Gift of the Protector: Pristine Embrace

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Summary

A young man eager to absolve his past sins sets out to finish his perilous quest. As he'll soon discover, forgiveness is not so easily found. Sometimes the consequences of conflict are more important than the causes. Where will his journey take him? Can he discover what truly matters in life? And will he be able to find solace in the arms of another? Find out as a new saga emerges.
The Heist and the Embrace

*Arc 1: Fractured Unity, Arc 2: Pristine Embrace, Arc 3: Radiant Heart*

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**Gift of the Protector Arc 2:**

**PRISTINE EMBRACE**

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**Prologue: "The Heist and the Embrace"**

Gentle steps. Quiet pacing. Their echoes resonated through the long white corridor. Wells in the floor illuminated a pathway leading to mysterious annexes in the compound. Their dull light made it seem as though the corridor had been hewn out of sky itself. There was only one figure in the building, adorned in white.

He looked angelic, garbed from head to toe in the purest of apparel. His billowing white lab-coat draped down beyond his knees, following his steady procession down the hallway. Every step forward he made seemed to fill it with air and cause it to flow behind him like a cape. He was far from saintly and he knew it.

The amber haired researcher looked down at his crisp white lab-coat. His bright green eyes, clear and unadulterated, spotted a tiny red spill on the side of his left lapel. He glanced back up and looked further down the illuminated passage in the direction he was traveling in. Only a matter of time now.

He walked past numerous bluish-grey doors with narrow windows on either side of him. Their dark contents contrasted the brightness of the hallway. All of them were sealed closed save one at this late hour. Unsurprisingly, there were no people here. Why would there be? They all had left yesterday. And now, it was as if the place had only existed for him. Rooms were empty, monitor screens were pitch black, and the only sound was the dull hum of the air vents overhead. He continued to walk steadily and rhythmically down the hallway. The faint echo of his light footsteps perpetually shattered the silence.

He swung to the right near the end of the hall and walked into the only room that was open. Turning the handle and pushing the door, he grinned at the label on the glass reading: "Employees Only". Once inside, he flicked the lights on with a quick stroke from his thin index finger. The clock read four-sixteen in green digital above the thermostat. Running just on time.

The man smirked. It was all going to be over soon enough. He could leave this world behind him, and more importantly, his guilt would be absolved. The man strolled about the room, through a maze of personal lockers, to find his own. His unbelted lab-coat was already removed and in his arms by the time he reached his small personal storage space. He turned the knob three times imputing his unique combination. Seventeen, forty-two, three, and "Click!"

He wore a white sleeved shirt underneath and a pair of pleated scrub pants to match. Tossing the balled up coat into the containment cell carelessly, he removed his clothing until he was in nothing but his undershirt and boxer briefs. The young man put his hand inside the locker and removed a uniform freshly pressed and hung on a hanger. Its cool black fabric made him shiver slightly as he pulled the top over his head. It was a dark, tight fitting material, which adhered to his somewhat narrow frame. Perfect for mobility. The long sleeves were tight on his arms; he was more
accustomed to wearing baggier lab-wear. Over his chest was a burgundy "R" embroidered into the smooth cloth. The pants, although less snug, were made of a similar material and matching color. He tucked the shirt top into his bottoms and rid himself of the excess fabric wrinkles. Finally, he grabbed the thin black belt with a holster attached and wove it through his pant loops. At the top of his locker was a small silver case. Opening it revealed his standard issue Gauntlet M-class sidearm. He swung the weapon about in his hand a few times almost playfully before taking the ammunition packets and loading the thin metal bullets into the chamber. Six in total. Good. It was no RAIL-Class weapon, but its rotating individual shells got the job done. As soon as he left this complex, anything was possible. He had a plan of course, but plans such as these rarely work out as expected. He needed to be quick on the draw. The portable metallic weapon slid barrel first into his holster, making an audible snap as it locked into place. Before garbing himself in a heavy black trench coat to conceal his loyalties, he looked up and gazed at his appearance through the locker's interior mirror. In moments, the young man had undergone a complete metamorphosis from light to dark, but his soul had not budged from its dark perch.

Prior to exiting the room, he put his hand into the pants pocket to be sure that the paper was still there. Sure enough it was, folded neatly into quarters. He opened it to read one last time before delivering it.

"Tim,

My friend, you will be receiving this letter from me at the conclusion of Operation: Semblance. It's with great reluctance that I'm passing this letter on to you, but I can think of no one else besides you, my personal adviser and friend. Although my time with the organization has been, on the whole, productive, for quite a while now, I have become less and less satisfied with the vocation. The direction of the company, the external group—Cipher—that I work with on Penta Island on behalf of the organization, and the new targets and the methods of accomplishing them are making it increasingly difficult for me to operate as a sovereign Pokemon researcher.

Therefore, I ask you to understand that this is my resignation from Team Rocket's organization and all of its affiliates, effective immediately. I'm prepared to relocate to an undisclosed location where you and the rest of the syndicate will never hear from me again. In preparation of this, I altered my name, using an undocumented middle name, Feyera, as a cover and an alias I used while working for Team Rocket (specifically under Cipher's direction). This will make it harder for anyone to track me.

Tim, you have been an adoptive father for me. Ever since the passing of my mother, I have looked up to you as my mentor and friend. When you joined the Rockets, I thought I too would find a place here. Sadly, this is not the case, I'm too weak for it, this life is not for me. In either event, thank you for providing me with the resources to further my personal goals and ambitions.

Tim, while I understand this letter may compromise my safety and well-being, I know you're the only individual I can trust with this information. Once again, thanks, I wish you all the best. Please burn this letter to ashes after you've read it. But before you do, I think you've earned the privilege to know who's beneath the façade of 'Doctor Feyera'.

A friend,

- Christian F. West"

The man looked at the neat and orderly hand-written letter one last time before stowing it back into his pocket. He was ready to dissent from the madness he had gotten wrapped into, but there was
one final mission he had to undertake to ensure peace of mind. Operation: Semblance. It all culminated here. All the research, all the sacrifices, all the experiments, they could be redeemed with one marvelous discovery. Mercurius would make it worthwhile. He was sure of it.

If Cipher's Evercrest branch had taught him one thing, it was that science had taken a dangerous turn towards recklessness and disregard for test-subjects. Of course, he had at one point taken pleasure in such methodology. To play a part in the evolution of creation, that had merit. But Project Progenitor had pushed too far. Even he was not immune to compassion, despite such compassion being forced upon him. Ever since experiment Delta-two had "spoken" to him, he felt insurmountable guilt. It haunted him. His past haunted him. He wasn't sure of who he was, or who he was becoming.

Yes, a Pokemon had communicated to him. It was a Psychic type after all; the host graft for Progenitor EX. The Progenitor Serum was a strain of virus present in the outer irises near the limbic ring of Dark-type Pokemon. Beginning as a beneficial mutation, it allowed for this particular type of Pokemon to see things that the unaltered eye would never be able to pick up on such as spectral energy, and other very slight variations in the environment. The most fascinating part about this entire phenomenon is that it was possible for such a virus to be transferred over to other non-Dark Type Pokemon.

The sedatives he administered during the pre-op should have suppressed the Pokemon's telepathic capabilities though. He wasn't perturbed by the communication, such anomalies were always possible when dealing with Pokemon that broke the evolutionary mold by venturing outside their native territory. What troubled him was what was said to him and its aftermath. He was still feeling the repercussions to this day. It was strange and ominous, as if his very soul had been exposed to the Pokemon. For that brief moment, all his thoughts, memories, and feelings were able to be plucked from the tree of his mind at a whim. Everything was known and uncovered; his veil of privacy had been torn off, revealing everything from his earliest experiences, to his darkest fears. He had always been keen to keep to himself, ever since his mother tragically perished thirteen years ago, and his father abandoned him. All of this information, how he had tried to cope, and the way it made him feel was rendered visible. It was enough to drive him mad.

Stubbornly, he tried to avoid absolution for as long as possible. He turned to other avenues of life in the Rocket organization, distancing himself from Cipher and the scientists there. He even took some time off, but to no avail. The Pokemon had infiltrated too deeply into his consciousness. It pried into the depths of cognition he did not want to even confront himself and made those thoughts boil to the forefront of his mind ceaselessly. Nothing was right in his world. Ghosts of his past seemed to encroach around him every night before bed. How could he have robbed the lives of so many? For science? For fame? Was it worth it? Who was he? What had he become?

But now he had a chance to remedy everything. For the first time in history, Team Rocket and Cipher of Orre were collaborating on a joint heist: Operation Semblance. The element Mercurius was that important to the scientists at Cipher. In fact, the so-called "Reiklen Mercurius"—literally "Mercury Relic"—could very well be the greatest asset to humanity's understanding of evolution, since in small quantities Mercurium could alter cellular composition through the gamma radiation sporadically emitted by a flash occurring at each half-life of the element. The Mercurium material itself was classified as a rare-earth element, past civilizations had gone to great lengths in order to collect it. Regardless of the element's history, the relic made out of it was of immense value and vaulted in Saffron for safekeeping following the Great War.

Scratching his thick hair, which was darkened in the sunless sky, he pondered. After snatching the relic, perhaps he could save the life of Delta-two and be rid of the cursed spell he had been placed under. And in the end, he would gain even more out of it if Mercurius was truly as amazing and
crucial to evolution as he had heard from lexicons predating the last Golden Age; it was said to create advanced, multi-celled life as we know it though the binding of single celled organisms through radioactive pulses. Through studying it, he could perhaps one day write the perfect follow-up to the dissertation he had recently published on Psychic Type Pokemon! That would be the perfect end result!

Excited, he exited the complex through a stairwell leading into the back of a casino building. It was the Luxaira Casino in Celadon City. The place was a cover for the Team Rocket Headquarters. It even made a tidy profit on the side. People's risk adoration was always profitable—that's the one thing he remembered from the Economics Principles course he had taken back at Saffron University, but he was more of a science-minded person. As he walked out, he nodded to the man who was in charge of opening the next morning at ten. It was all really happening. He was going to help pull off the biggest robbery from the capital of the world. No one would expect it. He'd even dupe Cipher, and—although these people were dangerous to cross—he had it all figured out. In a faint whisper he encouraged himself saying, "Nothing will go wrong. I've calculated the odds of success to be higher than that of failure." To a scientist that was encouraging, it meant things were on his side. Little did he know, but preemptive evaluation would prove insubstantial in dealing with what awaited him; a future he could not predict nor escape from.

As he walked out of the casino doors into the morning air, he looked up at the clock tower across the street reading ten minutes to five. Perfect. He was early. He saw a figure approaching him in the distance. Unusual for this hour, the sun wasn't even out yet and the sky was still off grey. He wasn't sure who she was. As she walked past him on the deserted street, he locked eyes with her; two hazel eyes delicately fit on her small face's contour like two small almonds. She stared at him for a few moments, before he broke the stare and turned away. Bizarre yes, but nothing warranting dire concern, she was probably a nobody. The dew on the ground chilled his exposed ankles as he strayed off the main road to open up his radio patch link.

Now to receive orders. He removed a small communicator that was in one of his coat's inner confines and turned it on. Static buzzed in for a few moments before he heard the voice of his commander on the other end. "Firestorm Squad, dispatched to southern gate. Thunderstorm Squad, dispatched to infiltration via sewer system, Rainstorm Squad dispatched to infiltration via western gate, Sandstorm Squad dispatched to distraction site, Snowstorm Squad prepare for drop in on military posts marked Bravo, Charlie, and Foxtrot on air cruiser coordinates. Click."

The young researcher grinned. The adrenaline was beginning to kick in, and it sure felt good. He studied plenty of charts and diagrams about how the adrenal gland works, but it was much different to actually feel it course throughout his body.

The plan was simple enough. If he had been in charge he would have put himself on Firestorm, but here he was on Rainstorm, approaching Saffron City from Celadon rather than Vermilion. Not that it mattered; he had a rented vehicle parked outside the southern gate, would have been nice if he could have checked up on it before the mission began. Because he had gone to study at the Pokemon University in Saffron his student visa had not expired yet, giving him unrestricted access to the heavily guarded city. Basically, he had no intention of sneaking in per se, rather he'd be walking right in through the front door. This made him a valuable asset to the Rockets. In addition, he was young, just barely under nineteen—no one would expect him.

His pace quickened as he neared the gateway to Saffron, it was nearly six in the morning judging by the sun's position on the horizon's lip. Walking to the counter, he tossed his visa to the checkpoint guard and smiled showing his pearly teeth. His innocent smile often took him further than the most well-crafted words would. The somnolent guard looked at him, nodded, stamped the card saying, "Enjoy your day in Saffron City, sir."
His eyes narrowed into a pierce as he walked past the secure siding doors. "Oh I will." Whispering under his breath he mumbled, "...Today I'm here to make a big withdraw."

The guard had opened the huge gilded metal gate into the Golden City of Commerce. He was in! How exciting! Back again, but this time without the irksome need to study and attend classes. For his final year at the university, he had been working as an intern for Cipher's Evercrest Branch on Penta Island, which was mostly lab-work under the supervision of the lead developers of Progenitor. He was still fairly new to Team Rocket, joining on the side of school about year ago to help pay off his student loans. He did mostly petty jobs because of his position as a Saffron City student. Smuggling, keeping tabs on Silph Co., scouting out structural vulnerability, that kind of stuff. Small time crime. He had never killed outside of a laboratory for instance. Never stolen more than a Ragecandybar back when he was eight and a half. Holding a gun was a new experience for the young man. Yet, the Rockets needed everyone they could get, for a nice reward lay in store if they delivered the artifact to Cipher. He was lucky to be able to make the cut for this mission. He had to pass a few fitness tests and attend a course on marksmanship to carry the M-series Gauntlet. Both were manageable for the youthful man. Being selected for this mission would be the only practical way to get a hold of Mercurius before it changed hands.

The yellow painted brick glowed golden as the sun rose over Silph Co.’s massive skyscrapers. Yes, the Kanto based company had multiple skyscrapers. Twelve to be exact, two of which were connected on the one-hundredth floor conjoining them into a larger tower. Silph Incorporated was an obscenely rich monopoly; it owned Devon Corp., the Poketch Company, and had the government of Kanto as its puppet. There were no Anti-Trust laws in Kanto. Companies could grow as large as they wanted to while eating up smaller firms, and were even encouraged to do so by market forces. Nevertheless, the biggest market force happened to be the government itself.

In quick strides, the coated man walked to Southern Street. He saw two other Team Rocket members along the way. He recognized their faces, but couldn't remember their names to save his life. There were probably more on the way through the underground and being airdropped in. On this wide road lay two buildings, almost directly across the street from each other: the Kanto International Depository and the Pokemon Sanctum. The latter was his target, for it contained the Reilken Mercurius in its vaults. Saffron City was built over the remains of an older city, and its underground served as a natural location for bank vaults. Sandstorm Squad would feign a bank robbery in the Depository at six thirty, while the rest of them infiltrated the unguarded and vulnerable Sanctum. A simple plan. What could possibly go wrong?

He stood suspiciously against one of the marble pillars supporting the façade of the Sanctum. His foot nervously tapped on the ground. The morning gradually brought light to the city. Streetlamps were automatically extinguished. It was almost time. To his right were a few other concealed operatives. Across the street, he saw half a dozen black garbed figures moving towards the back of the bank. Suddenly, an alarm came from the depository. Only a matter of time before the local police arrived now! They'd be able to handle a few city cops though. He glanced down the alleyway on his left and heard a loud blast as a manhole exploded open, expelling dust and smoke.

"Bingo!" said the first man to surface out of the hole. He had a rough voice which matched his appearance as a muscularly built man, with thin brown hair, greyed on the sides that he combed back, a large and defined jaw line, and two dark hazel eyes. Quickly, he ran up to the young rocket and gave him a shoulder hug while shaking his hand. On his wrist was an opulently jeweled timepiece. That was probably from the last heist! "You ready to go, buster?"

"Yes," his voice was cool and collected despite the rapid pounding of his heart.

"Hey," the burly man put his arm around the researcher, "stick with me and you won't get hurt.
Seven years accident-free!"

He laughed. His innocent laugh seemed out of place in this setting. Especially considering what he was about to go through with. "Haha, seven years is a long time now?"

"Well yeah sure it is, buster. It's almost half your age little one," Tim effervescently said laughing as he did so.

"You're calling me young? I'll have you know I'm just as qualified as anyone on this mission."

"I'm calling you a tyke. But...you're a tyke that gets the job done. Where's the rest of Firestorm?"

He shrugged. Most of Thunderstorm was already out of the manhole. There were about fifteen of them. Firestorm and Rainstorm served as auxiliaries to the main taskforce.

"Darn. They must've gotten held up. No matter, we have to move fella. Time's a 'wasting."

"Tim, I wanted to give you something," he reached for his pocket and the note.

"Save it!" the big man said breezing by him and releasing his Pokemon from its Poké Ball in a flash of light. "We got a job to do. Nidoking! Blast it open!"

The monster took its thick purple tail and swung as hard as possible into the Sanctum's sidewall. The concrete began to crack. Relentlessly the beast persisted to punch and whip the building with his powerful limbs. The noise of him thrashing was deafening. Eventually the wall shattered and a small hole led inside.

"Hold up, King," said Tim to his Pokemon.

However, the Pokemon growled eager to continue rampaging. "NIDO...KING..."

"Alright, well at least he'll be ready if any guards try to rain on our little parade." Tim smiled at his Pokemon. It was probably a foot or two taller than him, with even more muscle and meaty hide. Not to mention its claws, teeth, and horn suitable for joisting with. "Well there's our entrance. Hope Sandstorm buys us enough time to pick the place clean. The Kanto military will be coming in any moment now, but their first priority is always saving those fat little piggies in Silph's towers; that ought to buy us even more precious time! Let's get inside."

Clambering in, the young rocket found himself within the confines of a dark and dry section of the building. It looked and felt like the type of place where the deceased were kept. His nose twitched as he smelt embalming oils. "Oh great." He brushed some dust from a stone coffin embedded in the wall, "Corpses. Wonderful."

Tim laughed at his apprentice's sarcasm. "Well this used to be one of those weird religious temples back in the day before they made it a museum. Fairly sure it predates the city itself. Bet no one's been back here since...well who knows." Tim followed him in and recalled his Nidoking into the Poké Ball. The floor was very old stone and some sections were missing. It was as if someone had punched holes in the floor, although some were much larger than others.

"Not the most pleasant of robberies you've been on I'd imagine?" he asked Tim.

"Whenever you think you've seen it all, you're bound to be in for a surprise," he said with a faint chuckle. The Team Rocket member was perceptive to the young man's nervousness. "You're doing great, but we need to get to the interior. This way's a dead-end. I recon it's past that wall," Tim pointed to what looked like a thick rock wall with engravings and colored markings on it. The way
the faded warm colored lines connected to various points made him think about star constellations.

"Yeah looks promising, hopefully no more dead guys in there." He had not taken two steps towards
the wall before the floor from underneath him began to give way.
"ARRRRRGGGGGGHHHHHHHHHHHHH!"

It felt like the ground had just been ripped out from under him as the floor collapsed underneath the
young researcher. He continued to yell as he tumbled down into a lower level. Spinning and falling
in utter darkness, he was beyond disoriented. His feet could not grip anything; the tunnel was far
too steep. Sliding further into the building, he rolled down the incline and deeper into the
underground layer. He hit his hand against a rough scaly wall. "Oof…Ouch," he moaned. "ARGH! Uggghhh!" His maladroit plummet made him blush in frustration, but he was happy to be in one piece.

He saw flashlights above as he looked up. "Hey! Are you alright?" he heard. But everyone was far
out of sight. How deep had he fallen?

Grunting, he felt a small scrape on his hand from the impact. A tiny bit of warm blood trickled out,
but he couldn't see it. "Yeah! Fine. It's kinda a long drop. A really long drop actually. I don't have
my footing yet though. Can't see a single thing down here." The crepuscular darkness surrounded
him, engulfing his world.

There was a snap from above and he looked up to see a lit neon green glow-stick bouncing down
the same tunnel he had fallen into. The shroud was suddenly lifted, and he glanced around the
small confiding tunnel. "There ya go," said Tim's voice. "I'm gonna see if we can blast our way
past this other wall. Skirting around the perimeter of the room above you now!"

He clumsily picked up the light; it was his lifeline in this dank crypt's underground tunnel. "Hey! What about me!?!"

"We're gonna see if there's an easier way to get down there. There's no way I'm going for a tumble, I outgrew playground slides years ago."

"This isn't a laughing matter!" He gingerly massaged his stinging hand. "It's not funny! Send down
a rope or something."

"Just hold tight, buster. I'll be back for you, I promise. Stay put and don't do anything stupid," Tim's
voice seemed more distant suddenly.

"Don't leave me! TIM!" he shouted in agony. Staying still was the last thing he wanted to do. He
had come this far only to be held captive by some stupid floor in need of repair? What if the
authorities found him down here? That would be embarrassing. But it couldn't possibly be a dead
end. Tombs and tunnels like these always had another route in case of partial collapse. He told
himself, "Maybe there is a way to go further in…Gotta try…"

He had to get a hold of Mercurius before the rest of them. Now it was a race. Lifting the chemical
torch above his head, he sat up slowly careful not to bump his head. He couldn't stand down here
for the ceiling was too short to accommodate his six foot height. Getting down on all fours, he
knew that climbing out of here was going to be a real challenge. Cursing, he turned back around
towards the scaly wall. He leaned against the peeling wall. It didn't feel solid. He pushed against it.
Miraculously, it gave way. It was a hidden chamber!

He walked into the opened decrepit room and almost tumbled down a series of stairs that came into
sight out of nowhere. Had he not carried the light, surely he would have fallen down a huge drop.
Judging from how steep the spiral stairs were and how they seemed to travel down for what looked like an eternity, he would have definitely died. He sighed in relief and caught his breath. This place looked more promising than the false floor he had fallen into earlier. The only way forward was down. That was a good sign. Treasure would always be at the very bottom of the vault.

He deftly began walking down the stone steps, holding his light high as he peered down into the depths that were all too eager to gobble him up. Some of the bricks were deceptive and rather loose, crumbling out even under his paltry weight. It took him a good few minutes to warily descend to the bottom.

Once at the bottom, he instinctively gazed up and saw nothing but darkness above him. He had made a steep decent and wasn't sure if any of the other rockets would ever even ascertain his location unless he had found a faster way to where they were heading. Despite being a man of adventure, he was beginning to feel just a hint of fear. He reached for his Gauntlet nervously and silently drew the firearm, and disabling the safety. One could never be too sure of what might be lurking in the deep. He had heard stories about ferocious monsters that made their homes in the bowls of the earth where the dead were laid to rest. No one ever got away from them alive.

"Children's tales," he whispered to himself, "How could you even hear about a monster if no one could get away from it?" He then heard a crunch beneath his feet and leapt into the air pointing his gun and light at the source of the noise. Seeing something in the shadow, he swiftly pulled the Gauntlet's small trigger, filling the room with a distinct "Click!" of the priming lever, and earsplitting "Bang!" of the shot being launched; the acoustics of the massive pit caused the gun's noise to resonate throughout the sinister chamber. He froze up, locked into his dramatic pose; arms outstretched each holding a weapon: one to vanquish the darkness, and the other to annihilate whatever else might be lurking in these ruins.

It was a rotting skeleton, nothing to worry about. "Hate those things..." he mumbled, slightly embarrassed and rather glad no one was watching. He could imagine Tim laughing and never letting him hear the end of the time where a dead body almost made him jump out of his skin. In fact he could even hear him saying in his burlesque voice, "Say buster, do ya remember the time you tried to kill that poor fellow again?!" Wait, what was he saying? It didn't matter, he was leaving the Rocket organization after this was all over. Tim would be just another memory of a guilty life left behind.

In the murky darkness, his eyes—nearly as bright green as the torch he carried—saw a small stone pedestal at the base of the spiral stairs. Eagerly, he walked over to it; the lean table was not much higher than his chest height. Putting his gun back into the holster, and resting the light on top of the stand, he exhaled and blew the dust off the engraving. Plumes of grey powder and ancient debris flew off. On it was a small plaque with an eight-pointed star with a wide indentation in its approximate center. On top of the pedestal lay a small set of stone cubes, not more than a centimeter wide.

