dizzy. ] I wanted to be able to thank you for your gift with my own words. Thank you for entrusting one of your feebas to me. Opal and I are eager to show you the progress she has made.

Dizzy stares expectantly at Wallace and it takes him an embarrassing number of seconds to realize Dizzy is asking for permission.

Wallace: Oh, yes, I’d like to see Opal.

Dizzy whistles and two milotic slither through the crowd towards them. The smaller is Dizzy’s and she has a repeating heart pattern on her tail rather than diamonds like Wallace’s milotic who is accompanying her.

Peretau: Look, Wallace! Opal has evolved already! [ The two slither up beside their trainers and Opal curls her shimmering tail around Dizzy the better so Wallace can admire it. ] And see what fine condition she is in. I knew we were right to entrust him with her.
Dizzy smiles and Wallace cannot deny that the younger milotic is indeed in impeccable condition. Ren has been edging slowly backwards and she gives Dizzy the thumbs up before silently slipping away.

Wallace: You must be taking wonderful care of her. Thank you.

Dizzy: I do my best. She was very determined to evolve. I have been giving her much one-on-one training and she also has tutoring from Kaspà’s gyarados and dragonair. They report that she is a good pupil and will make an excellent battler.

Peretau: Yes, she has told me they have already been working towards dragon tail and aqua tail techniques.

Wallace: She is lucky to have you as a trainer.

Dizzy: Thank you for saying so.

Wallace: [ glancing away ] Well— [ He notices Ren is gone and whatever polite excuse he was formulating dies. He looks around, but she is nowhere in sight. ]

Dizzy: I will not keep you if you have other business, but I wanted to say that you are beautiful and strong and brave.

Wallace’s face goes stiff is preparation for the awkward flirtation he so desperately wanted to avoid, but Dizzy immediately surprises him and his face slowly softens as Dizzy delivers his speech.

Dizzy: I can never truly understand the weight you carry for your people because I never knew mine, but I know that it is great. Kaspà has often said to me that it one of the most sacred duties that exist. And I know some of the burden you carry for the world and all who live in it. You carry both with a grace I have never seen. I do not know how you can do so much and do each thing so well. You are singularly gifted and hardworking. Meeting you will leave a permanent mark.

Wallace can no longer quite conceal the emotion knotting up in his insides and swallows heavily.

Wallace: [ voice thick ] Thank you.

Dizzy: [ he dips his head and smiles ] And if by great fortune you are not busy, would you please grant me the honor of a dance? I admit that I am not skilled, but I promise to do my best.

Wallace: [ he glances around once more and sighs ] Sure.

---

Scene 13: [ Ren finds Steven near an empty bowl of cherries on the banquet table. He has already caught sight of her and smiles warmly as she makes her way over to him. ]

Ren: Hi Steven.

Steven: Hello Ren.

[ He nods slightly towards the dance floor behind her and she turns to look as she steps up to his ]
Wallace is leading Dizzy out onto the dance floor and Ren grins.]

Steven: Seems as though our friend is smoother than I expected.

Ren: So it seems.

Steven: And you wouldn’t have anything to do with that, now would you?

Ren: Of course not. [Steven gives her a doubtful, sidelong look.] I just helped him a bit with his Anglic. He’s actually really sweet and sincere. That goes a long way.

Steven: Well, color me surprised.

[They watch Wallace and Dizzy dance for a minute or two, and Dizzy does fine.]

Steven: I hate to do this to you after your brilliant escape, but we really should get you acquainted with everyone.

Ren: [flinching slightly] I know. It’s just that I’m still really nervous about it. I didn’t think I would be.

Steven: I’ll be right there beside you.

Ren: Okay… [Steven takes a step forward, but Ren hangs back.] Would you dance with me first, just for a little while?

Steven: [smiling] I’d be honored to dance with the Champion.

[Ren takes his hand and leads him onto the dance floor. She turns him around to face her and he takes her waist while she takes his arm. He leads her into the first few steps and she only glances down for a moment before smiling up at him.]

Steven: You caught onto this pretty quickly. Are you sure you hadn’t danced before I started teaching you?

Ren: Nope. I’m just coordinated from all the drumming and martial arts.

Steven: You play the drums?

Ren: All through middle school. Then in high school I was in a kumi-daiko club. I guess you don’t really have that here.

Steven: I think it’s called taiko drumming in Anglic-speaking regions and it certainly isn’t overly common in Hoenn.

Ren: [cackling] Drum drumming.

Steven: I was under the impression it was a male dominated instrument.

Ren: Traditionally yes, but it’s evened out a lot. My group was definitely a boys club when I started and they wouldn’t let me play certain parts. But once I was there, some other girls joined and by my last year I was captain and I assigned the roles.

Steven: That sounds about right.

Ren: Well what’s your instrument? Is it piano?
Steven: *And* viola. I started with violin, but I always liked the sound of viola better, so I switched.

Ren: That’s perfect. So very upper class and urbane but then you always *have* to have your way.

Steven: [ *ignoring the gentle ribbing* ] I am a little out of practice though. I haven’t much time to myself with everything that’s been happening the past few months.

Ren: Hey, now you’ll have time for all of your hobbies.

Steven: I still have to train you.

Ren: But that doesn’t require you to spend every waking moment with me. [ *Steven raises his eyebrows and tilts his head a little. Ren rolls her eyes.* ] I’ll be fine.

Steven: [ *genuine* ] I know you will. [ *cheeky* ] But who says I don’t want to spend time with you?

Ren: Oh, so the charm offensive is back?

Steven: [ *twirling her* ] Well, just look where we are.

Ren: You’re right. I should have expected it. [ *She takes a deep breath.* ] But if we could be sincere for a moment, I really have had fun spending time with you these past few weeks, when there wasn’t a crisis going on. And I’m really glad I have you to show me the ropes instead of Phoebe. [ *He chuckles.* ] But if you need some time, that’s okay too. I can take care of myself for a while.

Steven: [ *smiling* ] You’re not getting rid of me that easily.

Ren: Good. [ *glancing away* ] I just… wanted to check.

Steven: I enjoy spending time with you. That part isn’t an act. I don’t feel like I need to act with you anymore.

[ *They look at each other and a smile slowly spreads over Ren’s face until it has conquered the scarred side too. She squeezes Steven’s arm and knits her fingers through his. A smile just as warm spreads over Steven’s face he squeezes her hand. For a few moments more they just dance in silence, smiling at each other before Steven’s eyes turn sad.* ]

Ren: What’s wrong?

Steven: It’s nothing.

Ren: *Steven*. [ *He glances away and says nothing.* ] You’re allowed to be a little upset with me for this. You don’t have to be so perfect all the time.

Steven: It’s not that. Try as I might, I just can’t be mad at you.

Ren: [ *not letting him off the hook* ] You would tell me if it was something big, right?

Steven: Hopefully it won’t become so.

Ren: I’m the champion now. You’re out of excuses to protect me.

Steven: I’ll tell you tomorrow. [ *Ren opens her mouth to object.* ] You’ll be briefed on it, I promise. I just don’t want to ruin this and truthfully I don’t want to think about it. Could we pretend everything is fine just for tonight? [ *pleading look* ] Please.
Ren: Alright. Ugh, how is anyone supposed to resist that face? [ *He grins and she snorts at him.* ] Besides, you did promise to show me some of the other styles you’ve practiced. How about now?

Steven: With every important person in the region watching? [ *smirking* ] I couldn’t think of a better time or place if I tried.

[ *He takes a step towards her and holds her a little closer.* ]

Ren: Uh, what are you doing?

Steven: Salsa!

[ *He starts stepping back and pulling her with him then reverses. Ren almost trips, but he has a good hold on her and she recovers as he steps back again.* ]

Steven: It’s just a back and forth. Mirror me. Move your legs and hips. Torso stays straight and level. [ *She takes another moment, but falls in step with him.* ] Good. You feel it?

Ren: I guess.

Steven: It’s easier with the right music. [ *pulling his hand off her waist* ] Now take my hand.

[ *She does so and he gives her one more back and forth to get a feel for it before pulling her so that they are shoulder to shoulder and leading her through a turn. He spins on his heel to reverse direction, but Ren is ready this time and falls in step with him as they go the other way.* ]

Ren: This one is sort of fun.

[ *Steven just grins and twirls her, first out away from him and then in close so that she ends facing the same direction as him with her arms crossed, hands still in his.* ]

Ren: Uh—

[ *Before she can puzzle out how that worked, he spins her out again, then in so that they are chest to chest and puts his hand back on her waist to keep her there. Ren flushes a little.* ]

Steven: Tango has some similar principles, but a closed frame, meaning we stay like this.

Ren: [ *She swallows.* ] I’m still mirroring?

Steven: Exactly.

Ren: [ *looking down* ] But I can’t see what you’re doing.

Steven: Don’t look. *Feel* .

[ *He pushes her leg back with his and then she follows him as he moves the other. Once she has it, he starts taking larger steps and she has a hard time keeping up. She over compensates and steps on his foot.* ]

Ren: Sorry!

Steven: Don’t lead with your feet. Move from the hip down.

[ *She lets her thighs brush against his and can more easily follow his movements.* ]
Steven: Very good. Now…

[ He starts to go faster and turn and cross step. Ren stumbles after him, barely able to keep up but he doesn’t slow. ]

Ren: [ laughing ] Ah! Steven! I’m gonna fall!

Steven: No you won’t. Don’t you trust me?

Ren: Yes.

[ Steven grins and uses her next slip to dip her low. Ren yelps but starts laughing as he pulls her back up. ]

Ren: You’re such a showoff.

Steven: You don’t know the half of it, Ren Kosugi.

[ Steven lifts her by the waist and spins her around and around. ]

Ren: [ laughing ] Steven!

Steven: And now swing.

[ Steven puts her down and starts swinging her around. She can’t keep up with all the high stepping and bouncing back and forth but he keep hold of her hands and she does her best to stay with him, laughing all the while. Lots of people are staring by this point, but Ren and Steven don’t pay them any mind. He is smiling from ear to ear and she keeps laughing at his antics. Next he transitions into tap, using the metal heels and toes of his shoes to tap out a beat on the dance floor. Ren can’t dance anymore she is laughing so hard and he lets go of her hands to do a short solo performance. He fluffs out his coat and even pantomimes some hat tricks since he doesn’t have one. Finally he goes up on his toes and does some ballet spins. He takes a bow and Ren laughs and holds out her hands to him. He takes them again and they return to the standard ballroom dance he taught her. She is still giggling and her forehead thumps against his chest because she can’t stand up straight. ]

Ren: I can’t believe you did that in front of everyone.

Steven: I don’t know what you mean. I have nothing to be ashamed of. I’m a wonderful dancer.

Ren: You are! But you’re also a shitlord.

Steven: [ mock outrage ] What?!

Ren: [ grinning ] You heard me.

Steven: Why you impertinent rascal, do you even know who my father is?

Ren: Bring it, pretty boy. I beat you once and I can do it again.

Steven: Is that a challenge?

Ren: I don’t know, is it?

[ They stare each other down until Ren inadvertently breaks eye contact to glance down at his lips. He raises his eyebrows and she bites her lip, flushing a little. Steven tries and fails not to grin stupidly back and soon they both burst out laughing. It takes a while for them to quiet and by the ]
time they do, their audience seems to have collectively decided the show is over and most have gone back to whatever they were doing. ]

Ren: [sarcastic] Thanks for all the help making a good first impression.

Steven: You started it.

Ren: True.

Steven: It will be fine, I promise.

Ren: Okay.

[She gives him a twirl this time and they sway together, only looking at each other. In fact both of them have lost track of their surroundings such that Zinnia has to tap Ren on the shoulder to get her attention. Ren starts and turns to her.]

Zinnia: So sorry to interrupt, but I was hoping I might drag you away from Steven for a turn.

Ren: [glancing back at Steven for a second and coloring a little] Sure.

[She drops Steven’s hands and he smiles and dips his head. Ren turns back to Zinnia, who is holding out a hand to her. Ren takes it and Zinnia takes her waist and they start to move together.]

Zinnia: How’s your big night going so far, spitfire?

Ren: Oh, I’ve been stuffing my face and dodging responsibilities to have fun with my friends, so pretty good. [Zinnia laughs.] I should probably get on that soon, huh?

Zinnia: Yes. But I think we can get this last dance by on a technicality, seeing as how I’m one of the people you’re supposed to be meeting.

Ren: True. No one has to know we’ve met already.

Zinnia: It will be our little secret.

Ren: Maybe it is a first meeting in a way. We never had much time to talk before.

Zinnia: That’s exactly why I came tonight. I didn’t want to waste the opportunity to get to know you a little better.

[Ren feels heat rising in her cheeks but can’t do anything to stop it. Zinnia smiles, which only makes Ren’s blush worse.]

Ren: Who would have thought our first chance would be at my coronation ball?

Zinnia: I knew you would be Champion the first time I saw you battle on Mt. Pyre and I’ve hardly been able to take my eyes off you since. You’re almost blindingly brilliant.

[Ren blinks several times and goes bright red. She opens her mouth to respond, but closes it after nothing comes out and flushes even more. Zinnia laughs.]

Zinnia: I didn’t think you were the blushing kind, spitfire.

Ren: You’d think I would be used to it by now but… [She shrugs.] I could probably train myself to keep a straight face, but there isn’t much point when this gives me away all the time.
Zinnia: Well I hope you don’t decide to train your face. I like how expressive it is. I think it makes you more beautiful and not less.

[ Ren cannot resist pulling her head back into her neck and making the least flattering face possible, though it is probably to cover her embarrassment since the shade stays the same. ]

Zinnia: You’re not hiding anything, but nice try.

Ren: Well if you won’t let me thank you, how can I accept any compliment graciously?

Zinnia: Fair point, but the ban still stands. That glow of yours will have to do for now.

Ren: So when is this opportunity to thank you coming along?

Zinnia: Very soon, I promise.

Ren: And what about that battle you promised me? Does that still stand?

Zinnia: Absolutely.

Ren: Good. I looked you up and you have all ten badges, even the two southern sea ones, but you never challenged the Elite Four?

Zinnia: That is correct.

Ren: Champion title not for you?

Zinnia: I have other responsibilities and I didn’t have a point to prove like Wallace.

Ren: Fair enough. It will be nice to enjoy a real challenge without the stress.

Zinnia: I’m not so sure I could beat you, but you don’t have any ice or fairy types so maybe.

Ren: I beat Drake.

Zinnia: So could I. He’s still strong, but he’s over the hill.

Ren: Ouch.

Zinnia: He doesn’t get along with my people. Also it’s true.

Ren: He does seem like a piece of work.

Zinnia: Yeah, good luck with that.

Ren: Thanks.

[ Zinnia almost steps on Ren’s foot and trips. ]

Zinnia: Sorry about that. I’m not a dancer like Steven. I only do this when I have to go to these sorts of events.

Ren: Let me try leading then. I made Steven show me a little. [ She puts her hand on Zinnia’s waist and blinks in surprise. ] Holyshit— [ turning bright red again ] I mean, yeah, just— [ She gives herself a moment to think before something even more mangled comes out. ] What do you do to get that toned?
Zinnia: I grapple with my team. It’s a traditional training method.

Ren: That’s part of how Dizzy trains too. He said that’s how Kaspa taught him.

Zinnia: Some say it dates back to before we spread out across the seas.

Ren: Really? That’s crazy.

[ They continue to talk and dance for the rest of the set. Zinnia gets Ren to blush again more than once and Ren twirls her and sweeps them around the floor in retaliation. Zinnia is more than happy to play that game and pretty soon other couples have cleared the area to give them some space. Terra and Moana bounce their eyebrows at Ren as they go by and Zinnia throws a rakish wink their way. Kai and Wally have retreated to a corner and are talking and smiling, seemingly unaware of the party going on around them. Wallace and Dizzy are back off the dance floor and talking again, this time with drinks in their hands. Steven and Kaspa watch Ren and Zinnia together from the sidelines. Steven catches Ren’s eye just as the music draws to a close. She looks back at Zinnia and releases her waist. ]

Ren: That’s my cue to go. Sorry to leave you.

Zinnia: [ grinning ] I got what I came for. I think I’ll ditch now. Good luck with the rest of your night, spitfire.

Ren: [ smiling back ] Goodnight, Higana.

[ A warm smile breaks over her face at the nickname and she nods to Ren as she leaves. Ren watches her go for a moment before going to join Steven and Kaspa. She dips her head to the foreign Champion and Kaspa returns the gesture. ]

Steven: Are you ready?

Ren: Yes. Sorry if that took a while. She’s a really fascinating person.

Steven: It seemed like you were enjoying yourself.

Ren: Oh Arceus, she’s worse than you. Much more of that and I think I would have combusted.

[ Ren seems to realize she is talking in front of Kaspa as well and stops. Kaspa just smiles and gestures on towards some people behind her. ]

Steven: We’ll introduce you to the prime minister first.

[ Ren follows Steven and shakes the hands of all kinds of people for the rest of the night. The uncertainty that plagued her earlier is gone and she meets everyone’s eyes with confidence and only looks longingly at the buffet table once or twice. Wallace and Dizzy mysteriously absent themselves before Ren is finished with her duties. When Steven finally announces she is done, Ren is dead tired and goes to find her friends. Terra and Moana have left already and she finds the other two and her parents waiting together. They gather up their pokemon and leave. Ren waves to Steven as they exit and his smile holds until she is out of sight. ]
Scene 14: [ A few days later, Ren and Steven arrive to her first League meeting as Champion. They are the first there and Steven pulls out the chair at the head of the large oval table for Ren. Steven heads off to the other end but stops when Ren kicks out the chair next to her. He turns back and she holds his gaze, jerking her head to the chair. Steven sighs as he sits down next to her. ]

Steven: I just hope you know I'll be enduring Drake’s violent stare the entire meeting for this.

Ren: He'll have to adapt. At least for the first few meetings.

[ The rest of the League begins to drift in, starting with Senri. Drake stops dead as he comes in and glares at Steven before dropping into the chair opposite. He does not take his eyes off Steven, rage radiating from every pore. Steven does his best to ignore this, going so far as to turn and talk to Sidney who has sat down on his other side. Once everyone is there and the pleasantries are over with, Ren starts the meeting. ]

Ren: So the first order of business is the keystone thefts. There have been four in the past month. Two are confirmed to be the work of Dr. Courtney Kagari, former Magma admin. We believe she is currently in possession of Maxie’s team, meaning that she could have up to eleven top battlers at her disposal. She also has a history of mental instability and willingness to use pokémon as weapons. I need all of you with keystones to exercise extreme caution. Keep your pokémon with you at all times and call it in as soon as you see her.

[ Ren looks around to make sure she is understood and three of the Elite Four nod. Drake refuses to move his eyes from Steven and leans back in his chair in stony silence. ]

Ren: The other two instances are unconfirmed but Courtney’s involvement seems likely. Dr. Matsuda denied that Courtney was the one to take his keystone, but refuses to say who did. I'm not sure why he would give her his pokémon and not his keystone and thus far he has been staunchly protecting all former Magma members, so he has motive. The incident with Capt. Seaborn is a bit stranger. He is familiar with Courtney but insists another woman took the stone. The police currently suspect another trainer, probably another former Magma member, is in league with Courtney. We can’t be sure of Courtney’s motives for gathering keystones, but reportedly she is extremely loyal to Maxie and may be seeking revenge of some kind for his imprisonment. We all participated in the battle that led to Dr. Matsuda’s capture and the dismantling of Magma, so for now it’s safe to assume we are all targets. Any sightings or suspicious activity are to be reported to the League and your local police department. I have sent all of you information on Dr. Kagari and the pokémon she is using for you to review. And now I’ll turn it over to Steven for the second item.

Steven: Thank you. The rest of you have been briefed on this topic already, but there are some updates, which I will incorporate as I get our Champion up to speed. A large meteor, just large enough to rank as a planet killer, was detected heading for our quadrant about two years ago by Dr. Keanu Pukui of Fallarbor Observatory. Initial calculations of its trajectory estimated that it would miss us by a comfortable margin, but the Hoenn Aerospace Exploration Agency and other space programs around the world have since been working on technologies to destroy or redirect a meteor should it come our way. In the time we have been tracking Pukui’s meteor, its trajectory has been checked and rechecked. About a year ago it suddenly changed course and has been headed straight for us ever since. In addition to turning, it has accelerated, moving up the impact date to next Thursday.

[ Ren’s face has become very twisted with the effort of not screaming. She glances away from Steven for the first time since he started talking to gauge everyone else’s reactions. They look tense, but none are surprised. ]

Steven: The good news is that the international community of space scientists have developed a
device called a dimensional shifter that should safely warp the meteor away from us. This device will be sent into space via rocket and intercept the meteor shortly before it falls into our gravity. The HAEA just performed the final successful test and will be announcing the meteor and plan to deal with it to the public at a press conference later today. So, barring any drastic changes, we should all survive the event. [Ren is staring into the distance and Steven clears his throat.] Ren, Dr. Cosmo has requested that you come and personally tour the Moosdeep Space Center tomorrow afternoon. I can fly you there if you need transportation.

[Ren blinks several times to return from whatever plane of existence her soul fled to.]

Ren: Yeah, sure. Thanks.

[Ren slumps back in her chair, face slack and eyes still wide.]

Senri: You alright there kiddo?

Ren: [strained] Fine.

Phoebe: [chuckling] Yeah, you sure got a doozy of a first meeting.

Glacia: They won’t all be so bad, dear.

Wattson: [jovial] Most of the time it’s so dull I fall asleep!

Sidney: Yeah, don’t worry about it. I had kind of a rough first meeting too, though it was sort of the opposite problem. Pheebs, you weren’t there, but I bombed it. I forgot everything we were supposed to go over and I lost the itinerary and so I just sat there like “hi all, I’m your new Champion and a fucking moron, this should be fun!” And Glacia, you tried so hard to bail me out. She was sitting over there on the other end across from me and doing this crazy thing with her eyebrows, just trying to get me to remember one single thing we talked about right before the meeting and it was just blank, gone, all of it. Eventually she just had to prompt me. So really you did well.

Roxanne: Very professional up until the meteor thing. And goodness knows we were all a bit traumatized the first time it came up.

Flannery: I don’t remember a single thing we went over in my first meeting I was so nervous just being there. Did you all even tell me about the meteor then.

Lisa: We were going to but thought better of it.

Flannery: Thank you.

Tate: And let’s not forget the meeting where I had to come out to you all. That was a hoot.

[A muscle in Drake’s temple twitches.]

Wallace: Even better than when I joined up, right Drake?

[Drake does not respond but glares even more intensely at Steven if possible.]

Wallace: [turning back to Tate] Which reminds me, are you on for pride this year?

Tate: Conflict taken care of.

Lisa: We’ll be there.
Flannery: Ahh! I’m so excited! This will be my first time!

Brawly: Wait, what’s the date again?

Wallace: The fifteenth.

Brawly: Most excellent. I think I might get the whole crew over there this year.

Winona: Ren, Maia was wondering when we could arrange a joint practice.

Ren: Oh, uh, does Wednesday afternoon work for you?

Winona: Perfectly. We look forward to it.

Ren: Okay, if no one has anything else I think we can wrap—

Drake: [growling] I’m retiring.

Ren: Uh, what?

[Drake sits up straight and puts his hands on the table, still staring Steven down]

Drake: [more slowly and clearly] I am retiring and you are taking my place.

Steven: [disbelieving] What?

Drake: [spitting out one word at a time] I am retiring [pointing an accusing finger at Steven] and you are taking my place.

Steven: [Leaning back in his chair ever so slightly] Well, I’m not sure that’s going to be possible. You know I don’t think being an Elite Four member is for me.

Sidney: Why not?

Phoebe: Yeah, you already only use two types and you were literally just the Champ. What’s the problem?

Steven: I was considering trying something else for a while.

[Ren pulls back a little, brow furrowing and head shaking slightly as if she is trying to shake something out of her ears. Everyone else looks almost equally confused except for Drake who has returned to irate stillness.]

Steven: Maybe going on a world tour: train in different regions, collect rare stones, catch up with old friends—

Ren: Excuse me?

Steven: Well—

Ren: When exactly were you planning on this taking place?

Steven: If the meteor business goes well, I was hoping in another month or two.

Ren: NO! Absolutely not! **First of all**, I am the youngest Champion in over a century, no **way** are you blitzing off without training me. **Second of all**, you’re contractually obligated to stick around for
at least a year. Third of all, you promised me! We talked about this and I gave you plenty of outs. You insisted you were staying! I knew something was up the minute you started flirting with me again! [ hurt ] Why not just tell me?

[ Steven opens his mouth but nothing comes out and he swallows. ]

Ren: [ She sighs. ] But even putting all of that aside, as your friend I am not gonna let you run from your problems like this.

Steven: [ a touch defensively ] I’m not sure how this is—

Ren: You love pokemon and you love training. I know you do. Listen to me: you’ve been here before and that’s why you came back. What good did leaving it all behind do?

[ Steven looks away and Ren reaches out and puts her hand on his. ]

Ren: I understand. I’ve been there too. You hang everything on one part of who you are and then when you can’t live up to that vision, everything starts crumbling away. It’s easier to run and it can even feel right—hell, maybe it is right now and then—but you’re never going to find who you are by turning your back on who you were. And I know you. You’re going to hate yourself if you drop all of your responsibilities.

[ Ren lets go of Steven’s hand and he pulls it back toward himself, still unable to meet her eyes. ]

Ren: I don’t mean to make you feel guilty and I don’t want to trap you here. If you still want to do all of that after your year is up, I won’t stop you.

[ Steven looks up at her again and his lips part for a moment as if he is about to speak, but in the end he still can’t quite say anything. ]

Drake: [ clearly done with this drama ] I. Am. Retiring. [ He stands and looms menacingly over Steven ] And you. Are taking. My place.

Steven: I, um—[ He clears his throat. ] I don’t know what to say. I always assumed one day you’d drop dead and that’s how you would retire.

Drake: [ staring into the distance ] We all would’ve preferred that.

Asuna: Retiring before me, eh?

Drake: [ not looking at her ] You’re semi-retired, Asuna.

Asuna: And I’m five years older. Looks like I get the last laugh.

Drake: [ whipping around to face her ] No, I’ll have the last laugh when Sal and I DANCE ON YOUR GRAVE!

[ Drake storms out and Asuna laughs and laughs. Her cackling is literally the only sound in the room. ]

Asuna: Best joke he’s ever told. As if I’d ever let myself die before the old bastard.

Ren: So was that his two weeks notice? Is that a thing?

Roxanne: He can’t retire until we select a replacement. That’s why he went after Steven.
Glacia: Don’t worry about it. I’ll talk to him.

Ren: Thank you, Glacia. And sorry about that everyone. We’ll discuss this more at the next meeting. Dismissed.

[ Everyone gets up except for Ren and Steven who are still reeling from the whole affair. The rest of the League chat among themselves as they file out and a few of them give Ren consoling pats on the shoulder as they leave. Senri pauses and gives her shoulder a squeeze. Ren taps his arm with her head an he leaves. Ren and Steven just sit in silence for a few moments until they can no longer hear anyone in the hall outside. ]

Ren: I’m really sorry, Steven.

Steven: It’s okay, I deserved that. Well, maybe not the Drake part, but I shouldn’t have sprung that on you. I just— I panicked. I’m sorry, Ren.

Ren: Thank you.

[ She looks at him hopefully, but once again he can’t meet her eyes. He stands, face tight. ]

Steven: [ haltingly ] We’ll talk, okay?

Ren: Okay.

Steven: Do you need anything?

Ren: No, I’ll be alright. See you tomorrow.

[ Steven heads for the door but pauses for a moment with the handle in his hand. Ren waits, but he exits without saying anything. Ren waits again until she is sure everyone is gone and then faceplants on the table. ]

Scene 15: [ The next day Ren and Steven arrive at the Mossdeep Space Center on his aerodactyl. A docent brings them past the museum on the first floor and up to the second where Cosmo and Keanu are waiting for them. They are both glad to see Ren again and congratulate her before starting the tour. They take her and Steven through labs and test rooms before stopping at central control. It is a large semicircular room with a clear view of the peninsula where the rockets are launched. A few people are working at the long tables, but most of the stations are empty while the scientists are out to lunch. In the center of the room is the dimensional shifter. The top of the device is a tightly packed thicket of rods and underneath it is a cylindrical base. Ren and company head over to it and the woman working on it pulls up a schematic that shows what it looks like open. The rods form a giant ring large enough for the meteor to pass through. A portal will open in the middle of it, sending the meteor far away. ]

Ren: How the hell do you power this thing? Wouldn’t opening a portal that large require a massive amount of energy?

Cosmo: Yes, and all of that energy is contained within the meteorite you’ve kept safe all this time.

Ren: The meteorite? What on Earth is it made out of?
Cosmo: It’s not from Earth and we are not exactly sure what it is, but its composition is similar to that of a mega stone. Do you recall the incident in Kalos a few years back?

Ren: When those genocidal Flare maniacs made a super weapon and almost used it to blow up Europe?

Cosmo: Yes. We have developed a similar technology to extract energy from meteorites like this one, but they are extremely rare and the one in your vapor box is the only one we have found that is large enough to power the dimensional shifter.

Ren: But it’s not even that big. Well, it is pretty large, but it’s just kind of hard to believe there’s that much energy inside.

Steven: You did witness a taste of it yourself on Mt. Chimney.

Ren: [remembering as it comes out of her mouth] When Magma tried to make the volcano erupt. [She nods.] Right.

Steven: And the parts you delivered to me when we met were crucial to the power converter for this device. You’ve helped save this project—hmm, let me see… five times now?

Ren: So Magma wanted the parts and the meteor power their eruption device. Everything is making so much more sense now.

Steven: I’m sorry for keeping you in the dark so long.

Ren: [weak laugh] It’s probably better I didn’t know what was at stake, honestly. All of that stuff seemed crazy enough at the time without knowing the fate of the planet hung in the balance. [to Cosmo] At least I get why you risked your life for it now. [suddenly disturbed] Wait, you don’t think Maxie knew about the meteor do you?

Steven: No, it was all very tightly under wraps. Devon has been working on this kind of power for years through some business connections in Kalos I helped establish. I don’t think he had any way of knowing we were using it for this purpose.

Ren: I guess he’s probably not that crazy. [Ren takes a deep breath and exhales. She turns back to Cosmo.] So this isn’t just a tour.

Cosmo: No. We can’t thank you enough for keeping the meteorite safe all these months.

Ren: I’m glad it worked out.

[Ren reaches into her bag for her vapor box when there is a crash outside the room. They all look towards the door and a moment later Courtney and a whole slew of pokemon come bursting through (mightyena, houndoom, camerupt, ninetails, torkoal, pyroar, 2 weezing, and 2 swellows). Ren and Steven go for their belts right away and send out their pokemon. Unfortunately, Steven only has three (sandslash, excadrill, and archeops) small enough to maneuver comfortably inside the room and Ren has her two weakest (Teka and Tarahau) with her for training. Cosmo and the other scientists dive for cover as the pokemon run at each other. The swellows fly straight for Tāraki but Kōtai knocks both of them away with smackdown and Tāraki takes the opportunity to dodge past and slash the mightyena with x-scissor. Tarahau keeps the camerupt busy with illusions and Kata takes on the pyroar, while Ao and the houndoom exchange charge beam and sludge bomb across the distance. Teka dodges around all the engaging pokemon to attack Courtney directly only to be stopped at the last moment by a rock throw from her torkoal. The weezing belch smoke and Alwyn and Komatsu slash them with metal claw, stopping them mid attack. The smoke clears quickly since...
the weezing did not have time to release much, but Courtney’s ninetails has already slipped past all of the other pokemons and is almost to the dimensional shifter, flames already spilling from her jaws as she charges an attack. Liaoning downs her with a hail of rocks and lands on top of her a second later, pinning her head with a taloned foot. Courtney touches the keystones she has in bracelets on each wrist and they start to glow. Light arcs out of them and connects with the mega stone around the camerupt’s neck. Wind starts blustering around the room, grounding the swallows and throwing Tāraki back from the camerupt as it starts to mega evolve. Courtney’s face is twisted in a snarl and sweat beads on her brow as the rushing air tears locks of hair from the bun at the back of her head. The arcs of light flicker and warp before cracking like whips and becoming even brighter. The camerupt bellows distortedly as it transforms, volcano back expanding first with the rest of its body belatedly catching up. Everyone, pokemons included, stop what they are doing, transfixed by the uneven transformation. The camerupt trembles, blood vessels protruding across its face and Courtney pants raggedly behind it, hair wild and eyes blown wide.

Courtney: You two are going to hand over your keystones or I’m going to blow this place sky high.

[ Ren and Steven immediately move between Courtney and the dimensional shifter and Tāraki steps between them and the camerupt. ]

Steven: Dr. Kagari, you don’t know what—

Courtney: NOW!

[ The camerupt’s volcano starts to glow, charging an attack, when someone grabs Courtney from behind, twisting her arm and pinning it against her back and putting her in a chokehold. Courtney struggles and Zinnia leans out from behind her a little to get further from her free arm. ]

Zinnia: Fancy meeting you here, Courtney.

Courtney: Azalea! I knew you’d come for them. But I have keystones of my own! I’ll kill you! I’ll kill—

[ Zinnia kicks a foot out from under her and bears her to the ground. Courtney lands on her face and the camerupt staggers and moans. ]

Courtney: No—

[ Zinnia jabs her in the temple and the camerupt bellows again, eyes drifting as pain blinds it. It begins to glow a bright orange again, once more charging an attack. ]

Zinnia: [ tapping the pokeballs on her belt ] Hellebore, Phlox, get the camerupt.