"Curious…" Picking up one of blocks, he noticed it had a letter engraved on it. "Z" On the opposite side of the letter was a series of grooves and ridges. There were even more of these blocks on the ground scattered about the pedestal. There was another skeleton lying next to the pillar clutching a piece of tattered parchment, russet with age. He pried it out of the frozen bone hand. On it was a phrase written in jet-black ink:

"In the world above, whenever you stop and look you can always see me.

However, if you dare to touch, you cannot feel me."
I cannot move, but should you decide to give chase,

I then shall flee and you will be unable to match my pace."

It was a riddle. This was tricky. He played around with the blocks for a few moments. "Ah ha," said the researcher, "Simple. Spell out the solution by placing letters into the indentation." He couldn't guess the answer, there were far too many of the letter cubes. "Let's see...how many slots do we have for letters there in the indentation?" Counting, he checked, and there was enough room for exactly seven letter cubes. No spaces either so it was definitely one word.

"Okay. It's a seven letter word. And a tricky riddle. 'Always see'...hmm." He scratched his head. "Stop and look'..." He pulled gently on a strand of his amber hair, a nervous habit of his he was trying to kick, but in situations like these, it was impossible to worry about ridding himself of petty habits. Besides, running a hand through his thick hair calmed his nerves. "So, what can always be seen but never felt? The sun? No...can't be right, you can feel the sun; plus it's not a long enough word. Is it vision? Glasses? Sight? The sky maybe? That doesn't make sense though...the sky won't move away. Come on...think! Light? Clouds? Air?" He vehemently vented out of his gently curled nose, and tightly braced his head with both hands. "Doesn't move, but flees...What is it!?"

Suddenly, like a glint of light, the answer came to him. "Ah ha!" exclaimed the researcher with delight. "Got it!"

"H-O-R-I-Z-O-N" As he nonchalantly placed the final letter, there was a loud clack. He heard the pedestal groan and something in the room shifted.

A huge stone slab behind him began to sink into the ground, revealing a large chamber filled with light. He felt like he was in a movie, discovering an ancient world!

"What on earth?" he asked. He must have been deep under Saffron, well below all of the city's sewage lines. But there was no doubt that whatever was in here had filled the entire room with its magnificent radiance, a sharp contrast to the dank foyer he had just been inside of. He almost dropped his light as he walked into the white room reminding him of the interior of a tall tower. It was cylindrical complete with an old steam powered elevator on the side, outdating him even. This couldn't be real. How could such a place be right underneath Saffron for all these years? Judging by the white brick and steam elevator, it wasn't too long ago since this chamber had been apparently remodeled. But why? It didn't matter. This had to be the place. It was here after all.

"Ahh!" Crepuscular rays covered his view of the elevated marble stand in the center of the room. Nervously, he tried looking up at the source of the light, only to be forced into covering his eyes. The blindness soon wore off, and he began to approach the altar upon which the miraculous artifact lay. He bit his lip.

As he climbed up the wide imposing marble stairs, he thought he heard something cracking from above. Quickly, his gaze shot up to see that now additional light had begun to pour in from the high vaulted ceiling of the room he was in. Some small bricks and dust fell down, crashing onto the floor. Maybe Tim and the rest of them had broken through. It didn't matter though. He was here first. By a stroke of luck, the Reilken Mercurius was now within his grasp.

The top of the altar was adorned with gossamer white laced cloth. At the top of this grand spectacle lay a single thin silvery ring, not much larger than his hand. It looked almost like a halo made of shiny flowing metal.

The young man swallowed hard. This was it. Here. He had it. His heart was pounding so fast that
he felt his ribcage tremble. His breath became arrhythmic. Sweat formed on his palms as he extended his hand. He felt his eyes dilate in spite of the light it was giving off. The whole room began to pulsate to the drum of a steady heartbeat, as pastel hues that wrapped around every corner he peered at. There were steady tides of rose-colored light that could be felt all around him. "Huh?" he said looking at the "R" on his chest. Was that his heartbeat? Now that he was worried, the periodic thumping of palpable light increased its frequency. Why was it coinciding with the beating of his heart?

"This…is pure Mercurium?" he asked the ore. The arched piece of fluid-like metal radiantly shimmered and its composition seemed to flow freely while maintaining the basic shape of a ringed bracelet. However as his outreached hand approached it, everything about it began to change. It began to melt. It began to alter its very form right in front of his eyes!

First, one small protrusion stuck out of the form, creating an imperfect circle. The ringed object was already losing its circular properties, morphing into an ellipse. The longer he gazed upon it, the more it seemed to deviate from its original form. The drive to pick it up was now more powerful than ever. It was so beautiful. It reflected dazzling images and colors the young scientist had never even seen before.

As the young man touched the rapidly morphing relic with a single finger, the primal material reacted volatility, the side of the ring with the internal lever began to radiate a green aura. When his palm moved closer to the ring's bright jade side, the contour of the material changed, glowing brighter radiating palpable and foreign energy. Quivering, his hand was mere inches away from fully grasping the greenish section of the handle, the material changed yet again. The silvery metal trembled and shook in his hand; the metallic ring shuddered and hummed while shooting a large extension out of the side. Like a feral weed, the green spout grew rapidly, gaining width at its base. When it had reached the approximate height of his arm, it solidified, becoming a crystalline shard of pure emerald attached to the elliptical silver ring of spiraling metal.

The researcher gasped at its unprecedented beauty. He would have called it a blade, but it did not have edges. Instead, it was a fearsome spike. But as he gripped his hand on the ring, and tightened, the artifact shone with such terrifying light that he had to avert his gaze. It was brighter than the midday sun and the heat it gave off was unbelievable. He felt his face flush uncontrollably. The light began to dissipate, and the young man lowered the nearly weightless relic. His hand still clutched its sleek material, unwilling to surrender its might.

It was his. Reilken Mercurius was with him. It belonged to him now and him alone.

There was an even louder crash from above, and he deftly jumped out of the way of some larger falling debris. The whole room violently shook; the rumbling persisted, dropping more pieces of the room's sides and ceiling. The rest of Team Rocket's operatives were nearly here. Instinctually, he ran towards the mechanized elevator that he noticed earlier. Clambering onto the open platform, he attempted to figure out the control schematics of the lift with his free hand. Another tremor shook the chamber and he glanced up to see what looked like daylight far above him. Huge pieces of rock tumbled to the floor, smashing the altar which he had all too recently been next too.

He had to get back to the surface world before he was outright crushed. He held on tightly to one of the platform's three railings. What could he do? He had to get out of here fast. He did not have enough time to fiddle with the engine. The steam power used prior to twenty years ago took at least four minutes to heat up to safe operating power. But he didn't have that kind of time! He looked up and saw that although mechanized, the core system was a simple pulley sheaved to a heavy counterweight about halfway up.
Another downpour of rocks and brick made his decision easy. Biting his lip, he gripped the cable attaching to the center of the platform and climbed a little above the ground. He then swung the Reilken Mercurius below his feet and effortlessly snapped the tense cable beneath him. He winced as the shift in weight caused him to shoot up into the air at lightning speed. The heavy metal counterweight whizzed past him, narrowly missing a full on collision.

In a matter of seconds, he heard the counterweight's distinct thud as it hit the distant ground far below. He felt like he was flying, even though the cable was not pulling up, the momentum was still sending him soaring upwards. Yelling, he released his grip on the cable and attempted to grasp onto the wall's edge, just below the hole in the ceiling. Swinging the Reilken Mercurius over his shoulder, he rammed it into the sidewall to give him leverage, so that he wouldn't slip. It worked, and after a great deal of strenuous lifting, he had managed to appear on the floor above. He situated his elbows on the ground and pulled his body up, still grasping onto the Mercury Relic. Prying it lose from the wall once he had tossed his legs over, he caught his breath as the chamber below began to fill with fragments of the crumbling walls and ceiling. "That…was…close," he panted. His irregular breath and panting made his chest rush up and down sporadically.

He heard voices coming from the room adjacent to his. Soon there were even more loud crashes and bangs as the wall in front of him began to crack. He backed away towards the edge of the shallow room, clutching the Reilken Mercurius defiantly, its faded luster growing lighter with every sound made by the excavators. None of them would have it. It was his and his alone. Sweating, the man grasped his Gauntlet, pointing it right at the largest of the black fissures in the breaking solid wall.

With one final crash, he saw a thick purple tail breach straight through the fortification. Nidoking. It roared as its master clambered into the small room above the deep chamber vault. Tim was grinning ear to ear upon seeing his partner. But it was a short lived welcome.

"Get back Tim," said the researcher, refusing to lower his Gauntlet.

The rocket looked stupefied, and his grin faded. "Well buster…” The muscular man glanced down at the relic held by his green-eyed partner, "Looks like you've been busy since you fell down that hole."

"A hole you didn't want to save me from!"

"Pah nonsense, I'd get you outta there...just why don't you lower the Gauntlet, buster? C'mon easy does it now."

He swallowed some excess saliva in his mouth, drying his oral cavity. "I don't want to hurt you." he said tilting his head ever so slightly as he did so. It was the same head motion he would make when aiming down the sights of a firearm. "Step out of the way and no one has to get hurt."

"Threatenin' me eh? You sure got nerve considering how much you used to look up to me, ah ha," Tim laughed nervously. "The rest of the squad is up in the main channel, I took a diversion route. You'll have to get past them if you want to get out of here. And in order to do that, you'll need to get beyond me. Ain't happening though. You don't stand a chance, buster."

He remained fixed like a statue, the barrel of his Gauntlet lined up perfectly at Tim's heart. "Last chance. Move. Now."

"And if I don't?" Tim asked. His jovial expression morphed into an incredibly serious glare.

The amber haired researcher's expression turned sour as he pointed the tip of Reilken Mercurius at
his mentor, "I need this."

Tim looked over at his massive Pokemon, "And if HE doesn't?"

Nidoking let out a ferocious roar and smashed his enormously thick arms into the hole to widen it. The beast ruggedly scrambled into the small room, ejecting visible hot breath from its moist nostrils. It bent down on all fours and continued to aggressively growl and claw at the floor.

"Don't make me do this," he said. The researcher could feel Reilken Mercurius throbbing in his hand as he adamantly opposed Tim and his massive Pokemon. "You don't want it to end this way. It doesn't have to end like this."

"You seriously think you can get away?" asked the rocket.

"I have to try," he languidly responded.

"No," said Tim as he firmly clenched his fist. "No! You are going to relinquish that infernal device. It's made you irrational! You're not acting normal."

But he was normal. This was what he had to do. Tim didn't understand. It wasn't about the money, it was about the principle. Cipher wasn't going to get hold of this device. They had done so many atrocious things already. Their cruelty knew no bounds. Evercrest...Project Progenitor, were there any limits? No. They could do exponentially worse things with this type of power. Cipher could hurt more test-subjects and take more lives without thinking twice. He had to absolve his sins; he was driven to at this point. It was the insurmountable guilt. There was no other way to find peace in his volatile world. At least he could try to save Delta-two. Even if that meant dying on the way there.

"What has it done to you?" Tim asked the silent researcher, his voice lowering, and his concern growing.

"It has done nothing to me! NOTHING! The only thing that has done anything to me is this decadent organization!" he bellowed with fury, straightening his posture and feeling his muscles grow tense.

"WHAT?"

"You're in my way, Timothy Rallsen. So is your pet. I will not stand down."

"You fool! Drop the relic now!" ordered Tim, "It's taking over you!" His Nidoking's ears perked up sensing that battle would begin soon.

"No! No, no, no! No it's not!" The sensation Reilken Mercurius was giving him worsened. "It's mine! Mine alone!" He felt trapped. Cornered.

"Don't—"

"You've failed!" interrupted the green-eyed researcher. All he wanted to do was keep it out of Cipher's hands. "Don't you see? It's all over Tim!"

"You won't get away, this ends now. King, hold him down!"

"RARGH! NIDO—KING!" the Pokemon's cry echoed throughout the tiny chamber.

Now he had to confront his mentor. Everything was falling apart. Condiluted visions filled his
mind as he saw Tim's monster rise up on its back legs, and begin to charge.

Everything happened so quickly. He swore, fired a warning shot into the air and saw that the beast kept charging at him. "Click, Bang! Click, Bang! Click Bang!" Although the next three shots were lined up perfectly well, Nidoking's reinforced hide caused the bullets to simply be deflected or cushioned by its engross mass. Besides, the Pokemon's head was down, and its vital organs well covered by hulking muscle mass. Its wickedly sharp horn was aimed directly at his center, ready to impale him.

"KING! DON'T! NO!" roared Tim, but it was too late. The monster's primal rage had taken over, there were no reigns left on the inexorable Pokemon. It had been shot; there was no peace left in its world. The beast would take the life of the man who shot him.

Fearing for his life the amber haired researcher hollered at the top of his lungs, "STOP!" As if it would actually do anything. The Pokemon had one mission, not even its somewhat mediocre trainer could halt him. In terror, the researcher took the relic in his hand and raised it above his head, cowering under its majesty, and hoping that this ancient artifact would somehow save him.

It did. An ineffable bright beam of light shot out of the thorn, its magnificent brightness covered the room with opulent light. Nidoking stopped dead in its tracks, and began to retreat. New sparks and waves of focused beams jumped out of the relic. The resplendent rays pierced through the room until everything was blanketed in white. He saw only shadows of where Tim and his Pokemon happened to be in the envelope of colorlessness.

Nidoking froze where it had been, completely motionless, it stood with its back to him. The Pokemon had been in full retreat before the overwhelming light had caught up to it. Tim was petrified from the shock of seeing his Pokemon paralyzed in time.

Tim ran over to his stationary Nidoking. "How did…? What was…?" he said completely stunned by whatever had taken place.

What had he done? He held the artifact in his hand confused and troubled as the harsh light waned. But the young man had no time to try explaining, he had to get back to Penta and use this amazing power to save himself from the maddening torture Delta-two had put him under. Tim was safe; he was the only one in the Rocket organization that even mattered to begin with. The young man didn't want to kill him, he only wanted him out of his way. He thought about giving the note to him now, but decided against it. He was running out of time, and time was of the essence. His essence.

Now there was an opening. Darting past the muscular man, he leapt over the low wall and up the ramp towards the exit. Daylight approached. The steeper the stone ramp got, the faster he ran. His light steps and long stride carried him up, back to the surface world. Thoughts raced through his mind. How would he escape? The rest of the Rocket Squads were right outside and so was the Kanto Police Force. By now, the Pokemon League and even the military might even be on their way to Saffron. The Rockets, although professionals, were in the very heart of their prey's territory. Odds were bound to turn for the worse after the initial surprise.

Jumping out the tunnel's exit, he heard, "FREEZE!" Surrounding him were rockets and their Pokemon. About thirty, maybe more. Their Pokemon's claws gleamed and an assortment of firearms aimed at his surprised figure. There was only one thing he could do in this situation. Once again raising the jade beacon above his head, he allowed the consuming flash of light to blind all who looked upon him. The beacon lit up the entire structure in its mystic rays, as a lofty lighthouse would cast out the darkness of a tremulous sea.

He heard screams of agony and Pokemon howls. A few of the rockets fired off their firearms in a
myriad of directions. They all missed their target. Without sight, they didn't have a chance. They were completely blind to his lithé exit around the perimeter of their fortified containment. He was able to see their shadows, for the light came from where he stood. And he saw that a few of the members had even brought Electrode, made apparent by their spherical shapes. He put two on top of two. They were intending on leaving him down there for dead and blowing the place, once they had obtained Reilken Mercurius. How despicable. Emotion and rage soon blurred his once clear sight.

Overflowing with anger, he ordered the Pokemon to detonate themselves once he had cleared the area. "Use Self-Destruct!" Surprisingly, the Pokemon complied with his stern order; he didn't think it actually would have worked. He wasn't a Pokemon trainer after all, he thought it would be a fair deal more difficult to boss them around. A huge explosion rocked the very foundations of the Sanctum. The tremor following made him grasp a nearby marble pillar for support. Soon he noticed that the column itself was crumbling. He ran out the front of the building, past the overhanging marble visage before it began to collapse upon itself expelling huge clouds of dust and debris. He thought to himself, "serves them right," and ran south.

The scenery blazed past him. People were running everywhere in a panicked frenzy. Streets were packed. The capital of the world was under attack by a terrorist organization. As he reached the southern gate, he noticed it had been opened to allow for rescue teams and the Kanto Police Force to enter. Still concealed in his heavy coat, no one recognized that he was a part of the Rocket Organization. His innocently young face and quick pace amid the turmoil made no one question his motives. If they had, Reilken Mercurius would prove more than adequate defense.

A small caravan truck had been parked on the outskirts of Saffron. He ran through the low evergreen bushes and shrubs to reach it. Just where he had left it. Perfect. Jumping into the driver's seat, he reached for the keys in his pocket and jammed the bony key into the ignition. Turning it hard, it groaned, and then he heard the motor purr to life. Shifting the drive gear to "forward", he hit the accelerator switch and felt his body push back into the cloth chair's fuzzy embrace. The wide road ahead of him stretched out in a nearly straight path directly to Vermilion, for it was a major travel route. All sorts of vehicles and aircraft were heading in the opposite direction as he pushed south at blitzing speed. Turning on the radio, he adjusted to various frequency to listen to the madness unfold. Madness he had been responsible for creating.

Tapping the sound console, the on-board speakers buzzed to life. "Zzz…wehwuu…City has been attacked by the terrorist organization Team Rocket. Evacuation protocol has been put into effect by Silph Co. Federal marshals are guiding residents and Silph employees to rescue stations. Military forces approaching…zzz…a strange turn of events has sent Kanto's Capital into an uproar. Could Orre sympathizers and insurgents have instigated the assault? Under attack are: the Kanto International Depository and Pokemon Sanctum on Southern Street. The Sanctum has partially collapsed due to an explosion. More information to come as the situation becomes disclosed to us…zzz…Pokemon League intervention is imminent authorities tell us, but is it too late? Follow us for continuous coverage…"

"Guess there's not going to be any music on this ride," he muttered to himself as he lowered the volume. Hearing the result of his actions in the Pokemon Sanctum was not exactly music to his ears. He much preferred music he could keep a beat to with a tap.

While not a clean theft, it had been radically successful so far. The only thing that mattered is that Operation Semblance had failed. The Rockets, and Cipher for that matter, would not be getting their hands on the Mercury Relic.
About halfway through the hour journey, he became slightly warm. Maybe it was the high of adrenaline wearing off. Or it could have been just stuffy in the closed window cabin. The convoy truck didn't have any air conditioning, he had rented it at the base value for this mission specifically, and it was thoroughly lacking in amenities. He tried to take off the warm jacket he had been wearing. Strangely, it was stuck on his right arm. Just then, he realized that the Mercury Relic had not left his grip once since he had put his hand on it. Somewhat surprised, he laughed to himself. Large beads of sweat formed on his face, and his nervousness continued to grow while he struggled to relinquish it. Did he lack the willpower to resign this weapon? Shaking in convulsions, he dropped the artifact on the passenger's seat so that he could remove his jacket. Immediately afterwards, his hand felt around until it possessively held the artifact once more. Feeling cool again, he looked back at the road and noticed that Vermilion was only a little ways off.

The port city had all types of activity. Being in close proximity to Saffron, everyone was aware of the Sanctum Robbery. He drove the convoy truck straight to the port harbor itself. Most of the gates were left unbarred especially with all the commotion. His next leg of the journey would be a trip to the Southern Sea, so he needed to get himself in close proximity to the water. Exuberant to leave the road vehicle's claustrophobic confines, the young researcher leapt out and onto one of the large docks, smelling the distinct port smell. He walked towards the section for larger personal boats, searching for one with a big engine and hopefully an operator. Eventually his eyes fell upon a large narrow performance boat with a sky-blue underbelly near the end of the dock. He needed to get to Penta fast and this would be perfect. There was even a man inside the exposed command section, slowly parking the sea craft.

The middle-aged man docking his vessel heard his approach. "Y-Your're with the Rockets!" he cried out. His chubby figure pointed incriminatingly at the "R" over his black uniform's torso.

"Police!" yelled the balding man, his grey eyes full of worry. "It's a rocket! Help!" Desperately, he tried to steer the high profile boat away from the dock.

But the researcher jumped from the dock to the long power boat quickly, landing on its bow and shaking the vessel. Swaying slightly, he regained balance by using the Mercury Relic as a cane-like support. He didn't think he'd have to resort to hurting innocents, but this was too important. Penta Island was of upmost importance, he had to get there before anyone found out what he was up to.

The man struggled to defend his property; the speedboat was undoubtedly worth a lot considering that it was equipped with dual Samson engines. He soon backed off towards the stern as the Team Rocket garbed researcher held out the Mercury artifact and drew his gun. "Jump overboard now. Your life's more important than material goods…idiot."

"Make me, you criminal!" He stomped his foot on the boat as it lapped against the saturated docking boards. "You won't take me alive, this is my baby!"

He sighed. If he were being graded based on his first high profile robbery, he'd downright fail. "I said get off!" He lunged at the man and pushed him straight overboard with the butt of his Gauntlet. "Your life's more important than material goods...idiot."

"OOFFFF! Argh!" The balding man splashed around in the murky port water cursing obscenities at the young rocket. It didn't faze him; As he undid the docking ropes, he turned around and tossed the flailing boat owner one of his life preservers before spraying him with water from the engine's
The unrivaled power of Samson turbo engines propelled him out of the port in no time at all. One engine alone was fast enough to out run most aquatic Pokemon. Two was just overkill. The sea was fairly choppy but at these high speeds, it was difficult not be bounced around. Vermilion water was usually a lot warmer than this. The splashing of the cold water doused his face as he looked up to the afternoon sun. It was a warm day, and he was heading straight for the topics. Ducking under the shallow glass panel, he looked at the instrument panel. "ARMOS operating system and programming. Excellent." This was going to be a breeze, he just had to plug in coordinates and the speed-craft would get him there in no time. He typed in the Penta Island Research Facility's latitude and longitude for port deliveries. They'd never expect him to be coming back there so soon. All was going wonderfully according to plan. His plan.

"Estimated time of arrival is one hundred and fifty-seven minutes, Captain," the computer interface said through the speaker. Although loud, it was still muffled because of the tremendous roar coming from the dual Samson engines in the rear. He must have been traveling fast to make that kind of time. He'd be out of the Vermilion bay an into open waters in no time.

"Captain," he said with a smile. "I like the sound of that." Fixing his eyes on the sunlit tropical water ahead, he forced a laugh. Soon he'd be free.

The young man had begun to doze from the hot sun above when the instrumental panel began to alert him. "Incoming destination. Nautical approach imminent, switching to manual override," said the speakers. Daydreams of saving the Gardevoir had put him into a mild trance. The researcher swiftly gripped the steering wheel and guided the quick boat into a slower state. Sharp rocks on his left and right made him nervous, so he slowed the boat even further. The compound was built straight into a tall cliff face surrounded by water. As he exited the ocean and entered Penta Isle's western channel, he felt the old familiar chill he had gotten when he first arrived here for Evercrest. It was exciting for him to be a part of something so monumental at the time. The tropical aroma of the indigenous large flowering plants filled his nose.

How that excitement had worn off in recent times. He wasn't here to experiment, he was here to release one of the most tortured experiments from Cipher's clutches, and he was here to release himself from the guilt planted within him by Delta-two. The facility was within sight. Its large metal gates guarding the port separated acknowledging a visitor. A friendly visitor, one who had worked here long enough in the past.

The aquatic portcullis had the Evercrest symbol engraved on the bars. It was a sideways eight, the symbol for infinity with two symmetric wave crests on either hoop. Waves cascading into each other for eternity. It was a simple poetic statement made by a poet years ago, but he couldn't remember who had said it.

The rocking of the boat was no more than a slight lapping from the safe harbor of the Evercrest base. Entering the roofed dock, he gazed at all of the other assorted vehicles stationed here. Evercrest attracted numerous scientists and researchers from throughout the world. They came from Kanto, Johto, Hoenn, Orre, Sinnoh, and other far off places he had never even heard of, but the majority were from the Orre region; at least the ones from Orre were running the operation. As the once swift boat slowed to a toddle, he disembarked onto a dry dock coated with beige anti-slip material. Clutching the Reilken Mercurius and smiling, he entered the laboratory door. He knew just where to go.

The walk took him around the labyrinth, deep into the base. Along the way, he saw no one. They had all left for the day. How auspicious. The vile smell of cleaning agents stung his nose as he
entered the experimental section of the complex. How he wished he could have had those awful memories removed. However, it was not just the memories; it was the guilt which infested every fiber of his being.

Turning a corner and typing in his personal identification code and password into a wall mounted computer terminal, he waited for the massive door to open leading to the test subjects. It slid open vertically, splitting into thirds with a groan. Entering the dimly lit containment section, he walked past at least fifty of them. All were sleeping, moaning, or a combination of both. But he knew which one he was looking for. There was only one which had stood up to him. One who had managed to trap him under its curse.

Stopping outside of a cage not much larger than a changing room, he saw whom he had come here for. Delta-two. He glanced at the cage's electronic print of subject data.

"Subject Name: Delta-two
Species Name: Angelus Curator.
Lay Terminology Name: Gardevoir.
Original Type: Psychic
Gender: Male subject.
Date of Birth: Unknown.
Approximate Age: Seventeen years (young adulthood)
Origin: Penta (Chrono) Island, Sevii Isles of the Kanto Republic
Grafted Type: Dark (Progenitor E.X.)
Location of Graft(s): Limbic Ring, Ocular (2)
Comments: Poached on Penta. Found in habitat not native to species. High value on the evolutionary bell curve corresponding to elevated individual value. Demonstrated considerable resistance during capture. During initial testing, displayed incredible stamina prior to administration of Progenitor. Suppressed Psy-inhibitors and utilized minor short-wave telepathy prior to injection of local anesthetic. Following procedure, sight returned within forty-eight hours. Enhanced visual spectrum documented on day seven following Procedure. Suffered from acute high fevers and chronic delirium. Overcame mental trauma approximately seven weeks following the Procedure.
Concluding Words: Alteration successful."

"I'm here," he said to the caged Pokemon.

He saw the imprisoned creature move behind the thick steel bars coated in the most advanced psy-dampeners borrowed from Silph's Poké Ball technology. It slowly approached him, dragging itself on its knees. The white gown it wore was torn in numerous places. Its limbs were narrow and pale. As it opened its closed eyelids, he saw the glowing rings of light surrounding the irises. Those eyes. Those Progenitor infected eyes. The Gardevoir's natural scarlet eyes were separated from the white sclera by a thin golden light. It used them to stare into his soul once more.

"You'll receive no forgiveness from me. Not after what you've done to me," projected the peckish
Gardevoir through telepathy.

He thought about pressing the button to activate the cage's psy-inhibitors and shock the Pokemon with electrical currents, but he decided against it. This Pokemon had every right to be angry with him. The researcher's gaze darkened, his brow lowered, and he pulled his lips into his mouth. The day's activity had begun to wear on him, but this was his objective. He would not fail after coming so far. "I'm setting you free," he said, waving the Reilken Mercurius as if it were a baton.

"Free? How can I be free of this?" The lean Gardevoir pointed at its eyes, drawing small circles in the air with its large finger. "I'll never forget what you put me through."

"You don't understand. I've changed. I'm different now. I've changed my ways. I need to do this. Ever since you did that...thing to me before the operation." He hated the exposure. The vulnerability. The guiltiness imposed on him.

"So you liked seeing inside your charred soul? You miserable whelp. All I did was show you yourself. Don't sing me any praise for functioning as your mirror. You are a cruel being; guilt is an emotion you've had far too little of during your existence," said the Gardevoir as it rubbed the narrow red shard protruding out of the center of its chest.

He once again fought the urge to fight back. The creature was trying to get a reaction out of him. It was sneaky like that. When Gardevoir had control over your emotions, they could even control your body through latent short or long distance Psychic. But he was better than its petty taunts. Besides, by showing rage and harming the Gardevoir he would almost guarantee that he couldn't be forgiven and saved. "I can help release you. I can save you from remaining here. I have the power to," he looked down at the glowing jade-pronged device in his hand.

The Gardevoir gaze also turned to the Mercury Relic. Intrigued, it and sat up crossing its wire thin legs encased in thin white silken guards as it did so. "That? What is that?"

"The Reilken Mercurius," he said with pride. While usually a modest man, after all the work he had gone through to get his hands on the Mercury Relic he felt somewhat entitled. It wasn't easy to do, a little recognition would be nice.

"How will it release me?" asked the Pokemon.

The researcher shook his head and rubbed a hand through his bronzed hair. It had been blown around quite a bit by the sea breeze on the way to the laboratory. "I'll be the one to get you out. I have the controls to."

The Gardevoir fought back a smile and kept a stoic expression. "You owe me more than your life. You owe me more than anything you can give to me. You took me away from her."

Afraid it would say something like this; the man turned his back to the Gardevoir, "I can only offer you this one chance. If you do not accept, I shall slip away into obscurity, never to be seen again. They'll continue testing on you. Ceaselessly. They'll run experiments on you until you are nothing but a sack of blood. I can get you out if you help me. If you...stop whatever it was you did."

He heard a Psychic laugh, "You are slave to an emotion I've 'instanced' onto you. That's why you are here. If you left now, then there would be no absolution. Nothing would change. You'd come crawling back here begging for the same thing. Maybe it would be a day from now, maybe a week, maybe even a year, but you'd be back. The real question is—as you so eloquently brought up—will I still be here to release you from instanced guilt?"
The Pokemon spoke the truth. The entire reason he was even back here was because of the guilt which haunted him day after day, each night before he went to bed, and whenever he looked into a mirror at himself. By releasing this Gardevoir, he had hoped to be rid of the spell or the "instancing" Delta-two had made a reference to.

"Do you have a name?" asked the researcher.

"Of course I do." His tone was ripe with resonating emotion. "But only one may call me by it. Who are you?"

He opened his mouth, ready to reveal his name, it was a shame he didn't get to tell Tim, but telling the Pokemon he'd injured might make this all a little easier. "I'm…my name is—"

"I know who you are, I was speaking rhetorically," cut off the Gardevoir. "Though why you shield yourself behind deception confuses me. Don't fool yourself; you're no one."

He could say nothing to the creature as it rhythmically stroked its mint green hair from within the cage.

"I've suffered because of you." It bowed its rounded head, smooth and clear of imperfection, "In fact, you're the one who took me away from her."

Uneasily, the researcher twisted the ball of his foot on the floor outside of the cage. "I can lead you out of here," he nervously used up the last bit of leverage he had left. "So that you can be with your mate again. You'd—you'd want that, no?"

"Oh?" The creature sighed with faint satisfaction. "Then don't speak of intentions. Do it. Fulfill your role."

Excitedly, the researcher hastily pressed the cage door sequence on the monitor screen. A dull warning began to sound. "Containment cell eighty-four opening in Block Delta. Please stand clear and take protective measures to insure safety!" He quickly turned back to the terminal and cleared the history of his most recent login. Computers weren't his specialty, but his brief stay with the Rockets had taught him how to leave a cold technological trail.

The bars squeaked open. The Gardevoir within stretched its body and gracefully bounded out, hardly making any noise. Its tattered gown, shredded and tearing followed its elegant figure. The frayed edges barely reached beyond the Pokemon's knees, exposing its skinny white-garment encased legs. Its clothing ran down to the Pokemon's knees, straight and not billowing at any point. The fabric reminded him of frayed paneled curtains, its torn composition undoubtedly a consequence of Evercrest. Despite its malnourishment, the Pokemon seemed to be rapidly gaining vigorous stamina. It was to be expected, Gardevoir could 'feed' off of the serotonin of others through empathy after all.

The Pokemon rushed next to him and brought its large eyes to meet his own. Then its smiled, bringing its red shard-like horn close to his arm. The researcher felt it brush against his bicep through the thick black standard issue Rocket uniform. It made him uncomfortable to be next to a creature of such resentment.

The Gardevoir stood at about his height, perhaps a few inches shorter. The Pokemon exhaled softly, humming a high-pitched cry. It was eager to escape from the confined prison the researcher had shackled him within. Nevertheless, strangely enough, the Pokemon had a way of binding his captor. Through the emotion of guilt, it had secured his aid during this hour of flight from Evercrest.
The researcher did not budge a muscle. He just opened his mouth and slowly said, "Follow me."

The creature nodded its head, blinking its haloed eyes and backing away from him. As its red shard left the man's uniform, he shuddered from an unprecedented chill. Pokemon were so strange sometimes. They weren't quite animals, but sometimes they acted even more human than most people. Warily, he gripped his Gauntlet and drew the weapon. An action that did not go unnoticed by the Gardevoir.

He ran at a brisk pace, the Reilken Mercurius gleaming at his side, its jade spine nearly brushing the floor as he ran. It was as if it were an extension of his arm since he'd never let it go of its alluring chakram-like handle. Behind him, he heard the soft taps of the Gardevoir's tipped feet, keeping perfect tempo with him. The two ran down the corridor towards a route leading to the south-west of the base. Coming to a fork, they ran right. Each passing second seemed like an eternity. No one was here at all; everything had gone in his favor, but why such serendipity? How could it be this easy?

They arrived at the main gate. Standing by its controls was a scientist garbed in a lab coat similar to the one he had worn during the beginning of the day. The man jumped hearing another person approach. Expecting to only see one figure, he was stunned to behold a Gardevoir behind him. The Pokemon had moved like a shadow.

Austerely, the Gardevoir ordered, "Kill him."

"No." He turned his head to meet the Pokemon's distraught face next to him.

It softly chuckled, "Aw but why?"

"I'm not an executioner. I'm not your executioner!" he replied to the Pokemon's icy expression.

"What are you doing here!?" exclaimed the Cipher scientist in bewilderment. "What is that Pokemon doing out of its cage?!

"Then I'll do it for you!" The Gardevoir raised its slender arm and pointed it at the man guarding their exit.

"Don't!" yelled the researcher, half expecting Delta-two to unleash a Psychic attack. To his surprise, his own arm had been raised in unison by the Pokemon's Psychic control. "N—No!" In opposition, he desperately tried to fight the Psychic force and lower the weapon. But he couldn't defy, the longer he held his stance the more he became enthralled by bliss. Where was it coming from? And then he realized, he'd fallen into the creature's eyes, causing hypnotic control of his body!

"We're going to do this together, cooperate!"

"S—stop!" But he was too weak. The ecstasy his body felt from compliance was second to none. Every second he mimicked the Gardevoir, it transmitted a powerful dose of bliss-inducing neurotransmitters; it had captured him by using floods of 'instanced' emotion to manipulate his body like a puppet. In other words, just staring at the creature gave it the ability to control actions through brought upon feelings of euphoria. It only took three surges before his body completely gave in. His narrow index finger brushed against the trigger against his volition, and the weapon went off with a loud "Click!" and "Bang!" The echo resonated throughout the long hallway.

The other scientist clutched at his gut where he had been shot. "Guh…"

The Gardevoir laughed softly. "Nice shot."
The researcher gasped in horror. "What have you done?!" A pounding headache accompanied the smoking gun, he felt mentally exhausted from the massive releases of serotonin he'd endured.

"The mechanism fits your philosophy." Sensing emotion, the Pokemon grinned, revealing white teeth. "I understand why you use such devices; they're just perfect for your overly antsy human fingers—primitive, but effective. How comfortable you must feel holding it; in fact, I can derive a sense of your comfort through you. Isn't empathy a wonderful thing?"

"No! You used it to take control over me! I won't let you tell me what to do!"

"Your mind might say no at first, but that will change." Before the researcher could tend to the man he had shot, the Pokemon ordered that they be off before anyone else arrived. "Leave him, or else you'll find yourself killing more of them when they arrive." The green-eyed researcher wanted to comply; he was unwilling to take any more lives. And he didn't want to be put under the control of a Pokemon.

Nodding, the young man took one last look at the scientist, now wearing a crimson stained lab-coat. Who was he? He didn't recognize him. Probably some newcomer to Evercrest. No one important. Or at least no one he knew. The guilt of taking one life was enough. Thankfully, he hadn't known the dead man's background or his history. "I hope that he didn't have a family," whispered the researcher.

The Gardevoir turned his head and tilted it ever so slightly, squinting its eyes as it did so. "Care to find out?" it asked him with a roguish grin.

The stiffly posed researcher remained completely silent, unwilling to answer the offer or press the issue of how he was beginning to feel.

"You're slowly becoming quite the compassionate one!" Delta-two exclaimed with a smirk. "What a marvelous transformation."

"N—no," the researcher stammered out, "I was just thinking aloud. No more killing."

"That's what you think."

"Listen to me!" He pointed his revolver at the Gardevoir. "I'm not going to kill anyone! You forced me to. That wasn't me!"

The Gardevoir's eyes became blanketed in a coat of scarlet as it approached the researcher whose cement shoes had not budged since his firing of the Gauntlet. With a slight "tap-tap", its pointed feet, sheathed in white fabric, graced the tiled floor as it basically floated up to him. As it came close to him, he struggled to fight the sedation of happiness being imposed onto him. The Pokemon then stretched its back and raised its lanky arms beyond its head, rubbing its petite biceps on either side of its balled up mint green hair. It smiled when it sensed him shudder. "Suppose that wasn't you back at the Pokemon Sanctum either. That particular rocket who commanded the Pokemon to Self-Destruct certainly was a wicked man after all, unlike you. Haahhh," it said through telepathy. "Electrode have a nasty tendency to leave messes only undertakers will touch."

"N—No. I—I have no idea what you are talking about," stammered the researcher. What was he thinking though? Who was he kidding? He had executed the rockets in the Sanctum! They were trying to kill him though. Weren't they? What was happening to him? Then he saw the Pokemon smile and the aura covering its eyes dissipate.

The Gardevoir lowered its hands and leered at the researcher's Gauntlet. "I'd stow that device if I
were you. You're empty.” As the Gardevoir said it, his hand gracefully placed the firearm back into its holster. He wasn't sure if he had done it or the Pokemon, but it felt like a unified motion. Almost as if his mind had been absent from the decision due to the merger of minds.

"Eugh…” he murmured as his body slowly complied to the will of the Gardevoir. The Pokemon promised bliss in exchange for obedience.

"Good boy," it said with a smirk.

"…!" He wanted to counter the taunting Gardevoir, but instead he bit his tongue and puckered his lips. Sure enough, his firearm was empty. In his head, he did a quick recount of the shots he had taken. Six total. However, he still had the Reilken Mercurius. Delta-two had no idea about its potential. Or at least he hoped the Psychic Pokemon didn't know. He remained silent, posed in a similar position to the Gardevoir.

"Go. Now," the Pokemon ordered. "Lead the way, you have more meat on you than me."

"Fine." Running to the western exit, the pair climbed up various grated ramps and past partially opened gates. Up ahead, past the few external windows in this facility was the exit. He thought he heard the Pokemon say something under his breath. His head turned while still in transit and his pace slowed. The Gardevoir slowed down in unison with him. Its eyes pierced his essence and he felt compelled to look away from the creature. Taking a deep breath, he felt oddly lightheaded. He was starting to sweat. It had been a long day for the young man. It didn't matter though, they were almost there. A sign above a bulky metal door read, "Exit to Peak—High Altitude”. Another computer terminal sat situated in the wall. Swiftly, the researcher typed his password and the door hissed open, revealing the beautiful scenery. The sun was just about to set over the western side of the island.

As they left the facility, the tropical air filled their lungs. The man almost wished that he could go back indoors just to experience the comforts of air conditioning. He looked over at the Gardevoir. "There, I saved you…See?"

The Pokemon looked back at him and frowned. "Hardly." It shrugged and began to move off into the foliage of thick vegetation towards the departing light of the sun.

"Wait! Where are you going?!" he asked the fleeing creature. It refused to answer so he followed it. He had redeemed himself; there was no reason for this to go on any longer. As his Team Rocket uniform brushed against the soft leafy plants, he felt the moisture seep through. Considering how well off the Rockets were, they should have made these things weatherproof.

Pushing the tropical plants aside, he saw why the Gardevoir had been in such a rush to leave. Standing next to Delta-two was another Gardevoir, obviously female, judging from her more stitched together dress, visible curves, and longer lashes. Her smile and soft posture greeted his more wayward features in beautiful contrast. The two embraced tightly. He put his arms around her and she tightly reciprocated around him. Their legs crossed and they began to speak to one another, their susurration a foreign tongue to the researcher. He watched the spectacle for a few moments in utter disbelief. A few times, they would move their arms interlocking them as they "spoke". It was all very foreign. He had only seen Pokemon in a laboratory setting. He didn't know the first thing about their relations in the wild. Although he understood little about the concept, one thing was for sure beyond all doubt: they were in love. What had he done?

Eventually, the male pushed the female back and looked back over at the amber haired man whose green eyes had begun to grow swollen from the emotional scene. "Turn around. And leave now."
"No." He dug his foot into the soil to make a stand, "Not until you absolve me of guilt! Take this spell away!

The younger female looked at the male quizzically. He seemed to explain something to her, and she gasped, placing her two delicate hands above her tiny mouth.

The male Gardevoir looked at him with the sternness of a father he never had, "You'll bear that guilt until you die, wicked human."

"WHAT?!" he yelled. "NO! I saved you! I trusted you. You told me...you lied to me!"

"I never promised you anything, fool. It was you who thought you could change your fate by appeasing me!" the Pokemon said as it shut its eyes and shook his head. "I used you."

"No, it cannot be—"

"Ha, such naivety. How unfortunate for you. If you didn't want to be exposed to such guilt then you should have thought more about the potential consequences when you signed up for the vile organization which did this to me. You could have lived a blissful life. You could have made yourself into anything, and you chose the way of evil. It's all so simple in retrospect, isn't it?" the Gardevoir said whilst wrapping his hands together.

"No..." he said. He couldn't do this. His palms began to sweat furiously. "You have to forgive me! Take back whatever you did! I demand it! Release me from the guilt!"

The creature laughed. "Ha! You DEMAND it? How typical. Always so selfish. Using others for personal gain. You humans are all the same...you delude yourselves into believing that you are individualized rationally autonomous beings, when in fact you plague the world with your universal self-centeredness. How appropriate for this to be your punishment. Heh..." His laugh was mischievous, filled with scorn.

The female Gardevoir looked at her partner with disapproval. She said something to him, and the two began to argue. Their telepathic speech was riddled with various audible murmurs. She rose her hands a few times and traced his facial lines. Then she looked over at the Pokemon researcher, "You wish to be forgiven by my mate?" Her voice was gentle and restrained. Kind even. Perhaps she had some sympathy he could take advantage of.

"Yes. I...need to be. You have no idea. The guilt. I carry it everywhere with me. It courses through my veins, chafing my essence away. I'm sorry," he bent down on his knees, "please. Have mercy."

She looked at her mate with sensitively quivering cherry red eyes, "Seph..."

But the other Gardevoir simply shook his head in disgust, "He did this to himself. I saw his past. He's trying to use you. He's never been in a state of helplessness before and because of that, he's frightened. I'm showing him what it feels like to be powerless."

"You know what emotions can do," she tenderly spoke, "you know what they've done to others. You know what they've done to some of our own. You know what they've done to the Ashiel family. Don't let hatred cloud your sense of morality. I—I don't want this."

"Sana, you are mistaken. This human is no more worthy of life than the Dark types that roam our homeland. If I let you see the atrocious things he did to me in that facility, you would understand. Out of love, I keep such memories repressed. But you need to understand he should have known the price of evil."
She shook her head, "What I understand is that you are vengeful. Vengeance won't change the past. He still might have a future that you are inhibiting."

"He has nothing but his selfish ambitions. No family. No code. No ties to anyone but himself. The only thing that drove him to do any good was the gift of guilt I imparted onto his repulsive soul."

"Instancing is made for us to use in defense. Humans cannot bear it, their minds are too fragile. They are like us remember? At least...stop the instancing, please Seph," the female asked. "Don't let him die in guilt. Show him how to do what's right in life."

"It's too late to be teaching lessons, Sana," said the male Gardevoir, "The serum he injected into my eyes was not meant for me to bear! This man has done more harm than good and must be punished!"

"He's not yours to judge. We're together now Sephiteos thas Relius. The rest of this doesn't matter. You said yourself that our love transcended all obstacles. Don't let this mere human break everything we've fought for."

"It's not over, Sanaria," said the male as his hand began to shake.

"Yes. It is over," she hugged him tightly. "We're safe now, Seph. We're together again."

The man held Reilken Mercurius in his hand unsure of what to do or say. Why were they allowing him to hear their conversation?

"Fine. You want it to end?" asked the Gardevoir as he broke from his partner's embrace.

The researcher flinched, not expecting cooperation. "Y—yes."

Sensing his apprehension, the male Gardevoir turned away from his mate and glared at him. "I will...release you...human."

His pupils dilated as he saw the Gardevoir approach him. The Pokemon's stride slowed as he neared the cowering researcher. He was always mystified about how this species managed to balance themselves so well. It had something to do with acute gravitational manipulation. But all that didn't matter. Soon he'd be released and rid of ever encountering Pokemon again. Excitedly, he made a closed mouth smile. Freedom from guilt was almost here.

The graceful male sensed his hope. He had sensed it far before the man broadcasted it on his face. It reached out a three-fingered hand. The researcher grasped the Pokemon's palm. It pulled him up to his feet using a combination of muscle and telepathy.

Standing up next to the prisoner he had released, the Gardevoir studied his tormentor, releasing his sweaty palm. The tropical wind began to pick up. The researcher's gaze began to wander. He looked down for a few seconds. First at the soil, then noticing the creature's tattered gown was brushing against his uniform's bottoms in the breeze, he looked back up. He expected it to move, blink, or do something. Anything. But its contemplating face continued to not gaze at him nor past him, but through him. He fidgeted with the hand not holding the Mercury Relic by rubbing his index finger against his thumb. Back and forth, back and forth.

However, the creature just kept staring at him. Deep into his green eyes. Relentlessly. He tried to gaze back in response, yet he could not focus on the Gardevoir's scarlet eyes. There was too much hatred within them. Hatred he had placed there. Hatred he had injected there. He nervously looked past the three small clips on the side Pokemon's face at his female mate. She must have encouraged him to show mercy. Upon seeing this, the male turned around to look at his partner and
then back to the Pokemon researcher.

The Gardevoir whimsically peered at his own hand as he slowly rotated its three fingers about. "This is what you want?" it said through closed lips.

Shuddering, the Pokemon researcher exclaimed, "Take the cursed spell off of me! I cannot tolerate the guilt for any longer. You have to let me go. Please...let me live."

A silken tendril of Psychic energy extended from the Gardevoir's hand reaching down to the soft earth, curling slightly as it did so. The Pokemon's eyes began to glow a deep scarlet. The center of the thread-like substance was a rich dark navy, yet it was surrounded by a light cyan aura. A vine of pure Psychic power, it followed the movements of the Gardevoir's delicate hand effortlessly.

"Don't worry. I won't," the Pokemon said as its large haloed eyes, coated in a red psychic shield, followed the ebb and flow of the slender lash. "Didn't you know that you were a dead human from the moment you released me?"

He gasped, "No! What?" But he froze up in disbelief. What did this mean? He was going to be killed? He had done everything the Pokemon had asked him to do. Was it all for naught?

The Gardevoir turned around and faced the setting sun over the cliff. Down below, a distant echo of the ocean waves could be heard crashing against the rock formation. "You see, I was trying to figure out when you would stop being helpful to me. Your particular use ended a while ago, when we exited that despicable laboratory," he said. The male's shrill telepathic thoughts frightened the young man. "But I let you live longer than that. Do you want to know why?"

He couldn't bring himself to say anything. There was no response capable of surmounting the sudden shock.

"Did you think I felt bad? Did you think I felt empathy?" The male's expression was hidden as he walked away slower than usual. "No...I didn't let you live past your time out of mercy. Not out of sympathy. You closed those avenues of...feelings...off when you injected that serum into my eyes."

"Seph!" The female Gardevoir grabbed his arm and tried to pull her mate back, but he pushed her aside with impunity. "Seph, no!" She tumbled down to the ground as he continued to walk towards the orange majesty beyond the edge of the cliff.

The Pokemon's persistent march towards the edge of the rock face went uninterrupted for the next three steps, the whip of Psychic energy gracefully following it. "I just wanted you to see what it was that you tore me away from. Who it was. My Sanaria. I wanted you to see her unyielding kindness. I want you to know that she would even be able to forgive a sullied human like yourself. I want you to know you tore me away from this love. And before I execute you, I'd like for you to feel that desire, and the awful pain you've brought into this world..."