[ A goodra and altaria spring out of their balls and use muddy water and dragon pulse on the camerupt respectively. The camerupt just barely weathers these attacks and is turning to face its new opponents when Tāraki slices it across the shoulder with leaf blade. It falls and drops to its normal form. The rest of Courtney’s pokemons are already weakened and it takes less than a minute for Ren and Steven’s pokemons to subdue them. Meanwhile, Zinnia’s whismur has appeared and is prying the keystone bracelets from Coutney’s wrists. Zinnia has Courtney by both hands now and the Magma admin writhes in her grasp. Zinnia responds by calmly digging a knee into Courtney’s spine and a few seconds later, Aster has both keystones. ]

Zinnia: Thanks, flower.

[ Ren slumps with relief only to go ramrod straight again as a foreign presence assails her mind. ]
Strange Voice: [telepathy] CHAMPION! Make that woman let my trainer go or I'll use overheat!

[Ren touches her temple and looks down at the ninetails Steven’s archeops has pinned next to them.]

Steven: Ren?

Ninetails: [telepathy] I’m in range of that thing you’re protecting. I’ll melt it!

Ren: [telepathy] You don’t understand. If you destroy that, we’re all doomed. You’re trainer’s not well. If she asked you to attack it—

Ninetails: She just wants revenge on the lying woman. Let her go. We’ll leave you out of this.

Ren: Will you promise not to destroy the device if we do? It’s necessary for everyone’s survival.

Ninetails: If you don’t let my trainer go right now I’ll burn your other side and melt that metal thing to a puddle.

Ren: [clearing her throat] Zinnia, could you let Courtney up? Her ninetails in threatening to blow us up.

[Zinnia takes about a second to evaluate the situation and decides to let her up. Courtney looks around wildly, eyes full of rage and defiance. For a moment it still looks as though she may fight them, but she withdraws all of her pokemon except the ninetails. Liaoning tightens his grip on the ninetails’s muzzle as Courtney back up to a window. She opens it and sends out Maxie’s crobat, then withdraws her ninetails as she jumps out.]

Ren: [muttering] They always go out through the window.

Zinnia: Quickest route if you can hack it.

Keanu: Zinnia, I can’t tell you how glad we are you’re back. What made you decide to drop in?

Zinnia: [looking around and smiling nervously] Wow, everyone’s here. Hey, Sarah. [One of the scientists waves weakly from her desk.] This is going to be even more awkward than I thought.

[Without warning her altaria unleashes a flamethrower on the dimensional shifter. No one is in position to block and they all shy away as the altaria melts it. Just as the pokemon runs out of steam, the goodra uses an ice beam that tears the device apart from the inside as an ice crystal forms and expands out through the meteorite compartment. Everyone stares blankly at the twisted wreck that was supposed to save the planet from annihilation. Finally Steven gathers enough of his wits to ask the only pertinent question left.]

Steven: Why?

Zinnia: I had to stop you all from making the same mistake I did.

Ren: [total confusion] What are you talking about?

Zinnia: [looking at Cosmo] This plan of yours to warp the meteor away is just sacrificing the next world for this one.

Steven: Now just hold on a moment. We have no way of accurately predicting where the device will
Zinnia: [ *snapping* ] Don’t give me that! Where has every single portal we’ve ever opened in the entire history of our species led? [ *There is a beat of silence.* ] I’ll give you all a hint: I didn’t mean “next world” in the general sense, I meant it as in the one next to ours.

Ren: [ *trying to keep up* ] The Distortion World?

Zinnia: Exactly. [ *turning her eyes on Steven this time* ] And what exactly do you think will happen to the Distortion World when we launch a giant meteor at it? Do they have a fancy teleporter and a hunk of energy from an alien world? Who will defend them?

Steven: No one wants to destroy the Distortion World. If there were some other way to—

Zinnia: But you’re *willing* to. That’s what it comes down to. You can live with that decision and that’s fair, but I can’t. The denizens of the other side are the souls of our departed. It is the place we pass through before we are reborn on this side. And even if you can close your heart to that, the fact remains that we are too intimately linked to think that their fate will not affect ours.

Steven: None of what you are saying has been thoroughly substantiated by science. It’s all theory and belief.

Zinnia: [ *anger breaking through once more* ] That device would have sent the meteor to the Distortion World and destroyed it! Everyone who’s worked on this project knows that. At least own up to the decisions you make! Don’t hide behind some imaginary veil of ignorance!

[ *All are cowed into silence. Ren looks around at the others, waiting for someone to refute her. Steven’s jaw works, but he says nothing, clearly unable to deny her. Zinnia takes a deep breath and leans down to take the offered keystones from Aster. Ren notices then that there are three keystones set into the coil of steel above her ankle rather than the one Ren is sure she has seen there before.* ]

Zinnia: I knew what would happen the day this project was proposed. I almost quit right then and there, but I decided to stay on because my solution failed. And even after I left, I decided to let you all continue because I was afraid of failing again. Somehow doomed another world became an acceptable back-up plan. But I always knew in the back of my mind that it wasn’t right and that conviction made me so desperate to succeed that I was willing to risk everyone’s lives in a different disaster.

[ *Things are clicking into place for Ren and her eyes unfocus as her brain rapidly recontextualizes the events that brought her here. She barely has time to get through before Zinnia speaks her name and calls her back to the present.* ]

Zinnia: Ren, I’ll never be able to thank you enough for setting me straight and setting right my mistakes. Because of you, I’m not afraid of failing anymore. Because of you, I can see clearly that there are necessary sacrifices, and there are unnecessary sacrifices. This is an unnecessary sacrifice and I won’t allow it. We will live by our own strength, or die by our own weakness, not survive by the sacrifice of others.

Ren: So, you have some plan to get rid of the meteor?

Zinnia: Yes. I will protect our world and the next by calling Atua Rayquaza down from the skies and ride out with them to meet the meteor before it strikes as the founder of my people did in ages long past.

Steven: And what do you want us to do?
Zinnia: [raising her hands, palms open to the sky] I want you to send your pleas upward and pray that Rayquaza hears them.

[Steven is once again stymied and he lets out only a garbled noise as several different thoughts try to escape at once. He reddens with anger, but Zinnia ignores him as her eyes fall on Ren and she smiles softly.]

Zinnia: I am sorry Ren. Noho ake rā.

[Zinnia picks up her whismur and hops out the open window. They all stare out after her.]

Ren: What was that last thing she said?

[Steven takes a deep breath and sighs.]

Steven: Goodbye.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about that everyone. Sorry to Ren for how rough that chapter was for her and sorry to you all for how long it took. I just went on a 10-day trip, which was great, but I had anticipated there being a lot more time for me to write. But our plans changed a bunch and I wound up having almost no time. I can feel August 16th deadline I set for myself slipping through my fingers, but I'm gonna fight it out till the end. Hopefully the next chapter will take 2 weeks instead of 3. Anyway, this chapter is brought to you by zero sleep so feel free to point out any errors or if stuff doesn't make sense. Boy howdy was that an emotional roller coaster. 50% adorable/stupid shenanigans and 50% shit getting too real. It was longer than I planned and I'm pretty sure that's because I added more low-key shit to balance out all the yikes. Too bad being the Hoenn Champion doesn't fix your parent's marital problems, am I right? And Steven keeps getting his world shattered. They could both use a drink.

Character Chart:

HUMANS:
Ren, our protagonist and the Hoenn League Champion
Kai, Ren's friend who likes science
Wally, Ren's friend who likes the internet
Steven, the former Champion
Josh, a former Magma grunt who Ren befriended
Azalea, Zinnia's Magma grunt alias
Maxie, former leader of Team Magma now in prison
Terra, a former Magma grunt now dating Moana
Moana, an Aqua grunt who is dating Terra
Senri, Ren's dad and the Petalburg Gym Leader
Asuka, Ren's mom and a writer
Dizzy, Lugia's mouthpiece and friend of Kaspa
Kaspa, the current Sekiei (Indigo) League Champion and Ho-oh's Chosen
Hartmann, a former Magma grunt who is friends with Josh
Brenton, a former Magma grunt who is friends with Josh
Zinnia, the Draconid Lorekeeper and a former HAEA physicist

TEAM REN:
Tāraki the Sceptile
Akahata the Mightyena
Ao the Manectric
Kata the Grumpig
Kōtai the Sandslash
Roma the Sharpedo
Pohaku the Armaldo
Naihi the Absol
Teka the Pikachu
Tarahau, the Froslass

FORMER TEAM REN:
Ikki the Masquerain
Panahi the Pelipper
Maia the Taillow
Putenga the Breloom
Melethe Delcatty
Hauoro the Exploud

TEAM KAI:
Jay, the Blaziken
Dusty, the Breloom
Makō, the Wailord
Ruby, the Swellow
Lily, the Lileep
Zach, the Pikachu

TEAM WALLY:
Kihei, the shiny Gallade
Kana, the Delcatty
Aroha, the Roselia
Atiru, the Altaria
Ume, the Magnezone
Hōpua, the Azumarill

TEAM STEVEN:
Bessemer, the shiny Metagross
Damascus, the Skarmory
Gilchrist, the Aggron
Tungsten, the Steelix
Escutcheon, the Armaldo
Pīlometra, the Cradily
Alwyn, the Sandslash
Tulpi, the Aerodactyl
Pavise the Bastiodon
Komatsu the Excadrill
Liaoning the Archeops
OTHER POKEMON:
Kenta, Senri's Usaring
Peretau, Wallace's Milotic
Opal, Dizzy's Milotic
Aster, Zinia's Whismur
I Need You More Than Ever

Chapter Summary

In which Ren tries to track down Zinnia.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Scene 1: [Ren and Steven emerge from the Space Center as the sun is setting and Bessem er gets up from their spot beside the building to join them. The three of them walk down the hill towards Mossdeep. They are quiet, thinking over all that has happened. As they reach the main road, Ren yawns and stretches.]

Ren: Arceus I’m tired. I should go check into the Pokemon Center.

Steven: Ren, I think—

Ren: Actually, I’m starving. Know any good places to eat?

Steven: Ren, why don’t you come stay at my house?

Ren: Oh. You don’t have to do that. I’ll be fine. I should—

Steven: What if Courtney comes back, or Zinnia?

Ren: We’re the two strongest trainers in the region. I’ll be fine.

Steven: I’ll make you dinner.

[That gives her pause.]

Ren: That is tempting, but then I’d really be imposing and—

Steven: Please Ren. I—I’d sleep a lot easier of you were there.

[Ren stops and blinks and looks at Steven. He stares back at her, waiting for her answer.]

Bessemer: [in Ren’s head] Would you mind coming over?

Ren: [telepathy] No, I want to. I just don’t know how much he wants to see me right now. And I don’t want to make a hassle, not on top of everything else.

Bessemer: [telepathy] If that’s what you’re worried about, then please do come. It’s no trouble, honestly. And he’s not kidding about the sleep. In fact, we may not sleep at all otherwise.

Ren: Well…

Steven: If you really don’t want to, I understand…

Bessemer: [telepathy] Just so you know, this is him begging. You’re forgiven for not realizing
because he’s terrible at it.

Ren: [smiling] Alright, but you have to let me help with dinner.

[He perks up, a smile lighting up his face.]

Steven: [gesturing towards the lane that leads to his house] Well, that’s up to Anthy, but I don’t foresee a problem.

Ren: Thank you for inviting me.

Steven: You’re doing me a favor, really.

[They walk in silence a bit, Ren looking off north towards the sea and listening to the sound of the waves crashing against the rocks. Steven lets out a deep sigh beside her and summons his courage.]

Steven: I wanted to apologize for what I did at the meeting.

Ren: You don’t have to. It may not matter after Thursday anyway.

Steven: It matters to me.

[That makes Ren turn her head to look up at him.]

Steven: I made what should have been a private conversation very public.

Ren: I don’t know. I think I’m the one who turned it into a moment. I sort of forgot everyone was there.

Steven: I deserved everything you said to me. You were reasonable and kind while I was all but having a tantrum. And that after I lied and tried to dump everything on your shoulders and broke a promise to you. I did exactly what I told myself I wouldn’t do, what I least wanted to do.

[Ren blinks in surprise and Steven looks away down gravel road in front of them as he continues to speak.]

Steven: You were absolutely right. I hung everything on being Champion. It was something my father didn’t give me, something I had done on my own and I clung to it. I always knew I wouldn’t be Champion forever, but part of me always hoped I could be like Kaspa, hung onto that hope, planned on it. I don’t know why I felt so empty the moment it all came crumbling down. I have lots of other interests and I could still be a trainer without being the best. But part of me doesn’t want to, says it’s not worth it. It’s so stupid and it doesn’t make any sense but obviously denying that I have these feelings doesn’t make them go away. So I’m going to try and deal with them like you asked.

Ren: Thank you… You know, I always wanted to be a trainer as a kid, and the age to start in Johto is thirteen, but I didn’t register until after we moved here because of something that happened in trainer school. I may not have come back to training at all if it weren’t for Tāraki. So I do understand where you’re coming from and I don’t think it’s stupid. We can’t control how we feel. The reason I was so adamant is because I didn’t want you to make the same mistake I did.

Steven: I won’t make any more promises I can’t keep and I don’t know what I’ll do if we survive this. Clearly I need to give it some more thought. But I will stay the whole year if we get it. I don’t care how I feel, I’m not letting myself run out on you and everyone else.

Ren: Okay, but you’re allowed to take a vacation now and then, especially after the first month or
Steven: Thank you. I’ll keep that in mind. But there is one more thing. I wanted you to know that I do care about you and I don’t blame you for taking the title from me. Everything else I’ve told you is true. And I didn’t mean to lie to you about being fine, I was just trying to lie to myself. But I hurt you and I’m sorry.

Ren: Apology—apologies?—accepted.

[Steven smiles much more broadly and genuinely than Ren has ever seen him smile before. She smiles back, but then looks away to hide her blush. They are well out of town now and Ren can see a house near the cliffs not far off. The Eon Guardians appear in front of them on the road. Ren and Steven greet their friends. Latias is as affectionate as ever and even Latios gives Ren a hug. They all move on to the house together.]

Scene 2: [Steven’s house is a small stone cottage on the outskirts of town that overlooks the sea. There is a very large open shelter built onto the side in the lee of the building with a large sand bed. A bastiodon, cradily and armaldo are resting in it while a skarmory perches on the roof. There is a garden near the house with plants sprouting in it. Steven sends out the rest of his pokemon as they approach and Ren follows suit. Tulpi and Liaoning land on either side of Damascus on the roof and the Eon Guardians join them. Tungsten slithers over and curls around Pavise who shifts a little to settle against her but does not open his eyes. Gilchrist lumbers over to join them while Escutcheon and Ptilometra get up to make room and greet Pohaku. Alwyn and Komatsu take Kotai over to see the garden and Ao tags along. Escutcheon and Ptilometra start down a path to the shore, inviting Pohaku to follow. He looks back at Ren and she nods. He wiggles and goes after them followed shortly by Taraki and Tarahau. Kata and Bessemer sit on the edge of the cliff and talk. Steven lets Ren inside and a carbink dressed in a frilly pink apron comes floating out of the kitchen. Steven introduces her to Ren as ‘Anthy’ and they follow her back into the kitchen where she has already started cooking. The kitchen is quite large and professional for such a small cottage. Ren goes to the sink to wash her hands while Steven takes off his jacket and ascot before rolling up his sleeves and getting a crystal pattern apron off a hook by the door. Anthy has Ren shuck peas into a bowl while Steven puts a saucepan on the stove and starts to make something. Anthy brings him more ingredients as he goes and Ren smiles as she listens to him explain what he is doing to his carbink. Soon Anthy seems confident enough to take over and Steven starts making dough on the counter next to Ren. His bare arms flex as he kneads the dough in a practiced motion. Ren steals glances at him and tries not to smile the dopey way her face seems to want to. The two sandslashes and excadrill come in with a basket of root vegetables and an earthenware jar. Komatsu gets a lasagna pan out of a cabinet and puts it on the floor while Alwyn picks up a potato. She carefully balances it on one claw and spins it like a top. She runs the edge of her other claw up it length and peels it in one fluid motion. She smiles at Kotai who is watching her with wide eyes. She tosses the peeled potato up and cubes it in midair. The pieces land in the pan. Kotai compliments her on the trick and picks up a carrot to peel while she continues with the potatoes and Komatsu fetches some berries out of the fridge using a step stool. Soon Ren has a little pile of celery, carrots, mushrooms, and potato. Anthy floats them through the air and into a pot. Steven puts two of the crusts in pie dishes and leaves the other two on the cutting board for later. Komatsu pours the contents of the jar, which turns out to be grubs, over the roots and berries and the two sandslashes put it in the oven. Ren gets some supplies out of her vapor box and starts making mochi at the table while Steven gets some lemonade out of the fridge. He pulls two glasses out of the cabinet and holds one down to Alwyn, who frosts it over.
Steven joins Ren at the table with the two frosted glasses of lemonade which he has garnished with mint. Ren has him roll out little balls of red bean paste and Ren wraps them in matcha mochi before Steven dusts them in rice flour for the finishing touch. Steven soon gets ahead of Ren and rests his head on his hand with a sigh. He leans over with a mischievous smile and sprinkles some rice flour on her hair. She blows some matcha powder at him in retaliation and he flicks some red bean paste at her and she reaches her hand into the remaining gooey mochi to fling at him, expression gleeful. She raises it high and Steven begs for mercy, but this draws Anthy's attention and she yells at them for making a mess. They both protest and grovel but Anthy has their sandslashes throw them out. They give each other a sheepish smile as they are pushed out into the hall. Steven goes outside to take care of his pokemon while Ren goes to take a shower. She reemerges, clean and sweet smelling, in a loose t-shirt and plain pajama bottoms and goes into the living room. Three of the four walls are lined with cases of rocks and Ren goes around admiring them. Steven comes back in and quickly checks on her before going off to take his own shower. Ren is lounging on the enormous couch when he returns with a bowl of cherries and some fresh glasses of lemonade. He has put on silk pajamas that are a beldum print on a pale pink background. Ren can't help laughing a little at what a dork he is, but he just shrugs. She scooches her feet up to make room and tucks her toes under his thigh once he sits down to keep them warm. They talk for a bit and even laugh while they sip lemonade and eat the cherries from the bowl on Steven's lap. Ren takes off the stems and holds them in her hand, but Steven pops an entire cherry into his mouth and a minute or two later pushes a knotted cherry stem past his lips and twirls it theatrically, grinning toothily at her. The only reaction he receives is puzzlement and the grin falls off his face. He puts the cherry stem down on the coffee table before spitting the pit out. It lands right in his empty lemonade glass. For some reason, Ren finds that talent far more entertaining and Steven continues to spit his pits into his glass, never missing once even as he ups the difficulty by spitting them high into the air or out of the side of his mouth. Eventually Steven finds himself groping around an almost empty bowl and something occurs to him. He looks at Ren's glass, but there is still some lemonade and no cherry pits. He looks over at Ren and she grins at him, cheeks bulging. He recoils in horror as she opens her mouth and shows him the thirty-odd pits inside. Ren cackles, though quietly because it is muffled by the pits in her mouth. Steven shoves his glass at her but she makes him put it back so that she can try spitting pits into it. She mostly just gets them all over the table as she has pretty heavily handicapped herself by having her cheeks full. Eventually Steven's coaching and a lessening of the pits in her mouth leads to success and Ren thrusts her fists in the air in celebration. Taraki, Kata and Tarahau wander in and Kata joins them in the game. She gets it after just a few tries and Ren accuses her of cheating. Soon the rest of the cherries are gone and Anthy, the Eon Guardians, and the rest of the kitchen crew come in with the dinner and table settings. The three flying types and ocean trio get called in and they all gather around the table to eat. Ren sits in seiza, while Steven sits cross-legged beside her. She looks out over the feast, eyes welling and big smile on her face. In addition to the chicken pot pies she helped with and the roast vegetable thing the sandslashes made, there is a pile of whole, braised fish, a basket of steamed mussels in seaweed, a bowl of fruit salad, and a rack of ribs. A pair of stainless steel chopsticks float out of the kitchen, surrounded by the purple glow of telekinesis. Steven offers them to Ren and she tears up a little as she snatchers them out of his hand. Steven serves himself some pie and then puts some on Ren's plate as she reaches for everything else. Steven watches her as he eats his pie. It is kind of fascinating how neat and ruthlessly efficient she is. Komatsu and the sandslashes dig into their dish with gusto while the flying types eat the fish and ribs. Tarahau, Pohaku and his two new friends eat up the mussels first before helping with the fish. Taraki and the Eon Guardians mostly eat the fruit while Ao gnaws on the ribs. Like Ren, Kata insists on eating a little of everything and loves it. She especially compliments the pot pie and roasted vegetables. Much to Steven's horror, this convinces Ren to try some, including one of the fat grubs. She laughs at his expression and goads him until he angrily grabs one of the grubs for himself. He doesn't hate it and even serves himself some more of the dish so that he can try all of the components together. Ren smiles super wide and his expression softens too as they serve themselves seconds. Soon they finish dinner and everyone helps clear it away. The Eon Guardians are particularly helpful with their
telekinetic talents. After dinner, the pokemon get a bunch of cushions from the hall closet and bring
them in the living room while Steven goes to his bedroom to get some pillows and a blanket. Ren
brings the mochi in from the kitchen after she helps with the dishes a little. She flops back down on
the couch and makes herself comfortable with a pillow and the blanket. Steven goes to his liquor
cabinet and mixes something, then returns with two champagne flutes of golden liquid. They toast
and Ren eyes blow wide at the incredible taste of the concoction. Meanwhile the sandslashes have
disappeared and Ren and Steven chuckle about it. That leads to a discussion about the sandslashes
and eventually to Ren showing Steven the portraits she had taken in Mauville. After that they talk
about the house and where Ren should live now that she is Champion. It doesn’t take long for Ren to
tire of that and for both of them to finish their drinks, so they move onto other topics as Steven gets
up to fetch them more alcohol. She teases him and he gets her laughing and by halfway through her
second drink, Ren is feeling confident enough to ask him about his tattoo. Steven has to take off his
shirt to show her and Ren watches this with thinly veiled fascination. He raises his eyebrows at her,
but she just sips her drink, not at all ashamed of being caught this time. Steven’s tattoo covers most
of his upper back and shoulders and is full of color and fine detail. There is a beldum, metang and
metagross right between his shoulder blades and the rest of the design radiates out from there. In
the circle around them are representations of all the metal ores with a meteorite at the top. The next ring
is occupied by the crystal systems and the third by all of the evolutionary stones. Beyond that,
unbound by a ring, are his keystone and all of his pokemon's mega stones, including the steelixite
Ren gave him. The rest of the tattoo is occupied by his pokemon, each with their own mineral that
represents them in some way. Ren asks a few clarifying questions as he explains and he lets her
touch him so that he can tell which parts she is asking about. She runs her fingers over the lunatone
cradling the curve of his shoulder. He reaches up and holds his shoulder for a moment. She
reluctantly removes her hand he turns to face her. Their eyes meet and she begins to color a little.
She reaches for her drink and finishes it off. He watches her thoughtfully for a moment before
suggesting they watch a movie. Steven puts his shirt back on and uses his nav to find the Uttena
movie in his collection and put it on the big screen. Ren grabs the blanket and throws it over herself.
She is about to go back to her arm of the couch but hesitates and decides to scooch closer to him
instead. She leans up against him and he lifts his arm to make room for her without any hesitation.
She snuggles a bit closer and he wraps his arm around her. She offers him some of the blanket and
he pulls it over himself with his free arm. They watch the movie in Kantonese so that Steven can
practice his listening skills but pretty soon they are both asleep. Steven wakes up a little while after
the movie has ended to find his head resting on Ren’s. Her mouth is slightly open and she has
drooled on him a bit. She snores lightly as he picks his head up. He smiles down at her before
looking around the room. Most of her pokemon and some of his own are asleep on giant cushions
all over the floor. The TV has already turned itself off and it is dark except for a little moonlight
coming in the windows and skylight. Steven wakes Ren and she sits up just enough for Steven to
wiggle out from under her. Steven crouches and carefully slides a hand under her knees and
shoulders. It takes a little effort and isn't exactly elegant, but he does manage to heave her up and
carry her down the hall and into the bedroom. The bed is huge and very plush. There are a ton of
pillows and a big fluffy comforter, which Bessemer peels back with telekinesis from wherever they
are. Steven lays Ren down and she stretches and sighs, a big smile on her face. He pulls the covers
up over her and wishes her goodnight. She snuggles deeper into the bed and Steven can't help the
very warm smile that creeps onto his own face as he looks at her. He turns away and heads out into
the hall only to come face to face with Taraki. The sceptile just stares at him with his big golden
eyes. Steven steps aside and gestures to Ren and the bed. Taraki blinks slowly at him before moving
into the bedroom. He hops up on the bed and settles down next to Ren. She rolls over and strokes the
ridges on his head while he thrums happily. Steven smiles one last time before he heads back into the
living room. Bessemer smirks at him from the corner, but he either doesn’t notice or pretends not to.
He flops down on the couch, throws the blanket over himself and is soon asleep.]
Scene 3: [Ren wakes the next morning and breathes deeply, rolling and stretching in her soft surroundings. Then it occurs to her that she doesn’t know where she is. She opens her eyes and looks around. She is in Steven’s bedroom, in Steven’s bed. Her heart starts pounding and her brain kicks into high gear. She turns over and Tāraki is stretching out next to her.]

Tāraki: Good morning.

Ren: Good morning… [blushing a little] Hey Tāraki, did I really let Steven carry me in here last night?

Tāraki: [nodding] Hm. He’s stronger than he looks.

[Ren blushes crimson and Tāraki slides off the bed. Ren ducks back under the covers for a moment to try and compose herself before throwing them off and sliding out of the bed herself. Her blush doesn’t really calm all the way until she has been washing her face in the bathroom for several minutes. She makes her way down the hall and finds Steven and Anthy making breakfast in the kitchen. He is still in his pajamas and they are both in their aprons again.]

Ren: Good morning you two.

Steven: [too focused to turn around] You’re up. How did you sleep?

Ren: Really great. I can’t remember if I thanked you last night, but thanks for giving me your bed even though I asked you not to.

Steven: You’re welcome.

Ren: Did you sleep okay on the couch?

Steven: Absolutely. [turning] Much better than I expected—[stifled snort]

Ren: What?

Steven: Your hair! It’s— [gesturing inarticulately]

[Ren has a huge and miraculously gravity-defying cowlick. She feels for it with her hand and chuckles as it bounces but stays in place.]

Ren: You know I already washed my face and I didn’t even notice.

Steven: Sounds like you.

Ren: Hey!

Steven: This is pretty much taken care of if you want to go change or do something about… that.

Ren: Har har. Thanks for making breakfast though. It smells amazing. I’m already excited.

[She disappears from the doorway and Steven turns back to his work. He collects the eggshells off the counter and throws them out the window and into the compost before clearing all but his mixing bowl away and washing the various tools in the sink. Ren pokes her head back in as he is finishing.]

Ren: I can’t find some of my pokemon. I’m gonna go check if they’re outside.
Steven: Alright.

[Steven hears the door close as she exits. He puts the bowl in the mixer and turns it on. He looks out the window at the calm sea and sighs. He looks back down at what he is supposed to be watching without really seeing it. The metal beater spins in the warm yellow sauce as it thickens without meaning or end. There is a nagging thought, but he doesn’t let it enter. It comes again and again and he glares until it finally breaks through.]

Anthy: [telepathy] **Steven!** Is that ready yet?

[He starts and hurriedly turns off the mixer.]

Steven: Yes.

Anthy: Perfect. Can you go get everyone? The eggs are just about done.

Steven: Sure.

[Steven takes off his apron and heads outside. He walks around the corner of the house and finds Ren leaning on Bessemer with her back to him. One bare foot is planted in the grass while the other is resting on the back of her calf. Her arms are folded on the ridge just beneath Bessemer’s eyes. Bessemer is leaning down ever so slightly to accommodate her and their eyes are crossed looking at her. Steven smiles.]

Steven: And what are you two talking about?

[Bessemer’s lids lower ever so slightly in a smile of their own as Ren turns around. She leans back against Bessemer, resting her elbows on them and recrossing her legs in front of her, a coy grin on her face.]

Ren: Nothing.

Steven: [unconvinced] Hmm.

[Bessemer picks Ren up with telekinesis and places her carefully on their head. She laughs, gripping the edge of their head with her hands and swinging her legs between their eyes.]

Bessemer: [in Steven’s head] She’s great. Can we keep her?

Steven: [grinning] Well, that’s up to her.

Ren: What’s up to me?

[Steven colors a little and gives Bessemer a censuring look, but they just rumble in amusement.]

Steven: Bes will tell you when they’ve plucked up the courage. Come on, breakfast is ready.

Ren: Ooh! My three favorite words in Anglic.

[He laughs and they head back inside together. The pokemon have long since laid everything out on the coffee table but are waiting politely for their trainers to join them. Anthy has made eggs Benedict for everyone and Ren looks fit to burst as she sits down.]
Ren: You’re perfect. Did you know that?

[He looks embarrassingly pleased with the compliment but Ren doesn’t notice because she is too focused on the food in front of her. She seizes her knife and fork.]

Ren: Itadakimasu!

[Everyone digs in, although only Kata can match Ren’s enthusiasm. Kata eats faster however and floats the last helping onto her own plate before Ren can reach for it. Ren complains but Kata just laughs as she bites into it. Steven gives Ren the rest of his and she kisses him on the cheek. He is a little surprised at the sudden display of affection and smiles to himself as she scarfs the rest of his food. Soon all are finished and the pokemon start to clear everything away.]

Ren: So, time to return to reality?

Steven: Yeah.

Ren: You already talked to a few people, right? How is out there?

Steven: I don’t think a single aerospace scientist on the entire planet has gotten any sleep, but no significant progress yet. The governments are all busy working on contingency plans. Hoenn has a lot of deep caverns but we’re basically at the epicenter here. There’s not a lot of chance it would help even if we did get a bunch of people underground. At least Unova and Kalos and that half of the planet has a halfway decent shot of survival. We may have a mass exodus on our hands.

Ren: [She takes a deep breath.] Okay. Are you going to stay here and try and keep a lid on things?

Steven: That’s the plan.

Ren: Good. You’ve been the Champion for a while now. People know you and trust you. I’m not sure how much help I can be. I think Latios and I are going to try and track down Zinnia. She may just be crazy, but maybe there is something to this Rayquaza thing? I don’t know.

Steven: No, it’s a good idea. She’s a Lorekeeper and Draconid. If there really is some way for Rayquaza to fix this, she would know. What I don’t understand is why she insists on doing whatever it is alone.

Ren: Hmm, kind of sounds like someone else I know.

Steven: Who?

Ren: You really don’t see it, Mr. I’m-Gonna-Deal-With-Team Magma-All-By-Myself?

Steven: You bite your tongue, Ms. Kosugi!

[She laughs.]

Steven: [incensed] That is not a fair comparison! I didn’t sabotage others’ attempts to help! [He slumps down onto the table. Dejected mumble] We did it together.

Ren: [petting his head] I know. I’m just trying to remain optimistic about the madwoman who may be the last hope for the planet.

Steven: You’re right. Good luck finding her.

Ren: Thanks. Your hair is so soft by the way. [running her fingers through it] What do you put in it?
Steven: I get most of my hair care products in Kalos when I visit.

Ren: Can I try some next time?

Steven: Sure.

[She reluctantly removes her fingers from his hair and sighs.]

Ren: I’m just glad we sealed Groudon back in the earth before all of this happened. I would feel really bad if we accidentally erased one of the gods from existence by leaving them in the PSS when the apocalypse happens. I mean, they’re one of the two who could revive the word if the asteroid does hit us.

Steven: That is something, I suppose.

[He pulls his head off the table and she gets up and heads for the door.]

Steven: Ren, could you do me one favor? [She turns around in the doorway.] If you do find Zinnia, could you punch her in the fucking face for me?

Ren: [outraged] Agh! And you didn’t even let me punch Maxie. You’re such a hypocrite!

Steven: He had just had his hand bitten off!

Ren: Oh what, you want me to punch her if she still has two hands but hold off if she only has one?

Steven: Yes. That is exactly what I want.

Ren: You’re so particular.

Steven: I just want things done right.

Ren: [groaning] Alright. Looks like I’m off to make some calls.

---

Scene 4: [Ren, now dressed a ready, walks out into the morning and goes to sit by the edge of the cliff. It is not as high as she expected and there is a narrow path that zigzags down to the beach below. Latios settles down next to her and she puts a hand on one of his shoulders. She pulls out her nav and tries Zinnia’s number, but she does not pick up. Ren sighs and messages Iriaka, but unsurprisingly the student hasn’t seen Zinnia in a long time and has no idea where she is. Ren takes another moment to think and then calls Chief Honda of the Rustboro Police Department, whose number she acquired at her coronation ball. Chief Honda is able to put her through to the location Maxie is being held and after holding for a while and answering a bunch of questions, they put her on the line with him.]

Ren: Hello Dr. Matsuda.

Maxie: [very dry] So formal. Tell me, how can I help our new Champion?

Ren: I need you to tell me who took your keystone.

Maxie: I have already testified several times on the subject, but to repeat myself yet again: I do not
know the identity of the woman who stole my keystone. I’m sure you can get ahold of the deposition if it is so important.

Ren: They do let you watch the news in there, don’t they?

Maxie: Yes.

Ren: Then you know that the situation has changed.

Maxie: …Yes.

Ren: And I know now that Courtney didn’t take it, so I’ll ask you again: who took your keystone?

[There is silence on the other end for a long time and then a sigh.]

Maxie: I don’t know her true identity, but she was known to me. She went by Azalea while she was a member of Team Magma. I can’t tell you more than that.

[Ren’s eyes light up and she grips Latios’s feathers.]

Ren: Thank you, Dr. Matsuda. That was very helpful. Enjoy the rest of your day.

[She hangs up and calls Josh immediately, foot bouncing impatiently as she waits for him to pick up.]

Ren: [peppy] Hey Josh! How are you?

Josh: [sarcastic] Great. The future is so much easier to face now that I don’t have one. How are you?

Ren: Oh, we’re not out of the game yet.