"Sephiteos!" called the female Gardevoir.

"...But most of all, I want to make you feel false hope. It's the closest experience a human can have to wholesome emotion. Your species as a whole has a rather limited array of emotional perception and it is quite a shame. Imagine what you could do if you were more in touch to them...your understanding of life would be enriched beyond words. But I digress; here I am telling a helpless corpse how nice it is to read."

"You can't do this, you won't do it. She doesn't want you to! She won't allow you to do this to me!" shouted the researcher. He pointed towards the female.
Gazing out towards the tapestry of colors in the evening sky, the male Gardevoir continued, still not making eye contact with anything but the setting sun. "Hope is a marvelous contraption. For you see, hope is one of the strongest feelings a human being can have. Why, I would dare to say that possessing hope has allowed for individuality to be prosperous along your evolutionary road. It allows you to do incredible things, overcome impossible odds, and even pave the way for love. But when hope is torn away from you, it bizarrely becomes your own undoing, paving the way to death."

"Seph, don't!" the other Gardevoir shouted through her telepathy.

But it was too late, the Gardevoir, in its emotional rage, drew his hand over his head, raising the tendril of mental energy back and over the cliff. "How very…unfortunate for you."

"NO!" yelled the Pokemon researcher as the Gardevoir whipped the Psychic lash down towards him. He quickly raised the Reikken Mercurius to try to stop from himself from being cleaved in two by the strand. He desperately yearned for its marvelous power of light to halt the Gardevoir. Yet it wasn't glowing any longer. It was as if its power had been used up and only a physical shell remained. But its solid emerald material was still able to block the whip by causing the energy strand to coil around the spike, spiraling down until it met the center of the ring. Both Gardevoir looked confused. The male tugged back on the lash with a flick of the wrist, but it did not return to him.

"You deceived me!" hollered the man, his face askew with anguish. "I'll kill you and make sure you'll never live another day with your precious mate! You're done! Gaaaaaaaah!" Screaming, he rushed at his experiment, raising the spear to chest level. The Pokemon tried to move, but the connected tendril of energy restricted his flight by wrapping tighter around the relic. The wire of energy became tighter and thicker as the researcher approached the cliff. The Gardevoir desperately tried to unshackle itself from the Mercury Relic's possessive draw; it pulled using both hands, frantically trying to undo the extra-physical bondage, trying to release itself.

But it didn't take long. The charging man, full of resentment, took the spike and impaled the Gardevoir. It strangely made no noise as it dug into the Pokemon's narrow frame. Neither a crunch, nor a piercing noise. Everything became eerily quiet. And then an ear-splitting screech filled his entire head. The sudden uncomfortable sound made the green-eyed researcher twist the weapon. The Gardevoir's psychic scream softened as he did so.

He heard the female shriek in terror from behind him. But he didn't care. His bright green eyes were fixated on Delta-two's frightened face. Thoroughly enjoying his victim's change in expression, he laughed as the primal weapon sunk deeper into the wound. "If you…wanted…" he grunted and held the Pokemon's thin shoulder as he continued to burrow the weapon in. "If you wanted to be with her…you should have thought twice about crossing a human. I might die in guilt, but you'll never be able to be with her again." He nudged the weapon further and narrowed his eyes. "How does that feel?! You…you emotion-controlling-witch…!!"

"Aah…" The arm's length protrusion was nearly fully embedded in the motionless Pokemon's torso. However, it did not exit the Gardevoir's posterior. The Gardevoir gasped and looked down at where it had been punctured. Straight into the heart. It only had moments left before the remaining energy present in its chest shard would be expended. "No…" it whimpered.

"Now neither of us will get what we want, no thanks to y—!" The researcher gasped as the device further sunk into the Pokemon's torso. The brilliant spectacle of the purple and orange sunset behind the creature momentarily captured his entire attention.

"Huuhhh…" the Gardevoir weakly sighed, and wobbled limply into the researcher's clutch. He
unwillingly caught the Pokemon as it fell into his grasp, its light head resting on his bony shoulder with a faint thump.

As he stood there, transfixed upon the sight of a dying Pokemon, the Mercury Relic's base shone brightly. Its physical characteristics began to melt. Its form began to rapidly change from within the Pokemon it had impaled. Undergoing atrophy, it dripped and oozed liquid silver, pouring out of the dying Gardevoir's body. The runny metal spilled out as if it had been the Pokemon's blood, coating the man's chest with its lustrous sleek. As the shining warm mixture of liquid metal fell upon his uniform, he felt it burn as if it had scalded his skin. He shouted in pain and winced his eyes instinctually. He pulled hard on the Mercury Relic only to find that the jade shaft had disappeared within the Pokemon. As he tugged, the Gardevoir's wound opened up further leaking out more of the mysterious substance.

"What the devil?!" he asked in bewilderment. The Gardevoir was bleeding out too fast, and this noxious amalgamation of metal and blood seemed to be burning straight through his clothing. The man pushed the Pokemon away; he had to get it off him. Taking the arm not holding the relic, he tried to push the Gardevoir off whatever was left of Reilken Mercurius and down the cliff behind it. He only succeeded in pushing the Pokemon, for the draw of the relic kept his hand attached to its now semi-liquid hilt just barely attached to the violently erupting wound.

The Gardevoir vigorously worked in tandem with him, trying to release itself from the relic's imbedded clutch by using its remaining strength to pull away from his captor in a last act of free will.

The torrid goo continued to splash against the researcher, making him desperate to be rid of the Pokemon's body. He gasped, feeling his skin coil in agony beneath his uniform.

"ARRRRGGGGGGGGHHHHHHHHH! OFF! Get it off!" he screamed wide-eyed and afraid.

With a great heave, he pushed the creature away from him, but he couldn't detach his hand from the ancient artifact. His hand refused to relinquish whatever was left of the rapidly degrading Reilken Mercurius. He had fought too hard for it; even the inexplicable burning pain from Delta-two's body could not convince him to release the relic. As he saw the body of Delta-two fall in front of him first, he felt himself falling too, his sight went black in an instant as heated liquid covered his eyes in a splash of psychedelic colors.

Images and colors soared through his eyes as he fell, unable to tell which way was up and which way was down. It seemed like he was falling for hours. Gusts of upsetting wind whistled past his ears and through his hair. The shallow waters and sharp rocks below would certainly be his doom, if the impact with the water itself didn't kill him. It would probably be like hitting a cement floor from this height. Not even the Gardevoir's body could break that fall. As he waited for the seemingly infinite drop to end, he thought of all things people think of when they know they are going to die. He thought about an afterlife. Was there even an afterlife? He imagined what it would be like. What would he do with all of that time eternity promised?

He heard a dull splash from above, and his consciousness raced back to life. He had hit the water, yet didn't feel anything. It was like being in a daze. Nearly knocked out from the impact, he felt his body rise to the surface. As his face felt cool air against his wet face, he began to gasp in convulsions. His lungs greedily pulled in tropical air. What had just happened? How did he survive that drop? He wondered if he had an out of body experience. Coughing, he tried to swim, but couldn't see where he was. Dark lukewarm water covered his face. Something sharp scraped his leg. Must have been one of the pointed rocks at the base of the cliff meaning he was close to land. Still unable to see, he let the tide gradually push him inland. Then he felt his head hit sand as one of the more forceful waves tossed him to the shore.
The salty water had gotten in his eyes or something because he was unable to rid himself of a burning sensation. His knees touched the mushy sand. Reaching his shaking hands up, he rubbed his eyes. It was like he was looking through a kaleidoscope. The collage of colors overwhelmed him as he massaged the closed lids. Opening his eyes, he looked around. Colors zoomed around in an innumerable amount of patterns.

Eventually the light brown tones of a narrow beach came into sight. He was definitely on a beach. The wet sand below him rubbed between his toes as he tried to gain footing so the next wave wouldn't overtake him. He must have lost his shoes in the water. The dimly lit shore was completely vacant. No sign of anything other than the usual island fauna. The sun had set, and the moon shone down from above, covering the world in flecks of hoary. As far as he could tell, he was alone.

He looked down at his hand which once possessed the Mercury Relic. It still had the scrape mark on it from the Pokemon Sanctum Robbery, but the artifact itself was gone. He must have lost it in the fall along with his shoes. Maybe it was still embedded in the body of Delta-two. None of it mattered any more. He tried to lift himself up, but couldn't find the strength to. Using his quivering arms, he lifted his back up to sit so that the incoming waves wouldn't cover his face.

Panting loudly, he ran his hand down into the sand beneath the shallow water. The coarse material brushed softly against his palm, melting as the water mixed with it.

"What...happened?" He didn't know what he had done. But he had killed Delta-two. He didn't feel as guilty any longer. Had the hex been broken? Perhaps slaying the Gardevoir ended the so-called 'instancing'. It was over. Finally, he was set free.

Smiling, he lifted up his leg, and bent it up to his chest. As he did so, immeasurable pain rocketed throughout his entire body. He twitched and threw his head back in disgust. Vision blurred and faded. Scarlet images doused his perception.

Swearing loudly, he rolled over onto all fours. He crawled away from the water, back up towards the land. His slow procession through the shallow tide filled every muscle and joint with agony. He felt pain in places he didn't even know had nerve receptors. Every movement jolted him with soreness. His Team Rocket uniform was absolutely saturated and heavy on him. It and his undershirt had been torn up in various parts, exposing some of his beige skin. That burning liquid must have seeped through. Like acid, it had eaten straight through his clothing.

He pressed a finger into one of the tears and touched his skin, expecting to find his epidermis charred or something because of all the heat his chest now radiated. It hadn't been thankfully, but was warm to the touch even though the cool water and wet uniform caressed him. Feeling feverish, he shivered. He hoped the feeling would pass. He needed to find civilization amid this delirious state. Where could he go? Back to the laboratory? How could explain what happened?

He coughed, feeling warmth in his throat and tasting coppery blood in his mouth. Spitting up the awful liquid, his stomach lurched and he felt as if he was going to be ill. Wiping the thick substance off his shallow chin, he closed his mouth and tried to fight the urge. His entire stomach churned and ached. Groaning, he held his abdomen. His bent over posture seemed conducive to vomiting, but a sudden tight tug on his back muscles pulled his head up quickly before he could hurl and release the vile contents.

He heard the snap of a twig up ahead. The researcher looked up in fright, his neck muscles aching as he did so. It was the other Gardevoir. Her familiar form approached him swiftly, her immaculate white dress cutting through the dark night. Her face showed no more pity and no more remorse. It was as if he now looked upon an entirely different creature. One without sympathy. One without
kindness. And it was to be expected. He had committed an inexcusable action. He had killed her mate.

The Gardevoir raised her hand and pointed at him. A small orb of dark energy appeared in her palm, pulsating violet waves as it floated in midair. She'd have absolutely unimpeded control over his body in a matter of moments.

He reached for his gun, but his holster had been taken away by the waves. It wouldn't have helped anyway, all of his ammunition was used up. He was completely without power. "Wait…" He grasped down for something; anything. His hands raced along his uniform's contour; there was nothing left in the tattered clothing. Shaking his head, he cursed; he was stripped of all his devices. No Gauntlet, no Mercury Relic, no Poké Balls, not even a flimsy pocketknife. His execution was now inevitable. She would continue to make it as painful as possible.

"What have you done?" she firmly asked. He was sure she knew. She didn't expect him to answer. She was trying to cope with what had happened.

He continued to shake his head, but pain from within caused his neck to stiffen. "I…I…" his voice cracked and turned to simple exhales. His legs tightened and he felt locked in place. Was she taking over him? Is this what it felt like to confront death? "Aaaahhhhhhhhhhhhh!" he shouted in disarray.

"You…killed him." Her stoic expression did not change as she winced her eyes shut, closing off telepathic communication as she did so. "You killed Seph…"

He tried to scream again as the pain escalated to new unfathomable heights, but he could not vocalize any sound. The terror was too much. He could only gasp in rapid convulsions. "Haaaaaaaa…! Haaa …! …!"

Amid all of this fright was a new pain originating from his center. Strange sensations jolted his insides. All the while, he saw the Gardevoir staring at him, her glare tightened as he continued to jolt and buckle from the possessive agony. It had spread throughout his entire figure. Recoiling from the pain, his body went limp for a moment. All noise around him ceased and his heartbeat made the only sound, its elevating thumping a crescendo of organic percussion.

The entire world was shaking with his tremors. He couldn't keep a straight gaze. Everything was rocking. The maddening dizziness brought himself to his knees and he looked up at the approaching black clouds. They danced around the moon and veiled all but the brightest stars. The excruciating pain returned, confiding in his chest.

"AHHHGGGGGHHHHHH!" His vocal cords split and tremendous sound burst out. "AAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHRRRRRRGGGGGGGH HHHHHHHH!" he continued to scream as if he were being split open. His body arched back. It wouldn't stop, the harrowing throbbing persisted. It drove into him, it broke him, it shattered very his essence. He felt his neck bend all the way back. There was nothing he could do anymore; he was being possessed by the mate of Delta-two's newfound vengeance. Paralyzed, all he could do was look up at the dark clouds above as his emerald eyes dilated from torture. The first droplets of slight rainwater touched his face. She was going to kill him by overwhelming his brain with more sensation than it could handle through emotion.

The man's body grew stiff; it was no longer just his arms and legs, but all parts of him. Every last fiber of his body stung with the resonating anguish. He exerted all of his physical energy to see the source of his convulsions. Slowly, bending his neck down to look ahead, he saw the female Gardevoir looking at him in confusion. The orb of thick dark energy once in her palm dissolved.
Her mouth filled with awe and she softly lowered her arm below her waist. How could that be? Wasn't she the one exerting this Psychic torment upon him? Another cascade of painful aggravation caused him to take his eyes off her and peer down at where he felt the unbearable trauma.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHH! ARRRGGGHHHHHHHHHHHHH! NOOO!" he yelled in excruciating pain as a small red shard pieced out of his black uniform, splitting through the snug fabric. The thin, crescent shaped projection cleaved straight through the "R" in the center. It was a flat crystal of crimson, a translucent glass that riled him with pain by splitting clear out of his chest, tearing skin and bone as the new anatomy amassed cellular control over its host. He screamed louder and violently twisted his head back in rage as it continued to bring him unbearable discomfort. His eyes rolled backwards and he collapsed, his hands extending to break the short fall.

With a "thump!" he fell into the silky white sand, which plumbed up in dusty clouds reflected by the moon.

But it was far from over. Rather than feel relief from surges of warmth radiating out of the crystal, each new pulse brought unfiltered agony along with the gradual expulsion of the shard. With every breath, every heartbeat, it pushed out further to the man's disgust. What was this madness? A curse? "DAMMIT!" he cried. Its slim form inched outwards from his chest's center creating unspeakable levels of torture. He brought his hands to it in effort to resist it, to push it back and stop the pain, but it radiated such heat that he could not keep his hands upon it for long. Recoiling, he brought his fingers down to where the narrow vertical metal had torn out of his body. The tissue around it was soft and warm, his skin joined to the base of the material, as if it were a part of him ejecting from his sternum bone. At first, the base felt semi-liquid, almost like quicksilver, but it soon solidified into what represented a seamless connection between two organisms. It was far from gentle, even with an increased concentration of neurotransmitters the physical agony made him feel as though he would explode; flames had been cast into his torso, filling his ribcage with horrendous burning that longed to be freed. He would have preferred death to this experience. His arms shot backwards, his mouth hung open in disbelief. Once again, he involuntarily cast his head all the way back, and felt the rest of his body follow in suit. Arching fully past his normal stretch, he could not bear any more, and still the conquering shard forced outwards and upwards for all to see.

The female Gardevoir ran over to him, and caught his body before he fell backwards. She held him in her hands, allowing his head to rest in her lap. He looked up, and his eyes met hers. She gently placed her palm against his forehead. Instantly, he felt calm. It was if all the pain had been sent through a strain and was very distant from him. All of his senses tightened focus and mellowed out. The taste of blood in his mouth had been replaced with briny warmth. He smelled the coastal fauna and the Gardevoir's faint aroma. The silken fabric of her gown brushed against his hair. He heard the softness of the shallow ocean water lapping against the seashore. His eyes, now more focused, looked up at her own. Her warm scarlet eyes were precious, so full of patina and comfort. Feeling lost inside her gaze, everything that had happened began to fade away. He attempted to murmur a "thank you", but the right words to use seemed to escape him. "Huh…?" He had forgotten what he was trying to say. Everything was fading. Colors and images began to retreat to the peripherals of his dimming sight. He could not remember what he was doing here. Where was he? Who was he? What was he? The questions filled his consciousness with unease, but the Gardevoir's brilliantly beautiful eyes appeased even that terrible anxiety.

She nodded at him, as his eyelids grew heavy and weary. Who was she? Her face was gorgeous. He felt himself being pulled down, far below consciousness into a well of Lethe.
Amid the nebulous swirl of color and sensation, her two brightly shining eyes remained his focal point.

Those pristine eyes embraced him.
Christian Feyera, the man whose past had remained a cloudy enigma until this very moment, found himself gazing into the beautiful red cherry eyes of the same Gardevoir. Two long years separated them from locking eyes. Distance separated their gaze from reunion. Time presided as their cleaver, splitting them apart throughout the months that followed Operation Semblance. Yet time was not the enemy. For time was merely the means rather than an end in itself. The enemy had been within the entire time. Tears fell. Hearts broke. Ambitions of freedom and love shattered, while nothing seemed able to endure. And yet those eyes remained unchanged. For there was still something there. Something recognizable. The familiarity was far greater than anything else he had ever felt prior to this climatic moment.

Gasping, Feyera fell backwards. The sheer shock, the inexplicable nature of the entire string of events...his mind just couldn't take it. He slipped and fell away from her, stumbling back. His rear planted down on the wet ground. For such a short fall, it actually hurt. He felt pain from shock in his lower back. He lay there, not at rest, but in tremendous cognitive dissonance. As his tense muscles relaxed, he saw that he had been sitting down next to the Gardevoir. How could it have been this way? The researcher, the Rockets, and the two Gardevoir. Was this slew of events really his own? Why? What had he done to deserve this? How did he wind up working as a Pokemon researcher in such a despicable setting? Evercrest? Cipher? Team Rocket? There had to be something more to the story he thought.

Kneeling down, her arms outstretched to help him back up, but he denied her, shaking his head frantically back and forth in panic. It was all far too much. She was a Pokemon. And who was he? What was he? Boggling questions such as these made his head turn faster on its axis. Squinting his eyes because his head's vigorous turning made him dizzy, Feyera continued to gawk in awe. The entire situation made him dizzy. It all had to be a dream; it couldn't have been real.

"Christian..." He heard the Gardevoir say as her hand touched his knee. As she did so, the young man's frantic reaction ceased. Would she make this okay? Could she?

Gardevoir? He asked. The wind was very quiet. The entire meadow had been stilled. He wasn't even sure what time it was. Based upon the pale grey overcast, it must have been sometime during the day.


"Sa—What just happened?" He asked feeling slightly groggy, but mostly distraught that the dream had ended so abruptly. He rubbed his head, feeling as though he had just woken up by a cacophonous noise disrupting his sleep. That...what was that? He projected.

"It was a potent Hypnosis." Sana wobbled her head to and fro with a lighthearted expression. "Dreams we have tend to reveal parts of our past. Minds are typically highly creative though. They like to entertain us. Sometimes they even play sneaky tricks. But as our type discovered long ago, you can in fact supersede the creative embellishments and filter out an actual memory through the dream by using the right dosage of Hypnosis."
Feyera immediately recalled Fredrick Irving's explanation of Hypnosis. The similarity was uncanny. Only this time, a Gardevoir had done it to him rather than a Hypno. He had to say that of the two, he did prefer the latter even if both memories contained unpleasantness; the conclusion of the memory awoken by Sana was so radically different. Especially the ending.

What? Wait so that was all a memory? How did you get me to…? Feyera asked, hoping to secure a possible answer as to how the Gardevoir even knocked him out in the first place. The last thing he remembered prior to the dream was her hugging him.

"Sometimes the details aren't exact…" She took a deep exhale. "But if you are still struggling to accept some aspect then I can explain it to you aga—"

No…Sana I mean, he couldn't quite grip the proper words. He was trying to question why he had felt the way he did when she held him before in the meadow and at the end of the dream-memory. Was it something she had done to him? A spell? Something to calm the nerves? Maybe why could not approach it. It was captivating. I wasn't sure what you did. How did you…?

She batted her eyes, mildly taken aback by the comment. "Oh. You mean when I hugged you?"

Feyera nodded.

"I...well...I..." Sana murmured a feeble sigh, fighting some internal struggle. "...I tried my best to get you to an appropriate state of mind considering that I know a little bit about you already."

He rocked his head back and forth, mildly irritated. Yeah from wiping my mind that time. What am I thinking? You must be an expert. I'm lucky I can even babble out a sentence, let alone walk.

Sana smiled, revealing her flippancy. "I knew how to do it. You were in my arms during it. I didn't let any harm befall you. Look, you're fine." But soon her frivolous grin turned somewhat unpleasant. "You have no idea what type of pain you were in. You probably could not even remember it all. Gardevoir can typically sense the feelings of those around them, so when someone is hurt, we empathize with them to a certain degree. But after I had approached you and saw...when I saw what I saw, I-it was like seeing Sephiteos suffer. I don't know how else to explain it to you."

I am...I mean...I'm not what you think I am. Referring to past, he was but a mosquito charging at an elephant. He had no idea what he was. But he knew what he didn't want to be. I'm not—

She forced a smile and lightheartedly tapped his knee with her palm, leaning forward as she did so. "It's okay. I wasn't who you thought I was either."

He pushed his elbows back and arched his neck up off the ground slowly. You're right. You weren't who I thought you'd be. Not at all. I wasn't even close. That's the biggest problem. Who you are...What you are...Gardevoir?

"What I am is the key to what you are. Who I am is just a testament to how important our connection is." Her sharp response startled him. He didn't want to truly be so "connected". It made him anxious, fearful even. A Pokemon? Connected to him? What did that even mean? It had begun to all sink in and fester as serious anxiety, which did not go unnoticed by Sana.

I don't know. It is just too much. He fought the urge to start panicking again. I wasn't ready. I couldn't have been ready for this. All of this...

"You were never ready." The Gardevoir pointed at his chest shard, aglow and as crimson as her own. "It wasn't your choice to be impaled by the rocket."

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"You were never ready." The Gardevoir pointed at his chest shard, aglow and as crimson as her own. "It wasn't your choice to be impaled by the rocket."
Perfect opportunity. Feyera immediately retorted, *It WAS me however. It was my choice. I did it. I'm not Seph.* His memories of Sephiteos involved an external perspective during the dream memory. Sephiteos was his experiment after all. Christian Feyera's experimentation. He was sure of it. Feyera was a human first and foremost. But then a darker thought came to mind: how much the Gardevoir thought he was Seph. Or at least some derivative of Seph. Be it through the Gardevoir qualities observable on his torso or his psyonic powers. Such aspects came from Sephiteos. But that didn't make him a Gardevoir. Nor did it make him part-Gardevoir. Even if it did, what would that accomplish? Absolutely nothing. The real thorny implication came from him being perceived by Sana as part-Sephiteos. Quickly he dismissed the idea. *I cannot be Sephiteos. I'll never be Seph. I'm not your...ya know...partner.* He was extremely uncomfortable saying this. Feeling the beads of sweat on his forehead assured Sana of where he stood. Why had his mind even gone there?

"*I know.*" She smiled. He wasn't sure of what to make of the slight grin. "*You call yourself Edge, don'tcha? Even though your real name is Christian Feyera? It's rather...unusual for a person to have multiple identities.*"

"Y-Yeah but..." He didn't know where this was going, but at least she wasn't pushing on anything concerning what his mind had been so eager to recently dismiss. It was bad enough that she made him feel this way. The discomfort of not knowing what he was had been amplified by his uncertainty of who she saw him as. She hadn't killed him in vengeance. Something made her save him. Whether or not it was intentional and for what purpose was anyone's guess.

The young Gardevoir continued, "*But if you think about it...that name makes a lot of sense since you adopted it when you first used your psyonic powers. Edge...*" She said the name and murmured a nearly inaudible sound. The noise reminded Feyera of the murmurs made by young children. Completely foreign and yet natural enough to distinguish as familiar tones. "...*Edge Feyera...using his Gardevoir powers. It was in Pewter City, right? Never before though, correct?*

Feyera had a million questions to fire off at this charged question. Why did the powers take so long to manifest? How come he never used them back at Prevoy's? Was that part of the memory wipe? Had his memory loss been so debilitating that he they were suppressed, dormant even, for two long years following the incident. What had changed? What was the spark? Was it because of Pokemon? Why so violent? Why so volatile?

"Yes." Feyera shrugged. *Never before. You must've really swept through my memories. You did a fine job.* Sarcasm was one of the first things he turned to when attempting to cope with something so far out of his league.

She looked a little bit downtrodden by his derision. "*I'm not sure if that's the case. I couldn't rid you of who you are.*"

Who he was? He always saw it as a development. A change. An alteration. Something he was subjugated to over time. Sure, there was the red shard of Gardevoir anatomy, but that could have been anything right? It had been a large necklace one day, a battle scar the next, and most of the time: a fragment of suicidal Electrode shrapnel. Even if its physicality remained a constant since the Sanctum Robbery, it had not glowed or gleamed outside of direct sunshine until recently. Nor had it been an easily manipulated part of him. Of course, it was sensitive. That had always been the case. He had the bad memories of him being kicked there by Brad's fully extended pronged boot. How that had hurt and driven him into a frenzy. Then the belligerent man at Luxaira Casino. But the sensations given to him could not be topped by two particular incidents: Haunter in the Pokemon Tower, and Sana's own shard against his. Words could not describe either phenomenon. What he felt was just pure unadulterated emotion—almost enough for him to experience a
cognitive meltdown. The former primal fear and the latter something far different than anything he had ever known could exist on this earth.

He felt like his eyes were racing back and forth in their sockets, but that couldn't be the case. Sana was staring at him the entire time in tranquility. And she still said nothing.

As his psionic powers expanded, he had gone through increasingly larger changes, culminating in his eyes. The evidence was clear as day surrounding his irises in the limbic ring. For their green attributes were locked into a permanent svelte ring of light. And when he utilized even the most acute psionics, both eyes would become coated in a rich scarlet aura.

It wasn't always this way. It truly wasn't. That was all the young trainer could say in response to Sana's concerned gaze. Back in Pallet town, he wasn't able to do any of this. Either that or he just didn't know how. The thought of him serving coffee at Prevoy's with the ability to read people's thoughts, emotions, and fears frightened him. Thankfully, he hadn't figured out how to do it until his Pokemon quest begun. Or perhaps he didn't remember how to do it until he met Brucie. Was there something primordial about his first interaction with Pokemon in two years? He recalled feeling as though everything changed that day. His ambitions shifted. Feyera overcame a fear he had, quite possibly a fear held by him since before Evercrest. The first walk he took with Charmander changed everything for the young man.

"It wasn't always that way for Seph either." Sana staidly spoke breaking the silence, "That serum changed him. I know. And you remember now too."

Feyera froze upon hearing this. His hand nervously grasped at the meadow's thick grass. It was still slightly wet from either dew or the recent tropical rain shower. Tugging at it, he thought about how he himself might have been affected by Progenitor. He did have the symptoms after all. Even if he wanted to believe that he was fully human, his limbic rings suggested otherwise, broadcasting the abnormality with their steady golden hue.

How did I even remember the Progenitor Procedure? It seems to be impossible.

She raised an eyebrow, lifted off her kneeling position, and gently sat down. "You...you remember it? That's...that means..."

Feyera didn't want it though, so he stopped her mid-thought. That means I remember being present for the operation. As a researcher. Not as Seph. He knew this wasn't the truth; for he had specifically remembered the experience of a cold operating table beneath him, the large needle drilling into his ocular cavity, the fever, and the delirium. He felt the razor sharp blade slicing into his eye while he was helpless to do anything but watch. The entire recollection, a beset assault, though distant, resonated with him; not as an experience he had been a part of, but as an experience that had been a part of him. The occasional blurry vision and uncomfortable stinging remained a testament to how grisly the procedure had been. Progenitor should have never found its way to human eyes no matter how many evolutionary advantages it gave. And yet here he was, staring at his own green irises haloed in goldenrod being reflected by Sana's clear cherry eyes. The thought sickened him. He felt slightly woozy.

Sana changed the subject, while sitting up straighter than before. "The Hypnosis, were you okay with it? I know that I didn't ask you. I just assumed...you wanted answers so badly. Did it hurt?"

Far from it. Upon awakening, he wanted nothing more than to be still and absorb the various sensations coursing through his mind. Yet the rush of adrenaline and the shock of seeing Sana holding him forced him back. For starters, her Hypnosis had put him in a much deeper trance. While in it, he had remembered nearly every detail of the events coinciding with the Kanto
Sanctum Robbery two years back. Impressive considering his obdurate amnesia. In fact, it was as if he had actually relived the entire experience over again.

Fredrick's Hypno had used a similar method of Hypnosis to reawaken the dreadful memories of the Progenitor Procedure in dream form during his stay in Celadon City; however, the Hypnosis utilized seemed rather crude. It only gave him sensations of the Procedure. The figures were mostly obscure. He couldn't even tell who was in his dream. Never mind match their faces with their names. Everything about Progenitor was focused around the operation and moments leading up to its climatic execution. In comparison, nothing had been as radically vivid as the dream memory he had just come out of. No ordinary dream could possibly be that influential. Especially the ending of the dream when Sana consoled him.

_It didn't hurt. At least, it stopped hurting. The dream wasn't as bad as witnessing Progenitor's administration. Both times I felt like I was there though. I knew that was me in the dream…err…memory._

"So you remember when you injected the serum into Sephiteos?" Sana asked, fully knowing she had unwillingly erased many of the memories predating the Progenitor Procedure, which took place several months prior to the Pokemon Sanctum Robbery itself.

_Bits and pieces. Here and there, I see things. Remember a few details every once in a while. Feyera was not sure just how far he could push this denial. He didn't want the Gardevoir thinking he was some type of new replacement for Sephiteos. To be honest, he didn't know where she stood._

"Christian?" she said slouching over towards him. Furtive, perhaps, but not unseen by Feyera.

"Yes?" He said, speaking to her through his lips rather than his mind. His voice cracked slightly but she seemed to understand him just fine.

Leaning on her outstretched hands, the Gardevoir looked down, almost ashamed. _"My Hypnosis. I did it for you. I wanted to help; give you what you were looking for. It didn't hurt you did it? You can be honest with me."_

He thought about after he had fallen from the cliff. Of course, it hurt. The excruciating agony of that iniquitous shard was so unbearable she needed to intervene and save him from losing his mind. Obviously, she was looking for approval for what she had done seemingly sporadically. It wasn't like she asked him if he was alright with her placing him into a dream memory shortly after they had met here on Chrono Island.

"I wanted to remember what happened and you helped me to achieve that goal. There's nothing else that needs to be said." Feyera wasn't trying to make it sound like a business transaction had taken place, but his poor choice in words made it sound highly impersonal.

_"I told you I'm sorry." Her neatly folded legs quivered from under her gown. "I was only trying to help. It's my fault for clearing your mind, but what else could I have done? The agony you felt in the dream—when I came to you on the shore—that was only a fraction of how it truly felt to be in that circumstance."_

Feyera sat all the way up again, because his back and neck were beginning to grow stiff from the awkward position he had been in. His retreat from her was rather thoughtless actually, but he was slightly repelled from being swept into a dream memory without her warning him. Mildly offended even. But then again he was upset about how everything had turned out. For some reason he longed for someone or something to blame. Even after all of his desperate pleas for answers and truth, he had not heard what he wanted to hear.
The Pokemon tilted her head slightly as if she was trying to hear him think.

But what did he honestly expect anyway though? Sana to be Sabrina the Psychic Gym Leader of Saffron City? Lorelei of the Elite Four to be some secret human Psychic falling in love with him? It was all so absurd in retrospect. What were those desires even based off of? Loneliness? Pathetic. Those teenage fantasies were long over. Isn't the truth what he had wanted? Isn't the truth what he had fought so hard for? Truth had Feyera questioning whether or not ignorance would be a better option. As he had heard all too often: ignorance is bliss. And to a degree, the ex-researcher finally understood such a statement.

The real world had been thrust upon him; literally upon his chest. Lorelei and Sabrina were not interested in him. He was just chasing around decoys the entire time. One of which was set up by Sana. His expectations for who, and more importantly what, Sana actually was were seriously flawed and lacking rationality. He told himself that at least he wasn't drawn to who she was.

Aside from defogging his past and understanding an imposed interest in some fanaticized dream girl, he had little left to fight for. The quest for his answers seemed to have drawn to a climatic close. But what had the journey actually brought him? Answers he didn't want to hear. Answers that pushed him further out of the envelope of humanity's acceptance. He was a criminal, not a victim. A ruthless researcher driven to do good only when it aided him in the end. Guilt and self-interest paved his seeking of absolution. He couldn't have even nobly obtained his powers. Feyera did nothing to earn what was given to him. In fact, he had only functioned to take away what others had in this bizarre situation. Never receiving forgiveness from Sephiteos ended in tragedy. Their tragedy. Sana's tragedy. Feyera's tragedy.

The wind gusted up. Small rustling in the grass caused a few of the taller blades to tickle the back of his neck.

And his psionic powers, deriving from a Gardevoir rather than a human mutation, moved him further away from being a part of mankind. Sometimes people would display a brief unnatural power. Although rare, it was relatively understood that these people were not gods; they just had a more advanced brain and neural emitters. Scientists, to a certain degree, could even study them. Feyera wondered if Cipher had even tried to graft, psyonics for instance, on people. Why couldn't they have been the ones to do this to him? It would be easier if he could blame an external source. Owning up to responsibility was never one of Feyera's strong suits.

The young man reached down into his pocket and clutched his old tattered wallet, sliding out his Pokemon trainer's license from the see-through external slot with a firm grip. He looked down at his photograph. Taken maybe four months ago, he had grown up significantly since getting the card notarized by the Pokemon League. The journey itself had been enough to give him a few grey hairs. He wanted to laugh at the man in the picture's innocent smile. His shaggy amber hair. His pristine emerald eyes. His eagerness to explore and be amongst Pokemon. The hope he had of finding a future beyond simple research. He had gotten his wish. In fact, he had it all along. It was all just too unreal. The entire time, feral imprints of a Pokemon were left upon his seemingly unblemished visage.

Sana kept her hand on his knee, seeing the card being drawn with her observant eyes. She carefully watched the young man play with the identification, turning it about in his hands and rubbing its rim against his palms. It had a scrape on it crossing out "Christian", something he had done on a while ago. Amid the juggling, Feyera dropped the card and it landed tilted against his chest shard face-up, supported by a slight wrinkle in his off-white buttoned shirt underneath his unzipped black bomber jacket. The Gardevoir waited for the man to pick it up. But he just lay there, staring up into space pretending not to notice anything.
Sana nervously reached out with the hand not placed on Feyera's knee for the license. The trainer didn't even acknowledge her meager advance. He saw her, but his mind was light years away from this world. Her hand fretfully brushed against his shard as she clutched the card with her two fingers and opposable thumb. This Feyera could not ignore, and his focus returned momentarily to the situation present in front of him. He hated the sensitivity, but he adored the sensation. Whatever it did to him wasn't natural. There was nothing capable of replicating the foreign feeling when her skin met his own. Although not intense enough to drive him to eudemonia, it reminded him of how he felt when she hugged him. The brief stir of unified wholesomeness echoed through an action most would qualify as trivial. It wasn't quite as potent as when her perfectly matching crimson crescent had caressed his own in their embrace. Yet having her hand grace against his core seemed to at least make him introspective. This meditative moment of sublime peace blossomed into genuine warmth.

Feyera desperately tried to keep a stern face. Still, Sana had set off a series of fireworks through his physical receptors. He looked utterly lost, enraptured even, and yet half of his face remained determined to deny the sensation. But she did not laugh at his contorted expression. Perhaps Sana was uncertain of what he was experiencing right now. Although perceptive, Psychic Pokemon did not know everything.

She gingerly removed her hand from Feyera's shard and everything seemed to return back to normal. The saturated colors retreated from his visual field. Sana raised the identification card and looked quizzically at it. Curiously, she held it up to her face between her large cherry eyes. The fading daylight illuminated the light cyan watermarks.

She chuckled softly to herself, "You still look the same."

"Not really. Look at my eyes. Here," he picked up one of his hands from the ground and pointed at the small identification photograph, "No rings of light. And that was recent."

At this, the Gardevoir arched her neck back and grinned exposing her teeth through her small mouth. "I didn't mean your body. I meant you still have the same disposition. Besides," Sana took Feyera's license and elevated it slightly so that his pointed finger now aimed at his chest in the picture, "You still have that."

Christian Feyera lowered his gaze to where she had just so adroitly brushed against. All he had left was his body, but even that wasn't fully human. From his eyes to his chest shard, the young trainer couldn't blend into a crowd without being singled out. He'd never be the obscure one who just slipped out of people's minds; his presence alone would bring questions to other astute people. No sense in hiding. He peered down at his scarred elbows where Haunter had swiped at him with Shadow Claw. The maroon marks against his pale beige skin signified he was able to survive the atrocity in the Pokemon Tower. If these psyonic powers did not belong to him, if they were not given to him, there would have been no way for him to have gotten past even the first Gym. But did he prefer this to death?

He was semi-laying down ever since falling back from the Gardevoir's embrace. Sana still had her hand on his knee. She recoiled as he brought his legs up to his chest and squatted. He wrapped his arms around his bent legs and felt his chest shard slide between them. While not the most comfortable position, it did cover the metal horn. He may have passed for having an abnormal scar or even an amulet before, but when he was near Sana it was unmistakably a part of Gardevoir anatomy. There was no concealing it. From its razor thin crescent shape splitting his chest in two, to the glossy reflective opalescence; it was a replica to Sana's own. And a perfect one at that. Too perfect considering that it changed the way he felt. He wasn't just taciturn about its presence. He was far more disturbed by how it made him... feel. Was this what it was like to be a Gardevoir?
Had this been how they as a species went through their lives? Was this what it was like to sense feelings and emotion? Would it always be this way for him? Did it have to remain this way?

"This was not the best thing you could have done for—I mean to me," Feyera said to Sana as he continued to conceal not only his worry, but also his own Gardevoir shard. He almost wished she had not done anything at all to save him. It would have been better to have just died that night from the torture. He wouldn't have to worry about anything then. Fizzling out of existence meant no more stupefaction. While perhaps not the most pleasant thought, it was how he honestly felt. No changing that. Sana continued to gaze at his balled up form, focusing her attention on the piece he was so shamefully shielding. She might have been perplexed, but she could know.

Who was he hiding the faultless ruby shard from though? His Pokemon were all in their Pokeballs. They already knew about it though. They had accepted it as a part of him. Sort of in the same manner which you would accept someone with a tattoo or a scar. It was always just a part of who he was. A true facet since the conclusion of Operation Semblance. Sometimes it did peculiar things, like glimmer, but strange occurrences were Edge Feyera in a nutshell. He wasn't normal. Far from it! His Pokemon knew about his aberration the moment he started talking to them. Trainers couldn't hold entire conversations with their Pokemon. A few battle commands here and there, a unified sense of victory, and perhaps some bonding over meals were the extent of most people's relationship with their Pokemon. Not Feyera though. His Pokemon had personalities. They had discussions. Deep and meaningful ones. And when he battled, he could command them more fluidly than even the trainers best in tune with their Pokemon. Granted, this had been because he was 'siphoning' them through acute Psychic mind-control according to Sana, but it still made him a worthy opponent. According to the Gardevoir, siphoning just made his Pokemon slightly weaker on their own. But why would that matter? So long as he was in command of them, he could work with their limitations by pushing the mental conjoinment limits of his own. And he was getting better at it. He already had five Kanto Pokemon League Gym Badges. They all neatly sat pegged into his wallet's exterior on the opposite flap of the slot where his identification card normally went.

That chapter of his life was very distant now, as were many avenues once fancied by the young man. In fact, Feyera recalled when he first set off to complete the Pokedex for Professor Oak barely three fortights ago. Feigning death, he was liberated of such a task. Then there was the Gym Challenge he undertook. Why was he even going after the League Badges? To serenade Lorelei? She hadn't even been interested in him! Her evident shock on the yacht was more than enough information for Feyera to deduce where she stood concerning him. It was all just a stupid feeling: inauthentic nonsensical desire. She was a tease. The whole contraposition of a mysterious angel visiting him in his dreams turned out to be a lie. Sana didn't exist the way he imagined her. He felt wronged. And also a little frightened. For he would have never thought a Pokemon could influence his behavior so seamlessly. Especially behavior originating from such a crude dimension —lust. He couldn't be sure of anything now. In lieu of appeasing Lorelei, there must have been something else driving him to win and earn his Gym Badges, yet that remained elusive to the young trainer.

His arms quivered from the bicep muscles downwards as he tightened their hold around his pulled-in legs. He must have looked ridiculous in this fetal position. Upon his left wrist was the thick black and jade tartan Reilken Mercurius bracelet given to him by Fredrick Irving. Its fairly bulky construction was deceiving, for although snuggly grasping his thin wrist and granting it an additional two inch diameter, it was nearly weightless. Feyera still couldn't figure out why the International Police Agent had given him the relic. Something about protection. But Fredrick had a RAIL firearm. And Pokemon. And influence over the International Police Agency. Fredrick was a true leader. Paternal in all ways. What did Feyera have in comparison? Psyonics? Not even his brief gravitational manipulation could counter the L3 RAIL's ion beam capable of punching
through Rhydonhide. Speaking of psyonics, he really had hardly used them since last seeing Fredrick. The most recent stunt was in the Pokemon Tower against Haunter's diabolic manifestation. That was a good thing, it meant being further away from a possible meltdown. Or so he thought.

The dream memory made it seem as though the Reilken Mercurius dissolved into Delta-two's, or rather Sephiteos', body prior to assimilating into the Gardevoir's bloodstream. And while the spire dissolved, he wasn't sure as to what happened to the silvery ringed base. Was this all that was left of the relic following the traumatic event?

Fredrick had been able to locate the much more tame Mercury Relic here in the Southern Sea according to his radio message. The International Police Agent even delivered it to Feyera on the coastline north of Fuschia City. The material was so much more docile now and it had lost all amorphous attributes. All the chaotic volatility had seemingly vanished and now he looked upon a very plain looking object deprived of its sheen, its color, and its power. The small green squares checkerboarded about the circumference were the only details worth mentioning. That and the vice-like-grip it used to attach itself to his body. As if it weren't enough to impart Gardevoir parts of Sephiteos onto him, the drained relic persisted in its commandeering over his life by returning to his possession through a peculiar series of events.

Feyera didn't want to call it a fusion. It wasn't. His body, his memories were still his own. If anything, he had adapted per se some of the dying Gardevoir's attributes. Somehow. It was just too crazy. Science couldn't explain it. He thought about the unforgettable scene atop Pentí Island's Peak now burned into his memory by Sana's Hypnosis. Concerning the stifling fluid that had spewed out of Delta-two, he questioned where it had made contact with him. Did the Pokemon's blood mixed with Mercurius do all of this? Seemed highly probable all things considered. In the dream-memory, the warm coating goo was definitely all over his chest, he could almost recall the sensation of it searing through his clothing and into his flesh. That would certainly explain the crimson shard ejecting itself from his sternum. Perhaps some had splattered on his face during the plummet and caused Progenitor to infiltrate his eyes. But it just did not add up. Why did the shard emerge immediately afterwards and Progenitor not until very recently?

Strange circumstances aside, Pokemon genetic coding was far different from that of humans. Certain Pokemon could typically breed with other species within their so-called "Egg Group" because they shared a closer common ancestor. However, the process became a much more intricate task when trying to graft a certain aspect of one Pokemon onto another. Even though complex, it would be possible under very specific and rare set of conditions. That's what Evercrest had been all about! Yet the jump from Pokemon to human would be further than anything thought possible. It was the genetic equivalent to shooting the moon. He was a scientist; he knew how these things worked. Things like this didn't just happen. Yet he was reluctant to blame the event on the unknown. Magic and ancient relics were about as real as God.

But here he was, a man possessing the traits of a Gardevoir. No matter how he approached the issue his mind could not grasp the entirety of its causes, nor the implications of its end result. The only thing Feyera knew for sure was that it was impossible to relax now that he knew what he did. The Progenitor EX wasn't grafted onto Christian Feyera by who he thought. It wasn't the Rockets and their chaotic vengeance. Nor was it Cipher with their highly advanced—although macabre—technology. It was him all along, it was the man whose selfish hands had clutched the Reilken Mercurius in its primal form. It had been Chris Feyera. He did this to himself. Now he had to live with it, or find a way out. He looked up at the dull sky, its abated color starch contrast to the embellished tapestry witnessed when he had first encountered Sana.

Crossing one foot over the other, his black leather Alterieno boots made a distinct rubbing nose as
their taut material overlapped. The Gardevoir's head snapped down to follow the noise and Feyera fretfully shrugged. She really was ardent. Seeing her observant face made him nervous, so he began to subconsciously wiggle his feet, making more of the noise as if he had intended create a background sound all along. With lips puckered as if he had just eaten a lemon, he continued to look upwards at the grey sky. The clouds blotted out the sun, but the rays did manage to penetrate through along the horizon, probably far off the island's actual landmass. Chrono Island, or Penta Isle as the Rockets called it, was not a large island. In fact, none of the tropical islands of the Sevii Archipelago were particularly large save Quest Island and Fortune Island in the southwest.

Gardevoir also followed his lead, turning her gaze upwards as well. He was glad that she wasn't staring at him any longer. Comfort continued to escape him however. Feeling timid, the shard on his chest seemingly grew larger and more noticeable in his mind's eye. He questioned why. Was he embarrassed? The flowery meadow was empty and devoid of sentient life. Was he subconsciously hiding the crimson shard from himself? Even if he kept it buried beyond visual range, he still felt it. The nerves, encased within and extending to its delicate base where it met flesh, did not simply turn off when it was out of sight. He had object-permanence after all. It was still very much there and very much him.

Was he bothered by the fact that he could be compromised as a human being? Perhaps a little. It wasn't like he had an identification card saying he was human. The closest thing to that was his trainer ID. Although he sincerely felt human deep down, on the outside he wasn't sure of what other people would think. Would they be kind like Fredrick and Fuji? Or would they see his power and try to use and study him like the Rockets and Ein of Cipher? He was still a person; no one could take that genuine feeling away from him, not even if his body resembled another being. He was very self-conscious.

He thought about how he had averted attention before. No one would question him unless they saw his eyes aglow, and that shard had been mistaken for many other things in the past. The problem arose with being near an actual Gardevoir. It made the similarities blatantly obvious. Any Slowpoke could put two on top of two. More so, Feyera felt strained in the sense that such an ingrained part of him was so similar to Sana. He could get by as just a strange person if it weren't for her. No one would make the connection unless they saw them together. If he wanted to remain independent from external judgment, there was a simple solution: keep away from Sana.

Her expression dampened. She wondered why he was being so negative. True she had done something that could have given him permanent brain damage, but that had not happened. And even if it had consequences, she had done it out of compassion. She did not want to have to see him go through that agonizing transmutation. It was impossible to bear for him and for her. Reluctantly, she handed him back his trainer's card.

"My—sponsorship was only out of care. You would have died otherwise. Your mind would have broke from the physical punishment."

"Yeah well maybe that would have been better." His own sense of responsibility was merging with the impending consequences of being involved in the Rockets. However, it did not end there. He also had to own up to being a crucial antagonist in both these Gardevoir's lives. And now he found himself bound in more than one way.

"Especially after all I did as 'Doctor Feyera' to you and Seph," he said. Referring to himself in the third person seemed strange at first but it certainly got the point across. He was dissatisfied with the way things had turned out and was quite willing to make a dramatic scene about it. According to the dream, he did everything to try to earn Sephiteos' forgiveness. The youthful male Gardevoir, Delta-two, had adamantly denied forgiveness to Feyera. The Pokemon had done more than it could
have ever done to him while living. While in life it could transfer a guilty conscious over to
Christian via instancing, in his death, Sephiteos remained commandeering in all aspects of Feyera's
life. Whether he liked it or not, Sephiteos had imparted onto him. Somehow. The Gardevoir he had
abused was now very much present in his life. The irony was cruel and stung more than Feyera
cared to admit.