Josh: [ever so slightly hopeful] So you have some kind of plan to deal with a giant asteroid?

Ren: Yep! And you’re going to help me.

Josh: Great!—Wait, what?

Ren: Did you happen to know a woman named Azalea while you were working for Team Magma?

Josh: Uhhhh—

Ren: You did! Awesome! Okay, now tell me everything you know.

Josh: Well, I mean, I saw her around a few times, but she mostly higher profile recon and she always went solo, so we weren’t really moving in the same circles and—

Ren: You can’t even lie over the nav. It’s incredible.

Josh: [quiet and slightly echoey from cupping his hand over the mic] I don’t know what she’ll do to me if I tell you. She’s really scary.

Ren: Josh, listen to me: we are trying to stop a giant asteroid. This is life and death for the entire planet. You have to tell me what you know.

Josh: Okay… Let me just get out of town first.

[Ren waits patiently on the line while Josh walks to some place he won’t be overheard.]
Josh: So, do you know the Draconid Lorekeeper, Zinnia? That’s her.

Ren: Yes! Yeah, I figured that out.

Josh: Wait, really? How—

Ren: Long story, not important. Give me more.

Josh: Okay. Uh, remember when you convinced me to lie about Cosmo having the meteorite?

Ren: Mmhmm.

Josh: Well she stopped by and figured out what was happening because I’m bad at lying, but she wanted to protect you. So after that we sort of worked together to make sure you didn’t get killed.

Ren: Oh… That actually explains a lot.

Josh: Also we sort of pretended to be hooking up to make her talking to me and us disappearing at the same time less suspicious.

Ren: [She whistles.] Damn. Hart and Brent must have been jealous.

Josh: Yeah, kinda? Mostly concerned. Do we have to talk about that part?

Ren: Not sure yet. All I know is that I have to track her down and you’re the only person who knew her who the police haven’t already tried.

Josh: So you want to know where I think she would go?

Ren: Yes, and barring that just everything you know about her so that I have something to go off of.

Josh: I have an idea actually. We went to Courtney’s house a few times. I got the vibe she hid out there a lot and trained with her team.

Ren: Perfect. That’s on Kagari Island, right? Above the Magma base?

Josh: Yeah.

Ren: Okay. Send me your location and I’ll pick you up. Do you still have your Magma outfit?

Josh: Yes but—

Ren: Bring the glove in case we need to get into the base. And call Zinnia in the meantime and see if she’ll talk to you. Get any info you can. I’ll see you soon.

Josh: Ren—

[Ren hangs up before he can finish his objection.]

Ren: Alright, Latios, looks like we have a lead.

[She gets up and Latios rises, spreading his wings and tucking in his legs.]

Ren: Everyone get in you balls! It’s time to save the world again!
Scene 5: Ren and Latios land on a deserted piece of shoreline north of Lilycove and Josh is there to meet them. He climbs up on Latios’s back and holds onto Ren as they soar to Kagari Island. They land in front of the mansion and Ren knocks on the door, but Latios can already tell Zinnia isn’t there. They go in anyway to have a look around and Ren gets Josh talking about her as they search the place. Zinnia didn’t leave anything behind, but there is some subtle evidence she has been living there and recently. There is some food in the fridge and kitchen cabinet, toilet paper and towels hanging in one of the many bathrooms, a book sitting out on the desk in the study, and one music stand suspiciously free of dust. Ren and Josh meet up with Latios outside. Fortunately, it is low tide and thus he is able to fly the three of them into the Magma base entrance without dipping underwater. He once again stays outside as Ren and Josh use the gloves to teleport inside. The lights are on and the hallway looks very much as it did the first time Ren was there. There is a flash of red light behind them and Josh jumps, but it is just Tarahau popping out of her ball.

Tarahau: Did you find her yet? How long is this going to take?

Ren: No and it could be a while. Sorry about that. I know you don’t love being in your ball.

Josh: When did you get a froslass? How many pokemon do you have?

Ren: A little while after the last time I was here and eleven.

Josh: That can’t possibly be right.

Ren: Some of them retired.

Tarahau: Can I stay out for a bit since you’re not flying?

Ren: Sure, but I’ll have to pop you back in for a second to use the teleporter pads.

Tarahau: That’s fine. Who’s this?

Ren: This is my friend, Josh. He used to work for Magma.

Tarahau: Really? Weren’t we fighting them when I joined?

Ren: Life’s funny like that. Keep an eye out for anyone else, would you?

Tarahau: Sure thing.

[They move off down the hall and Josh watches as the froslass floats ahead of them.]

Josh: She’s really pretty.

Ren: You like ghost-types?

Josh: Not as much as dark-types, but yeah, they’re pretty cool. And ice/ghost is a neat combo.

Tarahau: What is he saying about me?

Ren: He thinks you’re awesome.

Tarahau: Oh! He has good taste!

[They search the open rooms off the hallway, but find nothing. The last door is the one to the living
room Josh spent all of his free time in and he pauses at the door.]

Ren: So how come the power is still on in here?

[Josh doesn’t respond and Tarahau taps him on the shoulder.]

Josh: Oh, uh, we have a tidal turbine so that we’re off the grid.

Tarahau: Why’s he staring at that chair?

Ren: I don’t know. Hey Josh, are you alright?

Josh: Yeah. I just used to read in here a lot.

[Ren translates this for her froslass as Josh backs out and closes the door. Tarahau’s first question is what books are and Ren explains. The teleport to the next section and the froslass pops right back out of her ball to ask what the books he reads are about. He tells her that a lot of his favorite books are stories about pokemon and she wants to hear the stories so he tells her about White Fang and Silverwing and Tales From Dimwood Forest and Watership Down and My side of the Mountain and Julie of the Lycanrocs. That takes up most of their time searching through the many rooms and corridors. Tarahau eats up the stories, often prompting Ren to translate as she becomes distracted by something or other.]

Ren: Maybe I should pick up one of these books some time. They sound good.

Josh: You’ve never read any of them?

Ren: I’m from Johto, remember? I grew up with stuff like Kemono no Sōja, Sorairo Magatama, and Brave Story. And I’m not a big reader, much to my mother’s disappointment.

[Josh cocks his head at her.]

Ren: My mother’s an author. She’s really good, but maybe not your speed. What’s this room?

Josh: This is the lab that made the magma suit.

[They snoop around a little and Josh stops in front of a peculiar and empty set of shelves.]

Josh: The other suit is gone.

Ren: There were two?

Josh: Yeah. Maxie had a backup for everything. It was right here.

[Ren walks over to look at the empty shelves.]

Josh: Do you think she took it?

Ren: I don’t know who else would, except maybe Courtney.

Josh: But what would she want it for?

[Ren has to think on that for a few moments.]

Ren: She’s going into space! She told us that her plan was to take Rayquaza into space and destroy the asteroid! Wait, will the suit even work in space?
Josh: Don’t ask me.

Ren: Well, it does have a self contained environment and can handle extreme temperatures, so I guess it would help. Looks like we’re on her trail. [heading back into the hallway] Is there anything else in here she might want?

Josh: I don’t know. Could we go back to the part about her riding a god into space to destroy a giant meteor?

Ren: Oh. Yeah, she told us that was her plan to save the world. She destroyed the dimensional shifter because it would have just caused the asteroid to destroy the Distortion World instead of our world. Not sure if that’s true or if she’s just crazy. How crazy did she seem to you?

Josh: There was something a little off about her. Everyone noticed but no one could tell you what it was. She’s really smart. Like she was always at least twenty moves ahead of me. It was a little hard to talk to her sometimes.

Ren: But lucid right? Ugh, none of this makes any sense to me.

[They warp into the next hall and start checking the rooms.]

Josh: So this thing with Rayquaza, is there any way it’s related to waking Groudon? Like, they are part of a trio…

Ren: Why do you ask that?

Josh: Well she was working for Magma and after Mt. Pyre, when I found out who she was, I asked her why. She said Groudon had to be awakened. So I just thought, if she knew this asteroid was coming and stopping it has been her goal all along, then the two must be connected.

Ren: Rayquaza is supposed to make sure Groudon and Kyogre don’t rage out of control. She said that she failed to summon Rayquaza before, so she must have tried to get their attention by reviving Groudon! Josh, you’re a genius.

Josh: [flushing and muttering] No one’s ever told me that before.

Ren: Of course, that doesn’t answer the question of what her plan is now that the last one failed, but I’ll bet it has something to do with all those keystones she stole.

[Ren opens the door to Maxie’s office only to find Courtney asleep at the desk. Josh and Ren freeze and Tarahau peeks her head around them to see what is going on. Courtney lifts her head and blinks blearily at them. Her face morphs from exhaustion to pure rage and Josh recoils.]

Courtney: YOU! What are you doing here!

Ren: Oops.

Courtney: [eyes falling on Josh] And you! You’re a traitor!

[Josh tugs on Ren’s arm and they make a run for it.]

Courtney: [chasing after them] GIVE ME YOUR KEYSTONE! I need it! I won’t let Azalea—

[Her rant is cut short as they warp to the next section. Ren sends out Tarahau again as they run to the other end.]
Tarahau: Aren’t we going to fight her?

Ren: [stopping] That’s a solid point.

Josh: [stopping just ahead of her] What are you doing?!

Ren: I’m gonna fight her and bring her in. She stole my friends keystones.

[ Courtney comes through the teleporter as Ren reaches for her balls. They both send out their pokemon.]

Josh: Does she still have them?

Ren: No, but—

Josh: [He has run back to her and is pulling on her arm.] Then let’s go! She has eleven pokemon and you have six!

[Tāraki charges into the fray and Kōtai and Pohaku block the half dozen flamethrowers that come his way with earthquake and aqua tail.]

Ren: Maybe you’re right.

[They sprint for the next teleporter and Ren withdraws all of her pokemon before warping away. The hallway they are now in shakes as Josh pulls her along to the next one.]

Ren: Thanks for that.

[Tarahau pops out again as Courtney comes through behind them and sends out her ninetails. It aims a ball of fire at them which is on track to hit Josh in the back head but Tarahau counters with a shadow ball. The two moves collide in the middle of the hall and the ghostly energy sucks in the fire and snuff it out.]

Tarahau: Leave my friend alone!

[The froslass’s crystals light up and she fires off an ice beam that freezes the ninetails to the floor. Ren withdraws her froslass as the ninetails targets it with a flamethrower. She and Josh teleport away before the flames reach them and emerge at the entrance where Latios is waiting for them. They both jump aboard, which is a first for Josh given his aversion to flying, and Latios rockets out of the cavern. Flames and incoherent screaming follow them out, but Latios takes them up and out of danger.]

---

**Scene 6:** [Ren sends out her pokemon as they land on the edge of Lilycove and checks them over. Everyone is fine, though Josh is looking a bit pale and sits down on the ground. Tarahau hovers around him, checking to make sure he didn’t get burned.]

Ren: Sorry, Josh. That could have gone better.

Josh: [grumbling] Now what do we do?

Ren: Um, I don’t really know. I mean, we did figure out some stuff, but we’re not really any closer
to finding her.

Josh collapses back onto the grass with a sigh.

Ren: Come on, think! Where else would she go?

Josh: I don’t know! They checked her hometown already, right?

Ren: Yes… We need something personal about her. Did you ever notice anything else odd?

Josh has to think about this for a while and Ren and her pokemon wait in silence. Eventually he sits back up again.

Josh: I don’t know if this helps us at all, but you know about that whismur Zinnia has with her all the time? [Ren nods.] I don’t think she has a ball. I’ve never seen her in one and Zinnia has a full team of dragon-types. And she doesn’t treat her like a normal pokemon. I even heard Zinnia call her ‘daughter’ once.

Ren: Hmm. That is odd. Why would she do that?

Josh: Maybe she thinks the whismur is her daughter?

Ren: Huh… Do you think she has a daughter?

Josh: No way! There’s nothing in her bio about a daughter.

Ren: You looked her up too, huh?

Josh: …Yeah.

They all just stand around in silence for a little longer, but finally Ren has had enough.

Ren: I think the only thing we can do is go talk to her parents. I know they said they haven’t seen her in a long time, but maybe they’ll tell me something they won’t tell the police.

Josh: Worth a shot I guess… Does that mean I can go home?

Ren: No way. You’re coming with.

Josh: Why? What do you need me for?

Ren: If we do find her, we might have a better shot of getting her to talk to us.

Josh: I don’t know about that but, if you think it’ll help I’ll come. Where do they live?

Ren: Fallarbor.

Josh lets out a big sigh.

Ren: [chuckling] Come on, we’ll get you a jacket and goggles first.

Josh: You don’t have to—

Ren: You were shivering all the way here and this flight is going to be way longer.

[Ren pulls Josh up and they head for the Department store.]
Scene 7: [When they emerge from the department store, Josh has warmer pants and a jacket with a pair of flight goggles on his head. They climb back up on Latios and he flies them up and west. Josh is more used to flying by now and doesn’t hold Ren quite as tight despite the great speed. However, he does keep his face tucked into Ren’s shoulder so that he doesn’t have to look at things rushing by below them. Latios pitches in the air as they run into a fierce headwind. Latios struggles for a moment but manages to redirect the air around them with his magic. Josh looks up to see what is happening as the wind howls and blusters around them. Ren sees leaves and other debris heading towards them and flattens herself against Latios’s neck. Josh meanwhile is distracted and squints at a small red dot hurlding their way. Latios sees it too and angles toward it at the last second. It turns out to be a fletchling tumbling around helplessly in the gale and Josh leans out of his seat to catch it. Latios sees it too and angles toward it at the last second. It turns out to be a fletchling tumbling around helplessly in the gale and Josh leans out of his seat to catch it. He almost slides right off Latios’s back as he snatches it from the air, but Ren grabs him by the belt and hauls him upright. She says something, but he can’t hear her over the roaring of the wind and Ren motions him to lean down before turning forward again. Josh unzips his jacket a little to slip the freezing fletchling inside and leans down against Ren’s back. After a while, they fly out of the gale and circle down to Fallarbor. Once they are on the ground, Ren inquires about the incident and Josh carefully unzips his jacket to show her. The fletchling is no longer shivering and cold, but she does flinch back against Josh’s chest at the sight of them. They decide to leave her be and make their way over to one of the modest houses on the edge of town. Ren knocks and an older woman opens the door. She looks them over.]

Woman: You must be the Champion.

Ren: Yes. I’m sorry to trouble you. I’ sure you’ve had a lot of people bothering you today.

Woman: Come in.

[She stands aside to let them in. The kitchen is small, but serviceable and has a table with two chairs. Beyond it is the rest of the house, but Zinnia’s mother does not invite them deeper in.]

Woman: I am Puaka Dracon.

[She offers her hand and Ren takes it, but is surprised by the roughness of it.]

Puaka: [noticing Ren’s confusion] They’re calluses. I’m a blacksmith by profession. What can I help you with, Champion?

Ren: This is Josh and you can call me Ren. We are here to ask you some questions about your daughter. I’m sure you’ve been through a lot and I want to assure you that we aren’t trying to catch or punish Zinnia. I don’t see the point in that. I just want to help.

Puaka: I’ve already told the police some places she might be and I haven’t seen her in quite some time. I can’t tell you where she is.

Ren: I believe you. Can you tell me what she said the last time you saw her?

Puaka: She came to pick up something I had made for her and she thanked me for it. She wasn’t here long and I can’t remember much of what was said. It was just small talk really.

Ren: Was it the keystone holder she wears on her leg by any chance?
Puaka: Yes it was.

Ren: You do very beautiful work, ma’am.

Puaka: Thank you.

[Ren shifts a little draws in a breath. Puaka watches her with the sharp intensity her daughter often did. Ren hesitates, trying to think of a more delicate way to ask what she wants to know.]

Ren: This may be a strange question, but did Zinnia ever have a child?

[Puaka’s eyes narrow, but she answers straightforwardly.]

Puaka: Yes, a daughter. Her name was Aster.

[Josh gets a sinking look on his face.]

Ren: [already guessing the answer] And what happened to her?

Puaka: She died.

Ren: [She nods and looks down.] I’m very sorry for your loss.

Puaka: Zinnia has never quite been whole since, none of us have. [She lets out a deep sigh and shuffles over to sit down in one of the chairs.] She had Aster when she was very young, so we helped raise her while Zinnia finished school. Even though they had to be apart sometimes, they had a very special connection. They were like two peas in a pod. And as soon as Aster was big enough, she went with Zinnia almost everywhere. After she died, you could feel a great chasm there, even just walking into the room. My husband called it a black hole—he’s a physicist like Zinnia—but my daughter is very strong. So one day she got up and kept on living. She has the soul of a dragon. That’s why they’re drawn to her. And even though things seem dire, part of me believes she can save us.

Ren: I hope so and I will help her if I can. Can I, can I ask where the grave is?

Puaka: At the top of Meteor falls, but she isn’t there.

Ren: I think I understand things much better now. Thank you so much. Have a pleasant evening.

[Ren and Josh leave, looking much more somber than when they went in. Latios takes them to the grave at the top of Meteor Falls and Ren kneels before the stone for a while. The fletchling pokes it’s head out of Josh’s jacket and chirps. He pulls a granola bar out of his pocket and offers the little pokemon some crumbles. She pecks them up greedily, no doubt starving from her ordeal. Ren stands and the fletchling hides in Josh’s jacket again.]

Ren: Are you gonna keep that fletchling?

Josh: Yeah. I think I’ll name her Frightful.

Ren: [light laugh] That fits.

Josh: I wonder how she got blown all the way to Hoenn.

Ren: [shrugs] Weird stuff has been happening since Groudon.

Josh: So, got any more ideas?
Ren: We’re going to Granite Cave in Dewford.

Josh: Why?

Ren: There’s a huge mural of the climate titans there painted by the ancient Draconids. And I know that Zinnia feels very guilty about her role in reviving Groudon. It just seems like the sort of place she might visit.

---

**Scene 8:** [They have another long but far less eventful flight to Dewford. Latios comes with them this time and Ren sends out Tarahau while Josh sends out Fang. The mightyena puts her nose to the ground and goes in a circle sniffing for a trace. She lifts her head and reports to Josh. They hurry farther in and down the tunnel, Latios making himself invisible as they near the mural chamber. It looks the same as the day Steven showed it to her, but kneeling in front of two climate titans is a dark haired woman in a cape and a whismur. Zinnia rises and turns to face them. Her jaw is clenched tight and there is a telling brightness to her eyes as she waits for them to speak first.]

Ren: [relieved] Oh thank Arceus.

[Zinnia blinks rapidly and just stares at Ren for a moment as they approach. She clears her throat and smiles tensely, not quite able to look Ren in the eyes.]

Zinnia: That wasn’t quite the greeting I was expecting.

Ren: Well, I started off this morning pretty fucking ticked at you, but I learned a lot today and I think I’m beginning to understand. Besides, there’s no point in grudges at this juncture.

Zinnia: [Her face slips into a genuine smile and the tension falls from her shoulders.] You really are incredible, you know that?

Ren: I do my best.

Zinnia: [nodding to Josh] And kid. Long time, no see.

Josh: Hi, Azalea.

Zinnia: [chuckling] You can use my real name now.

Josh: [looking down and flushing] Right.

[And just like that the atmosphere between the three of them has calmed significantly. Fang sits down and Tarahau starts floating around the chamber.]

Ren: So, interesting hiding place.

Zinnia: I came here to meditate on the past and gather some supplies. I can’t afford to repeat the mistakes of the past, mine or others. I’ve only got one more shot at this.

[Ren just nods, biting back a retort.]

Zinnia: Are you familiar with these paintings?
Josh: No.

Ren: I’ve seen them once before. Steven showed me, but I didn’t get to spend much time here.

Zinnia: As the Draconid Lorekeeper, perhaps I can explain a bit better. [turning to the wall and sweeping with her arms] This central mural depicts the first battle the great climate titans ever fought, the battle that formed our planet as we know it today. As you can see, they are in their primal state, something one person alive today has ever seen. [pointing up to the ceiling above them] And Atua Rayquaza watches from high in the atmosphere, fulfilling their task without need of conflict.

[Ren looks up and recognizes the image from a search she did on Rayquaza months ago, though she never saw it the last time she was here. Zinnia moves on, walking along the wall to the next part of the mural.]

Zinnia: Here, the climate gods rest and life flourishes. After a time, they wake again and seek to wipe the slate clean. [striding across to the opposite wall] But Arceus, the creator, did not wish it so. And so took from each a great part of their power and sealed it away. [to Ren] The orbs you carry.

[Walking further along until she is parallel with Ren and Josh] Since the creation of the orbs, the gods have risen many times, but the creatures of the world survived. This last time due to your efforts and the aid of the Eon Guardians.

[Zinnia looks up and Latios appears and floats down to loom just above Ren. Zinnia bows to him and he nods in acknowledgement. Zinnia walks to the end of the mural and presses her hand to blank stone there.]

Zinnia: I thought about adding on the latest chapter, but I think I will leave that to my successor. Who wants to tell a story in which they themselves are the villain?

[Zinnia lets her hand drop from the wall and turns back to Ren.]

Zinnia: I am so sorry for everything I put you through. I took the knowledge passed down from my oldest ancestors and used it to do great evil. The world is very lucky to have you in it, Ren Kosugi.

Ren: Did you give Maxie the idea to revive Groudon?

Zinnia: No, he did that part himself, but that is why I went to him. And I helped or hindered him every step of the way, manipulating him and the rest of the organization into reviving Groudon just before anyone could stop us. Maxie may have been driven by arrogance and myself by desperation, but we both endangered everyone’s lives in the same way. I did my best to keep you out of harm’s way, but I was also responsible for almost every danger you faced.

Ren: So that's what was up with the whole no-thanking-you thing?

Zinnia: [guilty] Yeah.

Ren: Well, that makes sense now. But let’s worry about that another time. [glancing at Zinnia’s anklet, which now has five keystones] Why did you steal all of those keystones?

[Zinnia pacing back to the central mural] To help summon Rayquaza. Unlike the other two members of the trio, Rayquaza is capable of mega evolution. They carry within their body a great mega stone. Draconids in the past used a large keystone to connect to Rayquaza’s mega stone, but that keystone has since been lost. In my first summoning attempt, I used my own keystone, but it turned out not be strong enough to reach them. For the second attempt, I hoped that Groudon’s awakening would draw them down to hear my pleas, but I failed again. But with all of these keystones, the signal should be strong enough to reach them. Is there anything else you want to
Ren: I think that fills the last of the gaps for me.

Zinnia: Thank you for listening.

Ren: I didn’t just come for answers, you know, though that was nice. I came to help.

Zinnia: That is kind of you, after everything I’ve done, but I’m afraid I cannot accept. This is something I must do alone.

Ren: Why?

Zinnia: That I won’t tell you.

Ren: Why not?

Zinnia: Frankly, I’m a little afraid of what you might do. I know it’s a lot to ask of you, after everything, but could you trust me one last time?

Ren: That is a lot.

[Ren’s fist clenches, her jaw tightens and she glares at Zinnia, but the Lorekeeper yields nothing. She stands tall, meeting Ren’s frustrated scowl with one just as intense and resolute. Josh glances worriedly between them.]

Tarahau: [sensing that the tension has spiked again] So, are we going to fight her?

Ren: [unclenching her fists] Oh, uh… [She takes a moment to think and something like a smile flickers across her face.] You know that’s not a bad idea, rookie. [to Zinnia] How about this: I’ll trust you if you keep your promise and battle me.

[Zinnia almost smiles too before her face hardens with determination and a light flashes behind her eyes.]

Zinnia: I’d be honored to, Champion.

---

**Scene 9:** [Ren, Zinnia and their teams square off on the beach outside Granite Cave. Josh has let his other pokemon out too and Latios lands next to him to watch the match. Tāraki steps up to battle first and Zinnia nods to her goodra. Tāraki’s claws elongate and he runs at the goodra. The dragon stands its ground, drawing its head back and opening its mouth to charge and ice beam between jaws.]

Fang: [muttering to Josh] Is this really a good idea?

Josh: I don’t know.

[Tāraki dives under the ice beam and slashes the goodra across the jaw. It reels for just a moment before nailing Tāraki in the face with a muddy water. It does very little damage, but temporarily blinds him.]
Latios: If Ren loses, we are where we were before. But if Ren wins, we have leverage. I see no downsides.

[Tāraki ducks and thrashes the goodra with his tail, but it grabs him, janks his up by his tail, and slams him down. Tāraki brings both fists down to protect his head and sends an earthquake into the sand. Earth erupts beneath the goodra, causing it to let go if his tail and sending it staggering back.]

Josh: [quietly to Latios] But why fight? We all want the same thing.

Latios: There is much more communicated in a battle than strength. That is why they felt they knew each other before they ever spoke: they saw each other battle. Now they have things they need to make the other understand, points they must prove. Words have failed them, so actions must speak.

[Tāraki runs blindly at the goodra, blocking its ice beam with one flaming claw and striking out with the other. He gets the goodra right in the chest and it slumps over.]

Josh: Oh Arceus, do I have a lot to learn.

Latios: [eyeing Josh] You are young and have spent many of your years adrift. Give yourself time and consider that there are many types of wisdom. Your experience has taught you things that others may never understand like the bone-deep drive for survival, the empty nature of cruelty, when not to overestimate your abilities, and when to run.

Josh gives Latios a wide-eyed look and the Eon Guardian smiles a little. Tāraki wipes the muck from his face as Zinnia’s noivern takes to the air. He readies another dragon claw with his good arm and dodges its first air slash, but it uses dragon pulse and he goes down. He drags himself off the field much like the goodra and Tarahau takes his place. The noivern sweeps around, sucking in air for a boomburst, but the froslass nails its wing joint with ice beam before it can strike. The Noivern teeters but manages to correct itself only for Tarahau to hit its other wing with another ice beam.

Josh: [under his breath] Damn she’s fast!

Latios: Yes, but she lacks experience and power. She’ll make a fine battler once day.

[The noivern fires a shadow ball as it crashes to the ground and Tarahau is flung backwards out of the arena. Kōtai runs in as the noivern shakes the remaining ice off it wings. It raises its wings but before it can take off, Kōtai leaps up and slams its head to the ground with smackdown. Next, the Tyrantrum rushes in and Kōtai uses earthquake to bog it down. It weathers the blow with its impressive defenses and retaliates with a stone edge from behind. Kōtai is knocked right into its mouth and it bites down with a crunch. Kōtai wheezes as the air is squeezed from his lungs but brings both claws down on its snout with a brick break. The tyranntrum drops him and Kōtai uses earthquake again as he hits the ground, pushing the tyranntrum back and over with a wave of earth and sand.]

Josh: Holy shit.

Fang: Is this what League battles are like?

Josh: We watched the Championship.

Fang: It’s not the same on a screen.

[Zinnia’s altaria swoops high into the air. Kōtai summons a rock just above it, but it twists in the air, avoiding the smackdown. The altaria spreads its wings wide and fires a moonblast at Kōtai. He is
knocked back and Kata take his place. The grumpig is uncharacteristically serious as she summons a wall of psychic energy to counter the dragon pulse the altaria unleashes. The blue draconic energy collides with Kata’s purples and is diverted around. As soon as the path is clear, Kata seizes the altaria with psychic and throws it to the ground. The altaria lashes out with hyper voice as it falls and sand sprays as Kata slides back with the force of the blow. However, the grumpig keeps her focus and the purple energy around her pearls switches gray as the altaria hits the ground. The massive bird hops back to its feet and summons another moonblast from above just as Kata fires off her power gem attack. Both of them go down.

Josh: Still think we can do this?

Fang: If her mightyena can, so can I.

[Zinnia’s flygon begins climbing into the air, but Pohaku extends the water around his tail outward and knocks it back down. Pohaku runs at the grounded dragon, claws glowing lime green and the flygon tries to push him back with a dragon pulse. Pohaku barrels through and slashes the flygon across the chest with x-scissor. The flygon retaliates with a point blank flamethrower and Pohaku staggers back a bit under the heat of it. He spins, surrounding himself with water to put out the flames before lashing out with aqua tail once more. The flygon falls, but its eyes glow and the earth erupts beneath Pohaku, sending him sprawling.]

Poppy: I want to be able to fight like that. Then none of us would have to be scared of anything anymore.

Josh: I guess that’s true.

Shade: I’m not afraid anyway. Josh takes care of us.

[The final two combatants step forward and Josh, Latios and the others wisely move further back. Zinna touches only her keystone, leaving the others unactivated as she mega evolves her salamence. Ren taps her own keystone and mega evolves Ao. The salamence flies high into the air and Ao crouches low, waiting for the strike. The salamence summons a hail of blue fireballs and charges at Ao. The manectric dodges with blinding speed, sparks flying behind her as she bounds clear of the draco meteor and flying sand. She hits the salamence twice with charge beam as it recovers and wheels to face her again, then once more just as it comes in for a dragon claw. Ao rolls so that part of the strike bounces off her and telltale flickers of electricity jump across the salamence’s shoulders and wings. Zinnia grits her teeth and the salamence turns sharply and with perfect precision despite the paralysis. Fire laps at its jaws as it readies a flamethrower and once again Ao holds her ground until the last moment before springing clear of the attack. Just as the salamence passes over, she discharges into it. The salamence convulses and so does Zinnia before it crashes to the ground. Zinnia staggers, holding out for a few more seconds before slumping forward and almost falling. Her salamence drops its mega form and Ao and Ren howl. The rest of Ren’s team joins in with their various roars and other calls as Ao drops her mega form. Ren lets out a long breath before standing straighter and marching across the battlefield to Zinnia. Zinnia steadies herself, but still looks rather distant as Ren approaches.]

Zinnia: I failed… I failed again. What if I can’t—

[Ren takes hold of Zinnia’s shoulder and forces her back to the present. Zinnia’s red-brown eyes eyes flick up to look into Ren’s deep green.]

Ren: It’s okay.

[Zinnia glances down and away, head bowed ever so slightly.]
Ren: I won’t stop you and I won’t stand in your way. [Ren ducks her head to meet Zinnia’s eyes again and grips her shoulder tighter.] But you have to let me help you. Now tell me the truth.

Zinnia: [searching Ren’s face] And you won’t change your mind if I tell you?

Ren: I swear it. You kept your promise.

Zinnia: Okay.

[Ren lets her hand fall from Zinnia’s shoulder as she straightens up and takes a deep breath.]

Zinnia: I didn’t want you to help me because it’s a suicide mission. Many Draconids before me have aided Rayquaza in averting disaster like this one, and none of them returned. The great keystone wasn’t lost, it was obliterated along with Rayquaza’s last rider.

Ren: Then why take the magma suit?

Zinnia: To help my chances. But to be honest, the vacuum of space may be the least of my problems. I don’t expect to come back from this. But I had to try, for my pokemon.

[Aster comes over then and hugs Zinnia’s leg with her ears. Ren looks down at her for a moment and her face tightens, but she pushes through it and looks back up at Zinnia.]

Ren: I promised I wouldn’t stop you and I’ll keep my word. I won’t try and convince you otherwise or try to take your place or anything stupid like that. I may be the hero type, but I’m not that keen on dying. Not to mention it would be pretty hypocritical after the Groudon thing. [Zinnia smiles.] But I am going with you to the Sky Pillar tomorrow. You shouldn’t have to do this alone.

[Zinnia’s smile falters and her eyes get suspiciously bright. Ren wraps her arms around Zinnia’s middle and hugs her tight. Zinnia looks up at the darkening sky as she wraps her arms around Ren’s shoulders. The sun is only just beginning to set and the first star peeks out from behind a cloud. Zinnia fixes her eyes on it until they are no longer trying to overflow. Ren hugs her tighter, straightening her back to pull Zinnia in closer and take some of her weight. Zinnia finally gives in and leans on Ren just a little, resting her head on Ren’s shoulder.]

Josh: [to Latios] I guess you were right.

Latios: You doubted the wisdom of one who has lived a thousand lifetimes?

Josh: Oh—I’m sorry—I didn’t—

Latios: I am not offended. Some level of skepticism is healthy. I was joking.

[Josh slumps in relief and Latios almost chuckles to himself in amusement. Some distance away, Ren and Zinnia let go of each other only for Ren to takes Zinnia’s hands in hers.]

Ren: Come back with me to Mossdeep. There’s great food, a comfortable bed, and you’ll be much closer to where you need to be tomorrow.

Zinnia: You have a place already?

Ren: It’s Steven’s house.

Zinnia: Is he gonna want me there?

Ren: He will by the time we get there. Besides, I have to make sure you don’t change your mind and
try and go without me.

Zinnia: Alright, but I can’t go directly. There’s one last stop I have to make.

Ren: Okay. I have to drop Josh off anyway. But you better be there by dinner.

Zinnia: Yes ma’am.

[They go tend to their pokemon, who have all been waiting patiently. They are all milling about in one big group together, so there don’t seem to be any hard feelings about the battle. Josh and Latios go over to help and soon enough everyone is taken care of. Josh stands up after spraying Tarahau down with a potion to find Zinnia looming over him.]

Zinnia: So you sold me out, huh?

Josh: I’m sorry! I—

Zinnia: Don’t worry about it. You did the right thing, kid. I’m proud of you.

Josh: Uh, thanks.

Ren: [walking up] Ready to go, Josh?

Josh: Yeah.

Zinnia: One more thing. [He turns back to her] Stick with the training. I think you’ll be good at it. [offering her hand] Good luck out there, kid.

Josh: [shaking her hand] You too.

[Ren withdraws her pokemon and hops aboard Latios. Josh withdraws his and follows. He waves to Zinnia as Latios takes them up, but Ren just makes the “I’m watching you” gesture and Zinnia laughs. Aster leans against Zinnia’s leg as they watch Ren disappear into the distance.]

Zinnia: Well, that didn’t go according to plan.

Aster: “According to plan” hasn’t exactly been working for us. Maybe this is a good thing.

Zinnia: Maybe so, Aster. Maybe so.

---

**Scene 10:** [Ren, Latios and Josh make good time getting back to Lilycove since the wind is with them this time. They land near Josh’s apartment, no longer very concerned about anyone seeing them. Tarahau pops out of her balls again to drape herself around Josh’s shoulders and nuzzle his head. He smiles and pats her despite the distinct chill she gives off and Ren smiles.]

Ren: Thanks for coming with me today and for all of your help. Once again you managed to save my ass and things probably wouldn’t have went as well with Zinnia if you weren’t there.

Josh: I barely even talked to her.

Ren: But I wouldn’t have known even half as much about her without our little adventure
beforehand. I wouldn’t have been able to reach her and I probably wouldn’t have wanted to. You’re plenty useful. Stop trying to deny it all the time.

Josh: Okay.

[Tarahau opens her jaws to nibble on his ear and he scratches absently at her teeth.]

Josh: Sorry if I complained a lot. It’s always kinda stressful being around you, but I think I felt better doing something then I would have felt sitting at home and waiting to die.

[Tarahau is enjoying the attention enormously and has her jaw gaping the full 180 degrees the better for Josh to pick at her teeth.]

Josh: Do you really think this Rayquaza thing will work?

Ren: I have to believe it will. It’s all we can do. Will you be alright here?

Josh: Yeah, my sister is coming over in the morning. Our TV is bigger.

Ren: Alright then. I guess I better get going.

Tarahau: [snapping to attention] Aw, are we leaving?

Ren: Afraid so.

Tarahau: But we’ll visit him again, right?

Ren: I can’t say for sure, but I hope so.

Tarahau: He said he’d read to me and he hasn’t yet, so we have to come back.

Ren: Sure but—

Tarahau: We got through Groudon’s revival, so I’m not worried about this meteor. Rayquaza and your friend will punch it right back where it came from!

[She punches the air for emphasis, keeping her other arm draped over Josh’s shoulder. Ren smiles.]

Ren: Yeah.

Tarahau: [lavender smoke starts spilling from her mouth, tendrils spiraling out around her] And if it comes down here, I’ll just crunch it into a thousand pieces! [Her jaws become shadow and extend to three times their normal size before snapping closed.] You saw me fight that dragon today! I would have won if it didn’t have a ghost move!

Ren: [chuckling] Yeah, you did good.

Josh: [eyeing one of the smoke tendrils coiling next to his face] Um, what is she doing?

Ren: Trying to cheer us up, mostly by bragging. [to the froslass] You’re freaking him out.

Josh: Oh, no, that’s okay. I know-ghost types can make illusions and stuff. I’ve just never seen it.

Ren: Come on, Tara.

The froslax slumps dejectedly and slowly slides off of Josh. He gives her a pat and she leans back into him.

Ren: Josh, maybe you should take her.

Josh: Really?

Tarahau: I can stay?

Ren: Yeah. You want to?

Josh & Tarahau: Yes!

Ren: Alright then, it’s settled.

Tarahau: Oh! Oh! Can I be named after a character from one of the books like your other pokemon?

Josh: What’s she saying?

Ren: She wants you to give her a new name from a book.

Josh: Is that uh…

Ren: Of course it’s fine.

Josh: Okay. Well, I’ll have to put some thought into it.

Tarahau: I want a pretty name but spooky too. And—oh, can I say goodbye to Kata first?

[Ren sends out the grumpig and the two of them talk for a few minutes while Ren conveys some information to Josh. Then Ren has to leave and Josh actually hugs her this time. She withdraws Kata and Josh and his new froslax wave as she and Latios fly off across the sea to Dewford.]

---

Scene 11: [Ren and Steven are sitting at his coffee table with a whole pile of food in front of them and their pokemon around them when there is a knock at the door. Ren goes to get it while Steven stays where he is. Ren opens the door to find Zinnia standing there and her face floods with relief.]

Ren: You really did come. I was starting to worry.

Zinnia: Sorry about that. I had to say some goodbyes.

Ren: No problem.

[Aster pokes her head around Zinnie’s legs, ears cocked and listening.]

Zinnia: Are you sure you want me here?


Zinnia: [stepping inside and taking off her shoes] What about Stone?
Aster follows suit by wiping her paws on the mat.

Ren: Uh, he’s not thrilled that I invited you, but he’ll deal.

Zinnia: Oh boy.

Ren: Please just give him a chance. He’s a real sweetheart I swear.

Zinnia: Anything for you, spitfire.

Ren smiles and leads Zinnia into the living room. Steven looks up at them from his seat on the floor as they come in, but says nothing. An awkward silence hangs in the air for a moment as Steven and Zinnia stare each other down. Ren opens her mouth to break it, but Zinnia beats her to it.

Zinnia: Thanks for having me over.

Steven: Just try not to destroy anything while you're here.

Zinnia: You know, I think your rock collection might be a threat to another dimension. Are you sure I can’t clear it out?

Steven bristles and Ren throws both of them a reproachful look. Zinnia forces her face back to neutral and sits down opposite Steven between Kata and the sandslashes. Aster climbs into her lap and Zinnia starts serving herself. Everyone eats in silence for a while and Kata seems to be the only one truly enjoying herself. Ren watches as Zinnia cuts things into smaller chunks for her whismur who then shovels the food off of Zinnia’s plate and into her mouth with her ears. It is all too reminiscent of a parent eating with their child and Ren’s stomach knots up. Zinnia does not use the utensils much for herself, preferring to stuff smaller items in whole and rip meat from the bone with her teeth. This only worsens after the first few minutes until she is tearing through the food in front of her. Steven grimaces at the lack of table manners and Ren looks rather concerned at the level of hunger on display. Zinnia does not look up, but can probably feel the other two watching her.

Zinnia: [to Steven between mouthfuls] Did you make all this?

Steven: Yes, though you can also thank my carbink.

Zinnia: It’s really good. I didn’t expect a wealthy guy like you to cook.

[Steven’s eyes narrow and Ren jumps in before he can make some equally snide remark.]

Ren: It surprised me too. He’s a lot better than I am.

The rest of the meal proceeds in much the same fashion with Ren trying to head off fights between the other two. She is grateful when they are finally finished and Zinnia displays that she wasn’t brought up in a barn by helping to clear everything away. Afterwards, most of the pokemon go outside and Ren plops down in the middle of the couch. Zinnia sits down so that she can slouch on the arm of the couch and Aster hops up and climbs back into Zinnia’s lap. The whismur settles down for a nap as Steven comes back in and Steven goes straight for his liquor cabinet.

Steven: [forced politeness] Can I get you anything to drink?

Ren: Can we have the liquid sunshine again?

Zinnia: The what now?

Ren: It’s a mixed drink he makes.
Steven: Regrettably I’m out of Champagne.

Zinnia: Got any prosecco? That might work.

Steven: They are both sparkling white wines, but I wouldn’t say they’re interchangeable.

Zinnia: Well I’m gonna go out on a limb here and guess the other ingredient for this drink is a liquor, in which case pairing it with something a little less sweet might work better.

Steven: Very well, I’ll give it a go. Would you like one too?

Zinnia: You like it? [Ren nods] Sure, Stone, I’ll try some. I’ve always got some of the late Mr. Kagari’s fine imported bourbon if that doesn’t work out.

[Steven rolls his eyes as he opens a bottle of wine behind them. He comes back with three glasses and hands them off. Ren takes a sip as Steven sits down by the other arm of the couch, as far away from Zinnia as possible.]

Ren: Holy shit this might be even better.

[Steven grunts.]

Zinnia: I usually go for prosecco anyway. It’s often better than champagne in my opinion.

Ren: Really? But champagne always costs so much more.

Zinnia: Sometimes, things that are more expensive, are worse.

[Steven pulls a face and Zinnia almost smirks in satisfaction. She and Ren talk for a bit, but Steven remains quiet over on his end of the couch. Eventually Zinnia grows tired suffering his silent ire.]

Zinnia: Alright Stony, enough with the polite brooding. If you have something on your mind, just let it out.

Steven: Why did you do it?

Zinnia: I already told you.

Steven: Not all portals lead to the Distortion World. There is documentation in Alola of another type of—

Zinnia: Which have not been “substantiated by science” as you put it. And even supposing they were, why is your assumption that they lead to some empty dimension? Who’s to say there isn’t yet another world on the other side?

Steven: Most of the universe is empty space! There’s no reason to—

Zinnia: Actually, if we’re basing our evidence for these portals on native accounts of them, there is plenty of reason to believe there is a populated world on the other side. And how about you don’t lecture me on portals, Mr. Bachelor’s-in-Geology? I’m a physicist and I did my dissertation on travel between our world and the Distortion World. I’m well aware of the current work on spacetime anomalies.

Steven: None of which proves the portal generated by the dimensional shifter would have led to the Distortion World.
Zinnia: To suggest that a slightly altered method based entirely on work that had previously only led to portals between our world and the Distortion World might suddenly lead to an entirely different location in space is ridiculous. And I could spend the whole night explaining to you the myriad reasons why that’s true, but won’t because I’m not here to convince you and I’m sure as shit not here to absolve you of whatever kernel of guilt has your undies in a twist. I’m here because Ren asked me to be. You can go right ahead and think I’m some kind of crackpot psychopath if that makes you feel better. I don’t care.

Steven: Good. Because I think I’m entitled to be just a little angry that you think you have the right to make decisions for the entire planet!

Ren: ENOUGH! [Both of them are cowed into silence.] We are not doing this right now! This could be our last night alive and I’m not spending it listening to you two bicker about shit that doesn’t even matter anymore!

[Steven and Zinnia look down as Ren glares at each in turn. A moment later, Ren’s nav rings and she looks down at it.]

Ren: I have to take this. [She gets up but turns to face them, looking stern.] But you two better be friends by the time I get back. You have plenty in common. Get to know each other a little!

[Ren stomps out of the room followed by the last few pokemon except for Aster who stays behind.]

Steven and Zinnia glance at each other.

Zinnia: So…

Steven: So…

[Steven sighs and Zinnia scratches absently at Aster’s ear as the whismur resettles herself in Zinnia’s lap.]

Zinnia: We’re not gonna disappoint her, are we?

Steven: Hell no.

Zinnia: So we do agree on something.

Steven: Yes, we do.

Zinnia: Right… So how’d you get into training?

---

Scene 12: [Ren steps out into the night. Almost all of the pokemon are outside including Zinnia’s dragons. Her goodra is looking over the berry plants with Steven’s exadrill and the sandslashes, her flygon is chatting up Steven’s steelix, her noivern is talking with Bessemer, Kata and Teka, her tyranntrum is hanging out with the other fossil pokemon, and her altaria is up on the roof with Steven’s flying-types. Tāraki is talking animatedly with her salamence while Ao, Akahata and Naihi sit on the cliffside together. Roma is no doubt swimming somewhere below. Ren walks a little ways away from the house and answers her nav.]

Ren: Moshmoshi.
Dizzy: Hello Ren. I’m calling to confirm that Kaspa and I will be there tomorrow. Ho-Oh and Lugia can’t land on the tower, but we’ll stay nearby.

Ren: Thank you so much. I’m sure that will help the public feel better at the very least. I’m glad you could make it on such short notice. Are you still in Hoenn? Where are you staying?

Dizzy: Wallace has been kind enough to host me since the ball.

Ren: [surprise] Oh. How’s that going?

Dizzy: He’s warmed to me quite a bit, but I can’t say if it’ll last. For the time being, my presence is appreciated.

Ren: I hope that pans out for you.

Dizzy: Thanks. So do I.

Ren: How are you two holding up?

Dizzy: Wallace has been on the phone all day trying to make sure all is prepared. He is worried, but he says there’s something to this Rayquaza plan. I have faced death before and I have faith in the gods and the strength of our partnership with them. I am not afraid.

Ren: That’s good.

Dizzy: I’ll go now if you don’t need anything else. I think Wallace will come looking for me soon if the past few nights are any indication.

Ren: Okay. See you tomorrow.

[Ren hangs up and checks her messages. There are a few from Wally which she reads through before sending off one. In the background, Tāraki has started grappling with Zinnia’s salamence.]

Ren: How are you guys? Is Kai still there?

Wally: Kai’s pretty upset, but I think I calmed him down a little. He went home but I’m flying us to Mossdeep tomorrow. My parents don’t want me to go, but they can’t really stop me anymore lol.

Ren: Thanks. You know you don’t have to come right?

Wally: We know.

[Ren smiles down at her nav and wipes at her eyes before changing the subject.]

Ren: So are you going to confess to him before the world ends?

Wally: Maybe. It still scares me. I’m not even that freaked about the meteor. Of all the things to be scared of. It’s so silly, right?

Ren: Maybe a little, but it makes its own kinda sense.

Wally: Yeah. I’ve spent my whole life expecting to die young, but I never really thought I could have a boyfriend. I don’t even know how I’d feel if he did like me back at this point. Would I be happy or just upset that I blew my one shot?

Ren: I can’t help you there, buddy.
Wally: Maybe you should just stop a giant meteor so I have another chance to ask out the guy I like.

Ren: I’ll do my best.

Wally: That’s the spirit! (๑•ᴗ•๑)

Ren: I’m pretty much just moral support. It feels very weird after all the swashbuckling around.

Wally: But you’re really good at moral support! I feel better knowing you’ll be there and I’m sure lots of other people do too. It’s really important.

Ren: Thanks.

Wally: Good luck tomorrow and thank you for everything.


[They type a few more messages back and forth before Ren finally puts her nav away and goes to join Akahata, Ao and Naihi by the cliff. She sit down between Akahata and Ao and they both lean up against her. Naihi stretches, claws gleaming in the moonlight.]

Naihi: Boy do I hate being right all the time. [Akahata laughs and Naihi smiles.] About impending doom, that is.

Ren: Curse of your species, I suppose. I’m sorry we couldn’t stop by and see Mele, Ao.

Ao: That’s okay. It was good just to talk to him over the nav.

Akahata: Don’t worry about us. Our time saving the world is done. It’s you that still has work to do.

Naihi: And I have faith that Lord Rayquaza will come. I spoke to the Eon Guardians and some of Zinnia’s pokemon. They believe she can do it.

Akahata: Ao was telling us how strong she is.

Ao: She even impressed Tāraki.

[Ren sighs and hugs Ao and Akahata.]

Ren: Thank you. I think I’ll go back in now and check on Steven and Zinnia.

[Ren gets up and heads back inside.]

Scene 13: [Ren comes back in to find Steven and Zinnia sitting on opposite ends of the couch talking. Zinnia is leaning back with her feet up and Steven has one foot up with his head cocked and resting on this hand. Ren pauses near the doorway to listen in for a minute.]

Zinnia: So she says: “but you’ve been dating me for six months and you had two other girlfriends before me” and I’m like: “that still doesn’t make me a lesbian. I’m bi”. She looked at me like I’d grown a pair of antlers so I start rolling out the definition for her like we hadn’t had this conversation three times already and she says: [aggressive finger quotes] “I think it’s time you stopped pretending
Steven: Yep. I’ve been there.

Zinnia: Haven’t we all? It’s ridiculous not to mention so condescending. How much effort does it take to just respect other people’s identities?

Steven: Too much apparently.

Zinnia: And of course after that she “felt like she couldn’t trust me” because I might “turn straight again” and acted like I was cheating on her every time I found I guy appealing, which is insane.

Steven: Yeah, Wallace pulled that on me too.

Zinnia: Really? But he’s always Mr. Inclusion at Sootopolis Pride.

Steven: This is back in undergrad and there was some other stuff going on with him that played into it. Maybe I should have seen it coming, but it blindsided me too at the time. He actually apologized later. He’s gotten a lot better and we’re still friends.

Zinnia: It’s nice when people can change.

Ren: [stepping into the room] Are you two discussing biphobia in the LGBT community?

Zinnia: Yep!

Ren: [sitting down in the middle of the couch between them] I don’t know what I expected.

Steven: We’re getting to know each other as instructed.

Ren: Well, don’t let me stop you.

Steven: Alright. While we’re on this particular subject, how did you come out to your family, Zinnia?

Zinnia: I just brought a girl home and introduced her as my girlfriend. I figured they probably wouldn’t really care since I had already come home pregnant before. [taking a sip of her drink] I was right.

[Ren nods but Steven’s eyes are almost bugging out of his head. Zinnia’s eyes narrow.]

Zinnia: No follow-up questions.

Ren: Well, how about you, Steven?

Zinnia: Oh yes, how did you come out to stuffy old Mr. Stone? That must be a fun one.

Steven: It was very much like the rest of my adolescence: just one in a series of failed rebellions. My father is a quietly progressive person, but I wasn’t at all sure where the boundary was at the time. So I, being a dyed-in-the-wool drama queen, decided to more or less come out in front of a whole ball full of Kalosè nobles and businessmen.

Zinnia: Oh ho ho!

Steven: I was sixteen and my father took me to Kalos for a business trip and the main event was this ball thrown at the royal palace. I studied dance and got a tutor to get my Kalosè up to snuff in
preparation. Then at the ball I danced with all of the young noblewomen and basically charmed everyone, as my father and I had discussed, until I got interested in this guy. We danced and flirted right in front of my father and everyone else and later made out in a dark corner because we were sixteen.

Zinnia: And how did that work out for you?

Steven: Dad was kinda upset, but mostly because he thought he’d forced me to do something I didn’t want to, which wasn’t the case at all. I love attention. So I had to explain that I was bi, not gay, but after that it was fine. And Technologie Agreste is the most lucrative foreign partner Devon has ever had.

Zinnia: Damn! That is some quality hobagging.

Steven: What can I say, I’m good at what I do.

Zinnia: More like good at who you do, ayyyyyy!

[They all laugh and Steven and Zinnia share a glance across the couch.]

Zinnia: And how about you, spitfire?

Ren: Me?

Zinnia: Sure. Wouldn’t want to leave you out. But obviously you don’t have to tell us if you don’t want to.

[Ren looks at their expectant faces.]

Ren: Oh, well, my parents always made it clear it would be fine with them no matter who I brought home.

Steven: That would have been helpful.

Ren: My mom asks me “how things are going” every now and then, but nothing’s really come up so… yeah.

Zinnia: Cool. So Steven, Ren was telling me she learned some ancient training methods from Kaspa. Did you get in on any of those practices?

Steven: I didn’t have the privilege, no.

Zinnia: Too bad. Hey spitfire, wanna spar?

Ren: Right now?

Zinnia: Why not? There’s plenty of room.

Ren: Okay.

[Aster gets up and hops down off the couch, taking one of the pillows with her to use as a bed. Ren and Zinnia go around the back of the couch while Steven slumps down on it.]

Steven: Please don’t break anything.

Ren & Zinnia: Yessir!
Steven sucks down the rest of the drink while they grapple in the background. There is a thump as Ren goes down and Steven pokes his head over the back of the couch to check on her. Ren is sitting on the floor but seems fine.

Ren: [complaining] She fights dirty.

Zinnia: [hauling her up] You’ve gotta fight to win, spitfire.

[Steven slides back down and has only just gotten comfortable when there is a much louder thump. Steven jumps up but finds Zinnia flat on her back with Ren hovering over her. Steven sighs in relief.]

Ren: I’m sorry! Are you okay?

Zinnia: Better than okay. [waggling her eyebrows] You can throw me around any time you want, spitfire.

Ren: Oh sweet Celebi.

[Ren comes back around the couch, flushing a deep red, and Steven barely has time to move his legs as she flops back down. Zinnia comes back too, chuckling softly.]

Zinnia: Sorry about that.

Ren: It’s fine. We can go another round later. I just have to calm down. [to Steven] You see what I mean about her?

Steven: [nodding] I do.

Zinnia: [resting her head on her hand and grinning slyly] So you do talk about me.

Steven: [grinning also] When she’s not busy telling me off for flirting.

Ren: [blushing even redder] Not helping!

Steven: Sorry, Ren.

Ren: [muttering darkly] I told you both that you’d get along.

[Ren and Zinnia finish their drinks and have another round of grappling behind the sofa, after which Ren informs Steven and Zinnia that they both play an instrument to get the conversation started again. Zinnia hops up to get her bag and materializes her violin out of her vapor box. Steven gets out his viola and it doesn’t take very long for them to find a piece they can play together. Ren smiles and her eyes drift closed as she listens from the couch. Outside many of the pokemon stop what they are doing to listen. When Ren opens her eyes again, she sees Steven and Zinnia grinning at each other as they play. Ren applauds them when they are done and they both take a bow. Zinnia gives Steven a friendly cuff on the shoulder before putting her instrument away and getting out the bottle of bourbon. Steven goes to the kitchen to get supplies and then back to his liquor cabinet to make himself a mint julep. Zinnia has her bourbon neat. Ren tries it and pulls a face so Steven takes hers to make another julep. All three wind up back on the couch. Ren leans back against Steven and Zinnia gradually drift closer until Ren’s legs are in her lap. The three talk and laugh until they eventually get tired and some of the pokemon wander in to sleep. They take turns washing up and putting there sleepwear on. Zinnia has a good laugh about Steven’s pajamas like Ren did the night before. Steven and Ren insist Zinnia take the bed and she agrees until she sees how big it is and offers to share. The other two firmly refuse and get some bedding out of the hall closet for themselves. Steven offers to sleep on the floor but Ren shoves him onto the couch and puts her pillow]
on the other end. The sofa is a good bit longer and wider than average, but still not large enough for two, so they both curl up on either end. Neither of them stays curled up tightly for very long and Ren falls asleep with her feet touching Steven’s. Steven waits until he is sure she is asleep and gets up. He gets some more cushions to arrange next to the couch on the floor and lays down there. Tāraki comes in as he is settling down and gives Ren a nudge. She strokes him for a bit before he goes to curl up nearby. She notices Steven on the floor below her and narrows her eyes before reaching out and taking his hand. They smile at each other and fall asleep holding hands.]

Chapter End Notes

Last chapter was all of the problems coming to a head at once, so this chapter is more of a reconciliation and fitting together the side plots into the main plot. This would certainly benefit from some more editing, but it hits all of the necessary points and I’m pretty happy with how it came out. I have more or less managed to catch up to where I need to be so I’ve decided to move on and finish on schedule so that I have more time to devote to the next project.

We’ve reached the point now where I completely deviated from the original outline. First of all, the Delta Episode was originally another 2 chapters longer and encompassed a great deal more of the post-game whereas this version is pretty tightly focused on the Zinnia plotline. There are some parts that I am a little sorry to loose, but this version works way better from a narrative standpoint.

Now, I did write some scenes for this chapter that I wound up cutting and I have another one or two from earlier chapters that didn’t make it in and I was wondering if you all would be interested in seeing those? The first visit to Steven’s house was originally much longer and I decided to summarize it so that the plot didn’t stop dead for it, but I still love the original and it has a lot of funny dialogue. Another is a scene with Josh and Zinnia before Groudon was awakened and then there are a few from Steven’s background that get alluded to in this chapter. Should I tack on another chapter of bonus scenes? Let me know if any of the above interests you.

Thanks for reading!

Character Sheet:

HUMANS:
Ren, our protagonist and the Hoenn League Champion
Kai, Ren's friend who likes science
Wally, Ren's friend who likes the internet
Steven, the former Champion
Josh, a former Magma grunt who Ren befriended
Zinnia, the Draconid Lorekeeper and a former HAEA physicist
Azalea, Zinnia's former Magma grunt alias
Courtney, former Magma admin now in possession of Maxie’s pokemon
Maxie, former leader of Team Magma now in prison
Dizzy, Lugia's mouthpiece and friend of Kaspa
Kaspa, the current Sekiei (Indigo) League Champion and Ho-oh's Chosen
Hartmann, a former Magma grunt who is friends with Josh
Brenton, a former Magma grunt who is friends with Josh
Puaka, Zinnia's mother and a blacksmith

TEAM REN:
Tāraki the Sceptile
Akahata the Mightyena
Ao the Manectric
Kata the Grumpig
Kōtai the Sandslash
Roma the Sharpedo
Pohaku the Armaldo
Naihi the Absol
Teka the Pikachu
Tarahau, the Froslass

FORMER TEAM REN:
Ikki the Masquerain
Panahi the Pelipper
Maia the Taillow
Putenga the Breloom
Melet the Delcatty
Hauoro the Exploud

TEAM STEVEN:
Bessemer, the shiny Metagross
Damascus, the Skarmory
Gilchrist, the Aggron
Tungsten, the Steelix
Escutcheon, the Armaldo
Ptilometra, the Cradily
Alwyn, the Sandslash
Tulpi, the Aerodactyl
Pavise, the Bastiodon
Komatsu, the Excadrill
Liaoning, the Archeops
Anthy, the Carbink

TEAM ZINNIA:
Aster, the Whismur
Korukoru, the Salamence
Datura, the Noivern
Hellebore, the Goodra
Phlox, the Altaria
Thistle, the Tyrantrum
Claret, the Flygon

TEAM JOSH:
Fang, the Mightyena
Shade, the Crobat
Poppy, the Mawile
Frightful, the Fletchling
Love Is Strong

Chapter Summary

Ren and Zinnia fight a giant meteoroid.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Scene 1: [Ren wakes up the next morning to find Tāraki in Steven’s place. She gets up and the two of them head outside. Zinnia is standing on the edge of the cliff overlooking the sea with her dragons around her. She is in her full regalia, dragonhide cape included, but her hair is unbound and blowing in the sea breeze. She turns as Ren and Tāraki approach and smiles.]

Zinnia: Beautiful morning, no?

Ren: It is. I’m surprised you didn’t run off.

Zinnia: [She laughs.] I thought about it, but Koru here wouldn’t let me. [She pats her salamence who cocks his head so that she can better scratch his neck.] Apparently, he and your sceptile had a talk last night and he was convinced you coming along was for the best.

[Ren turns to him and Tāraki puffs up with pride.]

Ren: [chuckling at him] Good work, tiger. [to Zinnia] And thanks for the honesty, I guess. But why did you come if you were just gonna ditch come morning?

Zinnia: I couldn’t say no to you, but I also promised Aster I’d keep you safe and it’s hard to break a promise to her.

[The whismur taps on Zinnia’s leg and she picks her up. She whispers something that Zinnia leans in to hear.]

Zinnia: I am forgiven. She’s always unfailingly generous with me, even when I let her down again and again. You two are a little alike that way.

[Only the unscarred side of Ren’s face smiles as she steps forward.]

Ren: I’m sorry we were never properly introduced. [offering her hand] Hello Aster, I’m Ren. It’s nice to meet you.

[The whismur puts her ear in Ren’s hand to shake and makes a purring chirp. Zinnia smiles fondly and the whismur turns to make some comment to her. Zinnia goes a little red, something Ren never expected to see.]

Zinnia: Aster!

[Aster ignores the reprimand, ears trained on Ren instead, and Zinnia adjusts the whismur in her arms, smiling in embarrassment.]
Ren: Got a mouth on her, hm?

Zinnia: She likes calling me out. It’s my own fault for raising such a little smartass.

Ren: I think she just takes after you. So who’s the rest of the crew?

Zinnia: Oh, the salamence is Korukoru—he’s my starter—and next is Phlox the altaria and Claret the flygon. The tyrantrum is Thistle and I got him, Datura the noivern, and Hellebore the Goodra on a trip to Kalos.

Ren: You must have stayed there awhile.

Zinnia: About six months. They have a lot of unusual dragon types there. I picked up some of the language but never really got fluent. I didn’t love the philosophy of the dragon trainers there, but it was very interesting.

Ren: See, you and Steven do have a lot in common.

Zinnia: Yeah yeah, you were right. No need to rub it in.

[ Ren grins. ]

Steven: [ calling from the doorway ] Breakfast is ready!

[ Ren’s face lights up and Zinnia smiles. ]

Zinnia: By the skies, you’re adorable.

Ren: [ reddening ] I’m hungry!

[ She turns and marches off and Zinnia and the others follow her inside. They all gather around the table and have one last meal together, far more amicable than the first. ]

---

**Scene 2:** [They say their goodbyes outside with all of the pokemon gathered around them. Steven shakes Zinnia’s hand and she gives him a playful cuff on the shoulder. He pulls his keystone out of his lapel and holds it out to her. Zinnia takes it, dipping her head and thanking him for everything. Ren hugs Steven tight, rumpling his freshly pressed suit, but he hugs her back tighter if anything. Ren withdraws her pokemon and climbs up on Latios and Zinnia withdraws hers except for Aster and hops up on Latias. Aster scrambles up after her and once she is situated in front of Zinnia, The Eon Guardians take off and zip away southwest. Sootopolis and tons of tiny islands and rocks and bits off reef steak by below them. Zinnia gets a big kick out of the speed and hollers into the wind. Latias does some loop-da-loops, rolls, swoops and dives in response and Zinnia looks as though she is having the time of her life. Ren smiles but Latios looks on with disapproval. They arrive at the Sky Pillar and the Eon Guardians land at the base where Ho-Oh, Lugia and their partners are waiting. Zinnia bows her head to both gods and Kaspa and Dizzy bow deeply to her. All stand aside as Zinnia approaches the entryway to the tower. She bows her head and chants softly until a wind blows out from the tower. She steps inside and beckons Ren and Aster to follow while the others remain outside. The Sky Pillar is ancient and crumbling in places, but well lit and airy from the many open windows on each level. The stairs and walkways spiral up the sides of the tower, leaving the middle open all the way to the top.]
Zinnia: Normally I would have battled you before bringing you in here, but we took care of that formality yesterday.

Ren: How did they build it so high?

Zinnia: The walls are thick and the bricks have a double interlocking pattern that remains stable while allowing some movement. The windows are also arranged such that the prevailing winds easily pass through instead of pushing against the tower.

[ Wind whistles and howls through the many openings and Ren can see the tower sway as she gazes upward. She swallows and decides to examine the walls instead, which are covered with murals as far up as she can see. ]

Ren: Will you tell me about the paintings?

Zinnia: Certainly.

[ Aster wanders on ahead of them and Ren and Zinnia follow along the wall. ]

Zinnia: Here is the beginning where Groudon and Kyogre formed the land and sea and Rayquaza flew above them creating the atmosphere. During that time, the world was overflowing with natural energy which now lies much deeper beneath the surface, only accessible through certain wellsprings like the Cave of Origin. But then it was freely available and the climate titans used it to fuel their endless feud. During this same time, our planet was still undergoing bombardment from a great hail of meteoroids. Even with all of their power, the other two part of the trio could do nothing but watch as these meteoroids smashed into their creation and undid their work even as they completed it. But Rayquaza swallowed some of these meteoroids as they came down and absorbed their energy as their siblings absorbed energy from the planet and became stronger. With this power, they created an atmosphere thick enough to burn away the smaller meteors so that all could finish their work.

[ Zinnia reaches the stair and starts to ascend and Ren follows behind her. ]

Zinnia: Then the trio rested and the planet flourished. Life of all kinds sprang up and spread across the Earth. But after a time Primal Groudon and Kyogre awakened once more and began to clash. Their battle threatened to wipe the slate clean, but highest Arceus wished for life to continue and so beseeched them to cease. But created as they were to feud forever, they would not calm. But Rayquaza headed Arceus wishes and used the energy of the meteorites within them to do battle with their siblings and stop them from destroying life at every turn. Arceus, seeing that Rayquaza was attempting to honor their wishes, granted Rayquaza the power to negate the climate effects of the other two. With this new ability, Rayquaza was able to subdue their siblings and Arceus took from each a great part of their power and sealed it away so that they could not so easily disobey their creator again.

[ Ren spots the red and blue orbs as they reach the next set of stairs and Zinnia takes a short pause in the story to catch her breath before continuing. ]

Zinnia: And so all three rested once more and the Earth flourished anew with the energy they had brought forth. The cycle of battle and hibernation continued, each time shaping the course of life on our planet until we emerged. Our first great threat came when a giant meteor streaked across the sky and plowed into the ocean, sending tidal waves to flood all the islands of Hoenn. The meteor strike cracked the mantle of the planet beneath it and a great welling of natural energy poured from beneath Hoenn. Thirsting for that energy, Primal Kyogre and Primal Groudon once again woke. Each sought their orb, found it, swallowed it and regained their primal forms. The ancient people of Hoenn were witness to the beginnings of their battle and saw that it would soon overwhelm them and the rest of
the planet, but were helpless to stop it. It is then that that, as if drawn by the battle, Rayquaza
descended from the heavens in a blazing emerald bolt. They consumed the meteorite and with that
great rush of power, overwhelmed that of the two Primal Pokémon. Peace returned to the world and
the people of Hoenn revered Rayquaza as a true savior.

[ As they mount the next set of stairs, the mural depicts a huge meteor shower with streaks of light
falling down to smash against the steps. ]

Zinnia: When the next bombardment of meteors came, many were burned up before they struck and
others burned away to a size that they would not threaten life on the planet. The people sought out
these meteorites that had been shaped by Rayquaza’s creation and held them as sacred. One
meteorite in particular that landed in the heart of Sootopolis gave off a boundless brilliance. Its
rainbow glittering resembled a vast and powerful keystone and an altar to Rayquaza was built around
it. As the people watched the skies for further gifts, a giant meteor fell, as large as the one that had
awakened the Climate Titans, and the people knew it would bring terrible disaster. But the people
had a wish—a memory from a thousand years before. They wished that the legendary Pokémon clad
in emerald light would appear again to save them and gathered around the keystone to pray. Its
power carried their prayers upward and once again, Rayquaza descended from the heavens. They ate
the meteorites the people had so carefully gathered and one person offered up the great keystone to
Atua Rayquaza and added their prayer for salvation to the others. As they did, a great change came
over the legendary Pokémon. The god was enveloped in blinding light and as the light receded, they
beheld a Rayquaza beyond all knowledge—a sublime figure, incandescent with overwhelming life
force. It was humanity’s wish that brought about Rayquaza’s transformation in the face of the
rainbow stone. A wish, invisible and intangible, that bound human and Pokémon together, enabling
the Rayquaza to change its form: the very first mega evolution.