"You keep saying that you did it. Maybe a part of you did, but what if it's not the whole entire
picture."

"Of course it is. I was the green-eyed researcher. I still am. I'll always be Christian Feyera, even if I
was somebody else beforehand. There's nothing you or your mate could have done to change that,"
Feyera cringed as he said those words. He didn't want to be trapped in this foreign world. He had so
much to look forward to. His journey with Pokemon. His future as a recovering researcher. All of
this would be forfeited if he were to acknowledge the Gardevoir. He wouldn't be able to turn back
knowing that he had a part of Sephiteos imprinted onto him. But if she only knew that he would
never be her mate then perhaps he could get past such an emotional obstacle.

"I didn't want this, Sana. I don't want this. You know that."

"I know it's hard, but you have to deal with it; you're not alone. Keep that in mind."

"Gardevoir...I mean, Sana, I'm alone. I'm Edge Feyera...because I was Doctor Feyera. It was my
fault. I should have been more conscientious in my youth. I did wrong. I joined an organization that
destroyed the lives of many. I did so willingly. But there is no undoing what I did. I'll never be
anything more than your partner's murderer. The sooner you come to terms with this the better off
we'll both be." Feyera said as coldly as he possibly could. There was no use in giving her false
hope. He was not Sephiteos. He'd never be her Seph. That much he was sure of amid all the
confusion. "I don't belong here. I gotta move on from here."

At this, she was totally quiet. Nothing was said at all as the amber flowers and soft lavender buds
surrounding their alcove rustled. Nothing could be said. The two just sat and listened to the
meadow leaves blow in the tropical breeze that had begun to lift up some stray pollen in the field.

She continued to stare at where the sun would have been if the thick clouds had not concealed the
radiant sphere of fire. Steadily, softly she rose to her feet. It was immaculate to witness. Feyera saw
her raise her pole thin leg and press down on the soil, slightly imbedding the tip of her foot into the
spongy ground. From there she pushed up and stood above him, towering over his condensed
frame. Her eyes took a quick look down at him and she forced a plain gaze, unwilling to expose
how he had just made her feel. The gown she wore rigidly formed her figure, and she pressed down
on the dress' hem as it blew in the coastal air.

"I'm sorry. Christian...I guess this is it then. I don't know what else you want me to do."

He stared at the Gardevoir and his eyes grew tired. "I...Sana, you don't need to do anything.
You've done enough. It's over now. I know what happened to me. Thanks."

"Y-You're not going to listen to anything else I have to say?"

He shook his head solemnly. "Sana, what else is there? I've done what you asked me to do. I came
here, I heard your story, I apologized; I even relived the events of two years ago. However, I
remain unchanged. I still need to find a way to deal with myself," Feyera said. He spoke truth. With
the recent internal turmoil he had been put into, he was confident no one would want to be around
him.
"But do you truly want to go at it alone?" Sana softly brought her hand to her temple and rubbed the area under her hair anxiously.

Feyera nodded and bowed his head down, resting his shallow chin upon the crimson Gardevoir horn on his chest. Although narrowly coming to an edge, it was not sharp. The material reminded him of a mixture of metal and cartilage. It was as inflexible and glossy as a lustrous transition metal, yet as sensitive and organic as his own flesh. Even if he could not feel the horn's rim, he still felt the slight pressure on his sternum and ribs when his smooth chin leaned on the piece.

He would not be alone. He had his Pokemon. They would be with him. "I have my friends Sana. They've been with me through thick and thin. Don't worry."

"Christian."

"Sana...this is my fault. Fate's set its claw upon me. I have the rest of my life to live out the consequences. I'd be better off staying away from those I've hurt already. I'm destructive. I'm..."

She then did something strange. Rather than walk away, she stepped closer to him. Her dress blew behind her in the southern wind. Feyera continued to keep his eyes focused on the sky, until she walked into his sight. Her head appeared above him looking down on his somber expression. "I can help you out if you want."

What did she want in return? "How? How are you going to help me out?"

Sana looked him dead in the eyes, hardly bending over as she did so. "I already told you. If you don't want to go at it alone, I'm here."

"What can you do?" Although he knew the answer. She had some way of consoling him. That was obvious. But there could always be more.

"I can protect you."

"Sure, as a Pokemon. Right, of course you can. Can you protect me from myself though?" Feyera asked.

She outstretched both of her slender arms, "I—I think so."

Feyera opened up and placed his hands on her own. She then helped him up off the meadow's floor. "I know that there is a way to fix this. There has to be a way to rectify everything."

"There will be. You don't need to worry about that now. Believe what you can, and do not be discouraged by those who believe less. You'll be okay, I know it."

She was only marginally shorter than he was. Although human, physiological similarities existed. Gardevoir had similar proportionality to human beings concerning their torso, legs, arms, and head. They were just a lot more narrow. Almost like a frail person. But Sana's billowing gown did much to increase her presence. Feyera wondered what it was even made of. He thought about this and a few other Gardevoir related questions, but decided to can it in lieu of asking her about his fate.

"How do you know these things Sana?" Feyera thought about when he tried to utilize his psyonics at Luxaira Casino. "Psychic Pokemon have their limitations. They don't know everything."

Her serious expression changed and she squeezed both his hands. "They know what's important."

Hearing this made him acknowledge her effort to try. What else could go wrong? He botched up
enough lives already. Especially his own.

"Fine."

Sana exhaled in relief. She seemed eager to talk with him more, but the day was fading. Although the sunset could not be seen through the overcast, he felt the day's wearing on him through an internal clock.

"Let's talk it over some more at length after you get some rest."

"Okay, but where do we sleep?"

"There's a cave with a small alcove off to the east. It's not much of a hike from here."

"Caves? On Chrono Island?" That didn't quite make sense, but the Gardevoir seemed much more familiar with this area than he was. He gave her a nod and she pulled him forward through the once beautiful meadow, now devoid of color. Together, they walked towards the hilly region beyond the meadow.

Later that evening, Christian Feyera sat up suddenly, the shadows of the moon's light in the midnight air bounced along the cave's dark walls. He still was not fully awake, but he felt as if something was amiss. He was full of energy even though he had been exhausted from the long day. It was a bizarre sensation for the young man.

"Sana?" he looked over to where the Pokemon was before, but saw nothing. Groaning, he stood up, and his head started spinning. The walls seemed to be closing in on him. Dizzy, his arms instinctively grasped his throbbing head.

He stumbled out towards the mouth of the cave he had been taking refuge in with Sana. It wasn't too far away, and with the impending darkness she insisted that it was a safe place to go. He let her lead him here and was surprised by the cave's size. It was unusual for a place such as this devoid of tectonic activity. He just hoped that they would be the only inhabitants.

"Oh you're awake!" Sana said, pretending to be startled by Christian's sudden appearance before her.

His vision was very distorted, but eventually he was able to see the young Gardevoir clearly.

"Yeah, I'm awake…Couldn't sleep," Feyera said as he sat down next to her to her left, "what about you? What are you doing up this late?"

Sana laughed, "Gardevoir tend to have very fast metabolism so sleep is more of a luxury than anything else. It's much different living in the wild."

"You say that as if you knew what urban life was all about," Christian said sarcastically.

"Well, we might not have the buildings and skyscrapers like humans do, but we certainly have our own small communities of organized species. I sometimes miss it. But when I met Seph, I knew that all I ever wanted was to be together with him. Even if that meant leaving our fellow species," Sana smiled as the frolicking silver moonlight gently caressed her face.

"That sounds like a big decision. Do you ever think back upon the choices you've made and wonder if things would have turned out differently?" Feyera asked. He thought about the numerous mistakes he had made. The times where he had been inadequate. The times where he had indulged
in his power. The times where he had sinned.

"I noticed you're always concerned with the 'what-ifs' and 'what would be best'. I don't know, to me pondering about those superlatives can be draining. I look to the future and not to the past. If I were to look to the past then I would become boggled in despair that Sephiteos and I chose to live our lives with one another rather than stay in the safe confines of our community. After all, by leaving the order and venturing on our own as a pair, we inadvertently allowed for all of this..." She looked at Christian's figure. Her eyes moved about his frame indiscreetly.

"Are you angry at me?" Feyera asked. The question was getting old, but he still felt as if it couldn't hurt to make sure. Perhaps now that they weren't in that gorgeous meadow she'd be more honest and less idealistic.

"If you had asked me that many months past I would have rendered you helpless in a psyonic prison," she grinned noticing Feyera's apparent distress, "It hurt at first; comprehending the past. I'm not perfect at it, but I can sense the future at times, and when I do I see great promise in you, Mister Feyera. How could I hate? I still feel the dormant energies of Seph radiating from your very essence."

Promise in him? The absurdity of looking at the circumstances from the perspective of the past; he had never quite realized how trapping such a concept actually was until now.

"Promise? In me? You're not angry that I not only inflicted terrible pain on but also killed your spouse?" Christian asked.

"I used to be bitter. I won't lie to you, Christian. But I was overcome with compassion. I learned of you at the bottom of that cliff. It was strange: half of you had killed half of you. Somehow, it seemed to be impossible. I had lost the one most important to me in physical form. Yet I knew you were still very much alive, Seph, as I had discovered. You somehow lived, and I believe that love endures all hardships," Sana said.

"I don't think it was you who did...this...to me though," Feyera smoothly replied running his hand through his thick light-amber hair.

"Then what could it have been?" Sana asked, focused entirely on his eyes.

"Reilken Mercurius. This," Feyera pointed to the bracelet on his left wrist. Without warning, she reached over him and clutched it with her hands. Startled, Feyera recoiled, not wanting her to accidentally brush against his torso's emotional conduit again.

"R-Relax, I'm just looking at it." The Gardevoir said, perhaps a little embarrassed that she alarmed him.

He wasn't sure whether or not to extend his arm so she could observe it in her own territory. It didn't matter though, she already had her elbows leaning on his knees. Slightly compromised, he let her rotate the armlet without saying a word. After she had begun to skirt her fingers around the black device's green-checkered perimeter he had to say something. The proximity was getting to be a little much.

"This was given to me by a man by the name of Fredrick. It was from before I challenged the Fuchsia City Gym," Christian said, but his mind wandered back to his starter Pokemon, Brucie who had become victim to Weezing's permanent Toxic. "Before my Pokemon partner became infected with Toxic."
This got the Gardevoir's attention. Sana glanced up at him, still holding onto his left hand with both of hers, and slightly closed the eye closer to him as it gave off a dull crimson aura. Reading his concern, Sana quickly replied, "He will be alright. It's because his body couldn't handle the poison."

Was she blaming him again for siphoning? He didn't stand a chance as a trainer without resorting to it. It may have weakened Brucie's immune system, but how else could he fluidly command his Pokemon? Edge had the incredible boon of being able to communicate with his Pokemon over their emotional tethers. While this might seem to be a fragile and subtle approach to formulate a connection, a Gardevoir's skill with such aspects of consciousness was unmatchable. Edge discovered this for himself when he was able to synchronize his mind completely with the minds of his Pokemon so flawlessly in the heat of combat that it became hard to tell where one ended and the other began. Sana told him that it was his ability of Synchronize in its purest form. Such a strategy, when employed correctly, won him Pokemon battles even when he was outmatched. He tilted his hand nervously, and Sana looked back at it predictably.

"He'll live though right? That's what matters."

She rocked his hand back and forth. "He's already been through the worst of it. You just need to keep medicating him with the antidote periodically. And avoid the...well you know."

Somehow, her carefully chosen words soothed his thoughts. Her unrestricted access to his heart helped him in times like these, but it also consoled Sana. She knew that Christian had been given a terrible burden, one that no one should have to tackle alone. Sure, he had his Pokemon, but they were not as well tuned into the intricate workings of his rapidly altering mind. She was desperately trying to figure out exactly what was occurring, but the truth remained very cryptic even to her Psychic abilities. At the very least, she wanted to help to curb "Edge's" potential for ruthless behavior. That would be an accomplishment.

For it seemed when he tapped into some of the more potent Gardevoir abilities, his body would begin to destroy itself at a rapid rate. As a member of that species of Pokemon, he could freely use such abilities, but in his current form, the consequences proved disastrous.

Sana knew however that these miraculous psyonic powers gifted to him had indeed saved him before. In Cerulean, on the S.S. Anne, and in Lavender Town, Feyera had told her everything. By confiding these details in her, she felt a great deal of responsibility to help him avoid the deadly consequences of over-expending his abilities. Still she worried for him. It was obvious.

"Do you remember this object from two years back?"

"Reilken Mercurius," Sana spoke softly. Her mummers following telepathy seemed to become more predictable when she was saying certain words. Perhaps the Gardevoir was even trying to pronounce them. "I do not know much about it, Christian."

The nighttime wind began to pick up. His hair blew in the balmy midnight air.

"I don't either. I still am curious as to why Fredrick chose to give it to me," Feyera's thoughts raced back to Fredrick Irving of the Kanto International Police Force.

"Maybe he trusts you. Humans do that right?" She questioned not out of ignorance, but rather play.

"Haha you'd be surprised to know that not many do. Especially when it comes to powerful ancient relics made out of rare earth metals. Greed's a bit of a challenge to overcome."
"You're possessive over things?"

"Materialistic tendencies run rampant amid us. Fame, fortune, et cetera." He thought about Silph Incorporated. He wondered if she understood. Could a Gardevoir understand human nature? Did they even have materialism in their lives? "Sana…Material objects are another way to exert influence and power over others. In doing so, a man can become a tamer of the universe. The objects are extensions of ourselves. Furthermore, it is considered a good thing to achieve power. For more power asserts control and control postpones death."

"We're possessive too then. No one wants to die silly."

"No. I mean…ah never mind." He couldn't explain the concept. Was she innocent to it all? Or had there just been a misunderstanding?

"So why don't you tell me more about your friend Fredrick."

"Oh yes. Right. Plenty of people like to take advantage of others and their gifts. But not Fredrick. He's kind, compassionate even. I could never tell him this, but sometimes I see him as…as my father," Feyera said not exactly trying to display a little bit of vulnerability.

"Maybe you can introduce me to him one day. He sounds like a nice person. I'd like to meet your people friends."

Feyera had thought about this. It would be nice to have a friend he could talk to about all of this.

"To be honest Sana, I have no idea where Fredrick even is now. He's a busy man working for the International Police." His actual father was apparently really busy too, but had never put forth the effort to contact him. At least Fredrick wanted to help him.

The Gardevoir "You don't know where he is?"

"We have radios to help us find each other," Feyera took out the small communicator from his denim jeans left pocket using his free hand. Seeing something new, Sana was keen to examine the piece.

"What does this do?" she excitedly toyed around with the black transmitter.

Feyera smiled. He didn't need to give her a big explanation. "It let's me talk to people I can't see. That way I can be in touch over distance. By carrying one you can speak to your friends who also have one by sharing the same frequency."

"So when you're lonely you use it? To hear your friends?"

Feyera laughed, and sat back upwards, closer to her. "Hah, I never thought of using it for that. Usually we use these things to tell each other quick messages and meeting points."

"But not have conversations? Do you ever do it to just hear their voice? What if you want to tell someone that you miss them? What if you need to tell someone something special?"

"Well, you see it's tricky. There is a lot of static since the technology isn't perfected. Most human technology derives from before the Terminal War. We don't know how to make everything as perfect as our distant ancestors, but we're getting there…slowly."

She held the small device in her hand and placed it adjacent to his chest shard, right above his heart. Do you think it's like us?
Feyera raised a brow, "What do you mean?"

"It can let you talk to someone from far away. That's what this does." She pushed up and pointed at her horn. "And you have one too!"

He felt the glossy part protruding from his sternum bone, about three inches outwards. Earlier that evening, Sana had tried to explain the process to him, but it did not really make any sense. Eventually, the Gardevoir had watered it down to, "the crest on your chest resonates with my own and because of that, we can communicate over great distance". He was still unsure of how this all even worked; for he had found himself trapped in a world in which he had little command over. How humorous. He had all the powers of the most prestigious Psychic Pokemon and could still not adequately understand the reason for his own existence.

"Does it still hurt?" Sana asked him as he tenderly held the crescent-shaped thin protrusion. The back of their hands met.

"Not as much as I remember it. Before it would be in pain all too frequently. I became worried when it hurt even when I did not employ my psyonics. In Fuchsia City, I thought it was infected around the baseline. I applied antibiotics since I was under the impression that it was a foreign characteristic of me. Recently however..." he trailed off. He felt his mind being read. No. Not just his mind, but also his very essence. It was as if someone had overlapped his being with that of another gentle being. He felt like the invisible force enveloping him was analyzing all of his current sensations.

"Not as much," she smiled gleefully, "Yes the heart. Your heart. Or shard, horn, or crest. It's an anatomical part of the Ralts line of evolution. You humans would compare it to a heart or a core. It is the source of many of our Psychic abilities and is linked directly to our cerebral cortex via a neuron track lined with a multitude of blood vessels. This neural network is fascinating as it can send the precise amount of blood and electrical signals needed in both the mind and the core of our biological structure".

Christian stared blankly at her, perhaps since he was still startled by being completely vulnerable to her mental ambitions.

"But what I am getting at is once it bonds to the heart of another then the two are able to share a special link transcending space. It's like being a part of the other Gardevoir. If you stray too far, there might be degrees of discomfort," She looked down at the dust beneath their legs as they sat together.

"How do you know so much about yourselves? As a Gardevoir, I mean," Feyera asked fascinated.

"We just know. We're in tune to how our bodies operate. What did you think? We cut ourselves open to find out what's on the inside?" Sana started laughing at how preposterous this notion would be.

Feyera appreciated her laughter but all the while, he felt very out of place.

Sensing this, she stopped her bright laughter and quickly responded, "Oh right...humans do that. I forgot."

Christian could sense that she felt upset about inadvertently making him feel uncomfortable. He forced a small smile and shook his head, "I don't think anyone will ever be able to find out just how I work ever since Semblance without cutting me apart."
Sana sighed full of relief that Feyera was using humor to offset his own insecurities. "A helpful tool to be sure," she thought to herself.

Still, she was not convinced that he was being completely transparent to her. True he had told her much, but she could not escape the feeling that maybe there were still memories anchored to his essence deriving from Christian Feyera. Would such dormant memories ever even be exposed to Feyera? And if they were, would he have the courage to tell her?

"Any other memories? Or are you still facing difficulty?"

"To be honest, I don't even know what types of memories I should be looking for," was Christian's response.

"The emotionally meaningful ones will be the easiest to access. I must warn you though, Gardevoir memories will always be more difficult to recall than your human recollections. As I said earlier, we are forward-looking creatures. When you dwell too long in the past, you can become paralyzed by the idea that things could have been different. It is almost as if we relive the past each time we think about it. But his memories are there...embedded in your essence, Chris," she said.

They made unbroken eye contact for several moments.

The annexed self-essence brought about great challenges for the young man. She could see it in his eyes. They were rich crimson with swirls of soft very faint emerald hues. In the center of their stormy amalgamation, were ebony pupils not unlike her own.

The dissipating green was certainly a part of Christian Feyera. She remembered that night two years back. The rocket who had tried to take the life of her spouse had such brilliant green eyes. She knew why she remembered this detail. She recalled it because it was bizarre; how could something so pure could contain the potential for such wretched malice? She recalled the details but refused to become trapped by them. This was surprisingly easier to do than she remembered it being in the past. After all, she was with him now.

How it was such a faint aspect of his colored eyes confused her. Green, the original color, had been overtaken by the same scarlet present in her irises. There was only one other difference separating them from having a mirror image as they stared at each other.

She remembered when Sephiteos had escaped from the Rocket's experimental lab on this very island. His eyes were different. The humans had done something malicious to him. He was treated as an experiment. Their endeavors to graft this aspect of Dark-type Pokemon onto a Psychic-type were a radical success. Revolutionary even. Defying their nature, Seph was able to see into the beyond by exerting this power granted to him. However, the pain inflicted upon him was beyond comprehensible.

She recalled her mate from using nearly all of his energy to inhibit her from employing empathy upon escaping the Evercrest research facility on top of Penta Cliff. To allow her to do so would be to allow her to feel his extreme pain as if it were her own. It would be best if he never shared the memories of being operated upon.

Still, the time she saw her mate's eyes in altered form was very brief. For Seph was being pursued by one of the scientists that had administered the Progenitor Serum: none other than Feyera whom she leaned next to right now.

Fate had an interesting way of twisting outcomes.
The constant flux of melding his own human traits with another being was not only a mental obstacle, but also a physical one. Especially since it had been a Gardevoir. Feyera blinked, breaking their extended stare. If he was placed into this body, a body with aspects of Delta-two, then one day would he be brought out of it? It was a burning question.

"Sana," Christian said rubbing his face with his free hand.

"Yes?" She tried to respond without sounding dreamy.

"Am I an abomination?" Feyera asked her, all the while thinking about what Haunter had told him in the Pokemon Tower.

Sana thought hard about this. He could see her mind frantically working. She wanted to give him an answer to ease his mind. "No." She paused for a few seconds. Briefly breaking and looking at the earth below them, she then returned her gaze to his. "Everything in nature is a circle. Everything that comes to be comes out of what it was once not. Look at the petals of the flower. When they die, they fall, but in the springtime, they are reborn in the bud. Eventually this bud blooms into a majestic flower even more tremendous than the one which preceded it. Do you know why we consider the new beauty to be more majestic than the old?"

Feyera scratched his head, "No, why?"

"Because it has survived death. It has overcome an obstacle, and persevered through it. If something living becomes dead, perhaps something dead can become living. If you live in nature, everything you see is just a cycle of movement where one contrary flows into another," Sana said. She sincerely hoped this perspective would help him.

"I…survived death?" Feyera continued to look at her face and became lost by the two whirlpools which were her drawing eyes. Their characteristics charmed him.

"Twice technically. That fall would have killed both of you. Maybe that is why Haunter was so angry at you. You had escaped the claws of death as both a human and a Pokemon," She spoke with conviction.

"Still, how does that explain my current state of being? What am I exactly? Is there even a word for it?" Anxiously, he gripped her hand even tighter.

"I have a theory."

Feyera pawed his chin, "Go for it."

"Souls are different from bodies. Bodies are visible; we can see that they have a lot of different parts. You see," Sana looked down at her own figure, "a body is a manifestation of intricate parts spread out over space and time. Souls don't typically have parts, they are not composite things. Sometimes you can get a sense of the soul through the eyes—which are the windows to the soul. The soul holds all of these parts together into one living organism. The soul is indivisible. Pure identity. Self-unity. Bodies can fall apart, because they're made of parts. But the soul can't fall apart..."

He didn't believe it. Her explanation was too riddled with the way she felt about Sephiteos. If an ancient relic was able to do this to him, by defying all laws of reason, then obviously the opposite could be done. He knew she wanted him to accept it to a degree; he did not want to create confrontation though. "What about my brain? My memories, do they not have a place in this schematic you've constructed?" Feyera asked. "Souls sound unscientific!"
"The soul is something more than mere brain activity, Feyera. You know that. You are thinking about the soul as if it were some type of sticky glue. I suppose that is an acceptable opinion considering that you have two converged souls. Even if they are one, then the body is dependent on the soul and not the other way around. The soul's a harmony now, based upon the instruments playing it. Your soul enlivens your body. And if you were to take the soul out of the body...the body will die," Sana said. Her eyes were trapped in his again, "Life belongs to a soul."

"Then what about my body? I don't know what I am to do any longer! This is all me, all Christian, except for this! I am not depressed about it because I am no longer in pain. Who is to say that it won't start up again though?" Christian was talking about the cognitive meltdowns resulting in bodily destruction.

"I…I…can only help you with certain aspects. Together, maybe we can find a way for you to command it. Although it would seem that the sheer unprecedented nature of your existence has caused your body to begin deteriorating…" her voice trailed off.

Christian's face was filled with concern, "Will it kill me? Do you know?" The thought of the crystal taking over him through Edge worried him.

"I've never seen anything like this. It is completely foreign to me," Sana took in a deep breath, her hands hovering just above his heart. "But I promise I won't abandon you. Now that you are here however…"

"Wait before you go on, why here? Why now? What was the reason for all of this?" the young trainer asked.