[ Zinnia touches the wall reverently and Ren looks up at a painting of Rayquaza unlike all others she
has seen. ]

Zinnia: After being transformed by the wish of the people, Rayquaza bowed their head and allowed
the human who had offered up the keystone to climb aboard them, the first Draconid. They ascended
to meet the meteor and the golden filaments that sprang from Rayquaza’s body covered the sky.
They rocketed upward and shattered the meteor into many harmless pieces and so the people were
saved. Though the first Draconid never returned, the keystone that had enabled Rayquaza to
transform fell back to Earth and landed on an island. That was where the people, constructed this
great tower to hold the rainbow stone and to try to get a little bit closer to Rayquaza in the heavens
above. To honor Rayquaza and the one among them who had given up their life, they began to train
dragon-types to help them become stronger like the great dragon that had saved them, and became
Draconids.

[ They walk along the last level platform towards the final flight of stair and progress through more
recent history. ]

Zinnia: A thousand years of peace followed, but the Draconid people, learning from their long
history’s cyclical nature, knew that one day another meteor would and they would need Rayquaza’s
help again. They carefully preserved all knowledge of the event in stories and appointed one dragon
trainer in each generation to be Rayquaza’s ally should the need arise, a position now known as
Lorekeeper. My ancestors migrated to meteor falls where they could gather the meteorites that fell
there. At several more points throughout our history, Rayquaza has been summoned to save us from
either their siblings or a threat from beyond our world and each time the Lorekeeper has helped Atua
Rayquaza to mega evolve and quiet its siblings with a terrible wind or shatter a meteor with their
strongest move, dragon ascent. But as I told you outside Granite Cave, the last time a Lorekeeper
went up with Rayquaza, the meteor destroyed them and the great rainbow stone. It rained down in
pieces too small to be found and Rayquaza returned to the heavens to recover.

[ They mount the final flight of stairs along which there are no paintings. ]

Zinnia: My grandmother was Lorekeeper over a time of peace and for a time I thought I would be as well. But when we discovered a meteoroid large enough to break the world forever, I knew I must rise to meet my fate. Because this threat was greater than ever before, I thought Rayquaza would need more time to grow stronger and prepare, so I looked for a way to summon them as soon as possible. Without the rainbow stone, my path was unclear, but through my study of the lore and the training of my own pokemon, I realized the truth of Rayquaza’s change in form and attempted to use my own keystone to summon them. When that failed, I delved deeper back and saw that the warring of their siblings could also draw Rayquaza down from the sky. That failed as well and so for my next plan I had to get really creative, devising a method unlike any other. Since you defeated Groudon, I have been gathering keystones and meteorites for the final attempt.

[ Zinnia pauses near the top of stairs before her head rises above the ceiling. She takes a deep breath and her eyes squeeze shut. Ren steps up and takes her hand while Aster hops up the last few steps. Zinnia looks up at the whismur waiting for her and squeezes Ren’s hand before leading her up and out onto the top of the tower. ]

---

**Scene 3:** [A prison guard leads Maxie into the visitor room and closes the door behind them. Archie is sitting in a chair on the other side of the glass. Maxie walks over and sits down opposite him while the guard waits back in the corner.]

Maxie: What are you doing here, Archer?

Archie: Well, I was with Matt and Shelly, but then it kinda hit me that the world might really be ending and I’d never have another chance at this.

Maxie: Chance at what, Archer?

Archie: To make things right. I didn’t want to go without at least trying. I’m sorry for how I hurt you, Max, and for how much I pushed you.

Maxie: You’re apologizing? You?

Archie: Yeah. Don’t misread though. I still think you were wrong and I probably always will, but I think I see now that it was a little my fault as well. And I know you didn’t mean for any of that bad stuff to happen, none of it. Not what happened to us or what happened to Hoenn. So I’m forgiving you too. I don’t want to live with that resentment anymore. You don’t deserve it and neither do I.

[ Maxie takes of his glasses and wipes his eyes. ]

Archie: [ putting his hand on the glass ] Max…

Maxie: I’m sorry too, Archer. I didn’t… I didn’t think you’d ever let it go.

Archie: And I didn’t expect an apology back. You’re at least as stubborn as I am, maybe more.

Maxie: Am I?
Archie: Absolutely! Are you kidding me? Remember on our first voyage when everyone told you you needed to have contacts just in case there was a gale or something but you wouldn’t get any because you didn’t like them. Then you went out in the first damn gale even though I told you not to and not only where you completely blind, but you almost washed right off the bow and your fancy custom frames got dragged to the deep never to be seen again. Then you had to wear your old pair that were the wrong prescription for like a month because you just had to have those same frames again!

Maxie: And you would never let it go. You must have brought it up at every meal we had together. You were always asking me how many fingers you were holding up or acting like you didn’t recognize me because of the glasses or refusing to use my name in favor of “custom frames”. You didn’t even stop when the new glasses came!

Archie: [ laughing ] Yeah, we’re both pieces of work, ain’t we?

Maxie: Two months ago I would have denied it, but you’re right... Thank you for coming, Archer.

Archie: Yer welcome, Max.

---

Scene 4: [As Ren’s head emerges into the open air, the sound of the wind blowing around her changes. Instead of being buffeted as she had feared, the air flows downward, anchoring her to the to of the tower. Much like the inside of the tower, there is no railing or any other barrier to protect her from going over the edge, but she feels no danger, only a sense of peace. She looks out over the region as Zinnia and her whismur go to the flat alter in the middle. It is a clear day and Ren can see all the way to the mainland, Sootoplis and Pacifilog. She reaches out experimentally with her mind.]

Ren: [ telepathy ] Steven?

Steven: [ in her head ] Hello Ren.

Ren: I wasn’t sure if I’d be able to reach you like this with both Latios and Latias here with me.

Steven: I’m glad we still can.

Ren: Zinnia and I are at the top now.

Steven: Everyone is here at the Space Center.

Ren: Give them my love.

Steven: I will.

Zinnia: Ren.

Ren: Hm?

[ Ren turns to find that Zinnia has emptied her vapor box of meteorites and arranged them near near the center of the tower. ]

Zinnia: I wanted to thank you again for all your help, before the summoning. Thank you for fixing my mistakes, for keeping me grounded, for trusting me even though I’ve done nothing to deserve it.
Thank you for showing me I’m not alone. And more than that, thank you for making me realize I was wrong to try and do everything alone. I wanted so badly to protect everyone that I put them in harm’s way. I can see now that it was a crazy risk to take and one I never had to. [She takes a deep breath before continuing and looks out beyond Ren to the northwest.] I have felt alone for much of my life, but I’ve always had the support of my family and my pokemon. Without them I would never have made it here. And without you I may not have… [She looks up to the sky, eyes suspiciously bright, but she does not cry.] I may never have fully appreciated all they have done for me. [voice thick] I’m glad and so very grateful that I can feel their love one last time.

[Aster nuzzles Zinnia’s leg and she glances skyward again, taking a deep steadying breath.]

Ren: [in wonder] How do you do that?

Zinnia: What?

Ren: Not cry like that.

Zinnia: Practice, I guess. Ever since I was a little girl, I have always turned my eyes up to the sky whenever I was feeling upset or alone. [She turns and looks up again.] I look up there and I remind myself of all the vast multitudes the universe contains. Even when I was so full of uncertainty that I felt my heart might be crushed by it, when I was so grief-stricken and alone I thought my heart might break of it, I turned and looked up there so that my tears would never, ever fall.

[Ren is quiet behind her for a moment and Zinnia turns back to find her face screwed up in a grimace.]

Zinnia: You okay there, spitfire?

Ren: Chikuso just come here!

[Ren opens her arms and Zinnia obeys, pacing back to Ren and hugging her. Ren holds her tight and Zinnia chuckles a little. Ren hiccups and chuckles too.]

Ren: I’m sorry, I just—it’s—you’re so crazy!

Zinnia: Hey!

Ren: Whatever helps you cope, I guess—I don’t even know how you function after everything you’ve been through—but that’s pretty insane.

Zinnia: [laughs loudly] You’re too honest! Don’t you know that you’re supposed to say that’s it beautiful and poetic or something?

Ren: It is beautiful and poetic, but why the hell won’t you let yourself cry? That’s messed up!

Zinnia: Great Serpent, Ren! We could’ve had a moment!

Ren: [fingers digging in] We are having a moment!

Zinnia: Yeah, I guess we are.

[She rests her head against Ren’s and closes her eyes. Ren buries her head in Zinnia’s shoulder and manages not to cry herself. Zinnia breathes slowly and calmly until Ren’s breathing has calmed and her grip has loosened just a little.]

Zinnia: I’m ready now.
Ren: [ letting go of her ] Okay. [ She pulls her keystone out of her pocket and presses it into Zinnia’s hand. ] One more for luck.

[ Zinnia smiles and kneels down to put the keystone in the holder on her calf. ]

Zinnia: [ straightening up ] Thank you, spitfire.

Ren: You’re welcome, Higana.

[ Zinnia sends out her pokemon and bows to them. They bow back and Ren bows with them. Ren sends out her own pokemon as Zinnia turns and strides to the center of the platform. Aster and the others stay back and watch as Zinnia puts her hands together and begins to chant. The keystones on her calf begin to glow one by one, beginning with her own and ending with Ren’s. Tāraki puts a hand on Ren’s shoulder and Ren puts her hand on his side. As Zinnia chants, wind begins to swirl around her, ruffling her cape and hair. It grows stronger as the keystones grow brighter and suddenly all of the air rushes upwards. Ren feels as though she may be blown up into the sky and Teka the pikachu, who is smallest and lightest, grabs onto Ao’s leg. Ren looks up at the sky and and emerald speck appears above them. The wind reverses, pushing everyone down against the tower. The dot of emerald grows larger until it is a snake coiling down to them. Zinnia looks up as the enormous dragon descends. Rayquaza lands and coils themselves in front of her. Their length seems to go on forever and they never stop moving, curling and twisting endlessly in on themselves to fit on the platform. Their scales shimmer a brilliant jewel green save for the thin gold and black stripes and the sun shines through their red fins. Zinnia gazes up at Rayquaza as the enormous serpent looms over her. ]

Zinnia: I did it… [ She looks back. ] I did it! Aster, I did it!

[ The whismur smiles at Zinnia and Ren looks up at the giant pokemon in wonder. ]

Ren: [ murmuring ] She did it.

Steven: I know. If you weren’t in my head I wouldn’t be able to hear you over all of the screaming over in Mossdeep.

[ Ren chuckles and watches as Zinnia raises her hands to the god. ]

Zinnia: Atua Rayquaza, I thank you for answering our prayers and descending from your home in the skies to aid us in this most perilous hour. I offer up these meteorites to give you strength for the task ahead.

[ Rayquaza dips their head and picks up the meteorites one by one in their crimson teeth before gobbling each down. When they are finished, they rise above Zinnia and look down at her with their golden eyes. ]

Zinnia: Atua Rayquaza, hear my wish! Achieve your Mega Evolution! Take hold of your true power! Show me your true face! The Rayquaza that will save this planet!

[ The keystones on Zinnia’s calf glow again and a puff of wind whirls around her for a moment before all grows still. Zinnia stops and looks up into Rayquaza’s eyes and they stare steadily back. Ren realizes that something is wrong and takes a step forward, a worried expression on her face. ]

Zinnia: Why won’t you mega evolve? I— I gathered all the keystones and meteorites, I summoned you here and you came… Why?! Why won’t you!

[ Zinnia’s hunches, every muscle coiling and the keystones flare to life once more, even brighter than... ]
before. Wind and light whirl around her and strike out at Rayquaza. The great serpent goes rigid for a moment and begins to glow only to fizzle out a moment later and slump. ]

Zinnia: It can't be… The one without enough power is you, Rayquaza? The meteorites I brought aren’t enough? But you should already have more inside you. So much time has passed. How can you still be so drained? [ Zinnia slumps forward. ] No… This can’t be… I-I’ve come all this way—everything I've done and I still can’t…

[ Ren grabs Zinnia’s shoulder and her head pops up, jolting her back out of her spiral. ]

Ren: What’s wrong?

Zinnia: Rayquaza can’t mega evolve. They need a certain type of meteorite or something. The last fight drained all of their power. I don’t know how to get any more. I don’t know where they are and we’re out of time and—

Ren: I have one. I have the meteorite that Magma stole and the one that HAEA was going to use to power the dimensional shifter. It’s in my vapor box.

[ Zinnia just stares at her and Ren kneels down to set up her box. She selects the meteor on her nav and it materializes up out of the wood. Zinnia’s eyes go wide and Rayquaza leans in a little closer above them, shifting and coiling once more. ]

Ren: [ standing back up ] There, is that—

[ Zinnia grabs Ren’s face and kisses her full on the mouth. Ren blinks rapidly and her whole face flushes brilliantly as Zinnia pulls away. ]

Zinnia: You saved me! You saved all of us again!

[ Ren blushes even more deeply if possible and it begins to spread down her neck. Zinnia lets go of her to turn back to Rayquaza and Ren puts a hand over her mouth. ]

Zinnia: Atua Rayquaza, please accept this final offering and take hold of the power you need to save the planet! [ turning back to Ren and smiling brilliantly ] Go ahead, offer it to them.

Ren: Oh, uh, I don’t think I can lift it.

Zinnia: Then we’ll lift it together.

[ They bend down and grab either side of the meteorite, lifting it first to chest level and then raising it above their heads. Ren’s arms shake a little from the strain, but Rayquaza dips their great head and takes the meteorite from them. They cock back their head and swallow it. The change is almost immediate. A sudden brightness flickers across them and wind whirls around the tower with frightening intensity. Rayquaza rises up even higher above Ren and Zinnia, then looks back down and trumpets deafeningly. Ren feels a hand on her shoulder and finds that Tāraki and all of the other pokémon are behind her. ]

Tāraki: They want to battle, all of us, you and Zinnia together.

[ Ren looks over at Zinnia and she nods. She takes Ren’s keystone back out of her holder and hands it to Ren. ]

Zinnia: They want to test us, to see who will ride with them to destroy the meteor. Are you ready, spitfire?
Scene 5: Ren and Zinnia pace back to the edge of the tower, and Ren glances back over the edge, but the wind is blowing so intensely upward that she suspects she wouldn’t fall even if she did go over the edge. Ao and Zinnia’s goodra step up first to face off with Rayquaza. They both start charging but Rayquaza strikes out as fast as lightning with extreme speed, hitting both of them. Ao is knocked back a little but Hellebore stays rooted to the spot and lets loose a dragon pulse. Rayquaza uses air slash and the goodra takes the hit, which allows Ao to dodge around and use charge beam. Hellebore takes another two hits, giving Ao the opportunity to charge up. The manectric unleashes a powerful discharge as her battle partner falls and Rayquaza recoils before knocking Ao away with another extreme speed. Next up are Kōtai and the tyranntrum, who open with a smackdown/stone edge combo that pummels Rayquaza from above and below. Rayquaza breaks through the rocks, wraps them and flings them away off the tower before unleashing a dragon pulse. Thistle staggers but Kōtai rams right through the blow to lay into Rayquaza’s side. While the god is distracted, the tyranntrum recovers and delivers a dragon claw. Rayquaza flings them both back and Kōtai recovers but Thistle goes down. Zinnia sends in her altaria and Kōtai endeavors to keep Rayquaza engaged while she charges a moonblast. Rayquaza shrinks back for a moment from the hit but retaliates with another dragon pulse. Phlox manages to dodge but Kōtai is knocked to the edge of the arena. Kata takes his place and tries to distract Rayquaza by blasting them in the head with power gem while the altaria swoops around charging another moonblast. Rayquaza takes to the air, blocking Kata’s next hit with their body. They slam Phlox down with a flick of their tail before knocking both opponents back with dragon pulse. The altaria is finished but Kata gets in one last power gem before Rayquaza knocks her flat. Naihi runs forward and Zinnia’s noivern rockets upward. Rayquaza follows the noivern with their head, preparing to strike, but Naihi slices down their side to draw their attention. Rayquaza strikes at her but misses and she claws at their neck while Datura swoops around and dragon pulses them in the back of the head. Rayquaza uses extreme speed to knock Naihi away before striking at the noivern, who twists in the air and hits Rayquaza on the throat with another dragon pulse. Meanwhile Naihi has bounced back up and slices one of Rayquaza’s fins as they go by. They double back and knock Naihi away with a hyper voice as the noivern comes in for another pass. Datura dodges Rayquaza’s air slash and Akahata runs in to deliver a crunch. Rayquaza surges upward again after the noivern and she aims a dragon pulse over her shoulder at Rayquaza’s head. The attack hits them square between the eyes but the great serpent plows right through. Their jaws open to catch Datura but Akahata has latched onto their tail just before it leaves the ground and sends an assurance through them. Rayquaza’s jaws snap shut and they ram the noivern instead of catching her. Akahata is carried upward and then flung even higher as Rayquaza whips around. She twists in the air and lands on the back of Zinnia’s flygon as it circles Rayquaza. Claret goes straight for Rayquaza’s face as the god circles up to meet them. The flygon uses dragon pulse and Akahata leaps off her back to land on Rayquaza’s head just as Claret dodges to the side. Akahata grabs one of the fins on Rayquaza’s head to anchor herself and uses assurance once more. Rayquaza twists their head as they fly down again and tosses Akahata to the ground. They graze the flygon with an air slash from their tail as Pohaku runs in to take his teammate’s place. He pummels Rayquaza with stone edge, giving Claret a chance to right herself and fire off another dragon pulse. Rayquaza spins rapidly, creating a twister of bluish energy that sucks Pohaku and Claret towards it. Pohaku digs his claws in and needles Rayquaza’s underside with another stone edge while the flygon turns to ride the cyclone, preparing another shot. Rayquaza takes out one and then the other with extreme speed. At last it is Tāraki and Korukoru’s turn. The sceptile and salamence grin at each other as they mega evolve. The salamence swoops up high, summoning a hail of meteors as...
Tāraki charges forward, claws elongating. Rayquaza blocks most of the draco meteor with their tail and strikes at Tāraki. The sceptile catches their enormous jaws with his dragon claw and slides back. Korukoru wheels and lays into Rayquaza’s neck with dragon claw just as Tāraki wrenches the god’s jaws to the side and their combined force smashes Rayquaza’s head into the top of the tower. Rayquaza slaps themselves, crushing Tāraki and Korukoru between their skull and tail for a moment. The god then uses the few seconds while both are stunned to wrap them in their coils. The two mega evolutions come to and rake their claws across every bit of Rayquaza they can reach. Rayquaza roars but their head rears above their captives and they let loose a dragon pulse and then another. They great serpent uncoils and the sceptile and salamence drop their mega forms. Ren and Zinnia both slump a little but straighten as the air around them calms. Tāraki and Korukoru go to stand with their trainers and teammates as Rayquaza resettles themselves and looms up over the group once more. They look on Ren and Zinnia, who bow their heads, and then lower themselves to the ground, jaw and talons touching down on the tower in front of the two trainers and their teams. Rayquaza raises their head again, but keeps their claws planted on the ground. They open their mouth and speak in a voice deep and howling.

Rayquaza: I KNOW YOU.

[ Ren and Zinnia both lean back a little, stunned. ]

Ren: How…?

Rayquaza: THE HUMANS WHO AIDED ME IN AGES PAST TAUGHT ME THINGS ABOUT YOUR KIND MY SIBLINGS WILL NEVER KNOW.

Zinnia: Then why could we not understand you before, Atua Rayquaza?

Rayquaza: WE HAD NOT FOUGHT TOGETHER. THROUGH OUR COMBAT, YOU HAVE SHOWN ME YOUR TRUE SELVES, THE FIGHTING SPIRIT THAT LIES WITHIN YOU. OUR HEARTS ARE NOW CONNECTED AS YOU ARE CONNECTED TO THE POKEMON YOU TRAIN.

Zinnia: We are honored, Atua Rayquaza.

Rayquaza: THE METEORITES AND BATTLE HAVE GIVEN ME STRENGTH. I AM NOW READY TO FACE THE THREAT TO THIS WORLD WE SHARE. YOU HAVE DONE WELL.

Zinnia: Thank you, Atua Rayquaza. Which of us shall go with you to help you in this fight?

[ The god fixes its gaze on Zinnia and she stares back unflinchingly. ]

Rayquaza: LOREKEEPER OF THE DRACONIDS, DEFENDER OF THE DISTORTION WORLD, AND TRAINER OF DRAGONS, YOU SHALL BE MY CHAMPION.

[ Zinnia bows her head and lets out a sigh of relief, but then the god fixes their gaze on Ren. ]

Rayquaza: BURNED BY FIRE, WHELMED BY WATER, AND MARKED BY THE EONS, YOU TOO SHALL BE MY CHAMPION.

[ Zinnia’s head whips back up to look at them, eyes wide. She glances over as Ren bows her head and her jaw clenches. ]

Rayquaza: THE HOUR OF OUR DEPARTURE GROWS NEAR. PREPARE YOURSELVES.
[Ren turns to see Zinnia’s broken face and her own softens.]

Zinnia: You—

Ren: [low and gentle] Don’t…

Zinnia: You have to take the magma suit! You’re the Champion! If one of us doesn’t make it back—

Ren: I have my own. I kept the one Tabitha gave me.

Zinnia: Oh. [Zinnia deflates a little] You sure came prepared.

Ren: That’s right. So let’s both try and make it back, okay?

Zinnia: Okay.

Ren: Come on, it’s time to say our goodbyes.

 Scene 6: [Rayquaza bugles and the Eon Guardians fly to the top of the tower. Latias starts healing Rayquaza’s wounds while Latios floats over to Ren. He puts a paw on her shoulder and she touches her forehead to his.]

Ren: [telepathy] Hey Steven?

Steven: What is it?

Ren: Rayquaza is recharged and ready, but there is a complication. They chose both me and Zinnia to go with them.

[There is a long pause before Steven responds and Ren’s fingers dig into Latios’s fur. She looks over his shoulder and watches as Rayquaza uses dragon dance to power up.]

Steven: Alright.

Ren: I’m sorry.

Steven: Don’t be.

Ren: We both have magma suits and we’ll be working together, so that should help our chances. But just in case, you have to promise to take care of my pokemon. And have Roxanne keep an eye on my parents.

Steven: I will.

Ren: Can I call you at the Space Center and say goodbye to everyone?

Steven: Of course… But please come back.

Ren: I’ll do my best.

[Ren gets her collapsible screen out of her bag and sets it up. Zinnia is nearby tending and talking softly to her pokemon. Ren calls Steven on her nav and when he answers Kai and Wally and her]
parents are there too. The room behind them is full of scientists and government workers, but they have backed off to give Steven in the rest a little space.

Ren: So it looks like I’m gonna be an astronaut.

[ Steven facepalms and the other four just stare at her in confusion. Realization dawns on Wally’s face and soon spreads to the others. ]

Wally: Oh…

Ren: Not really what I had in mind, but it should be pretty cool. Not many people can say they’ve been to outer space.

[ Wally smiles a bit, but the other three just seem shell-shocked. ]

Ren: Everything is fine here. Rayquaza should be able to mega evolve and destroy the meteor. They’re getting ready over there. [ Ren turns her camera for a moment so that they can see. ] Zinnia and I got to battle Rayquaza, which was awesome. They kind of kicked our asses, but I probably should have seen that coming. For Groudon I had Kyogre and the Eon Guardians helping plus the whole League pummeled them first. Anyway it makes me feel better about our chances. Rayquaza is insanely powerful and they’ve done this before, so we shouldn’t have any problems. I just wanted to uh… to thank you all. Wally, thank you for showing me how to be brave. [ Wally blushes. ] Bravado will only get you so far, you know? You showed me how to push further, how to do what I loved even when it scared me. So that’s what I want you to keep doing. I want you to keep on being brave until you’ve done everything you want to do. And I do mean everything.

[ Wally goes from pink to beet red. He swallows and nods, too embarrassed to speak. ]

Ren: Kai, thank you for always supporting me even when I was a jerk and didn’t want you to. It made a huge difference and I’m a better person for it. And thank you sharing everything with me. I’m really glad I got to see Hoenn the way you do. It made it feel like home, like I belong here. [ Tears start to spill out of his eyes and Ren fights to keep her own at bay. ] So please just keep letting that curiosity and kindness lead you. Get into a great school and keep researching whatever strikes your fancy.

Kai: [ wiping his nose ] O-okay.

Ren: Otosan, thanks for teaching me everything you know about pokemon and training. It’s such a huge part of me. So just keep teaching new trainers like you taught me. Oh, and also take okasan out on a date every once in awhile. The gym will survive without you.

Senri: [ smiling but eyes welling ] Understood.

Ren: Okasan, thank you for teaching me literally everything else. [ Her mother smiles broadly and chuckles a little through her tears. ] You are so brilliant and you’ve taken such good care of me. Thank you for getting me that therapist and patching me up constantly when I was going through that growth spurt and for always listening and checking in with me and all of that other great parental stuff. A+. Please just keep writing.

Asuka: I will, Ren-chan.

Ren: [ wiping her eyes ] And Steven, thanks for opening up and trusting me and believing in me. I know it was difficult for you.

Steven: Rude.
Ren: It’s true. And thank you for all of your help with Magma and my pokemon. But most of all, thank you for always cheering me up and making me laugh. It made all the difference. [He smiles but it is brittle and she wipes her nose.] Just keep doing what you do best and take care of everyone. Only remember to take care of yourself too sometimes, okay?

Steven: Okay.

Ren: Oh, and someone tell Cosmo I’m sorry about his meteorite. Rayquaza ate it. But it’s still helping to save the world, so there’s that… I should go but, um, I love you all.

Asuka: We love you too.

Senri: I can’t wait to tell everyone my daughter is the Champ and an astronaut. Kick that meteor’s ass!

Ren: Will do!

Wally: You can do it!

Kai: And thank you for everything.

Ren: You’re welcome. I’ll see you later.

[She salutes and ends the call. She slumps and wipes at her eyes as Akahata and Ao come over to sit on either side of her.]

Ren: That was so tough and I haven’t even said goodbye to you all yet.

[Akahata nuzzles her and Ren digs her hand into the mightyena’s fur as the rest of her team gathers around her.]

Ren: I don’t even know where to start. We’ve done everything together since I moved here. You took me all the way from rookie to Champion. I’m not sure I remember how to do anything alone anymore.

Latios: You are not alone. We will always be with you.

[Ren looks around at them all and smiles, though more tears start running down her face.]

Ren: [sniff] There I go. [wiping her face] So, um, we’ll do this in reverse order. Teka, thanks for sticking with us even though things got really intense right off the bat. Your ideas and battle strategies saved our asses a bunch of times and I might not even be Champion right now if you hadn’t talked me into buying that overheat TM. And also thank you for being so ruthlessly smart all the time. I know I was a little upset when you used nuzzle on all of those Magma people, but I would probably be dead if you hadn’t.

Teka: You’re welcome. And thank you for treating me so well and respecting me. My whole life everyone has called me a liar and a trickster, but you showed me I could help others and not just myself with my talents, so I’ll wear those titles with pride.

Ren: Pound it, sly!

[Naihi, thank you for being so fearless and for working so hard. That incredible strength of yours got us through a lot of tight spots. I’m so proud of how you’ve grown. [Ren hugs her and the]
absol pats her back with a clawed paw. ] Take care of Akahata for me.

Naihi: I swear it will be done.

[ Ren smiles and turns to Pohaku. ]

Ren: Pohaku, you were probably too freshly hatched to remember this, but I was in a pretty bad place when you joined the team. Thanks for pulling me out of my funk and giving me hope. That boundless enthusiasm of yours never fails to make me smile. It helped me to remember everything I loved about training and battling. Stay awesome little guy.

[ Ren stand up to hug him and he starts sobbing all over her. Kōtai pats his leg and talks soothingly until the armaldo calms down enough to let Ren go. ]

Ren: Kōtai, thanks for taking such good care of all of us and for saving my life. I quite literally wouldn’t be here without you. You are the world’s number one dad and all the little sandshrew you’re going to have with Alwyn are so incredibly lucky. So make sure you get home to them, okay?

Kōtai: I will. Thanks for the ride, luv.

[ Ren kneels down to hug him before standing again and turning to Kata. ]

Ren: Kata, thanks for making us all take it easy and keeping us on our toes. Not sure how you managed to do both.

Kata: [ winking and flexing ] My powers of pranking are legend.

Ren: [ laughing a little ] They are. Thank you for making me laugh when I needed it the most and for taking all of those pictures of everyone. I feel a lot better knowing they’ll still be there even if I…

Kata: Don’t get all morbid on me now. You’re gonna blast that meteor apart without breaking a sweat. [ Ren wipes her eyes. ] Bring it in.

[ Kata opens her arms and before Ren can move Kata has moved her with telekinesis and hugs her. Ren boops the grumpig’s pearl and Kata drops her, rubbing at it indignantly. ]

Ren: Just keep taking photos. You’ve gotten so good and the world of photography needs that fresh grumpig perspective.

Kata: Thanks, Ren.

Ren: Ao, thank you for being so patient and determined. Things were so rough for you at the beginning and it took a lot of faith and perseverance to push through. I hope you are half as proud of yourself as I am of you.

Ao: I am.

Ren: Good. And thank you for being such a team player. No matter where you go or which family you choose, they are going to be so lucky to have you. [ She squeezes her manectric tight and her tail thumps on the ground. ] Make sure you go to Mele’s premiere for us all.

Ao: I will.

Ren: Akahata, thank you for protecting me even though you had such bad experiences before. You have no idea how privileged I felt when I finally earned your trust. And that skepticism you brought
in really helped me stay grounded. You’ve always been such a rock solid support and the best lancer any leader could ask for. You’ve earned some time off so enjoy your honeymoon with Naihi.

Akahata: I will. Thank you for restoring my faith in humanity.

Ren: You’re welcome.

[ Ren hugs her tight and then stands to face her starter. ]

Ren: Tāraki, I’ll never be able to thank you enough for dragging me kicking and screaming into the life I wanted. You said before it was selfish, but I don’t believe that. I think you saw right through me, saw what we could be and never gave up until we made it there. You gave me back everything I thought I’d lost forever and so much more. You’re the best partner anyone could ever have. You have no equal in the whole region, but I know you’ll never rest on your laurels. Keep doing what you love forever.

[ The sceptile hugs her tight, head bowed to press against hers and claws digging into her back. She looks up at his face when they pull back and he is smiling. She has to wipe her eyes again to be sure. ]

Ren: Not even one tear, tiger?

Tāraki: [ grabbing her shoulders ] This isn’t goodbye. I have no doubt in my mind you can do it. And I’ll be right there with you just like Latios said, just like I was when you had to face Kyogre and Groudon and everything else. I’ll put all of my energy into you through our mega stone and keystone and together we’ll blow that meteor apart!

[ He lets go of her to flex dramatically and she laughs and hugs him again. ]

Ren: [ pulling away just a little ] Oh, and you have to tell Ikki that she’s beautiful and she’s going to be a great mom, and Panahi that she’s done more than enough for everyone else and it’s her turn to shine. Tell Maia she awesome and to never give up until she’s the strongest bird there is, and Hauoro and Putenga that I’m proud of them and to keep protecting their homes and their families. Tell Mele thanks for all his songs and to keep singing his heart out, and Roma thanks for all her help and to keep exploring. And wish Tarahau good luck with Josh and I hope they both make it to Ever Grande someday.

Kata: Alright, okay, we got it! Calm down, hero. You’re coming back.

Tāraki: Yeah!

Ren: Okay.

[ Ren turns to see how Zinnia is fairing and sees her kneeling on the tower and talking urgently with her whismur. ]

Zinnia: Don’t you dare hurry up to join me. I’ll come back to you no matter what happens, no matter how many worlds I have to cross. I’ll find you like you found me and we’ll have another life together. Promise me!

[ Aster nods and murmurs something Ren can’t hear, Zinnia picks her up and hugs her tight and Aster wraps her ears around Zinnia’s head. ]

Zinnia: Nothing can keep souls like ours apart forever. Wait for me and I’ll catch up.
Aster hugs her tighter and Zinnia stands, still holding her close. At last Aster lets go and Zinnia puts her down. She gets out her vapor box and starts pulling out the magma suit. Ren realizes she should be doing that as well and pulls out her own vapor box. Soon both are dressed and ready to go. Latios and Latias float up to them while Rayquaza waits in the background.

Latios: Rayquaza will do everything in their power to keep you alive.

Latias: They can control air and will try to keep a bubble around you when you exit the atmosphere.

Latias: Thank you both for your service to us all.

Latias: Without you, even Rayquaza could do nothing. Only their mega form can survive and move in space.

Zinnia: It is our honor, Guardians. Thank you for your service as well.

Ren: I’ll miss you too, stuffy.

Latios snorts but drifts forward to touch his nose to her forehead. Latias strokes Zinnia’s hair and pats her shoulder.

Rayquaza: COME.

The Eon Guardians move aside as Rayquaza lowers their head to the top of the tower once more. Ren takes Zinnia’s hand and Zinnia leads them to Rayquaza’s neck. She hops up and seats herself just behind their head before pulling Ren up to sit behind her. Zinnia grabs onto the ridge in front of her as Rayquaza rears up, long body coiling behind them.

Zinnia: Hold on tight, spitfire.

Ren: [wrapping her arms around Zinnia’s waist] You too, Higana.

Rayquaza finishes coiling and rockets off into the sky.

Scene 7: [As Rayquaza soars higher, Ren and Zinnia concentrate on their keystones. Air swirls around rayquaza and light pours out of them like a beacon. They change forms in a flash, growing to nearly twice the size with larger fins and long, bright filaments of light issuing from their head. Their underbelly has turned black and golden glowing orbs adorn their sides. All around Hoenn and the world, people and pokemon watch the transformation on screens in their hands, their houses, or public places where it is being broadcast. Terra and Moana are huddled up together on a loveseat, watching on a tv in a small apartment. Hartmann, Brenton, Josh and a young woman who must be his sister watch on a much larger screen, surrounded by their pokemon. Kai, Wally, Steven, Wallace, Ren’s parents and a bunch of scientists watch from the control room at the space center. Even with their excellent telescopic equipment, visibility is limited in the daylight. All that Ren and Zinnia’s pokemon can see from the tower is a shining speck like a star. Taraki, Ao, Korukoru, Phlox and the Eon Guardians go to the center of the platform and close their eyes. Taraki’s mega stone is the first to glow, followed by Latios and Latias’s soul dews. Korukoru grits his teeth and his mega stone flares to life as well. Ao’s is next and finally Phlox’s is lit as well. Light swirls around them and the Eon Guardians float above the other four. They open their eyes and light shines out as the energy from the four mega stones links with their soul dews. They join hands and look up, sending]
out a single beam of incandescence into the sky. In the upper atmosphere, Rayquaza forms a bubble of air around their riders to protect them. Ren and Zinnia lean as low as they can over Rayquaza’s neck to present less of a target. Suddenly they are struck by a shaft of light and energy pours through them and into Rayquaza. The god surges forward with a burst of speed and straightens like an arrow as they exit the atmosphere. The vast starry universe unveils itself before them, blocked only by one enormous hunk of rock dead ahead of them. Ren hugs Zinnia tighter as they rocket straight for it. Rayquaza’s streamers glow brighter just before impact, which shatters the meteor in a blinding flash. The people below lose sight of Rayquaza as it exits the atmosphere, but a few moments later there is a flicker and then the bright streaks of far smaller meteors burning up in the atmosphere. In the Mossdeep Space Center, all wait with baited breath for the conformation.

Scientist: It was destroyed! Satellites are only picking up small debris!

[ Everyone who was seated leaps up and cheers. The only people who don’t seem to be celebrating are Ren’s friends and family. Senri and Asuka are holding each other, watching the screens closely for any sign of their daughter. Kai and Wally are holding hands and watching too. Wallace slumps in relief, but straightens when he hears a sniffle beside him. Steven’s eyes are searching the screens and he is biting his lip, face lined with the effort of holding back. A tear falls and Wallace takes a step towards him. ]

Wallace: Steven…

[ Steven whips around and hugs Wallace tight, sobbing softly into his chest. Wallace wraps an arm around Steven’s back and cradles his head with the other. ]

Wallace: Darling, we don’t know if she’s gone yet. She’s strong. She was strong enough to beat you and Groudon after all.

Steven: [ between sobs ] She won’t—answer…

Wallace: She’s a little busy right now. Give her time.

[ Wallace presses his cheek to Steven’s crown and strokes the back of Steven’s head with his thumb as he continues to cry. Nearby Senri’s eyes are welling and Asuka is sniffling quietly while the rest of the room continues to celebrate except for the few whose duty it is to keep scanning. One of them is peering at a small screen in front of them. ]

Scientist: [ under her breath ] That’s weird.

---

**Scene 8:** [Ren is floating weightless in the blackness and all is crushingly silent. Then a distant noise in the void, a call Ren tries desperately to hear.]

Voice: Ren… Ren…

[ She tries to focus on it but it is distant and so very faint. ]

Voice: [ blaring in her ear ] Ren!

[ Ren wakes and gasps, opening her eyes. It takes her a few moments to process, but she find that she is floating in space, but it is not empty. She can see bits of rock against the glow of the planet ]
below and others illuminated by the distant sun. They are scattering all around from the point of impact and as she scans she catches sight of Rayquaza not far from her. And there is also a dark triangle, perplexing in its blackness and its perfectly even sides. For a moment it seems to only be occupying two dimensions, but then Ren sees movement at it center, something like tentacles tentatively emerging.

Zinnia: [in Ren’s headset] Ren!

Ren: Zinnia!

[She looks around again and sees Zinnia floating near her.]

Ren: What is that thing?

Zinnia: I don’t know, but we have to wake Rayquaza.

[A fist sized piece of debris comes floating by and Ren reaches out and grabs it. She hauls back throws it at the god. It bounces off without effect. Rayquaza remains unmoving and their orbs and streamers are barely glowing.]

Zinnia: They’re still mega evolved. We should try using the keystones.

Ren: Zinnia look out!

[A rock at least twice her size is headed for the Lorekeeper. She readies herself, grabs it and pushes off towards Ren. Ren holds her hands out and manages to catch Zinnia as she passes. They spin slowly as the rock hands, drifting closer to the triangle and whatever is trying to escape it. They lock eyes for a moment and knit their fingers together. They close their eyes and try to push energy into their keystones. Ren can feel the connection and catches a glimpse of Rayquaza’s streamers flaring back to life as she turns. In another moment Rayquaza is between them and the object and Ren and Zinnia let go one hand so that they can grab on to the great serpent. As soon as they are back in place, air issues from Rayquaza’s mouth and the bubble reforms around them. Rayquaza coils, readying themselves as the tentacles emerge further and wave around. The tentacles crack the door open and a somewhat humanoid creature emerges, albeit with four tentacles instead of arms and no mouth. It is orange and electric blue with a smooth surface and spindles for legs. It turns towards the sun, illuminating a gemlike sphere on its chest. It almost sparkles as the solar energy pours into it and its tentacles twist together to form two arms. Rayquaza and the others watch it carefully, the humans with wide eyes and Rayquaza with tail lashing. The creature turns its head sharply and fixes its white, sunken eyes on them. Ren can feel Rayquaza coiling beneath her and grabs onto Zinnia just before the creature strikes. It aims its chest at them and fires a beam of white light right at Rayquaza’s head. Rayquaza tilts their chin up at the last moment to shield Ren and Zinnia from the blast. The impact sends the god reeling back and its riders hang on with all their might so as not to be thrown into open space. Rayquaza lashes out with extreme speed and slaps the creature away with their tail. The combatants both recover and Rayquaza charges at the creature, claws elongated and glowing. It shimmers for a moment and changes form, becoming more streamlined with thinner limbs and one large spike protruding from the back of its head. It dodges so fast that it almost seems to be teleporting and strikes Rayquaza’s side. Rayquaza tries another extreme speed, but the creature counters with an extreme speed of its own, easily outstripping and outmaneuvering the god to strike them another three times in different places. Rayquaza uses twister, trapping the creature in the center of the whirlwind and blocking the exit at the top. Seeing that it is surrounded, the creature shimmers again using cosmic power to shift into a far bulkier form with a domed head melded into its broad shoulders. Rayquaza charges it, jaws wide, but it catches them with it four broad arms and forces their jaws shut before delivering a point blank hyper beam. Rayquaza is blasted away and the creature shifts again to a new form with pointed tentacles and spikes protruding from its knees and...
skull. Psychic energy masses near its head as it swoops around and plows into Rayquaza from the other side. The sudden and violent reversal of direction causes Ren loses her grip, but she manages to grab Zinnia’s foot before she is flung away. The dragon trainer is unseated but holds fast and pulls them both back aboard as Rayquaza fires a dragon pulse. The creature shifts back to its defensive form and blocks the hit with its arms, then shifts to its attack form, charging a huge ball of psychic energy in front of it. Rayquaza dives away but is struck in the side and crumples.

Ren: Come on!

Zinnia: Dragon ascent!

[ The creature’s head becomes clouded in a mist Ren could swear is amnesia, as Rayquaza charges at it once more, this time glowing with light blue energy. The miasma distracts it long enough that it cannot get away or change form and Rayquaza plows into it. The creature crumples and is fired off across the debris field, crashing into several hunks of rock before coming to a stop. ]

Zinnia: Shit.

[ It turns its gem towards the sun and energy flows into it once more. ]

Ren: Fuck!

[ Rayquaza fires a dragon pulse at it and it dodges behind one of the bigger pieces of meteoroid. ]

Ren: What are we going to do?

[ Rayquaza fires another dragon pulse and the creature, in its speed form once again, zips to another hiding place in the debris field. ]

Zinnia: We have to keep attacking! If we let it use recover again we’re finished.

[ Rayquaza’s eyes flash and many of the meteoroids erupt into blue flames. They converge on the alien’s hiding place and smash into it from all sides. It breaks out, once again in defense form, and sends bits rock flying in every direction. ]

Ren: Can we even kill it? Dragon ascent is our strongest move—we blew the meteor apart with it—but it still wasn’t enough to incapacitate that thing.

Zinnia: I know, and we’re losing steam. Maybe if we can get in a dragon dance or two…

[ Rayquaza dodges a hyper beam with extreme speed and uses twister again, imprisoning the creature in a funnel of debris and draconic energy. While it is contained, the god uses dragon dance to regains its strength. ]

Ren: Wait, we just have to weaken it enough to catch it! I have some ultra balls with me.

Zinnia: Will that even work? We don’t know if this thing is a pokemon.

Ren: It’s using magic. I say it’s worth a shot.

Zinnia: Alright spitfire.

[ Twister wears off and the alien switches to its attack form and charges another of its powerful psychic attacks. Rayquaza is ready this time and dodges with extreme speed before striking the creature with their tail. The alien switches to its speed form but Rayquaza traps it in another twister and powers up with dragon dance. The alien uses its defense form to break out but Rayquaza is ]
ready with a dragon pulse. Rayquaza closes while the creature is reeling and uses outrage, slamming into it again and again. It curls into a defensive ball and takes the hits until Rayquaza is overcome. They strike and miss, unable to see through the confusion and the alien uses the opportunity to switch to attack form and use its psychic move. The ball of psychic energy hits Rayquaza and, while not as powerful as the first time, sends them reeling back. Ren and Zinnia hang on tight, closing their eyes so as to not contribute to Rayquaza’s dizziness and focus instead on throwing off the confusion. Rayquaza rights themselves and shakes their head as they curve back around to face their opponent. The creature tries to use recover again, but Rayquaza fires off a dragon pulse to stop it. The alien tumbles for a moment, but soon stops and turns to face them. Ren can feel Rayquaza weakening and they have no way to recover. The creature’s crystal glows white as they charge a hyper beam and Rayquaza charges at them with dragon ascent. The beam of energy hits Rayquaza square in the forehead and almost hits Ren and Zinnia on their neck, but they plow through straight into the alien’s chest. The creature is flung away, but Rayquaza’s momentum keeps them charging after it. Ren throws her ultra ball and it catches up with the alien, opens and draws it inside in a flash of red light. The ball shakes a little, button glowing red, but stills after a few moments and the button fades to white. They soon catch up to the pokeball and Ren stands up, reaching out of the air pocket for it while Zinnia grabs her belt to keep her anchored. She catches it and sits back down, fixing it back on her belt. It is then they notice they are drifting dangerously close to earth’s atmosphere and are being pulled in by its gravity. Zinnia is patting Rayquaza, trying to rouse them as they drift ever closer. They god does not react and Ren and Zinnia are too drained themselves to channel anything more than the bare minimum through their keystones to keep Rayquaza in their mega form.

Zinnia: Looks like we’re going home. Hold on tight, spitfire.

[ Ren grabs hold of Zinnia as they gain speed, falling ever faster towards their planet. ]

Ren: At least we did it.

Zinnia: Yeah, we did.

---

**Scene 9:** [Everyone in the Space Center is watching the screens intently once more. Steven has stopped crying, though Wallace still has his arm around Steven’s shoulder.]

Scientist 1: They have to be fighting something out there, it’s the only explanation.

[ A beam of white light flashes across one of the screens. ]

Prime Minister: Can’t we get a better visual?

Scientist 2: Negative, sir. Guidance is damaged and the satellite cams aren’t telescopic. They’re just meant to pick up anything in the immediate vicinity.

Steven: But they have to be alive, those streamers we saw are part of Rayquaza’s mega form. It can’t sustain mega evolution without a partner.

Scientist 3: I think we have something on the telescope again.

[ They transfer it over to the large screen and everyone leans in to get a closer look. There is something like a blinking speck, but it is difficult to distinguish against the general brightness of the ]
sky. Meanwhile, somewhere over Hoenn’s southern sea, Rayquaza and their riders are reentering the atmosphere. Ren and Zinnia are clinging desperately to Rayquaza as they descend head first. The bubble of air surrounding them begins to burn away and their magma suits soon become uncomfortably hot. Try as they might, they cannot seem to rouse Rayquaza and the great serpent plummets ever faster out of control. Suddenly a tendril of light snakes up towards them and energy flows into their keystones. Ren and Zinnia push it into Rayquaza and the god’s eyes snap open. They twist in the air so that their blackened underside takes the heat of reentry and Ren and Zinnia’s suits soon begin to cool in the rushing air. Rayquaza spirals for a moment, summoning a violent updraft to slow their descent. They slow dramatically, but Rayquaza cannot sustain the gust for long and their mega form melts away, signalling the end of their strength. They are frighteningly high and the bubble protecting Ren and Zinnia from being buffeted disappears. Without it the wind soon tears Ren from Rayquaza’s back. Zinnia catches her by the wrist, still clinging onto Rayquaza with her other hand. Ren grabs onto Zinnia’s wrist with both hands, but then sees her slipping.

Ren: Let me go! I’m pulling you off!

Zinnia: No way in hell, spitfire.

[ Zinnia fingers continue to slip and they are both ripped away from Rayquaza. They spin frantically for a few moments and they hold onto each other with all of their might. Soon enough the spinning slows and Ren lets go with one arm to reach for the other. It takes a few tries, but they catch each other’s wrists and lock themselves together, face to face as they plummet ever downwards. ]

Ren: Now you’re stuck with me. I thought you didn’t want me along.

Zinnia: You’re the one who said I shouldn’t have to do this alone.

[ Ren pulls Zinnia in closer and taps their helmets together. They can see Rayquaza below them and off to the side falling like a piece of ribbon. The great serpent’s body twists and flutters as the air catches their fins, but they still grow ever further away. Ren can see the islands below them now. ]

Zinnia: Any more bright ideas, spitfire?

Ren: Time to call for backup.

[ Ren reaches out with her mind and Latios answers. ]

Latios: We are coming to you.

Ren: See if Lugia and Ho-Oh can help Rayquaza. We got separated.

Latios: Is Zinnia with you?

Ren: Yes.

Latios: Keep hold of her. We will find you.

[ Ren scans the ocean beneath her and soon spots the Eon Guardian spiralling up to meet her. Below them, Ho-Oh and Lugia arrow towards Rayquaza, giving off a purplish tint as they mass psychic energy. Ren and Zinnia let go one arm, but hang on with the other, trying to get parallel as the Guardians catch up to them. Latios and Latias flip as they get close and partially fold their wings so that they are falling only a little slower than the humans. Ren and Zinnia let go of each other just before they land on the Eon Guardians backs and Latios and Latias make sure to guide them into place with telekinesis. Once they are secure, the Eon Guardians opens their wings to slow their descent. Below them, Lugia has gotten beneath Rayquaza and is trying to slow their progress with }
telekinesis while Ho-Oh has grabbed them by the arms and is slowly opening their wings to provide further resistance. They get dangerously close to the ocean below them before Ho-Oh spreads their wings fully and Lugia heaves up from beneath. The water is blown away by the force of their wingbeats and Rayquaza’s tail cuts through the waves for a moment before they gain some altitude. They swing west back towards the Sky Pillar and the Eon Guardias follow.

Ren: [telepathy] Hey Steven? We made it.

**Scene 10:** Everyone is watching the screens at the space center, but it is difficult to tell exactly what is happening since none of the cameras are nearby. The only thing they can make out clearly is an emerald ribbon that must be Rayquaza plummeting towards the ocean. There is blip of white as it touches the horizon that looks like a splash and then nothing for several agonizing seconds. Then a rainbow appears above the water line. Steven goes rigid for a moment and then a smile break over his face.

Steven: They made it. They both made it!

[This is met with raucous cheers and applause and quite a few tears. Steven stumbles over to a chair and sits down, clutching at his chest. On the screens in front of him, which no one is paying much mind at the moment, a streak of green and white scoots west just above the horizon. Rayquaza and company have not drifted far from their original launch point and it is a short flight back to the tower. Ho-Oh and Lugia lower Rayquaza carefully onto the top and Ren and Zinnia slide off of the Eon Guardian’s backs as they land. Their feet have barely touched stone before they are both swarmed by their pokemon. Ren is nearly crushed between Taraki and Pohaku and Zinnia grabs her whismur only seconds before disappearing beneath a pile of dragons. Latias sets to work healing Rayquaza’s wounds and the great serpent lets out a shuddering breath, eyes opening. Kaspa and Dizzy remain sitting on their respective legendaries backs since they have not been personally invited to set foot on the tower but watch with smiles as Rayquaza’s chosen are reunited with their teams. Ren pulls off her helmet and ducks away from her starter to greet the rest of the crew who lick and nuzzle and rub up against her. After a while she all but shoves them away to wriggle out of her magma suit. Rayquaza is sitting up now, though their body is not restlessly coiling like it was at their first meeting. Zinnia is talking to them, but soon turns and bows to Ho-Oh and Lugia in turn. Kaspa and Dizzy nod back and then nod to Ren as Lugia and Ho-Oh take off. Zinnia picks up her bag and pulls out her goggles.]

Ren: Just where do you think you’re going?

Zinnia: Not sure yet, but I thought it might be time to make myself scarce.

Ren: Why? You just saved the world.

Zinnia: For the stuff before that.

Ren: I’m sure they wouldn’t—

Zinnia: I’m not. And I probably deserve it, but I can’t spend the rest my life in a cell. Someone needs to take care of my pokemon.

Ren: You risked everything to save everyone. You’re a hero, Zinnia.
Zinnia: I’m not so sure about that.

Ren: [stepping into her space] Well I am and I’m the Champion. They’re not gonna deny me a pardon, not after I saved the region twice.

Zinnia: [looking away] I don’t know, spitfire.

Ren: You don’t have to live in exile the rest of your life to atone or some shit. [Zinnia meets her eyes again.] If you want to make things right, do it by helping people. [grabbing Zinnia’s shoulder] The Draconids still need a Lorekeeper and the region needs more trainers like you. Come back with me.

Zinnia: [smiling a little] How can I resist you?

[Ren grins as their pokemon gather behind them and the Eon Guardians float up beside them. Rayquaza looms above them and they both look up.]

Rayquaza: THANK YOU. [Ren and Zinnia bow and Rayquaza dips their head back.] WE SHALL SPEAK AGAIN SOON, LOREKEEPER.

[With that they take off into the sky in a rush of air. The rest watch them go until they disappear from view. The two trainers withdraw their pokemon, climb back aboard the Eon Guardian and the five of them fly northeast back towards Mossdeep.]

Scene 11: [Latios and Latias circle down and land at the base of the hill that the Mossdeep Space Center sits atop. Ren and Zinnia straighten themselves out a bit and even Aster smooths out her ears. Ren looks up at the Space Center and sees a figure in a suit running down the hill towards them.]

Ren: Steven!

[She runs to him and Steven sweeps her up in his arms, holding her too tight to be comfortable. He presses his face into her shoulder and she feels tears against her skin a moment before he sniffs loudly. She rests her cheek against his head and moves one hand up to stroke his hair.]

Ren: [soft teasing] Aww, was someone afraid I wasn’t coming back? I would think you’d be ecstatic, getting to be Champion again and all.

Steven: [annoyed and muffled against her] I love you, you asshole.

[Ren gets a little dewy-eyed herself and swallows thickly, grabbing a handful of his hair and hugging him tighter.]

Ren: I love you too.

[Steven squeezes Ren even closer for a moment before readjusting his grip to support her better. He looks up at her with eyes red and puffy from crying and a smile so full of emotion that it is almost ugly. Ren giggles a bit and wipes a tear off his face before pressing her forehead to his. He closes his eyes for a bit and just breathes her in. When he opens them, he sees Zinna over Ren’s shoulder, slouched with her head cocked slightly and wearing a big grin on her face. Ren notices Steven has gone still and turns to see what he is looking at. Ren takes in Zinnia’s smirk and goes a little pink.]
Zinnia: You two are adorable. Like I’m envious but I can’t even be mad.

[ Steven puts Ren down, marches over and hugs Zinnia before she can get away. ]

Steven: [ voice husky ] Thank you.

[ Zinnia is caught off guard but she hugs him back, even deigning to smile a little as she pats him on the back. ]

Zinnia: [ catching Ren’s eye over his shoulder ] You were right, spitfire: he is a sweetheart.

[ Ren comes over and joins the hug, trapping Zinnia between her and Steven. Zinnia doesn’t seem to mind this at all and sighs contentedly. ]

Kai: [ from the top of the hill ] Ren!

[ The trio looks up to see that Kai, Wally, Senri, Asuka and Wallace have followed Steven outside. Ren waves, leaning on Zinnia who leans on Steven for support. Kai and the rest come charging down the hill except for Wallace who follows at a more reasonable pace. Steven and Zinnia step back as the other four pile on Ren. Only Wally is dry-eyed as they hug her. Asuka kisses her daughter’s nose and cheek and forehead over and over. Zinnia’s eyes well up as she watches and Steven notices Aster giving her a worried look. He scoops up the whismur and hands her off to Zinnia, who flashes him a watery smile as she takes her. She holds Aster tight and the whismur hugs her back with her ears. She kisses Aster’s forehead and sighs. ]

Zinnia: Thanks, stony.

Steven: If you don’t come up with a better nickname for me, I’m gonna have to start calling you “Zinny”.

Zinnia: And what makes you think I need a permanent nickname for you?

Steven: I get the feeling we’ll be seeing a lot of each other.

[ They both look back at Ren who is talking and laughing with the others. ]

Zinnia: Maybe so.

---

**Scene 12:** [It is early the next evening and the sky is streaked with pink and orange as Kai and Wally walk into the Mossdeep Space Center. Wally is wearing minicord jeans and one of his nicest cardigans while Kai is in one of his more relaxed normal outfits, complete with signature white beanie. They hand in their tickets and are directed into the planetarium. The dome is open and all of the seats are still upright. Kai and wally sit down and look around. There is no one else in the planetarium and Wally starts to look nervous.]

Wally: Oh geez, I’m sorry for bringing us so early. I didn’t even notice there were assigned seats on the tickets.

Kai: That’s okay, neither did I. This way we get to watch it get dark.

Wally: [ smiling and blushing ] Yeah.
Kai: Do you know if Ren’s coming?

Wally: She said she is, but she probably won’t be here till later, haha.

Kai: [ *looking up at the sky* ] I’m actually really pumped. I was watching *Cleffa and Elgyem* earlier and they said it’s going to be even more spectacular because of all the debris from that big meteor. And the weather is perfect! They don’t even need the castforms! Wait, did I tell you they called me last week and offered me a free ticket because of Paki?

[ *Kai looks over and Wally is leaning on the armrest between them, watching him and smiling.* ]

Wally: [ *absently* ] No, I don’t think so.

Kai: Must have forgot. Anyway, they wanted to have some castforms on hand in case we got rain or something. Did you know they’re turning out every light in Mossdeep so we can have a better view? [ *looking up again* ] Like Mossdeep is already hardly any light pollution because it’s so far from any of the major cities, but with all of the lamps off and the clear weather conditions, we should be able to see the milky way and even the nebula in Swablu’s wings really clearly!

[ *Kai’s nerdy gushing fades into the background as we focus in on Wally, whose attention is still trained on Kai instead of the lovely evening sky above them. He worries his lip as he watches Kai talk, hand gripping the armrest tighter. After a moment of internal writhing, he grabs Kai by the face, leans over and kisses him full on the mouth. Kai’s eyes blow wide in shock as Wally’s squeeze closed. Kai’s eyes flit shut just as Wally pulls back. Kai blinks owlishly at him, mouth hanging open a little. They stare at each other for a moment, both of their faces tinged with a blush.* ]

Kai: Uh, um…

Wally: [ *blush deepening* ] I’m sorry! I should have asked first. Shit! I just—I really really like you. I have since we met basically and I’ve been meaning to ask you out for a while but I couldn’t get up the nerve. This was supposed to be a date—that’s why I was so nervous I made us come early—but then I never even said anything and—[ *He has to stop and take a breath from his inhaler because he’s been talking too fast and he catches the look of profound surprise on Kai’s face.* ] Oh gods, I’m so sorry if I made this weird. It’s okay if—we can still be friends if—[ *burying his face in his hands* ] Arceus, I messed this up.

[ *Kai swallows heavily as Wally balls himself up in his chair, completely mortified. Kai stares at Wally for several seconds, wracking his brains for what to say. He reaches out to touch Wally’s back but changes his mind and grabs the armrest instead.* ]

Kai: Um, Wally, could I kiss you?

Wally: [ *peeking out of his ball* ] We can just forget it happened—that is if you still want to… Wait, what?

Kai: [ *flushing deeper* ] Could I, uh, kiss you?

Wally: You… like me?

Kai: [ *rubbing the back of his head and looking away nervously* ] I hadn’t thought about it much, but yeah, I think so.

Wally: [ *folding his legs under him* ] And you want to—?

Kai: [ *whipping back to Wally* ] Yes! [ *quieter* ] I—I want to figure this out, if that’s alright with you.
Wally: Yeah, okay. Um, just stop me if I make you uncomfortable.

[ Kai nods and Wally slides a little closer to him, putting his hand next to Kai’s on the armrest. Kai looks down for a moment and slowly knits their fingers together. They can’t meet each other’s eyes and both look about ready to chicken out before Kai’s resolve hardens and he leans in. They meet halfway this time, eyes closing and lips bumping softly. This kiss is longer and more exploratory than the first and when they separate, they do not pull back as far. Wally’s eyes look questioningly into Kai’s. ]

Kai: Okay, yes, yeah, definitely. I am one hundred percent into you. [ pulling at the hair sticking out from under his beanie ] How did I not notice?? Like you are so brave and funny and cute I just… Great gods, I’m an idiot.

[ Wally laughs a little in relief, eyes welling, and Kai moves their hands to push back the armrest between them so that it is no longer in the way. He squeezes Wally’s hand and kisses him on the nose and the cheek and finally the lips again. Wally pushes back harder this time, grabbing Kai’s shirt with his free hand and pulling him in closer. Kai fumblingly stokes Wally’s arm and they both giggle as they separate. They look at each other and laugh again. ]

Wally: I’ve been daydreaming about kissing you for months and somehow this is still so much better than I imagined.

Kai: [ tugging gently on Wally’s arm ] You could do it more.

[ Wally giggles again and so does Kai. Wally lets go of Kai’s hand to climb into his lap and kiss him again. Kai grabs Wally’s cardigan and pulls him flush while Wally pulls the beanie off Kai’s head and wraps his arms around Kai’s neck. The planetarium is growing steadily darker and the lights on the floor come on to guide people to their seats. Steven, Wallace, Tate, Lisa, Cosmo and Keanu all arrive in one big group. There is a lull in conversation as they enter which is drawn out as they all spot Kai and Wally. They stop, smile, look at each other and walk right back out again without Kai and Wally noticing. ]

---

**Scene 13:** [Less than an hour later it is dark and the planetarium is almost full. Steven, Wallace and Dizzy are sitting in a row together, but Steven keeps glancing around. Eventually he hops out of his seat.]

Steven: I’m going to look for Ren.

Wallace: Don’t be too long.

[ Steven edges his way out of the row and then out through the planetarium doors. He scans the lobby and sees Ren walking in the front doors. ]

Steven: There you are! It’s about to start.

Ren: Sorry I’m late. I actually only came to tell you I’m gonna watch outside with my pokemon. Care to join us?

Steven: And waste my ticket? Of course I will.
Ren smiles at him and they walk out into the night together. They barely get ten feet from the door before the entire island goes dark.

Steven: So where to?

Ren: Your place?

Steven: Sounds perfect. What kept you?

Ren: Kyogre severed their connection with me. I decided to put the orbs back on Mt. Pyre.

Steven: Is that safe?

Ren: I doubt anyone is gonna try and awaken them now that everyone’s had a fresh look at the kind of damage they can do. And if anyone tries, I’ll be around to stop them. I’m not worried.

Steven: [laughing] You’re right.

Ren: And it just felt right too, like closing a chapter. It’s time to start something else now.

Steven: I’ve felt that too. I’ve been doing a lot of thinking and I’m going to take you up on that job offer, if you’ll have me.

Ren: [smiling big enough to split her face in two] Anything to get Drake Nathan out of my life.

Steven: Ren!

Ren: I’m joking! Sorry! [mumbling] Feelings are hard sometimes. Besides, you know perfectly well I’d like nothing better.

Steven: Really?

Ren: Yes! [He laughs again but she is quiet for a moment.] Are you sure though? You have plenty of time to decide.

Steven: I am. Believe it or not the world almost ending really helped put some things in perspective. I realized there are some things I’m much more afraid to lose and not much else I’d rather do.

Ren: And nothing stops you from pursuing other things just because you’re on the Elite Four. If you need to travel, we’ll work something out.

Steven: You’re wonderful, do you know that?

[She smiles and there is a little more spring in her step as they continue down the dark road. When they get to his cottage, Kotai and all of Steven’s pokemon are waiting for them. Ren sends out the rest of hers and they all settle down in the grass. Ren and Steven lay next to each other with Taraki and Bessemer beside them. The meteor shower has already begun and bright streaks light up the night. It almost seem like you can see forever up into the blackness and no matter where you look there are little points of light. Ren reaches for Steven’s hand and he knits their fingers together.]

Ren: So Steven, about what you said yesterday, did you mean it in a platonic way or a romantic way?

[Steven takes a few seconds to respond and Ren holds her breath.]

Steven: Both.
She squeezes his hand tight and he turns to look at her.


[Steven smiles and squeezes her hand back.]

Steven: It’s good to be on the same page… I’m sorry it took so long.

Ren: Don’t be. This is better, I think, a lot better.

She rolls over onto his chest and rests her head on her arms so she can look down at him. He smiles up at her and she grins back.

Ren: But out of curiosity, how long have you been into me? [He squirms uncomfortably.] Want me to go first? [He nods.] To be honest, I wanted to smash my face into your face pretty much from the get go. [He laughs.] And it was a weird thing for me. I’d never felt that way about anyone before and it had sort of gotten to the point where I thought I never would. [She shrugs.] And then you had to be a wonderful person on top of it. I was definitely gone by Meteor Falls.

Steven: It was a lot more gradual for me. You’re younger and you had only just gotten your first badge when we met. Meanwhile, I was the Champion. I just thought I’d keep an eye on you for Senri. But after you bonded with Latios and more or less took the reigns on taking down Magma, I guess I sort of started to see you differently.

Ren: More like I demanded you did. But this was an unintended consequence for the record.

Steven: I didn’t mean for this either. [He flinches and draws his hand away.] Shit! Was that a little too honest? I’m sorry if I’m ruining the moment.

Ren: Don’t be ridiculous. I’m glad we both followed our better judgement. Things are much more even between us now and we actually know each other. There’s a lot less room for a colossal disaster. Although, I’ll level with you: I’ve never actually dated anyone before, so I guess I’m still woefully unprepared.

Steven: Do you think we shouldn’t…

Ren: NO! [Steven starts at her sudden forcefulness] I’m sorry. What I mean is: if you’re willing, we are so totally doing this. [crooked smile] Woefully unprepared is how I like to enter all the major commitments of my life. Are you sure you want to do this though? Things will be awkward.

Steven: Yeah, and maybe a little more difficult than I was anticipating. It never occurred to me that I’d be your first relationship.

Ren: [looking away] Yeah…

Steven: Thank you for telling me. I hope you know that I don’t expect anything from you. I like where we are now.

Ren: [She lays her head on his chest and hugs him.] Thank you.

Steven: [petting her back] We’ll be careful. You’ll tell me if I ever do anything to make you uncomfortable, won’t you?

Ren: You bet I will. I ain’t shy. Plus I can kick your ass.
Steven: [smiling] That’s true.

[She sighs in contentment and snuggles into him. All around them their pokemon are staring up at the sky and talking quietly to each other. Steven looks up too, smiling fit to burst. He feels Ren shift on his chest he turns his attention back to her.]

Ren: And you’re sure you don’t mind being stuck with [pointing at the scarred side of her face] this?

Steven: [completely taken aback] What?

Ren: By your own admission you’re pretty vain, Steven.

Steven: Ren, not that it matters, but I think you’re beautiful.


Steven: I’m serious. I—how can you think otherwise? Just looking at you right now with the stars falling behind you, and that light in your eyes… I can’t even picture anything I’d like to look at more.

Ren: [She snorts.] It’s dark and I’m disfigured. You can’t deny that.

Steven: So it’s possible not everyone is as enlightened as I am.

Ren: Steven.

Steven: So what if other people can’t see past it? I don’t have to look past it. It’s part of you and I love it. I love your freckles and your little button nose and your huge fucking eyebrows. I love that amazing jawline and the way your whole face scrunches up when you’re annoyed. Sometimes I want to smack myself because it took me so long to notice your eyes are green and I could have been looking at them for months now. [Her expression softens, but he is still a bit too agitated to stop.] You’re beautiful to me. And I hope you can see yourself that way. [almost petulant] Maybe I’ve been blinded by your other charms. [obstinate] I stand by my opinion regardless.

[Bessemier and a few of the others snicker and Steven huffs. Ren smiles and shifts her weight so that she can stroke Steven’s hair. He closes his eyes and lays his head back, tension leaving his body.]

Ren: You’re beautiful, but you probably already knew that.

Steven: I do get that all the time, but it’s still nice every time I hear it.

[She smiles wider and he folds his arms behind his head so he can look at her easier.]

Ren: So what exactly are these blinding charms you mentioned?

Steven: Well first off, you’ve always treated me like a normal person. You’d be surprised how rare that is. And you’ve always just accepted me for who I am. I know I’m kind of a big personality, but you always take it in stride. I’ve never felt this comfortable with another person.

Ren: I feel the same. I’ve been able to tell you things I don’t feel comfortable sharing with anyone else. And I like your big personality. It keeps things interesting.

Steven: Personally, I think you’re the one who keeps things interesting around here.

Ren: A little too interesting.
Steven: Maybe. But I like that we can banter and I love that light you get in your eyes when you battle. And there’s something very admirable about your competitive streak. You’re always trying to prove something to yourself, not to other people.