She grinned, "You read my mind. Just now. Faintly, but I felt it. I was just getting to that. Do you remember how you felt after you earned your very first Gym Badge?"

"Terrible. I lost a close friend, Lawrence my Pidgey. He was the first Pokemon I caught as a new trainer. I'll never forget the friend I lost that day. I also destroyed Brock's Gym inadvertently by losing control of my psyonic powers," for a brief moment Christian relived the event and shuddered as his emotions tried to possess him. These negative emotions of inadequacy and guilt did not seem to be as persuasive as they usually were. Did Sana have something to do with that?

"But what did you gain from subsequent badges? I know the feeling since I am reading your mind just say it to me," Sana said.

"Err…self-respect. Pleasure even. For me and my teammates," Feyera stammered, very wary of having his thoughts and emotions completely spread out and available.

"That's right. It is something primal. Humans don't understand it. Perhaps they have a tainted idea of what it is with their sense of duels using their petty firearms, although it is just not the same as a Pokemon battle," the Gardevoir said. "When you put everything on the line in competition...it is just so...exhilarating," strangely, Christian knew the exact feeling Sana was describing. "A Gym Badge is more than a piece of the past. It is a symbol for triumph. The victor recalls the tribulations he faced in the past and remembers the most emotional of moments. Furthermore, you use this sense of progress to further your desire for accomplishment. You feel the pull of contest more than most because of Seph, Christian".

Feyera wasn't convinced by her rational but it was the best theory yet. "Why the Soul Badge though? Were you trying to be funny or something?" Feyera asked.

She started laughing as her face grew beet red from blushing. "Hahaha! I never thought of it in
those terms, but now that you mention it, I suppose there was some deeper meaning to the entire series of events that took place. I needed to convince you to come here. I knew you had a small romantic interest in Lorelei, so don't try to hide that. It was how I first made contact with you."

Mister Feyera began to blush as well, a little embarrassed.

"She was on this very island at the time, due to her home island, Floe Isle being only a few nautical miles east of here. So I devised a plan. Using this," Sana clutched his chest, "I communed with you in your dreams to inflame your passions under the guise of Lorelei and motivate you to travel to Fuchsia. I knew that you would be experiencing the aphrodisiac effects from earning Gym Badges as well. You are fortunate to be able to be both Pokemon and trainer. It means you can issue Gym Challenges and fight with your friends through your mental and emotional connections. After the battle is won, the thrill of triumph is not only your Pokemon, but yours as well. In a more primal sense than any human could possibly understand. But in any event, by briefly entering her mind and using Psychic close to the southern sea, I telepathically controlled her to deliverer you here."

"I know she was upset about her boat being destroyed," Edge said, "What was the urgency behind getting me here?"

"I wanted to be with you now that you understood more about yourself. You couldn’t expect me to confront you with all of this information prior to it manifesting itself in the way that it has. I anticipated this day for such a long time and my patience was at its end. How I longed for the day to come. I did not know when, but I knew it would happen eventually. Even after inadvertently clearing a large amount of your memories in order to reduce the pain, I somehow just knew it would come back. And then I felt it," Sana sensitively spoke.

"Felt what?" asked the trainer.

"Your power. Through the crest," she replied, "It was beginning to be unlocked through your use of Gardevoir abilities. Amazingly, it would seem, you were able to overcome a myriad of obstacles without totally losing yourself to the corruption of power."

Edge thought about when the power was at its worst. How cruel he had become. Feasting on negative emotions allowed for nearly limitless potential, but at a terrible price. He thought of the rocket, Brad. He thought of how he had nearly lost more than his life that evening on the S.S. Anne. He shamefully looked down, avoiding her gaze.

"Hey," Sana nudged him with her cheek. Oddly the three white clippings on her face were exceedingly soft. Their yielding texture reminded him of ear cartilage. "It's going to be okay. You're safe now. What did I tell you before? I'll protect you."

"Can you protect me from myself?" Edge wanted to know for sure.

She smiled nervously, "I will. But you need to remain by my side. I cannot guarantee anything if you leave my sphere of influence."

At this, Edge exhaled as if a large burden was removed from his back.

"Now I must ask you if you are ready to hear what I am going to ask of you," said the Gardevoir with a determined look on her face.

"Of course but first…what about Lorelei? Will she be okay?" asked Feyera.

Sana rolled her large eyes and let out a soft growl, "Of course she'll be fine. She's an Elite Four member after all. They are the best trainers. I mean…not HER specifically, but those she
associates with," Sana was careful in choosing her words.

"Well, won't she be looking for me? I'm sure I gave her quite a fright by just appearing to her after the boat crashed in the coastal storm. Plus she couldn't remember anything due to your little Psychic-commandeering of her body," Edge muttered.

"I suppose..." the Gardevoir did not seem to be pleased, "What did you have in mind?"

"Well it has been hours since I saw her last. I mean after we met, I just totally forgot. There were so many things on my mind. But we have to make sure she's alright. Maybe we should check out the crash site?"

"Would you like to go now?" The Gardevoir asked him as the sky started to become pale from the impending morning.

"No...it can wait. Like you said, she's a member of the Elite Four. How about we go once it is daylight?" Edge suggested.

He did not need to see her face to know that she approved. She placed an arm behind his neck, held him close, and began to doze off in the balmy morning breeze.

"Wasn't there something you wanted to ask me?" Feyera questioned the drowsy Gardevoir.

She didn't seem to be disturbed by his question. He heard a subtle yawn.

"It can wait until tomorrow. I just want this moment to last."
The subtle stirrings of morning light did very little to disturb Chris Feyera and Sanaria—the young Gardevoir resting on said trainer's shoulder. As the morning sun rose out over the horizon, Sana sighed gently. Audible, yet not disruptive, her minute exhale made him realize that she had been woken. The Pokemon trainer pondered whether he had been sleeping for the past hour or so or just mildly dozing.

Feyera looked well rested for once. He even felt well rested. It was strange. At peace to a certain extent, the busy life of his past seemed much less appealing. Collecting Pokemon League Badges, stopping Team Rocket, finding the origins of his psyonics, it was all a monumental and tiresome task. So drawn out were his prior undertakings, he could not think about it for long without feeling the steady creep of worry. He could not comprehend moving beyond this moment; he did not feel like doing anything at all. Would he have to do anything else? Everything had been at rest and the inertia was tremendous in the best of ways. It would have been fine just staying here.

"Isn't it paradoxical?" she asked still clutching one of his hands.

"Nuh…what?" Feyera groaned and his voice cracked. "What's paradoxical?"

"Look," the Gardevoir said resigning her hold on his neck and pointing at the sunrise. Although certainly not as brilliantly beautiful as the meadow of colors, the rising daylight was striking. The way it lightly caressed the ocean's horizon made it seem like there were millions of glistening diamonds in the waves, forming a heavenly pathway to the sun. From the eastern mouth of this cave, the two of them could see nearly everything.

"Yeah, I see it. It's a fine-looking sunrise, Sana. Really bright too."

He felt her nod against his shoulder. "Yeah."

"What's so paradoxical about it though? Do you see the colors?" Feyera asked, referring to the colors emotions evoked for Gardevoir. Such colors became apparent and were contingent upon emotional states. States of emotion varied greatly, and could come from nearly any source, be it internal, external, or—in rare cases usually reserved for between Gardevoir—both. He wasn't so sure if he fully understood it, Sanaria had been brief in her explanation back at the meadow. One thing was for sure about them they were strong, rich, and vibrant enough to change perception.

She shook her head no. "It's paradoxical how the sun rises over the world casting out the darkness."

"It is? H-how? Doesn't it always do this?" Edge questioned, unsure of whether or not he was oblivious to something big. What did she mean? Sunrises were always the same.

"Think about it Chris," Sana said. After saying his real name, the Gardevoir made a slight noise separate from telepathic communication. He wondered what she was vocalizing.

Perplexed yet interested he responded, "You got me on this one. Why don't you just tell me?"
"How does it make you feel?" She asked while nudging him on the base of his neck with one of the cartilage projections where her ears were.

"Umm…” But Feyera was stumped. How did he feel? "Happy?" Sunrises made him happy. How was he supposed to feel? What did it matter? It seemed like a game to him. "You need to help me out here. What about the sunrise specifically?"

"Consider it Chris! It's an enormous radiating orb of fire. *Sigh* Not effected by any gravity. You witness it soar above the darkness…and banish it. The way it resonates with you...It is—just—experience," she might have been enthralled by the situation, but given her explanation, Feyera could sort of see why. Although he did not like it.

"Experience," Edge Feyera said while stroking his amber hair as he did almost habitually at this point. The coarse sensation of running his fingers against his scalp made him happy. When his nerves tingled from the nails brushing hair follicles, he felt airy.

Sana straightened one of her knees, exposing her now extended leg from beneath her dress. "Yeah. Experience," She repeated.

"What a strange way of viewing it." He again said, "Experience…?"

"Why is it strange to see it that way? Isn't that it? How do you see the sun?"

Feyera figured there were a few ways he could answer this question. Rather than responding on instinct, he paused. Gathering his thoughts with this precious time, he addressed the inquiry carefully. "Personally, I always saw the sun as a massive source of energy."

"Energy? Like to go out and enjoy the day because it's pretty out?"

"Sorta," he said while trying to arch his back without being too disruptive.

He could tell that she was confused. "Usually the sun makes me tired when I'm outside for too long."

"I don't mean me being outside. I'm talking about how it gives us the strength to be productive with our day. Light and all. It's useful."

"You like the light don't you? Is that why humans build those towers of light and steel?"

Feyera immediately thought about Silph Towers. They were largest skyscrapers he knew of. The tallest one surpassed the clouds. While living in Saffron, he felt a mixture of inspiration and inadequacy every time he peered up at their untouchable heights. Such a feeling although diminished, was still present even at a distance. "Yup. Exactly, Sana. Electricity gives us light. You probably know about Electric Type Pokemon. Well people can also generate electricity by using machines. That way you can see when the sun goes down and it's dark without resorting to fire candles."

"Oh! That's...umm nice. So you don't need to go to sleep right?"

"Yeah, all that and then some. It turns out you can do so much with electrical energy. Did you know there was this huge push by Silph to convert sunlight to electricity a few years back? Could you imagine? They even had a massive facility being built in Orre to harness the renewable energy. Don't remember what it was called. Ah well, not really important, it was technology based on ancient designs. Our ancestors did this long ago; they had everything figured out, without relying on Pokemon."
Sana seemed to be thinking over what he just said. How much did she even know about human civilization? More or less than what he knew about Gardevoir? "They did? And you evolved from them?"

Feyera thought it was humorous that she was paralleling generations with her own life cycles as a Pokemon. "Well...perhaps devolved is a better term." He thought about explaining the Terminal War, but even he didn't know what happened. "Basically people became really advanced and then we lost everything in a cataclysmic war. Kinda sings to the ballad of hubris don'tcha think?"

"But you got it back didn't you?" She asked somewhat troubled. Something had to be on her mind.

"Yeah," Feyera said. He wasn't romanticized by the idea of apocalyptic war. He remembered feeling disgusted that it even took place when he was younger. All that technology. All the progress. All lost in a blind instant. "We're getting it back. It's not going to happen overnight, but each day we discover more and improve upon what we've already unearthed."

"People...they like to build stuff don't they? With lots of pretty lights."

"Sure." Feyera agreed. "Sure we do. You think the lights are pretty?"

He felt her press her rounded head against his bomber jacket's black material. "Yeah I do." She then quivered, startling Edge. It wasn't that cold and she seemed to have been pretty comfortable against him.

Full of concern he asked her, "You okay Sana?"

"Y-Yeah. I'm okay. I'll be okay." She then tightened her clasp on his shoulder. Maybe something had put her off. Was it something he said?

"I became sidetracked though, as I often do. Sorry. What were you saying? Experience?"

"Yes, experience." She still did not resign her tight hold on him. "Like how something makes you feel. Not just how you can use it or what you can do with it."

Edge could almost grasp where she was coming from; however, every time he focused, the meaning seemed to slip away from him. "I guess I understand what you're getting at. You have a very interesting perspective, Sana. But I'm afraid the sun really isn't doing any rising off the ground. It's actually the earth doing the moving; the sun's stationary. Our planet spins around and that makes it look like the sun is going around us. You can't always trust your senses. They trick you. And if something's lied to you once, there's no reason for it to stop. That's the first thing they'll teach you in any academic setting."

Sana raised her head off his shoulder and tilted her gaze up to meet his own. Feyera was once again facing those gorgeous cerise eyes. "But what about when you were a child? Didn't you ever wonder if your unique experiences had some validity?"

He felt cornered, and the Gardevoir was right up against him, physically and mentally. He didn't particularly like reflecting on his past. Especially his childhood. There was too much baggage there. "Yes...I suppose. Let me think now...umm." Nothing came to mind and he just stared at her. He didn't even want to say anything. There was nothing to say from his perspective.

"Take your time. No rush, I was just curious," said Sana. For an emotional Pokemon she was especially easygoing. He wondered what made her so calm. She had every reason to hate and distrust him. Every time he thought back to himself however, he would find his thoughts wander back to her. That serenity and peace she embodied. Whatever it was, it came across in her eyes.
That was just one of the reasons why they were so precious.

His mind abruptly snapped him out of the trance and he regained his composure, straightening his head back up. In an attempt to break the state of affairs, he posited in astonishment "Ah ha!" making her blink and recoil away from his face. "Right," he took a deep breath. "Before I was sent to boarding school, I thought the moon would follow me wherever I went. Hah," he sighed, seeing Sana blink again. "Crazy right?"

"The…moon?" She awkwardly asked, for Sana had not been entirely focused on what Feyera was saying about the moon.

Restlessly he continued, paying no heed to her quelled expression. "I really thought I was someone special because wherever I walked, so long as the moon was out, it would follow me. One time I even tried to run away from it. I ran all the way around the park where I had grown up. Boy that was silly of me."

Sanaria laughed and sarcastically replied, "What you couldn't get away?"

He smiled for a moment and then dismissed the joyful look. "No. Of course not. The moon follows everyone. Actually…I didn't mean to say that. What am I thinking? It doesn't do any following. Everyone always sees it in the sky. We just think it's following us since it looks that way."

"But you remember being followed. Chased even. He he," her laugh made him become dangerously close to producing a wide grin. And here he was trying to be serious with her. He wanted to be a little less personal and staidness was the easiest method.

"Er…I was young remember? I didn't really know any better. I thought that because the moon took an interest in me I was special. But that's not the case. No one is special; we all see the same moon in the sky."

"What if everyone was special though?" She kept on pushing him with her questions. Prodding for answers not unlike he had over the past few weeks.

"That's being idealistic. The facts are what they are. The moon is just a dumb big old rock up in the sky, Sana."

"For a dumb big old rock, it sure gets a lot of attention though don't you think? Do humans ever write songs and poems about it?"

"Of course we do. I mean, not me specifically. I learned about the moon and what it is, what it does, you know…" Feyera shook his head. "I'll admit it's inspirational in that regard. Always beyond our reach, yet somehow here with us."

"Haha, careful now 'Doctor' Feyera, that almost sounded like a poem to me." Sana cutely made it sound as if she was speaking to someone important. Professional even.

Edge blushed. She might have been patronizing him a tad with her slanted words, but he really didn't mind for some reason. It was innocent enough. He began to smile and then gave an airless laugh. Making crude poetry wasn't his intention. All he was doing was recollecting the way it made him once feel. He was answering her question. Nothing more. Flustered, he tried to recover lost ground. "Hey, I never said it wasn't useful. People like the moon since it can help you see on a dark night and even gives our oceans tides conducive to the ecosystem."

"There you go again. Being all scieny. Is it really so hard to accept just beauty BECAUSE it's beautiful?"
He was taken aback by her comment. What did she mean? "Accept beauty...because of its beauty,"
Edge repeated softer and slower.

He was expecting a nod of acknowledgement or something but her cherry eyes continued to stare at
him, their reflective sheen revealing his own eyes.

"Sana, I don't know. I do get emotional at times." Usually it was when his psyonics were
employed, however he hadn't used them for some time and yet the over-sensitive emotions
remained. Was this really him?Were the emotions really him? Had they always been there? He
thought of the times when meltdowns possessed him with their ferocious clench. Those certainly
weren't Chris Feyera, but could they have been instigated by Chris Feyera?

She made a face that showed she was contemplating. Maybe she knew what he was going through.
But how could she? Edge wondered. She was always a Gardevoir, not some bastardized half-linked
person grafted in. What was he even grafted into? Her life? Sephiteos’? Overwhelmed, he put his
hand on the rocky earth and pushed back a little bit.

Sana, feeling him move ever so slightly, gave a reply, "So you don't mind being open to the idea of
accepting beauty because of its beauty and nothing more?"

"I—I guess," replied Feyera. This seemed to be a logical trap. "What was beauty? It's not really my
place to say what's beautiful and what's not. What a person sees as beautiful is always subjective.
Like if I really hate sunrises for some reason..."

"...But that's what I'm trying to say, Chris!" She moaned. "It's about experience rather than facts and figures. You look at it like we're all just objects in the world."

"Aren't we?" Edge pouted, "You said yourself that Gardevoir have full awareness of their bodies
due to this thing here. Your thoughts, feelings, and even your anatomy is open to you right? You
understand how this...y—you work." He trailed off in wonder.

"I didn't mean it like that. I was talking about our hearts. Our hearts let us know what we are. They let us know who we are."

"This?" He pointed at hers, even though he could have just easily motioned to his own. His pointed
finger just hairs above the piece radiating with unknown secrets trembled with apprehension. They
were the same in all aspects. "This looks exactly like my own. Do they vary amid different
Gardevoir?"

"Yes." The Gardevoir said bowing her head to look at his chest, "But, it isn't just about what it looks like."

"Fine." Feyera withdrew his hand. "What it does though is similar. You can use it to read emotions and communicate with other Pokemon right?"

She gave him a half nod. "What it does isn't too important either."

"Huh? I don't get it." Frustrated, he made a loose fist and cupped his mouth, coughing. "You aren't making sense anymore, Sana. What it does has to be important! You told me this was a part of the Ralts evolutionary line!"

She curiously moved one of her hands near the trainer's heart. Feyera wasn't sure if she was going
to brush against his hypersensitive shard or not, and fretfully clenched. "It's about how it makes you feel. That's how it 'works'. You know that. Don't you? It's okay if you're afraid."
"I-I'm not afraid, Sana," but his tone suggested otherwise. Of course Feyera was afraid! All of these new and foreign feelings, they had no way of being explained. He couldn't exactly bring his case up to a medical doctor and expect a clear-cut diagnosis. The fact that he existed—let alone in his body altered with Sephiteos' eyes and his Gardevoir heart—defied all rationality. It all seemed so hopeless to the young man.

"I didn't say you were. I don't think you are. You've been through scarier things without more than a scratch." She said supportively, referring to Haunter. "But if you ever do get scared it's okay. That's all I wanted you to know."

"It's just not normal. All of it! I'm unsure; not necessarily scared. I've come too far to be afraid."

"You can be afraid of the unknown; that's fine. I know what it feels like to be frightened; it's a familiar feeling."

"You don't know what it's like to be me. You'll never know..." but he stopped mid-thought as he realized who he was talking to. A Gardevoir, quite possibly the incarnation of empathy itself. Her species alone made her leaps and bounds ahead of any psychologist.

"You're right," she said sadly. "I can't. At least not physically...However, I can figure out how you feel. And you can do the same for me."

Still not wanting to share a deeper connection with the Gardevoir, Feyera addressed the statement's stratosphere equivalent. "It must be difficult to do, always sensing emotions and incorporating them into your existence."

"What do you mean?" She asked wide-eyed.

Feyera shrugged. Sanaria probably had no idea. This was her Gardevoir nature he was referring to wasn't it? It was probably like asking a person if breathing or anything else you do without thinking was difficult to do. "I mean you always are open to people's moods and then you empathize with them."

"I'd say you've done a pretty good job of it yourself."

"W-What? What do you mean?"

"You're a Pokemon trainer aren't you?"

"Yeah...but..."

"Good trainers can sense how their Pokemon feel. They have an emotional connection transcending the barriers of dialogue."

True, he had been a gifted trainer. Most of it derived from psyonics. The fact that he defeated five Gym Leaders using weakened Pokemon was testament to this. Feyera was nearly positive that if he were somehow striped of the Gardevoir powers, then he would not be an adequate enough trainer to even tackle a wild Raticate. Okay, well maybe even a siphoned Desperado could handle a Raticate on her own. But a swarm of Beedrill or a Pokemon League Gym Leader, not a chance. That link, although potentially detrimental to his Pokemon's natural growth, was his lifeline. An umbilical cord of sorts connecting to his Pokemon's consciousness. Sana saw him reflecting and decided to let him soak it in, blinking twice and then bending her neck back away from him.

Edge continued to sit, frozen like a statue. Eventually he decided to ask a question with a narrower range. "Yeah but I was talking about how Gardevoir..."
"Oh. I think you've done an even better job at that though Chris!"

Her telepathy shocked him, "Wait. What? No. You don't know what I'm trying to say."

"Sure I do." She gave him a cheerful smile. "You have been so good at it that you don't even realize you're doing it! And wasn't that what you were worried about?"

"No I haven't." What had he been doing? "I—My psyonics…they're…"

"Gardevoir psyonics. All the telepathic communication you've had with your Pokemon, any time you've used Psychic power, it stems from emotion."

The young Gardevoir kept grinning. Emotions really were powerful; Edge Feyera had learned the hard way via his intermittent meltdowns. "Maybe not only your emotion, but others as well."

"Others?" Feyera thought about how he had been keen on knowing how others felt throughout his Pokemon adventure. Perhaps it was true. "You mean other creatures right?"

"Yup," Sana said.

"Doesn't it get—you know—tiring though?" Feyera thought about the implications of such a gift. The burden of always being perceptive to every little feeling, every stray emotional pattern, all irrationality. The prospect was frightening. "You can't always be open to how others feel. It would make you mad in the head," was his response ripe with conviction. Maybe there was a defense mechanism that shut it off. Maybe that was key to his salvation.

"You seem to be okay with it though, since you haven't really even realized what you've been doing the whole time. It's almost like second nature to you. Isn't that a good thing? I think you're stressing out over nothing."

"No, that can't be."

"Aw, why not?" She responded endearingly.

"I'm not okay with that at all. I don't feel that way." A half-truth. Sometimes he did get powerful sensations of how others felt. Even more so when he himself was in a closely neighboring mood. And as for his Pokemon, he always had the choice of communicating with them. If he didn't want to, he could always draw them back into their respective Pokeballs with impunity.

Sana gave him a sly smile, "Since when does feeling a certain way ever have an effect on the way something actually is, Chris?"

"Uh…what?" Then he realized the subtle trap he had fallen into. It wasn't even Sanaria being overly rational or intelligent, although he was certain she was the latter. He had dug himself into this one unknowingly. Logic was a devious opponent whose skirmishes never required reinforcements.

"You were trying to say that experience—or the way you felt—did not affect reality, remember?"

"I wasn't trying to say…” Edge trailed off. Busted.

"But you did." Sana firmly responded. Then she laughed, "Haha! Twice already."

"Who's counting though?" He wasn't sure what he was trying to prove by arguing with the Gardevoir. At this point, he was arguing with himself really. "You know, language is tricky. I occasionally mess up what I'm trying to say. Things don't come out perfectly. Nothing's perfect.
Like from time to time I'll say one thing and mean another."

Sana shook her head back and forth, her mint green hair brushing against his jacket's right sleeve as she did so. "I think it's the opposite actually. I think you can mean one thing but say another."

"Now you're trying to confuse me. I don't appreciate it," Feyera said lying to her face. He liked the attention given to him, but not the subject matter.

"I'm not trying to though...All I want to do is help you see things authentically. Like...like a..."

"Like a Gardevoir?" He completed the uneasy thought for her.

She swallowed and nodded yes to him.

"Sorry but that isn't going to happen Sana." Defiance took command of his tone, "I'm a human first and foremost. Even with all this," he motioned down at his shard, "I'm still Chris Feyera."

"But I thought you said you would be open to seeing beauty as beauty."

Angry and feeling like she was reprimanding him, "What does that have to do with anything?" He demanded.

"It's just a perspective, that's all. Nothing permanent or groundbreaking. What's done is done. You're here now."