Ren: I like how you do your best to take care of everyone, even people you barely know. You are very privileged, but you’re always trying to use it for good.

Steven: Well you don’t take any of my shit.

Ren: [ quirking an eyebrow ] And you like that?

Steven: Absolutely. I become a real shit-peddler when people let me and most people let me. You don’t let me charm or flirt my way out of things or think that I’m the only capable person in the room. You always cut me down a peg when I’m being too vain and you drag me out when I’m getting too self-involved.

Ren: Again, you’re saying that you like this, right?

Steven: Yes. Sure I do nice things sometimes, but I also abuse my charm and privilege and I don’t like who I am when I’m doing it. Of course I enjoy getting my way or I wouldn’t do it in the first place, but it doesn’t ever feel quite right.

Ren: I’m still a bit lost over here.

Steven: What I’m trying to get at is that I like who I have to be with you, even if I grouse about it sometimes.

Ren: That—that is so fucking sweet… I have no idea how to top that.

Steven: [ relieved ] Oh, good. For a moment I was scared I was screwing this up.

Ren: [ soft teasing smile ] Aww, were you nervous?

Steven: A little. I’ve never had it quite this bad before.

Ren: [ turning beet red and groaning ] Stop it! This is so much cuter than all of my dumb fantasies. [ thumping her forehead against his chest ] You’re killing me!

Steven: This is going pretty well. We’re covering a lot of ground.

Ren: That’s for sure. [ popping back up ] And we haven’t even kissed yet. [ smirking down at him ] Isn’t that supposed to be before we discuss all the ins and outs of our relationship?

Steven: We can do things in whatever order we want.

Ren: But how do we know this will even work? What if we’re not compatible?

Steven: [ smirking up at her ] If you want to kiss me, all you have do is ask.

Ren: May I kiss you, Steven Stone?

Steven: Please do.

[ She grins and climbs the rest of the way on top of him, planting her hands in the grass on either side of his head to get a little leverage. He reaches out and touches her cheek, running his fingers along it and back to tuck her hair behind her ear. She leans in and he moves to meet her. It is soft at
first but after a few moments, she pushes harder into him. He responds in kind, tilting his head slightly so that they don’t bump noses. She puts her weight on one arm so she can run a hand through his hair and his hands run up her back. After a bit more he pulls back just a little. 

Steven: Well, what do you think?

Ren: You know what the hell you’re doing.

Steven: Benefits of being a slut.

[ She laughs and kisses him again. He arches into it, pulling her tighter against him, she hums happily. ]

Taraki: Whoa! Did everyone see that?

[ They break apart and look over only to find Taraki is looking up at the meteor shower like the rest of the pokemon. ]

Ren: Kuso! We’re totally missing my show! [ rolling off Steven ] More makeouts later.

[ Steven grabs her hand and squeezes it tight as he turns his gaze back to the sky and she gives him a squeeze in return. ]

Bessemer: Thanks for that, Taraki. I was about to say something myself, but I didn’t want to interrupt.

Kata: One of us had to.

Ao: We wouldn’t want you to miss the whole thing.

Ren: Sorry about that everyone. It must have been weird listening to half that conversation. Steven was a perfect gentleman, don’t worry.

Teka: We heard the whole thing. Bessemer has been translating for us.

Bessemer: It was more efficient that way.

Akahata: And Kata filled us in.

Pohaku: [ wriggling in delight ] I can’t wait to tell Panahi!

Kotai: Aye, she’ll be right proud.

Ren: Oh gods.

Steven: Are yours giving you a hard time? Half of mine were taking bets apparently.

Naihi: We were too. Is that considered rude?

[Ren starts laughing and so does Steven. She edges closer to be in more contact with Steven and he tilts his head to touch hers. Ren reaches out with her other arm and takes Taraki’s hand and he lets out a contented sigh. They all look up at the brilliant rain of meteors and smile. All around the region others are watching too. Kai and Wally are in their reclined seats in the planetarium, hands joined and armrest still tucked away between them. Wallace’s head rests on Dizzy’s shoulder and Dizzy smiles contentedly. Josh and his pokemon are on the roof of Courtney’s mansion taking turns looking through a telescope and marveling at the sight. Courtney herself meanwhile is on a small
deserted island with her and Maxie's pokemon around her. She is reading a letter with the aid of her ninetails's will-o-wisp. She gets to the end and sets it down. We can see that the signature at the end is Maxie's before her ninetails puts out the lights and she looks up at the sky. Archie and Maxie watch from the fenced in yard of a prison. Maxie is in the standard issue orange jumpsuit while Archie has a big visitor sticker on his breast pocket. The orb guardians are watching from the top of Mt. Pyre where the orbs are now back in their place at the shrine. Latios and Latias watch by the pool on their island that once again holds their soul dews. Ikki and her mate watch while a little surskit skates across a pond, chasing the reflections of the meteors. Putenga watches with her apprentices from a clearing in the Petalburg Woods. Panahi and her coordinator watch from one of the field in Fallarbor and Mele and his agent watch from Lighthouse Point in Lilycove. Terra and Moana are lying on a beach with their camerupt and sharpedo nearby. Asuka, Senri, Roxanne and the Birches are watching from a bridge over the estuary near Littleroot. And at the top of the waterfall in Meteor falls, Zinnia stands with her pokemon, parents, and grandmother, looking up at the sky. Even Aster, who cannot see, has her face turned upward. Zinnia’s eyes brighten and a tear runs down her face. She holds Aster tighter in her arms and her mother and grandmother each put a hand on her shoulders. Tears continue to fall and she lets them, never looking away from all the lights in the vast universe beyond. For just a little while all of Hoenn is dark, quiet and at peace.

Chapter End Notes

I DID IT. I AM THE MASTER COMMANDER! IT'S OVER HOLY SHIT. Well, not exactly. There is still the epilogue but I already wrote it and it's going up tomorrow. I am so damn happy I can't even tell you. This chapter came out longer than I thought it would and I still managed to write an extra scene on top of it. (You're welcome Maxie/Archie fans.) I'm very proud of myself. I really hope you all are satisfied with the ending. Endings are always hard.

For those of you who are curious, I didn't actually use Rayquaza in-game. I used Tarahau and Taraki for Zinnia and Akahata and Naihi for Rayquaza and Deoxys. We totally crushed it. Space baby is a little bastard though and didn't want to be caught, but I managed eventually.

I love you all! Thanks for reading!

Character Sheet:

HUMANS:
Ren, our protagonist
Kai, Ren’s friend who likes science
Wally, Ren’s other friend who likes the internet
Steven, the Hoenn League Champion who is low-key flirty all the time
Zinnia, the Draconid Lorekeeper and a former HAEA scientist
Josh, a Magma grunt who Ren has saved twice
Azalea, Zinnia’s former Magma grunt alias
Courtney, former Magma admin now in possession of Maxie’s pokemon
Terra, a former Magma grunt who is dating Moana
Moana, an Aqua grunt who is dating Terra
Senri, Ren’s dad and the Petalburg Gym Leader
Asuka, Ren’s mom and a writer
Dizzy, Lugia’s mouthpiece and friend of Kaspa
Kaspa, the current Sekiei (Indigo) League Champion and Ho-oh’s Chosen
Hartmann, a former Magma grunt who is friends with Josh
Brenton, a former Magma grunt who is friends with Josh
Puaka, Zinnia’s mother and a blacksmith

TEAM REN:
Tāraki the Sceptile
Akahata the Mightyena
Ao the Manectric
Kata the Grumpig
Kōtai the Sandslash
Roma the Sharpedo
Pohaku the Armaldo
Naihi the Absol
Teka the Pikachu

FORMER TEAM REN:
Ikki the Masquerain
Panahi the Pelipper
Maija the Taillow
Putenga the Breloom
Melet the Delcatty
Hauoro the Exploud
Tarahau, the Froslass

TEAM STEVEN:
Bessemer, the shiny Metagross
Damascus, the Skarmory
Gilchrist, the Aggron
Tungsten, the Steelix
Escutcheon, the Armaldo
Ptilometra, the Cradily
Alwyn, the Sandslash
Tulpi, the Aerodactyl
Pavise, the Bastiodon
Komatsu, the Excadrill
Liaoning, the Archeops
Anthy, the Carbink

TEAM ZINNIA:
Aster, the Whismur
Korukoru, the Salamence
Datura, the Noivern
Hellebore, the Goodra
Phlox, the Altaria
Thistle, the Tyrantrum
Claret, the Flygon
Epilogue: Don't Stop

Chapter Summary

In which Champion Ren has a challenger.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[ Two years later, the Pokemon League stadium in Ever Grande is full once more. The last few stragglers are settling into their seats and everyone is waiting for the match to begin. ]

Announcer: Ladies and gentlemen, the challenger has made it through the Elite Four and will now face the reigning Champion. Should he lose this final battle, he will receive the title of Victor to acknowledge his victory over the Elite Four as well a cash prize. Should he win, he will receive the title of Champion and all the honors and responsibilities that go along with it. Now, please welcome your current League Champion, Ren Kosugi!

[ The crowd erupts as Ren walks out onto the field followed by her team. ]

Announcer: And her defending team, Tāraki the sceptile!

[ Tāraki leaps forward and spins, performing a complicated sweep with his tail, then roars at the top of his voice. ]

Announcer: Akahata the mightyena!

[ Akahata raises her ruff and snarls sparks flying from her jaws. ]

Announcer: Māia the taillow!

[ Māia swoops off of Ren’s shoulder, twirls in the air and lets out a boomburst that shakes the stands. ]

Announcer: Putenga the breloom!

[ Putenga’s tail cracks like a whip as she strikes. She then leans back on it to deliver a powerful double kick. ]

Announcer: Kata the grumpig!

[ Kata bounces forward and waves to her fans, basking in the applause. ]

Announcer: And Naihi the absol!

[ Naihi slices to and fro with her horn before flashing her long foreclaws and letting out a long ghostly howl that echoes through the stadium. The cheers and chanting continue until the announcer’s voice booms over the speaker once more. ]

Announcer: And now, please welcome the challenger, Josh Takamoana!
Josh and his team walk out onto the opposite side of the field. He has grown another inch or two and is a lot less scrawny than he used to be. He is also dressed a great deal better and his leather vest shows off his tattooed arms.

Announcer: And his team, Fang the mightyena!

Fang raises her brown hackles and barks out a challenge, dark energy massing around her jaws.

Announcer: Shade the crobat!

Shade leaps up with a burst of air and glides in a tight circle, leaving vapor trails from all four of his wings.

Announcer: Poppy the mawile!

Poppy turns her back to the crowd and bares her huge fangs before her huge, crocodilian jaws snap shut like a bear trap.

Announcer: Frightful the talonflame!

Frightful rockets into the air and scatters flames like a firework.

Announcer: Inlé the froslass!

Inlé fades away into a lavender mist only to reemerge in a completely different location with her exaggerated jaws gaping wide and a sinister cackling echoing through the stadium.

Announcer: And Kapu the manectric!

The shiny manectric zips to the front, leaving a trail of electricity in his wake. He howls, fur glistening like a starry night as sparks shoot from his pelt.

Announcer: Champion and challenger, shake hands.

Ren and Josh walk forward, but Ren breaks into a run for the last few strides and jumps on Josh. He catches her easily but gives her a disapproving look.

Josh: Could you behave for two minutes? This is kind of a big deal for me.

Ren: I’m sorry. I’m just so fucking proud of you! You even beat Steven!

Josh: Well he does have the type restriction. Can I put you down now?

Ren: Yes. [Josh sets her down.] So you want serious Ren, huh?

Josh: Please.

Ren: Alright then, [she wipes her hand down her face replacing her smile with an intense expression] gameface. I’m gonna stomp you flat, hotshot.

Josh: We’ll see about that.

Ren: [offering her hand] Let’s do this thing.

They shake hands firmly, both smiling now, and walk back to their respective sides of the arena. Ren nods to Tāraki who gleefully takes the field and motions to Frightful who spreads her wings and
tak's to the air.

Announcer: The Champion has chosen sceptile and the challenger has chosen talonflame. Let the battle begin!

[ Ren mega evolves Tāraki right off the bat to up his fire resistance but Josh and Frightful keep up with the flame charges, building speed until they are faster than the mega sceptile. Even this is not quite enough and Tāraki snags the talonflame out of the air and slams her on the ground. Tāraki’s victory is short-lived as Inlé takes him down with a single ice beam. Naihi takes his place and the froslass does her best to stay out of reach of her old teammate. She is faster and weakens the absol considerably, but Naihi eventually lands a critical night slash and Inlé goes down. Poppy takes her place and josh mega evolves her using the keystone on his wrist. She takes Naihi down with a play rough and Putenga takes her place. Ren and her breloom play the long game, trying to bog the mega mawile down with leech seed. Putenga manages to land paralysis by closing quarters, but Josh and Poppy throw it off and finish Putenga with an iron head. Kata jumps in and finishes the mega mawile off with a series of charge beams from afar. Kapu rushes forward to face her, using his superior speed to dodge her supercharged psychic attacks and strike back with his own charge beams. A psyshock and thunderbolt meet in the air and send both parties reeling back. Next Māia and Shade duke it out for quite a while. They are both fast and almost equally maneuverable but Māia eventually wins with a perfectly timed boomburst only to have to withdraw to be treated for the crobat’s poison. Finally it is just the two mightyena’s facing off. Josh and Fang go for a sand attack/crunch combo to weaken and disorient their opponent and Ren and Akahata respond with a thunder fang that pulverizes the other mightyla. Fang intercepts Akahata’s rock smash with a sucker punch and follows it up with a take down. Akahata goes tumbling but bounces back to her feet and delivers another rock smash right to Fang’s skull. The brown mightyena can’t get away due to paralysis and collapses. ]

Announcer: The challenger’s mightyena is down. Champion Ren Kosugi wins!

[ The crowd erupts into cheers and Josh walks out onto the field to check on his pokemon. Fang lifts her head and he kneels down to hug her tightly. Ren walks out to check on them and two medics come to see to Fang. Ren offers Josh her hand and he takes it. She pulls him up and they wave to the crowd before taking a bow. ]

Announcer: Josh Takamoana is awarded the title of Victor for his triumph over the Elite Four!

[ Ren smiles and Josh hugs her as the people from his box and Ren’s file out into the stadium. The first to get to them is a young woman who looks a lot like Josh. She throws her arms around him and he hugs her back. ]

Hannah: Ahhhhh! Josh! You did so well! Who would have thought my baby brother would be a Victor?

Josh: You’re only a year older than me.

Hannah: You’re the youngest and that makes you the baby forever. No exceptions.

[ Josh sighs. The rest of the group, consisting of Hartmann, Brenton, Terra, Moana, Whenua, Kai, Wally, Steven and Zinnia, has arrived by this point. ]

Hartman: Ugh, this is why it’s better not to have siblings. [ shaking Josh’s hand and patting him on the back ] Congrats, bro. That was something else.

Ren: Long time, no see, Hannah.
Hannah: Sorry! [giving Ren a kiss on each cheek] Did you really have to beat him?

Ren: It is my solemn duty.

[By this point Terra and Moana have shoved Hartmann and Brenton out of the way to offer their own congratulations. They move aside to give Whenua space and she offers Josh a wordless fistbump, which he is both shocked and honored to receive. Wally is next to shake his hand.]

Wally: That was even closer than my Victor match! [to Ren] I still say I’ll beat you one of these days.

Ren: No fair! Let me rest.

Kai: [shaking Josh’s hand] Congratulations, that was really awesome.

Josh: Thanks. [turning to Steven] Oh, Steven, is Sanmei going to be okay?

Steven: She’s fine, but I may have to take her to Puaka to be polished and sharpened. The medics here don’t have the equipment. [shaking his hand] Congratulations on beating me, Josh.

Josh: Thank you. Congratulations on your master’s.

Steven: [beaming] Thank you. I’ve been working on it so long it doesn’t feel real.

[Zinnia elbows Steven out of the way and Josh holds out his hand, but she gives him a cuff on the shoulder instead.]

Zinnia: You couldn’t wait another week until Sterling was out of town so I could fight you, kid?

Josh: Are you ever going to stop calling me ‘kid’?

Zinnia: Nope.

Josh: Then I definitely had other plans and couldn’t.

Steven: What she means is she’s proud of how far you’ve come.

Zinnia: Shut up.

Steven: I’m just trying to help.

Josh: Hey Wally, are we still recording tomorrow?

Wally: If you’re up for it. I really like that improvising you were doing last week and I thought of a way to teak it to fit into the composition. I was hoping we could try a few variations.

Josh: Sure thing.

Ren: Okay, glad that going well, but Josh and I need to have a little chat if you’ll excuse us. [taking his arms and steering him away] We’ll meet you all outside.

[They leave their friends to chat among themselves in the middle of the stadium while they head for the champion side doors.]

Josh: What are we talking about.

Ren: Well, I know you may not super love me right now, but I could really use your help with
Josh: You’re the reason I made it here in the first place. It’s fine. Shoot.

Ren: Alright then, there has never been a dark-type gym in Hoenn. In fact, there has never been a dark-type gym in most regions of the world and I don’t know about you, but that is seriously starting to piss me off.

Josh: People are superstitious. It isn’t fair, but what are you going to do?

Ren: I want you to start a dark-type gym in Mauville.

Josh: But—

Ren: Wattson is retiring soon and the gym has no fixed type. Wattson decoupled it from grid maintenance a while back. And sure Route 110 has a lot of electric types, but Mauville is also adjacent to the habitats of most of the region’s dark-types. It’s perfect!

Josh: You think I can be a gym leader?

Ren: Of course I do or I wouldn’t be asking. You’ve grown up a lot in the time I’ve known you. You’re even-tempered and responsible and devoted to your pokemon and the well-being of pokemon in general. You’re always trying to help others and give back to the community. Those are exactly the kind of qualities that make an excellent gym leader. Besides, Sydney and Wattson and I will totally help you every step of the way. It probably won’t re-open for a year, but whoever is running it is going to need some time to prepare, so you have to let me know soon, okay?

Josh: I’ll do it.

Ren: [thrusting her fist in the air] YES!

Josh: I’m— I’m really honored that you asked me.

Ren: You’re just the person for the job.

Josh: So you’re making a dark-type gym and you already changed the League rules to have substitute Gym Leaders and Elite Four. Are you planning on turning the whole thing on its head?

Ren: My time on the throne is limited. I have to leave my mark!

Josh: Alright. I’ll do what I can to help.

Ren: You’re the best.

Josh: Hey Ren.
Ren: Yeah?

Josh: Thank you for believing in me and… thank you for the family. I know I’m not good at showing it, but it really means the world to me. [He swallows thickly.] I still can’t believe they all came out to watch me, even Whenua.

Ren: [stopping] Josh…

Josh: [wiping his eyes] I know. I j-j-j— I didn’t think I’d ever have a family again. S-so thank you.

Ren: [reaching up to take his shoulder] You’re welcome. But just remember you helped build it too.

Josh: [wiping his nose] Okay.

Ren: Ready to go out and join them? I made dinner reservations.

Josh: [big sniff and then gameface] Yeah.

[Ren opens the door and everyone is waiting for them a ways off. The sun is setting behind them and the grass looks bright and golden in the light. The humans are all in a loose circle while the pokemon all mill about together. Inlé and Kata are having some kind of wrestling match while Fang is deep in conversation with Akahata and Naihi. Māia is leading Shade and Frightful through some sort of maneuver over everyone’s heads while Tāraki catches up with Jay and Kihei. The humans look up as Ren and Josh approach and make room for them. Ren makes her announcement and everyone starts clapping or patting Josh on the back and shoulders. He finally cracks a big grin and there is a chorus of “awws” from the gathering. Ren rallies them and they all head off for dinner together.]

Chapter End Notes

I CANNOT BELIEVE IT IS ACTUALLY OVER. I feel so elated right now. I’ll probably be sort of sad about it later, but is hasn't really hit me yet. I really love these characters and this story, but it’s time to say goodbye.

Now what does the future hold? Due to popular demand, I will be uploading a chapter of bonus scenes on Friday. The tumbr for this nuzlocke (https://rhnuzlocke.tumblr.com) will continue to update with art and other bonus content until the end of the month. My next project is a Sun & Moon Nuzlocke comic titled The Night Grows Pale, the first page of which will appear 09/30/2017 on https://ngpnuzlocke.tumblr.com and http://nightgrowspale.smackjeeves.com. I hope you all check it out because I am so unbelievably pumped for it.

Thank you all for reading and commenting and just being along for this amazing ride. You made me feel like all the hours I poured into this project meant something and that the end result is something I can be proud of. Really, thank you. Best of luck in all of your own endeavors.

Character Sheet:

HUMANS:

Ren, our protagonist and the current Hoenn League Champion
Kai, Ren’s friend who is studying pokemon behavior and sociology in university
Wally, Ren’s friend and a Hoenn League Victor who is dabbling in composing
Steven, an Elite Four member and former League Champion
Zinnia, the Draconid Lorekeeper and substitute Elite Four member
Josh, a former Magma grunt who Ren befriended
Terra, a former Magma grunt who is dating Moana
Moana, an Aqua grunt who is dating Terra
Whenua, a former Magma grunt and Terra's BFF
Hannah, Josh's sister and an editor
Hartmann, a former Magma grunt who is friends with Josh
Breton, a former Magma grunt who is friends with Josh
Puaka, Zinnia’s mother and a blacksmith

TEAM REN:
Taraki the Sceptile
Akahata the Mightyena
Maia the Taillow
Putenga the Breloom
Kata the Grumpig
Naihi the Absol

TEAM JOSH:
Fang the Mightyena
Shade the Crobat
Poppy the Mawile
Frightful the Talonflame
Inle the Froslass
Kapu the shiny Manectric

Other Pokemon:
Sanmei, Steven's Aegislash
Bonus Scenes

Chapter Summary

The following is a series of scenes that got cut, shortened, or take place before the main story-line. Each comes with a bit of explanation and context. Enjoy!

Ren stays at Steven’s house

This scene is a much longer version of Ren’s first visit to Steven’s house at the beginning of chapter 22. I wrote it ahead of time in a fit of inspiration only to realize later that it completely ruined the flow of the chapter so I hacked it down to the current version. But I kept the original because it's funny and has some good character moments.

Steven’s house is a small, stone cottage on the outskirts of town that overlooks the sea. There is a very large open shelter built onto the side in the lee of the building with a large sand bed. A bastiodon, cradily and armaldo are resting in it while a skarmory perches on the roof. There is a garden near the house with plants sprouting in it. Steven sends out the rest of his pokemon as they approach and Ren follows suit. Tulpi and Liaoning land on either side of Damascus on the roof and the Eon Guardians join them.

Steven: The bastiodon sleeping there is Pavise. He’s a retired battler. I’m sure he’ll get up for dinner, but we’ll let him sleep for now. And the rest I think you know already.

Tungsten slithers over and curls around Pavise who shifts a little to settle against her but does not open his eyes. Gilchrist lumbers over to join them while Escutcheon and Ptilometra get up to make room and greet Pohaku. Alwyn and Komatsu take Kōtai over to see the garden and Ao tags along. Escutcheon and Ptilometra start down a path to the shore, inviting Pohaku to follow. He looks back at Ren and she nods. He wiggles and goes after them followed shortly by Tāraki and Tarahau. Kata and Bessemer sit on the edge of the cliff and talk. Steven opens the front door and flips on the hall light. He moves aside and motions for Ren to come in. She steps inside and he closes the door.

Steven: Welcome. First door on the right is the laundry room, next is the kitchen, then there is a closet and the door on the end is the bathroom. First on the left is the living room and the bedroom in the back. Here, let me take your shoes.

He takes off his own and then waits while she takes off hers. He puts them both in a tray in the laundry room and gives her a pair of house slippers, a custom he probably picked up from his time in Kanto. A carbink dressed in a frilly pink apron emerges from the kitchen as they step into the hall.

Carbink: [ telepathy ] Steven, I started dinner! [ seeing Ren ] Oh! Hello!

Steven: Anthy, this is Ren. She and her pokemon are going to be staying the night.

Anthy: Okay! I already changed the sheets so you’re all set.

Ren: It’s nice to meet you Anthy. Thank you for taking such good care of Steven.
Anthy: Of course! I have to get back to the kitchen. It was lovely to meet you!

[ Anthy floats back into the kitchen, little apron fluttering. Ren turns back to Steven. ]

Ren: Steven, there is no way I’m stealing your bed. I can sleep on the couch. Knowing you, it’s plenty comfortable.

Steven: I get to sleep in my bed all the time. You need some rest after what you went through today.

Ren: So do you.

Steven: If it makes you uncomfortable, then obviously you can sleep on the couch. But otherwise I insist you—

Ren: Come on, I’ve already made up my mind. You know how stubborn I am.

Steven: I can be very persistent.

Ren: [ turning to go into the kitchen ] We’ll see.

[ The kitchen is quite large and professional-looking. There is a huge six burner stove, a large oven, a farmhouse sink, a smaller sink and a big two-door refrigerator. The room also features a wrap around countertop, generous cabinetry and a small table with two chairs. Anthy is at the end of the counter using telekinesis to chop celery with a knife. ]

Ren: Anthy, may I please help you cook?

Anthy: You don’t need to.

Ren: Please. I know I’m making a lot of extra work for you.

Anthy: Okay, you two can help. Could you shuck these peas for me, Ren?

Ren: [ saluting ] Aye captain.

Anthy: [ giggling ] Steven, could you make the roué? I want to watch you again.

Steven: Of course.

[ Ren is washing her hands, but looks up to watch Steven take off his jacket and ascot. He drapes them over one of the chairs and rolls up his sleeves before getting a crystal pattern apron off a hook by the door and putting it on. Ren quickly looks away and dries her hands so that he can wash his. He puts a saucepan on the stove while Anthy gets some broth and butter out of the fridge. He puts a ton of butter in the saucepan and it sizzles as it melts. Anthy hands him a container of flour and he sprinkles that in as stirs the mixture with a spatula. ]

Steven: You see how it’s fluffy and spreads across the bottom? That’s what you want to see. If it’s too flat, add more flour. If it’s too dry, add more butter. And you have to toast it just a bit or it will fall apart later… Alright, now the broth just a little at a time. The important thing is to not let it get too cold. Wait until it’s smooth and hot again to add more.

[ Ren smiles as she listens to this while she shucks peas into a bowl behind them. Soon Anthy seems confident enough to take over and Steven starts making some dough on the counter next to Ren. His bare arms flex as he kneads the dough in a practiced motion. Ren steals glances at him and tries not to smile the dopey way her face seems to want to. ]
Ren: I’m done with the peas, Anthy.

Anthy: Thank you. Save the pods for Pavise please. He loves them. Could you finish chopping the celery for me?

Ren: Sure.

[ The two sandslashes and excadrill come in with a basket of root vegetables and an earthenware jar. Komatsu gets out a lasagna pan and puts it on the floor while Alwyn picks up a potato. Komatsu puts a bowl down next to her. Alwyn carefully balances the potato on one claw and spins it like a top. She runs the edge of her other claw up its length and peels it into the bowl in one fluid motion. She smiles at Kōtai who is watching her with wide eyes. She tosses the peeled potato up and cubes it in midair. The pieces land in the pan. ]

Kōtai: Now that’s a fine trick. Couldn’t do that with my claws.

Alwyn: Then try the carrots.

[ Kōtai picks up a carrot and starts peeling it lengthwise with the edge of his claw while Alwyn continues with the potatoes and Komatsu fetches some berries out of the fridge using a step stool. Meanwhile, Steven is rolling out the dough into four large circles. Ren continues to steal furtive glances at his face and arms between each vegetable she dices. Soon she has a little pile of celery, carrots, mushrooms, and potato. ]

Ren: I’ve finished the vegetables, Anthy.

Anthy: Thank you!

[ Anthy floats them through the air and into a pot with telekinesis. Steven puts two of the crusts in pie dishes and leaves the other two on the cutting board for later. Komatsu pours the contents of the jar, which turns out to be grubs, over the roots and berries and the two sandslash put it in the oven. Ren confers with Anthy and gets some supplies out of her vapor box: rice flour, matcha, and red bean paste. She starts making mochi at the table and Steven gets some lemonade out of the fridge. He pulls two glasses out of the cabinet and holds one down to Alwyn, who frosts it over. Steven joins Ren at the table with the two frosted glasses of lemonade which he has garnished with mint. Ren has him roll out little balls of red bean paste and Ren wraps them in matcha mochi before Steven dusts them in rice flour for the finishing touch. Steven soon gets ahead of Ren and rests his head on his hand with a sigh. ]

Ren: You are going to have to be patient. This is not as easy as it looks.

Steven: I hate waiting.

Ren: You are so full of shit right now. Are you really gonna tell me that excavating rocks and fossils requires no patience?

Steven: If you don’t give me something to do, I’ll just have to find some other way to entertain myself.

Ren: Good. Get creative.

[ He leans over with a mischievous smile and sprinkles some rice flour on her hair. She blows some matcha powder at him in retaliation and he flicks some red bean paste at her and she reaches her hand into the remaining gooey mochi to fling at him, expression gleeful. She raises it high. ]
Steven: No! Please! What if it gets in my hair?

Ren: You asked for this!

Steven: [ trying to shield his head ] I’m sorry! Mercy! Please!

[ Ren cackles wickedly. ]

Anthy: What are you two doing?!

[ They both freeze. ]

Steven: Uh—

Anthy: You’re making a mess!

Ren: I’m sorry—

Steven: We’re very sorry—

Anthy: [ waving her spatula for emphasis ] Out of the kitchen!

Ren: We’ll stop—

Steven: We won’t do it again, we promise—

Anthy: OUT!

[ They both protest and grovel but Anthy has their sandslashes kick them out. They give each other a sheepish smile as they are shoved into the hall. Steven snatches the bowl of pea pods as soon as the sandslases turn their backs and goes outside to take care of his pokemon while Ren goes to take a shower. The bathroom is extremely fancy as Ren probably should have suspected. She snoops around just a little, looking over all of the soaps, lotions and hair care products. There is even a little organizer of makeup on one of the shelves. She inspects the switches on the wall which have the letters ‘O M S V F T’. The first three turn out to be the overhead, shower, and mirror lights respectively. ‘V’ is the vent, ‘F’ turns on the heated floor and ‘T’ makes a small orange light on the towel rack turn on. When Ren gets out of the shower, she wraps herself in a warm towel and wiggles in delight. She changes into a loose t-shirt and plain pajama bottoms and goes into the living room. Three of the four walls are lined with cases of rocks and Ren goes around admiring them. Steven comes back in and quickly checks on her before going off to take his own shower. Ren is lounging on the enormous couch when he returns with a bowl of cherries and some fresh glasses of lemonade. Ren thanks him as he lays the offerings on the huge coffee table before she notices what he is wearing. He has put on silk pajamas that are a beldum print on a pale pink background.]

Ren: Thank you— Oh, great Lord Arceus.

Steven: Hmm?

Ren: Your pajamas. They’re… precious.

Steven: Like them?

Ren: You’re such a dork!

[ He just shrugs and makes to sit down on the couch next to her. She scooches her feet up to make room and he flops down. ]
Steven: How about you? Did you forget yours?

Ren: [gesturing to her tattered outfit] These are my pajamas.

Steven: You don’t… have any others?

Ren: No, I do, but they’re pretty much all like this.

[Steven turns away from her and stares off into the middle distance, lips tightly sealed.]

Ren: Your bathroom is wild by the way. I don’t think I’ve ever smelled this good in my life and that includes the time I went to an actual spa in Lavaridge.

Steven: What can I say, it takes work to look this good all the time.

Ren: I’d make fun of you, but that heated towel rack is probably my new favorite thing on the entire planet.

Steven: I’ve told you before: St—

Ren: I know, I know: “Steven Stone does nothing by halves”. But back to you being a huge dork: your carbink wouldn’t happen to be named after Anthy from Šōjo Kakumei Utena, would she?

Steven: No. She’s named for anthracite.

Ren: [smirking] Cuz that’s so much less dorky. Just admit it already.

Steven: I’ll do no such thing and furthermore I’ll have you know that Utena was certainly not my idol as a child.

Ren: [laughing] That explains a lot.

[Steven leans forward and grabs the bowl of cherries. He puts it in his lap and pops an entire cherry into his mouth, stem and all. Ren reaches over and pulls out a few for herself. Her toes slide forward as she stretches up and touch his thigh. He doesn’t react to the contact so she decides to leave them there. She smiles as her toes are warmed by his body heat. A minute or two later Steven pushes a knotted cherry stem past his lips and twirls it theatrically, grinning toothily at her.]

Ren: That is so weird. Did you make that up or did someone else show you how to do that?

[The grin falls off his face and he puts the cherry stem down on the coffee table before spitting the pit out of the side of his mouth. It lands right in his empty lemonade glass.]

Ren: Now that’s crazy. How do you do that? It’s like you didn’t even look, I swear.

Steven: You know, most people have the opposite reaction to those two talents. They love the cherry stem trick and think the pit spitting is weird and gross.

Ren: [brow frowning] Huh. Why do you think that is?

[Steven blinks at her, then shrugs, but he is blushing just a little. He can feel Bessemer laughing outside and blushes harder. Ren is busy reaching for more cherries and doesn’t notice. They continue eating for a little while in silence except for the occasional tinkling of a cherry pit landing in Steven’s glass. Steven gropes around the almost empty bowl and something occurs to him. He looks at Ren’s glass but there is still some lemonade and no cherry pits.]
Steven: What are you doing with your stones?

Ren: Hmm?

Steven: You ate at least half of these. Where are all the stones?

[ Ren just grins at him, cheeks bulging. ]

Steven: No!

[ Ren opens her mouth and shows him the thirty-odd pits inside. ]

Steven: [ laughing ] Augh! Ren! That’s disgusting!

[ Muffled cackling through the pits in her mouth. ]

Steven: [ shoving his glass towards her ] Here.

Ren: No, put it back! I want to try spitting them.

[ Steven put the glass back down on the coffee table though a little closer to her this time. Ren winds up and spits. The pit misses by at least a foot but does land on the coffee table. ]

Steven: Not bad.

[ She spits and misses again. ]

Steven: You know you might be handicapping yourself by having all of them in your mouth at once.

Ren: Yay! I love unnecessary challenges.

Steven: That you do. [ grabbing a cherry ] Here, I’ll do it slow so you can watch my technique. [ cherry in his mouth ] Though honestly most of it is repetition.

[ He spits it up into the air slowly and exaggeratedly and it lands perfectly in the glass. Ren tries again and gets a little closer. They take turns, Ren getting a little closer every time except when Steven makes her laugh and she misses spectacularly. Tāraki, Kata and Tarahau wander in and Kata joins them in the game. She gets it after just a few tries and Ren accuses her of cheating. Ren gets it in on her next try and they all cheer. Anthy, the Eon Guardians, and the rest of the kitchen crew come in with the dinner and table settings. The three flying-types and ocean trio get called in and they all gather around the table to eat. Ren sits in seiza, while Steven sits cross-legged beside her. In addition to the chicken pot pie Ren helped with and the roast vegetable thing the sandslashes made, there is a pile of whole, braised fish, a basket of steamed mussels in seaweed, a bowl of fruit salad and a rack of ribs. Ren looks out over the feast, eyes welling and big smile on her face. ]

Steven: I’m sorry we have to eat on the floor.

Ren: No, this is just like home. Thank you, Steven. [ wiping her eyes ] And thank you, Anthy. It looks wonderful.

Anthy: You’re welcome!

Steven: Oh, and the finishing touch… [ A pair of stainless steel chopsticks float out of the kitchen, surrounded by the purple glow of telekinesis, and into Steven’s hand. Offering them to her ] Here you are.
Ren: [tearing up again and snatching the chopsticks from him] Cut that out! You’re going to make me cry.

[Steven serves himself some pie and then puts some on Ren’s plate as she reaches for everything else. Steven watches her as he eats his pie. It kind of fascinating how ruthlessly efficient she is at grabbing, slicing and shoveling the food into her mouth with her native utensils. Komatsu and the sandslashes dig into their dish with gusto while the flying-types eat the fish and ribs. Tarahau, Pohaku and his two new friends eat up the mussels first before helping with the fish. Tāraki and the Eon Guardians mostly eat the fruit while Ao gnaws on the ribs. Like Ren, Kata insists on eating a little of everything and loves it. She especially compliments the pot pie and roasted vegetables. Much to Steven’s horror, this convinces Ren to try some, including one of the fat grubs. She laughs at his expression.

Ren: I’ve never tried a bug before but that was actually really good. Come on Steven, you should try some.

Steven: No thank you.

Ren: It’s good though.

Steven: [doubtful] Hmm.

Ren: Would I lie to you? Lead you astray?

Steven: No.

Ren: Then what’s the problem?

Steven: I’ve never eaten a bug either, but I’d prefer to keep it that way.

Ren: Where’s your sense of adventure? Lots of other cultures eat bugs. It’s perfectly natural and not at all icky.

Steven: I let them cook it in my oven didn’t I? I think I’ve been plenty open-minded. I just don’t want to put it in my mouth.

Ren: And why not? Are you afraid?

Steven: No. I just don’t think I’ll like the texture.

Ren: It’s not that different than the potatoes really. Just give it a try.

Steven: Why do you want me to eat it so badly?

Ren: [giving] Because you don’t want to.

Steven: You’re impossible.

Ren: I just want to know why you don’t. Are you squeamish?

Steven: Ren.

Ren: You don’t seem squeamish, but on the other hand I’m not sure what else I expected from a spoiled rich kid like yourself. You probably only had to eat whatever you wanted because you had a personal chef or some taurosshit.
Steven: [sentences running together in frustration] We did have a chef and she taught me how to cook and I’ve eaten plenty of weird things why won’t you let this go?

Ren: So, like, do you have a strong gag reflex or something? Are you afraid you’d throw up? Because that I could totally understand—

Steven: I. Do. Not.

Ren: [holding up her hands] Alrighty then. Whatever you say.

Steven: Give me one.

Ren: Are you sure? I don’t want to force you.

Steven: Just do it.

[She picks up a grub with her chopsticks and moves it towards him, then pauses.]

Ren: Do you want it on your plate or—

[Steven lunges and grabs the grub, teeth clacking against her chopsticks. She watches as he chews it and swallows.]

Ren: So?

Steven: …It was fine, nice even.

Ren: [smug] Ha!

Steven: I hope you’re happy.

Ren: [genuine] I am. I’m actually really really happy. And not just cuz you ate a bug.

Steven: [melting a little] Good. Me too… Actually, could you pass me the vegetables? I’d like to try all of the components together.

[Ren smiles super wide and passes it to him, taking a little more for herself. Soon they finish dinner and everyone helps clear it away. The Eon Guardians are particularly helpful with their telekinetic talents and the clean-up goes quickly. The pokemon get a bunch of cushions from the hall closet and bring them in the living room while Steven goes to his bedroom to get some pillows and a blanket. Ren brings the mochi in from the kitchen after she helps with the dishes a little. She flops back down on the couch and makes herself comfortable with a pillow and the blanket.]

Steven: Want something to drink?

Ren: Yes please.

Steven: Anything in particular? I’ve got just about everything.

Ren: Whatever you want. I like trying things.

[Steven goes to his liquor cabinet and gets down some champagne flutes. Ren hears him pop a cork before he reappears with two glasses of golden liquid.]

Steven: Since this is a special occasion, I thought I’d break out the good stuff. I call it liquid sunshine.
He hands Ren her glass and she takes it.

Ren: [ holding it up ] Here’s to the world not ending.

Steven: [ holding his up ] To many tomorrows.

[ They clink glasses and drink. ]

Ren: [ eyes blowing wide ] Oishi! What is this?

Steven: Champagne and elderflower liqueur.

Ren: [ She takes another sip. ] It really is like liquid sunshine. [ another sip ] So good. Can the world end again sometime?

Steven: Nonsense. We can just do this again sometime.

Ren: I’d really like that.

[ They both smile at each other before looking away in embarrassment. Steven notices that some of the pokemon are missing. ]

Steven: Looks like our sandslashes have disappeared.

Ren: But your excadrill is still here. They have no chaperone! How very improper.

Steven: [ He laughs. ] It was only a matter of time I suppose. Apparently your Kōtai is quite the sweet-talker.

Ren: Really? I guess I shouldn’t be surprised.

Steven: And after his performance in Ever Grande… Well, Alwyn’s had suitors before, but they were more or less beneath her notice.

Ren: Can he stay here a while of they decide to have an egg? I think he’d like to be a father. Actually, sometimes I think he was one once, before I met him.

Steven: Well, he’s welcome to stay here as long as he likes. He doesn’t seem the type to make a burden of himself. Quite the opposite.

Ren: Yeah, he’s pretty much taken care of me from day one. He’s the reason I survived the explosion.

Steven: Is that what happened to his scales?

Ren: Yep! He evolved to save me. We match. I have a photo actually. Want to see?

Steven: Definately.

[ Ren grabs her nav off of the coffee table and quickly locates the photo. She passes it off to him and he studies it for a while. ]

Steven: This is really good. Did you have this done professionally?

Ren: Yeah. I did a whole shoot actually.

Steven: May I?
Ren: Go ahead.

[ *Steven scrolls through the rest of the photos, including the newer set.* ]

Steven: These are superb.

[ *He stops at the team photo with Wheta’s outline in the middle.* ]

Ren: I still look at that all the time.

Steven: [ *handing back her nav* ] It’s a wonderful memorial.

Ren: Thank you. It wasn’t an easy shot to get, but everyone was so patient…

[ *She sighs and looks at the photo for a bit before putting her nav back down on the coffee table.* ]

Ren: So, your house is a lot smaller than I thought it would be. Especially after seeing Wallace’s.

Steven: It has everything I need.

Ren: And it’s made of stone.

Steven: And it’s made of stone. I did have to do a little work on it, and I added the pavilion, but I really loved the layout and location.

Ren: It’s really nice. I guess I’ll have to get a house too now.

Steven: The League pays all of your living expenses, so you can rent for nothing. They just have to approve it first. And it can’t be too far from Ever Grande of course. They would also help you buy if you wanted, but most people don’t since being Champion isn’t usually long-term.

Ren: That’s cool. In Johto, the Champion has a palace.

Steven: [ *rambling* ] I think most regions have a Champion residence. There is a lot of peculiar history as to why we don’t. At least there are houses for the Elite Four now. They used to have to find their own places too. I’m gonna get a refill. Would you like some more?

Ren: Yes please!

[ *She downs the rest of her drink and hands him the empty glass.* ]

Steven: Whoa, pace yourself. There is a lot of alcohol in this stuff.

Ren: I do what I want!

Steven: [ *walking over to his liquor cabinet* ] Alright. Just making sure these are informed decisions.

[ *She pulls her feet up on the couch as he pours their drinks.* ]

Ren: Why did I bring up the house? Now I’m thinking about mortgages. *Ugh*, adulthood sucks.

Steven: Says the current League Champion.

Ren: That’s right. You’ve got your work cut out for you, former champ.

Steven: At least you admit it.
Ren: Whatever. It’s not like you’re some bastion of maturity.

Steven: [handing her glass back] And what is that supposed to mean?

Ren: [She takes a long sip of her drink and smirks at him.] Like how it was the gag-reflex comment that finally got to you.

Steven: [flopping back down on the couch] It wasn’t any more irritating than the rest, just the straw that made the numel sneeze.

[He takes a long draft of his own drink.]

Ren: Somehow I don’t quite buy that.

Steven: Fine. It did bother me. I have a reputation to uphold.

Ren: What kind of reputation?

Steven: I think you know.

Ren: Nope. Still a little fuzzy over here. Would you mind clarifying?

Steven: I’m a slut, Ren, okay?

Ren: You? I don’t believe it.

Steven: And I’ve worked very hard to earn that title.

Ren: How hard are we talking?

Steven: So I don’t want anyone getting the wrong idea.

Ren: Not taking the bait, huh?

Steven: Everyone enjoys their time with Steven Stone.

Ren: Have I ever told you how weird it is that you refer to yourself in the third person?

Steven: Let it be known that Steven Stone can gargle dick for days.

[Ren nearly spits her drink.]

Steven: Was that enough explanation for you?

Ren: [laughing] All cleared up over here.

Steven: Good.

[They both sip their drinks in silence for a few minutes because there is nowhere to go from there. Eventually Ren has had enough silence and alcohol to change the subject.]

Ren: So, I think it’s time you showed me that tattoo you mentioned.

Steven: You remember that?

Ren: Yup.
Steven: Alright, but I have to take my shirt off.

Ren: Fine by me.

[Steven gets up and turns to face her. Rather than reaching for the buttons, he grabs the bottom of his shirt, crossing his arms as he does so. He pulls the shirt up and over his head in one fluid movement and throws it down on the couch. Ren watches this motion with thinly veiled fascination. What little body hair he has is silver and very fine so that it barely shows up at all. She marvels at how he once again won the genetics lottery.]

Steven: Enjoying yourself?

Ren: [sipping her drink] A little.

[Steven turns around and sits back down on the couch so that she can see the tattoo. It covers most of his upper back and shoulders and is full of color and fine detail. There is a beldum, metang and metagross right between his shoulder blades and the rest of the design radiates out from there. There are three concentric rings separated into sections and beyond that his keystone and all of his pokemon’s mega stones, including the steelixite Ren gave him. The rest of the tattoo is occupied by his pokemon, each with their own mineral that represents them in some way. She quickly puts her mostly empty glass on the coffee table and folds her legs under her so that she can see it better.]

Ren: Whoa. I can’t believe you don’t trot this out at all the parties. This is awesome, Steven.

Steven: Well, it’s a little personal.

Ren: Thank you for showing me.

Steven: Of course.

Ren: Is this a beldum?

Steven: In the middle? Yeah and a metang and a metagross.

Ren: Did you design this? It’s really good.

Steven: Bes helped a little.

Ren: [pointing] What’s this? Oh, uh. May I…?

Steven: Go ahead.

[She touches his back and runs her fingers over the tattoo.]

Ren: [tracing a circle around the center] So what are these?

Steven: Those are all of the metal ores including a meteorite at the top.

Ren: Hmm. Are these the crystal systems?

Steven: Very good. I’ve never had anyone get that before.

Ren: I took some geology back in Johto. It was fun. Was that what you majored in?

Steven: [He hums an affirmative.] Double-minored in physiology and magic studies. That’s how I got into Prof. Sycamore’s lab.
Ren: That must have been really cool.

Steven: It certainly had its benefits. Maybe I’ll have time to finish my master’s when this is over.

Ren: [running her fingers over the next ring] These are all of the evolutionary stones. [wandering out further] And these are all of your mega stones? [gasp] You added the steelixite I gave you!

Steven: I can’t thank you enough for that.

Ren: [tracing it with a finger] Is this your bastidion? Oh, and there’s Damascus and Gilchrist and Tungsten.

Steven: They’re all there.

Ren: [smiling as she traces each] Hmm… Ha, I almost didn’t see Anthy. She blends in. And I love how Alwyn looks with the quartz crystals… Oh, there she is.

[She runs her fingers over the lunatone cradling the curve of his shoulder. He reaches up and holds his shoulder for a moment.]

Steven: Yeah, still with me.

[He lingers on Hecate for a moment before moving back towards the center of the tattoo, watching how it moves with his skin before looking it over as a whole.]

Ren: Can I just say again that this is amazing? Who’s your artist?

Steven: Alexandra Keynes in Slateport. Why, are you thinking of getting one?

Ren: This is making me seriously consider it.

[He looks over his shoulder at her.]

Steven: You’re not going to make fun of me for this?

Ren: Why would I?

[Her hand finally drops from his back.]

Steven: It’s super nerdy.

Ren: This is nerdy in the best way possible and it’s beautiful, Steven. I love it.

[He shifts and turns to face her. Their eyes meet and she begins to color a little.]

Steven: Thank you.

Ren: You don’t need to thank me. I’m just spitting truth over here.

[She reaches for her drink and finishes it off. He watches her thoughtfully for a moment.]

Steven: Would you like to watch something?

Ren: Sure. What did you have in mind?

Steven: Did you ever see the Utena movie?
Ren: Nah, just re-runs of the show.

Steven: How about it then? We can watch in Kantonese if you like. It will help my listening skills.

Ren: Sounds great.

[Steven puts his shirt back on and grabs his nav. He turns on the TV and searches his collection.]

Ren: Did they change a lot of stuff?

Steven: Well, the biggest difference is probably that the movie is pretty explicit where the show just implies things, so fair warning.

[Steven starts the movie. They are now sitting about two feet apart. Ren grabs the blanket and throws it over herself. She is about to go back to her arm of the couch but hesitates. She glances at Steven and takes a deep breath. She scooches closer and leans up against him. He lifts his arm to make room for her without any hesitation. She snuggles a bit closer and he wraps his arm around her. She offers him some of the blanket and he pulls it over himself with his free arm. They watch quietly for a while, settling comfortably into the contact.]

Ren: I forgot about her tiny aipom. It’s so weird.

Steven: They’re not all that small?

Ren: You’ve never seen one? They’re like, at least four times that size, even the smaller variants.

[They watch for a bit longer, offering only the occasional yawn or sleepy comment and it isn’t long before both of them are sound asleep. Steven wakes up a little while after the movie has ended to find his head resting on Ren’s who has her head on his shoulder. Her mouth is slightly open and she has drooled on him a bit. She snores lightly as he picks his head up. He smiles down at her before looking around the room. Most of her pokemon and some of his own are asleep on giant cushions all over the floor. The TV has already turned itself off and it is dark except for a little moonlight coming in the windows and skylight.]

Steven: Ren. Ren, I need you to wake up for a minute.

Ren: [bleary] Hmm?

Steven: We fell asleep on the couch.

Ren: Sorry. [she sits up just enough for Steven to wiggle out from under her.] How did the movie end?

Steven: Utena turned into a car and Anthy drove away in it to the real world.

[Ren giggles softly and flops down on the couch.]

Steven: Come on now, we have to get you in bed.

[Ren groans noncommittally at this.]

Steven: I’m going to pick you up now and put you in the bed, okay? I don’t want you to be confused in the morning.

Ren: [her eyes are closed again] Mmkay.
Steven crouches and carefully slides a hand under her knees and shoulders. It takes a little effort and isn’t exactly elegant, but he does manage to heave her up.

Bessemer: [in Steven’s head] Do you need me to move her?

Ren’s head lulls against his shoulder.

Steven: No, I’ve got her.

He takes her down the hall and into the bedroom. The bed is huge and very plush. There are a ton of pillows and a big fluffy comforter.

Steven: Bes, could you get the covers?

The covers peel back seemingly of their own accord and Steven lays Ren down. She stretches and sighs, a big smile on her face.

Ren: Your bed is like a fucking cloud.

Steven: Of course. I need my beauty sleep.

Ren: [mumbling] This was your plan all along. I should have known.

Steven: [pulling the covers up over her] Yep. [He yawns.] Sleep well Ren.

Ren: [yawning] ’Night.

Steven: I’m going to sleep on the couch. I’m closeby, so just yell if you need anything, okay?

She nods and snuggles deeper into the bed. Steven can’t help the very warm smile that creeps onto his own face as he looks at her. He turns away and heads out into the hall only to come face to face with Tāraki. The sceptile just stares at him with his big golden eyes.

Steven: [stepping aside and gesturing to Ren and the bed] All yours.

Tāraki blinks slowly at him before moving into the bedroom. He goes to the far side of the bed and hops up. He feels out the comforter before settling down next to Ren. She rolls over and strokes the ridges on his head while he thrums happily. Steven smiles one last time before he heads back into the living room. He picks up the blanket off the floor and tosses a pillow on the end of the couch. He flops down and throws the blanket over himself and is soon asleep.

Josh and Zinnia go to a bar

Another scene I wrote a head of time and had to scrap. This was going to go near the beginning of chapter 18 between the time Josh gets some new clothes and starts feeling better about himself but before the scene when he overhears Tabitha and Maxie screaming at each other and starts to feel that his actions and Ren’s are tearing Magma apart.

Josh, Hartmann and Brenton are sitting at a bar. The bartender is a young woman and demonstrates that she is experienced in fending off drunken advances as they watch her make her
way down the line towards them.

Hartmann: I’m glad you came out with us, bro. Why didn’t you let us take you for your birthday?

Josh: I just—I wasn’t feeling up to it.

Hartmann: But is was your eighteenth! You’re supposed to go to a bar and get smashed! It’s tradition!

[ Josh squirms uncomfortably and Brenton leans around him to glare at Hartman, who shrinks away. Once he is satisfied, he turns his attention to Josh. ]

Brenton: Do things at your own pace.

[ The bartender finally gets to them and Josh gulps as she leans on the bar in front of them. This does not go unnoticed by Hartmann and Brenton, who share a knowing smile. ]

Bartender: What can I get you all?

Hartmann: Shiftry whisky on the rocks.

Brenton: Domestic brandy, neat please.

Bartender: Coming right up. And you?

Josh: Um, I’m a little new to this. Maybe you could help me? Any recommendations?

Bartender: Of course, hun. Any type of alcohol you’re particularly interested in?

Josh: [ flushing just a little ] No. I’m sure I’ll like whatever you pick out.

Bartender: Alright then, coming right up.

[ She swivels around and fills up a frosty stein with one of the beers they have on tap. She squeezes a lime wedge in it and slides it over to him. Josh takes a sip and smiles. ]

Josh: This is great. Thank you.

Bartender: [ smiling ] Good. Let me know if there’s anything else I can get you.

[ She gets Hartmann and Brenton their drinks and moves away down the bar to a group of women trying to get her attention. ]

Hartmann: [ elbowing Josh in excitement ] Hey, that wasn’t bad!

Josh: Really?

Hartmann: Well, for a beginner it was pretty good anyway, right Brent?

Brenton: I would congratulate you, but isn’t that a little dangerous?

[ The grin drops off Hartmann’s face and he looks concerned. Josh takes another sip of his beer before answering. ]

Josh: [ trying to be nonchalant ] No. We’re not… exclusive. She doesn’t care what I do and she’s allowed to do whatever she wants.
Brenton: Nice that she’s letting you off the leash, I guess.

Hartmann: Yeaaah, I suppose fuck-buddies is good work if you can get it.

J重复内容：

Brenton: It was good in that you didn’t offend her.

Hartmann: Agreed, but you also didn’t come on quite strong enough. What you said could definitely be viewed as flirtatious, but you also could have just been being nice. You don’t want that. It’s confusing.

Brenton: What he means is: you need to focus on your goal. Obviously you want her to like you, but she has to notice you first.

Hartmann: Exactly. And sometimes being nice isn’t the best way to achieve that. What you need to do is—

Zinnia: Don’t listen to these chumps. Let an old pro show you how it’s done.

Hartmann: If you’re so good, how about a little demonstration?


[ She knocks back the rest of her drink and heads for a small group of women across the room. They watch as she introduces herself and asks one of them to dance. Zinnia gets her partner moving and grinding and laughing without any trouble at all. The three stooges just watch with various expressions of amazement (although in Hartmann and Brenton’s case, it is mixed with irritation and disbelief) as the women dance and flirt and have a good time. After a few songs, Zinnia leans in and says something in the other woman’s ear. She hands Zinnia a piece of paper which she accepts and gives the woman a kiss on the neck. ]
Hartmann: Wait, I thought she liked guys?

Josh: Well obviously she’s bi.

Hartmann: Ohhhhh.

[ Zinnia saunters back over to them while the woman practically skips back to her own group, looking thrilled. Zinnia leans back on the bar, exuding confidence and flashes the paper at them, which clearly has the woman’s name and number on it. ]

Hartmann: How did you do that?

Brenton: Okay, okay. You’re the queen.

Zinnia: Correct.

Hartmann: No seriously, how did you do that?

Zinnia: [ She turns to face them and rests one elbow on the bar as she leans in conspiratorially ] Well, first off, I like to treat women like people.

__________________________

Steven attends a ball in Kalos

This scene was never going to be in the story proper, but I wrote it anyway because I felt like it. Steven told Zinnia and Ren an abbreviated version at the end of chapter 22.

[ Steven is in his mid teens and dressed to the nines for an event hosted in the royal palace in Kalos. Steven’s hair is dyed blue to match his eyes and he has an aquamarine earring in one ear. He leads a young woman off the dance floor and kisses her hand before handing her back off to her parents with a bow. They dip their heads back and seem pleased although we cannot hear what they say. Steven wanders away, dipping his head to the nobility he passes. Soon a blonde boy about his own age catches his eye. The boy is standing alone looking over the gathering without much interest. Steven approaches him, introduces himself and strikes up a conversation. As they begin to talk we pan over the grand party. The middle of the ballroom is devoted to dancing and the invitees sweep up and down it in the elegant patterns of traditional dances. Live music flows from a platform at the back, while each of the longer walls has a long banquet table along it full of drinks and food. Mr. Stone is by one of these tables talking to a small group of men and woman. As we pan back to Steven, we see that he is leaning in closer to the other boy who is smiling. ]

Adrien: [ chuckling ] Your Kalosè is terrible!

Steven: Be kind! I’ve only had the pleasure of studying your beautiful language for two years now.

Adrien: Flattery will get you nowhere, friend. You forget that we are all so accustomed to it. It’s more like background radiation.

Steven: Well then, would you mind if we switched to something I am a bit better at? [ He bows and offers his hand. ]
Adrien: [ taking his hand and trying not to grin ] I suppose not.

[ Steven sweeps him out onto the dance floor and merges seamlessly with the other dancers. They twirl and sway and step around the other dancers with Steven leading. He is of course very good at it and shows off for his partner with a little flourish here and there. ]

Adrien: [ teasing ] So they don’t teach Kalosè in your country, but they do teach court dances?

Steven: Not exactly. Language is… complex. There is so much to learn. Dancing is different. It’s all about how you feel. As long as you know how you feel, there’s nothing to it.

[ Adrien is a little distracted staring into Steven’s bright blue eyes and stumbles. Steven catches him and they start to move together again. ]

Steven: [ thoroughly flirtatious grin ] Not sure how you feel, chéri?

Adrien: [ trying and failing not to smile back ] I’m getting there.

[ Pan away from them dancing and flirting to see Mr. Stone watching. He does not seem pleased. ]

[ A little later, Steven and Adrien have quit the ballroom and are making out in some more or less discreet corner of the palace. Steven has Adrien up against a wall but surfaces after a moment to look earnestly at his partner. ]

Steven: Are you sure you’re alright with this? You know I won’t be here long.

Adrien: [ quirking an eyebrow ] I’m nobility and gay. You think I don’t know how this works?

Steven: [ pulling back a little farther and looking away in embarrassment ] No. I, um—

[ Adrien cups Steven’s face with a hand and Steven looks back up into his, which is smiling gently. ]

Adrien: You’re sweet. [ He leans in and kisses Steven. ]

[ Late that night, Mr. Stone and his son are in their hotel room. Steven has taken off his shoes, socks, jacket and tie, but Mr. Stone is still fully dressed. He sits down on the end of his bed as Steven puts his jacket on a hanger in the closet, his back to his father. ]

Mr. Stone: Care to explain your performance this evening?

Steven: [ hanging up his tie ] I did exactly as you asked, father. [ turning around, looking irritated ] I mingled. I danced. I was charming. [ pulling an impressively large stack of contact cards out of his pants pocket and thrusting them at his father ] Look at all the cards I have!

Mr. Stone: [ keeping his voice even ] Your instructions were to pay the appropriate attentions to all of the young ladies present.

Steven: [ crossing his arms ] Which I did.

Mr. Stone: Steven!

Steven: I don’t see any problem with what I did! [ He slaps the stack of contact cards down on his
Baron Agreste owns two successful tech companies, he is an excellent business contact and he has no daughters.

[ Mr. Stone has no immediate response to this. Steven shucks his pants and goes to hang those up as well. He begins angrily unbuttoning his shirt. ]

Mr. Stone: [ He sighs. ] I just wish you had told me.

Steven: [ hanging up his shirt ] Well this is why I didn’t.

Mr. Stone: Steven, I’m your father. I could never be… ashamed of you. We could have worked something else out. I didn’t know that I was… I never wanted to force you to do something that would make you uncomfortable. I thought maybe this trip would be fun for you.

[ Mr. Stone gazes down at the carpet, looking tired and small. Steven walks back to his nightstand and places his cufflinks and ring on it. He takes the earring out of his ear and puts that down as well. ]

Steven: [ not looking at his father ] …I did have fun.

Mr. Stone: But—

Steven: Dad, I’m not gay.

Mr. Stone: [ very confused ] What?

Steven: I’m bi—bisexual, that is. [ His father still looks confused. ] I like men and women.

Mr. Stone: Oh.

[ The older man clearly has no idea how to proceed. Steven, now wearing nothing but a pair of boxer briefs, turns away. ]

Steven: I’m going to take a shower.

[ He disappears into the bathroom and a moment later we can hear the water running. Mr. Stone heaves a big sigh and wipes his hand down his face. ]

Mr. Stone: [ muttering to himself ] I guess this is why he got that damn earring.

Steven and Wallace meet in university

Another scene that I just wrote on a whim and was never going to appear in the main storyline. The background for this is that Steven and Wallace went to the same university for undergrad (Steven 2 years behind Wallace). Wallace was the top coordinator in Hoenn by age 18, but he decided to quit at the top of his game and further his education so that he could have a more stable long-term career. Steven got into university last minute after his lunatone,
Hecate, died and he quit training to study geology.

Wallace walks into his university’s nightclub and takes stock of the scene. People are already out on the dance floor and the bartender already has his hands full with the crowd at the bar. Wallace does a circuit of the room, greeting a few acquaintances as he passes by. He talks to one of his friends for a bit before she takes off on business of her own. The crowd at the bar has thinned by this point and Wallace takes a seat at the end and orders a drink. He continues to survey the room as he sips it. He spots Steven at the other end of the bar and that gets his attention. He watches as Steven talks to the bartender for a while, never seeming to lose track of the conversation even as the bartender has to zip up and down the bar and turn his back to prepare various drinks. Wallace tries to make himself more visible, but nothing he does seems to get Steven’s attention. He watches with increasing frustration as Steven finishes his drink and is presented with another. Steven smiles and leans on the bar, resting his head on one hand and laughs as the bartender cracks some joke. Wallace finishes his own drink, eyes never leaving Steven, and puts down the empty glass before heading over. He slides onto the stool next to Steven while the bartender is away and introduces himself.

Wallace: Hi, I’m Wallace. We’re in the same dance class.

Steven: Steven. One row back, three to the left was it?

Wallace: Do you remember where everyone in the class is?

Steven: [grinning] No, just the ones I think are cute.

[He finishes this off with a rakish wink. Clearly Wallace did not prepare for this scenario in his head and it throws him off of his game. He is quiet for a moment while he tries to think of something to say.]

Steven: I’m sorry. You were trying to hit on me. Go ahead, I’ll behave.

Wallace: [he almost smiles but manages to keep a straight face] You know, maybe I’ve thought better of it.

Steven: [smiling sheepishly] Oh geez. I screwed that up, didn’t I?

Bartender: You think? What’s up with your whole big-man-on-campus attitude anyway, freshman?

Steven: I just get a little eager is all. [sinking further into his hand until it is partially covering his face] And I’ve probably had a bit much to drink.

Bartender: I’ll say.

Steven: Cut me off at two next time. [smiling at Wallace] Two’s a fun number. [He laughs at himself.] That was terrible. My apologies. It must be amateur hour.

Wallace: [teasing] Are you always this smooth?

Bartender: To be fair, he was far more charming a drink or two ago.

Wallace: Oh, was he hitting on you too?

Bartender: Naw, just chatting me up.

Steven: [He straightens up. To the bartender] That would be rude. You’re working. [to Wallace]
I just try to befriend the bartender as a matter of course. It’s always a good move in my experience.

Bartender: Still not something you rich kids usually bother with.

Wallace: Not trying to score free drinks are we?

Steven: Of course not. No point. Besides, this is Jake’s work-study job. I’m not gonna cut into that paycheck.

Wallace: Hmm… I still say you’re cocky and you might be trouble.

Steven: Aww, I’m not so bad once you get to know me.

Bartender: You should give him a chance, Wallace. He’s sweet and he tips well.

Wallace: Well that is quite the ringing endorsement. And you are cute… I guess I could give it a shot.

[Steven grins at him.]

Wallace: So what’s exhibitionist like yourself doing getting drunk at the bar instead of tearing up the dance floor?

Steven: Well, I had every intention of getting down when I got here, but drowning one’s feelings in alcohol always seems like such a good idea at the time.

[Wallace raises his eyebrows and glances at the bartender.]

Bartender: [shrugging] Don’t look at me, he never told me what his deal was.

Steven: [pondering the dregs of his drink as he swirls it slowly in his glass] Of course in reality it’s the worst of all possible distractions. [He puts his glass down and slides it away from himself. Flirtatious smile] Conversation is so much better.

Wallace: Seems like it must have done something. You’re not so down now, are you?

Steven: Well you’re here now. [He laughs at himself again.] I’ve got better material, I swear.

[The bartender returns and slides Steven a glass of water.]

Steven: Thank you, Jake. You’re a gem of a human being.

[Steven chugs the water gratefully.]

Steven: So am I really on thin ice here or is that just your preferred approach?

Wallace: No, I was just pretending to be annoyed because you threw me off by being so forward. I’d been trying to get your attention for a while, so I thought I was going to need my best pitch.

Steven: Sorry for being oblivious and for messing up your opener. I’m sure I would have liked it.

Wallace: It’s not your fault. I’m just used to being in control of these kinds of situations.

Steven: So was I once. I find the other side can be enjoyable too. Perhaps you should give it a try.

Wallace: Maybe. I’m bad at improv. I like rehearsing things in my head first and when things go off script…
Steven: So are you a performer?

Wallace: Yes.

Steven: What field?

Wallace: I’d actually rather not say if that’s alright with you. It’s rare that people don’t recognize me straight off. I’d like to enjoy it for a moment.

Steven: I totally get that. It’s nice to be just yourself for a while without the… strings attached.

Wallace: Are you famous too?

Steven: Minor celebrity. But let’s keep it anonymous for now.

Wallace: Sounds good to me… So why are you taking dance? Is it because you have no idea how?

Steven: [ laughing ] No, I have a pretty firm grasp on the subject. Just thought I’d broaden my horizons. Most of my previous instruction has been in Kalosè line dances.

Wallace: Great, so I can’t take you anywhere. You know, you’re not making the best case for yourself here.

Steven: I wouldn’t embarrass you too badly. [ rakish grin ] I’m a fast learner.

Wallace: Well I’m a regular here, so maybe I could show you a few things.

Steven: Why, I’d be honored.

[ Wallace leads him out onto the floor and of course Steven catches on right away. He may not be as experienced as Wallace, but this is hardly his first rodeo. He’s also not afraid to look a little silly and gets Wallace laughing by inserting a few of his ballroom moves into their club dancing. They take a break at the bar and drink some water and talk. The conversation flows easier this time and Steven compliments Wallace on his hair and makeup and Wallace compliments Steven on his earring and clothes. They take another turn on the dance floor before returning to the bar. They chat easily and there is a lot of laughter and teasing. They lean in close to better hear each other. The night drags on and eventually the population of the club begins to dwindle. Wallace stretches his long limbs and cracks his neck. ]

Wallace: I think I’ll turn in for the night.

Steven: Good idea. Thanks for all the info. I’m sure it will help.

Wallace: No problem. It was fun.

Steven: Maybe we could do this again sometime? You know, properly. When I’m sober.

Wallace: I’d like that.

---

Works inspired by this one: Running Hot by zephyr_iphis

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!