"Maybe...I'm not convinced however." He would continuously tell himself that he would a way to undo everything eventually. This whole experience at the cave's entrance, although nice, was not him. Feyera could say the same thing about his encounters with Sana physical and mental. He didn't know how to tell Sanaria though without resorting to the way he felt. Everything once thought objective had been turned into subjectivity.

Her eyes drooped down. "I'll do what I can Chris..." She might have been upset.

"Thanks Sana. That means a lot to me you know?"

She nodded. "I know. Listen, can you at least try to give what I said a chance?"

"Yeah okay fine." Feyera didn't really intend on it, he figured he could somehow diminish the pressure she was putting on him by fibbing. "So answer this for me, how do you know what's true in the world?"

"I know what feels true." Sana's tone matched her idealistic viewpoint.

Feyera was going to continue to question her but realized that he really wouldn't be getting anywhere. Sanaria's sense of the world had much less objectivity present than his world perspective. He felt like nothing was getting across. How could he bridge this gap? She had been situated in her ideals and he in his truth.

By now the sun had risen well over the horizon. The distant water sparkled beyond the eastern side of landmass. In between the mountainous region where the two of them were stationed and the crystalline Southern Sea was a large expanse of vegetation bordered by the meadow where they had met. Although not nearly as colorful as before, Feyera was able to make out a few of the distant flowers. Subtle lavender and rich auburn dotted the green field.

He sat watching the scenery. "Those emotions..."
Sana's ears perked up. "What about them?"

"People have the same ones as Gardevoir right?" He questioned.

"I think we do." She said excitedly. "Some emotions are easier to share than others. The higher tiered ones are especially restrictive because they have some...permanence."

"But Gardevoir are always in touch with emotions since that is where their power comes from."

"Pretty much," she acknowledged. "It isn't all about power though. You really like to see things as having use."

Feyera rocked his head back and forth, "Yeah that's what humans do though, Sana. We build; we make tools to help us because they have use to us. That's survival. There's no sense in getting attached to our creations. What something does is what makes it what it is."

Her disproval was apparent but she didn't argue. "Tell me about what you're earlier stage was like."

Feyera raised a brow. "Earlier stage?" Maybe she wanted to know more about him before Semblance and him taking on Sephiteos' traits.

"Like childhood. For Gardevoir it's a period in time where we are 'Ralts'."

"Oh...I knew that," Edge felt silly for extrapolating it enough to mean something else. Uncertain, she responded, "Yeah."

"Well..." Why was she so interested in him? "Why do you want to know?" Feyera asked, half expecting a response alluding to affection. Something like "You fascinate me" or "I need to know about the one with my mate's heart."

But the Gardevoir's response was simple and unblemished, "I'm just making conversation. If you don't want to talk and rather just sit here with me I'm okay with that too. It's up to you."

What could he talk about? He had an unfortunate past. Misfortune after misfortune led him to the Rockets, Cipher, Evercrest, Semblance, and eventually here. He thought about that picture he kept in his wallet's internal sleeve. The one with him as a little boy, his mother, and father. Before they were separated. Back when they were a whole. A family. Maybe if life was a little easier on him he wouldn't have had all of this subjected to him. Perhaps if she never died, he wouldn't have left. They could have been together, and there would be no need for crime or heartless research in his life.

Feyera gave an exacerbated sigh. Sana didn't deserve to know about his family. What right did she have to that knowledge? Things like his early childhood made him vulnerable. They upset him. And besides she was a Pokemon. Even with her consoling abilities, that information was deeply personal to Edge. He didn't share it with anyone. Especially not Pokemon. Not even Brucie knew. And he was definitely not going to unveil his secrets to Sana or any other Gardevoir. She already knew more about him than he deemed suitable.

He decided to answer her interest with a vague, broad, and overarching claim. "I had been drained of many emotions due to circumstances. What happened was I became a Pokemon researcher. That's what I did with my life after youth. I became someone who was put in a place where order and reason reigned. Academia. Yet with that knowledge, I committed misdeeds. Based on my personality, it's easy enough to see me getting pulled into things. Cipher and the Rockets, that's all
believable enough. It was in the name of science after all." Feyera paused. If only it had been that simple. The whole Semblance mission and Reilken Mercurius on the other hand, was a burden too grand scale to even comprehend. He was working without a concrete memory, through dreams to understand a concept that did not make any logical sense whatsoever.

"So that was your young adulthood?" Sana curiously asked. Unbeknownst to Edge, Sana had begun paralleling her various life stages to his own. A line comparing human and Pokemon development could be easily blurred. Especially amid their species.

"Yes," he thought about how to explain it to the Gardevoir, still unaware that she was trying to do the same thing from her end. "A second stage in growth. Before adulthood, but after childhood."

"That's uncanny."

"What is?"

"The similarities. You have the same life cycle."

"Yeah but it is complex. I'm sure it is for Pokemon too. There are plenty of differences between us."

She whimsically responded, "There are?"

"Yeah." Edge said. This used to be his subject of expertise before the whole memory loss. "Pokemon transform suddenly, radically undergoing metamorphosis. Even if it's a build-up, it all culminates in one moment."

Sana shrugged. "For us it can be as simple as a thought that pushes us into adulthood. How do humans gauge what an adult is?"

Feyera rubbed his boots against the cave's floor. "Usually it's a matter of age. You reach a certain birthday and then 'Bang!' just like that you're suddenly an adult."

"Hehe really? Sana giggled. That sounds like Pokemon evolution to me."

"I guess…that's how the legal system sees it anyway."

She didn't seem to really care when he gave her generalized questions. "How do you see it though?"

"I see it as…well maybe it varies from person to person," Feyera said. "There are plenty of people out there that never grow up. They have adult bodies, but haven't matured enough yet to use them."

"That's interesting. Profound even. The way you're saying it makes it sound like humans are not as strictly physical as I once thought. And here I was thinking that humans never really delved too deep into their emotional states."

"We have minds you know, Sana! We're not helpless sacks of bones and meat walking around."

She gave a laugh. "Ha ha. I know you're not, Chris. You have emotions. People have emotions. It's all similar enough."

"Sana?"

"Yeah?" She sighed.
"All I made was one mistake. How much more will I have to pay?" Feyera wanted a second chance to undo what he had done. That was his intent during the Sanctum Robbery wasn't it? That's why he went back to save Sephiteos. The male Gardevoir was lying to him by saying he was selfish. He couldn't help but take some notice in how the punishment fit the crime. His mind was making the entire slew of events seem like destiny. It repulsed him.

"What you do with the time you're given matters a great deal."

"I got in too deep over my head. Thought I was doing good. I just didn't know how much it would hurt others. Was that my downfall?"

Sana moved her head to look him in the eyes, "I don't know. You can't change who you were, but you can change who you become. I am sure of that."

"I know I haven't got the right to ask you to sympathize…but thanks," he spoke quietly and sincerely to the Gardevoir, "It has been only escalating. I can't describe these feelings. I…ahh…"

He felt his mental essence being discerned. He felt himself drowning in the brief union of spirit. Not his own spirit. He could not call it that. Even though it only lasted for a microsecond, their connection was potent enough to deliver a plethora of unified emotional states. Individualized memories and visions were not nearly as satisfying as sharing them.

She closed her eyes, "Your thoughts are all over the place. It's like trying to read a code without a key. What are you concerned about?"

"Memories," he answered immediately. He felt a little uneasy.

"Memories? Like Seph's memories?"

"No." Although he meant yes. Progenitor had been the only experience recollected from Sephiteos' perspective. Where would it end though?

"Your memories were damaged—fractured really—when I saved you from the pain."

"Right…and there wouldn't be any memories that didn't actually happen to me."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I'll remember stuff that actually happened right?"

"You think that your mind is playing tricks on you still?"

"To a degree, maybe."

"Dream recollecting through Hypnosis is a powerful way to expose the past. If it seems a little much then maybe I shouldn't have…"

"It's fine. 'What's done is done' you said. You did what I asked you to do, you informed me of my past."

"Not just your past though," she answered. "Those two lives have ended and this one has begun."

"Regardless of the specifics, it is in the past. You said something akin to that earlier. I just keep thinking though…" Edge began.

"About what?" She inquired despite being able to read his mind's feelings. She knew about the
inadequacy. She knew about the fear. It was their inadequacy. It was their fear.

It made him feel strange. Why the words? If she could commune with him directly then why even speak with him?

"About undoing this—everything—somehow." The young trainer looked at his altered body. It was very uncomfortable to say the very least. He felt squeamish just thinking about converged souls fighting inside of him. It made his skin crawl. What were they fighting for? Physical representation? Who were they fighting for? What was left of who he was?

Fortunately, they were both humanoid creatures yet they were still so different. Sana had tried to make it seem as though they were not all that far apart but Feyera thought otherwise. The sequence of events confused the ex-researcher, "It must be possible," he sternly looked at Sana, her head remained anchored atop his shoulder. "If the Mercury Relic has this type of power surely it must be reversible."

His glance turned to the seemingly lifeless armlet attached to his wrist. "I need to figure out how to use it properly."

Sana exhaled a deep sigh, her head stayed locked in place, gazing at his face. Her breathing slowed down as if she was thinking intently. Her thoughts must have been absorbing her entire consciousness. "Yes. Please just...you cannot leave. For a brief time I thought I would never see you again. I never want to be back there. If you are able to undo anything, promise me that you will not kill yourself."

Edge laughed and he readjusted his back but she still leaned against him unfazed, "Ha, well I'm sure you would be eager to be rid of the Chris Feyera part of me, after all that I have done to torment you and Sephiteos. Those atrocities, are they even forgivable? I cannot remember half of them. How do I know what else I have done to wrong you?"

"I...don't harbor ill feelings towards you anymore," the Gardevoir responded, "I just want to save something special while I still have a chance to save it."

"But that something special is Sephiteos, not me," Feyera solemnly spoke, "even if his...attributes are represented in a physical component of me, heck even if I have his haloed-eyes because of Progenitor...I'm not...no, I can't..."

He was grappling for the right words to use. What did he want to say? That he was not eternally tied to the soul of a Pokemon? Why was this that difficult to communicate to Sana? It had to be reversible. She bent her neck, intently observing his disposition.

"There must be a way to split apart the converged souls. I need to move forward, but the past still haunts me, Sana," Edge said. He clenched his fist and shook it, reflecting upon the atrocities he had committed to Seph as a member of Team Rocket. He now had both of these memories. A synthesis of memories caused him to shudder. It was so unnatural to see the same event from two radically different perspectives. Worse still, Feyera realized that by harming the Gardevoir in the past, he had indirectly brought horrific memories to himself today because now they were his own. This troublesome truth was intoxicating; it permeated Edge's essence, leaking into all of his cognition. Should he feel grief because he was now trapped? What did grief serve to do? Seemingly nothing to aid his plight, and yet it felt so very good to allow grief to overtake him.

"It doesn't have to haunt you. You aren't a slave to those feelings."

He felt exactly that though, shackled by his position. And now enslaved to the guilt. "If only I
hadn't been the one to administer Progenitor to Sephiteos…it was the same as doing it to myself," Feyera said, his voice filled with indignation. The irony of it all drove him near to snapping.

"If it wasn't you it would have been someone else," Sana began to say, but Edge quickly cut her off.

"No! I did it. The dreams, the memories, the people I've encountered, they all point to the same thing! It was my project. I was directly involved. They wanted…I wanted to synthesize a merger between Psychic Pokemon and Dark Pokemon. I'm sure I involved myself in the project out of curiosity. I was trying to play God. And look who got played!" Edge felt like thrashing, and his legs squirmed in his discomfort.

Sanaria sat completely motionless, watching him ardently. Her glare was hardly one of passivity. She focused tightly on Feyera's face and tried to give him a sense of reassurance through a determined expression.

Feeling slightly vented, Feyera went on, "And they…hunted Sephiteos down because he was a powerful specimen capable of surviving the procedure. I was the green-eyed researcher who helped administer the genetic graft on his eyes. H-he was just a Pokemon. Another specimen. And I…I was just caught up in affairs."

She brushed one of her slender legs against his denim jeans. "It's…it's what happened Feyera. At least you're alive."

"I'm not alive! I died!" He exclaimed.

"What do you mean?"

"I should have died. That fall should have killed me. All the times I've fallen it should have killed me. I don't deserve anything. Just death."

"There's a reason why it didn't though. Is it that hard to see?"

I didn't know Sana! How could I have known? If I had known that the Reilken Mercurius would do…this!" he looked at his chest with disgust. The shining red shard pulsated with a small light aura synchronizing with his own elevating heartbeat. This wasn't his. These powers weren't his. They were stolen from a life that was not his to own.

"You didn't know. No one could know. Stop tearing yourself apart."

"I should have known better."

"What do you want me to say Chris? 'Now you know better?' That doesn't make any sense. You've been given a gift."

"An awful one robbing me of everything I know."

"You are making progress though," Sana winked at him, "I'm not perfect at it either. Sometimes I get lost in the past as well. Edge, as I told you: that is very dangerous. Emotions might be the source of our powers. But you must never forget that they can always destroy us."

"Physically?" asked Edge. His body had fought itself in the past. Especially during cognitive meltdowns.

"Yes. I knew a Gardevoir that happened to. She was my mother in fact," Sana began to grow misty-eyed.
Edge did not need to employ any of his emotion-reading abilities to know of her bottomless sorrow. He felt it. As she did. There were few boundaries between them. Everything rushed together. He felt the distance separating them shrink as she began to tell her story.

"When I was still a young Ralts, my mother, she just lost it. It was after my father Evarettium thas Relius was killed protecting our homeland. He…my father died defending the Psi Alliance. A Dark Pokemon ripped him to shreds. His wounds were so severe there wasn't even a chance to say 'Goodbye'. He was there one day and then not there the next."

"I'm sorry Sana," Feyera said. He knew the pain of losing a parent. Sana had lost both. What was he doing claiming that he had it difficult? Did he have the right to say such things to her?

"I was young though Chris, I never knew that he would never come back. I went to my mother, but something inside of her had broke. Permanently. There was no way to pull her out of her depression. As a child, I knew nothing about the dangers of dejection. I assumed it was a phase or a mood that would pass. As you are undoubtedly discovering, Edge, emotions are a part of physiology as much as they are a part of cognitive functions for Gardevoir," her quivering hand rubbed his core, seeking comfort.

"Sort of like when I am able to use gravitational powers based on my state of mind?" Edge asked her.

"Yes. However…" she took both of her arms and picked up his arm. Turning it over and examining it by running her smooth fingers along its perimeter, she discovered to remnants of incisions. Such wounds which had been opened most recently during the second confrontation with Haunter. These very gashes were from exploiting his power to the highest levels. Edge groaned softly as she pressed against one of the larger skin abrasions, just below his right elbow. Her eyes seemed mystified by not only his half-morphed body, but also the trauma it had endured.

"Her body began to deteriorate. She lost someone close to her, and became pulled down by the emotional fracture. I never understood such feelings until I thought I lost Seph. When I was a Ralts I could never understand death. I just thought maybe my mother would move past it…I had no idea of how strongly our higher evolutions bond together. It is almost complete dependency. In hindsight, I always thought that she could have looked to the future and see the promise in me as her child, but instead she chose to not only live in the past—but allow herself to become consumed by it. I blamed myself for the longest time," below Sana's eyes, a collection of water was indiscreetly forming.

Edge took his right arm, barely free from her clutches and sympathetically put it around her shoulder. It was the least he could do to give her some comfort. She seemed appreciative, and snuggled closer.

"Chris, I…I saw the progression of her ailment. First the incomprehensible pain. Then the radical instancing. *sniff*"

"Instancing'? I've heard that terminology before." It was one of the last things Sephiteos had said. The Gardevoir described it as gift. Something he was able to give Chris. Something that bound him. "What does it mean?"

"Oh…I should probably tell you about that…yes, instancing. Instancing is what Gardevoirs call emotional projections. We can take our own emotions and impart them onto others," Sana said trying to force a smile. "But they need to be our own emotions to a certain degree."

Feyera thought about the times where he had employed such a skill. Back in Vermilion City came
to mind. "Sounds powerful." He said dryly.

"When used properly it can change another individual's perspective similar to the way our perception is changed when we feel a strong emotion. It's a defense mechanism however. If you instance too often then you lose sight of who you are. You'll forget where your emotions end and others begin. In extreme cases it causes a breakdown in non-Gardevoir by forcing them to undergo a rare condition known only to Gardevoir."

"So you make them experience what exactly about being a Gardevoir?" It sounded more and more like Gardevoir were able to make others feel like they did rather than just feel for others.

"They're forced to undergo radical instancing. That's what...he did to you. Seph told me that he instanced guilt onto you before he tried to kill you."

"And you were okay with that?" Edge thought she was compassionate not collaborative.

"Of course I was not okay with it. I know better than most what radical instancing can do. I tried to convince him to let you go, but his heart was set on one thing. I thought he wouldn't actually do it. So vicious...as vicious as what they did to him in that building."

"I—I'm sorry. I didn't mean to..." Feyera began to say, but she cut him off.

"You're not going to change anything by apologizing. I've already forgiven you. I...had to."

Edge wasn't sure if he trusted her completely. Could someone have that much compassion? Or was her mind so set on him being Sephiteos that she embraced credulity? "Sana. You know I'm sorry and I mean it. I can just hope that I will make things right again for not only my sake but also yours. You've helped me out so much, and I hope you realize that I am appreciative."

"Thanks," she replied sweetly.

"Sana," Feyera said, "I don't think I'm sure how instancing works. Is it always there? How do I activate it?"

She forced a tight smile. "Think of it as an aura of sorts deriving from your very being. However, it is mutable based upon emotions. So the closer tied to a particular emotion you are, the thicker and more entrenched you become to such an instanced emotion. That is why you need to balance your emotional stability and be wary of harmful variants. Should negative emotions take hold, you run the risk of being pulled about by their terrible influence. When that happens, it is a disease really. An addiction to their self-sustainability."

Feyera looked dumbfounded. This was very similar to his meltdowns in certain ways. He remembered the creeping sensation of uncorked emotion pervading the world around him when he generated those alarmingly powerful wells of gravity. Always volatile, they coincided with the pinnacle of his stress and hatred. They even fed off themselves. They became self-sustaining until he gave out. At least that was what he remembered occurring during them.

Sana went on, "Finding one emotion and becoming married to it. That's radical instancing. It cannot be yours alone since it deteriorates you, therefore you impart it elsewhere. To another being, the physical world, any avenue really, its untamed entropic characteristics drive it. It's something only Gardevoir undergo, but we can make it happen to others."

"I—I see," he said. And although he did not admit it, Feyera felt a little wary over the consequences of such radical instancing. Would it ever go away once inflicted? Or was he stuck with it just like he was stuck with Seph's shard? Was the radical instancing synonymous with his cognitive
meltdowns? Did he have control over it?

"Chris, please tell me, have you ever experienced the same possession?"

In a rare form of blunt honesty, it must have been because he was now more comfortable, he responded truthfully. "Yes." Emotions can be judgments. Some people are able to choose their emotions. But not Feyera. He had been slave to them. "I do know what you are talking about though. I became a slave to the negative emotions…and their repercussions…" Edge let out a gasp as she tightly put both her arms around his torso. She squeezed forcefully as she sobbed in his arm.

"Don't let it happen to you."

He nodded his head. There was not a single time he walked away from employing the potent emotional discharge without consequence. It was a dance with death each time, and their steps were growing closer with familiarity. Edge probably had even less of a threshold since his body was not a suitable conduit for Gardevoir powers.

"You can't let it happen to you. Please. Let me help you. You'll destroy everything if you let it take command. Don't let it…"

"I know." He knew all too well. "I won't." But there was still a side to him that relished in the capacity to do so. A side that yearned for the next opportunity to unleash devastation. A side taking pleasure in the fact that he could be destructive, even at his own expense. Feyera caught his thoughts wandering in that direction and casually dismissed the bizarre feeling. He patted Sana's head. Her hair was soft and matte even in all the humidity. The thin minty green strands adhered slightly to his moist hand.

"You don't understand what they can do. You're innocent to it all. I…I've made you innocent to everything."

"What do you mean?" He asked referring to his Gardevoir attributes. Did she still think that her wish had made all this happen to him? Could she be that naïve? "I did this to myself."

"You might have, but what if I erased Seph's…?" Her head shook back and forth as if she were expelling a dark thought from within the confines of her mind.

Feyera tried to rationalize what she was saying, but it did not make all too much sense to him. If Seph was in any way, shape, or form part of him then he was pretty sure that his human side was much more pronounced. Dominant even. He had no memories of Seph other than the Progenitor Procedure awakened by Fredrick's Hypnosis. "Stop blaming yourself; this all happened already."

"I've been trying to move past everything."

"You haven't been able to move past your earlier memories?" Feyera knew the feeling.

"Chris, one day, my mother was gone. She just vanished into a thick mist of her change. That was it. The other Pokemon in the community—mainly the Psi Alliance—looked after me, but I had been branded as underprivileged because of my background. While orphans are looked after, they always carry with them a stigma," Sana's tears fell upon his lap, staining his thin jeans with their genuine warmth. "It's a mark of brokenness. Especially for the Ralts line. Family ties are important and even necessary for our species. Without them, you're an outcast."

"That's horrible, Sana." As terrible as it sounded, he could believe it. The same thing happened to him while he was at the Pokemon Academy. Teasing, bullying, ridicule, the works. People were cruel. At boarding school, you only had yourself to rely on.
"But then, *sniff* just when I thought everything was falling to pieces, I met Sephiteos veh Ashiel."

Gardevoir and their strange names, Feyera didn't understand the system at all. He was about to ask, but decided against it because of Sanaria's current expressive mood. "Seph?" He asked plainly. Maybe later he'd find out more about their culture. She needed to be calmer. Her sporadic and shrill telepathy riddled with sobs made Feyera feel as if he had to provide the Gardevoir comfort. She'd helped him out in the past after all. It was an even exchange. Fairness. Nothing else.

"He was my Seph. My protector. He cared for me. He didn't judge my past. He didn't see me as different or underprivileged. We did everything together. I wish there was a way I could have you remember some of it."

The thought of it made Feyera nervous. What business did he have prodding in their relationship? "He wasn't shunned for being with you?" Edge asked. Seph couldn't have come from a broken family too could he?

"Of course he was. His background was much different from my own. Seph's position in our society was different than my late family's. Even if our parents had been in a similar class, the fact that I lost mine caused me to plummet in the society's eyes. But never in Seph's eyes. To him I was always thas Ashiel. Eventually we turned our backs on the land we grew up in. He had become ostracized because of me. But neither of us cared anymore. We had one another. It was wonderful while it lasted. Together, we escaped that wretched place," Sana started sobbing again as she pulled on Edge's thick jacket covering his now more slender frame. "Seph was the one who helped me overcome the loss of my family and standing."

"A heart just can't contain all of that empty space; it breaks," Edge's sympathetic side came out. He did not know his human parents. He used his left arm to dry her eyes. His mother was killed by a fire when he was only five. And Feyera's father didn't care about him, he just buried himself in his work for Silph. At age seven, he was sent to boarding school. There facing much ridicule, he slowly turned into the monster that worked for Evercrest. Perhaps not the chief scientist, but an intricate part of the program nonetheless. He thought about how grief could do that. Especially when there is nothing else to fall back on. For the longest time, Edge didn't have anyone to fall back on but himself. He became cold. Calculating. Obsessed with research. Maybe that was why he joined the Rockets. There was nothing else in his life.

Edge Feyera just held Sana unsure of what to do to console her. Little did he know that by simply being a part of her embrace, he did exactly what she needed. The two sat quietly for a few minutes. The morning air was pure and tranquil. He had nearly forgotten about the external environment due to his complete resolve to support Sana. He had stayed awake most of the night. The morning sun was comforting. But not nearly as comforting as Sana's embrace.

Feyera had been truly saddened by the trouble she had gone through. In more ways than he'd be fond of admitting, they were not that much different from one another.

"You mentioned a Psi Alliance. What is that?" He probably couldn't read her mind even if he had wanted to. She was able to isolate emotional experiences from certain events. Without access to the emotional connection, psyonics were useless to him.

"They were…I mean they are a collective group of various Psychic Pokemon. Their main constituents consist of purely Psychic Pokemon of all different species. Their leader is the Psi Commander. They have always been a prominent part of Psychic Pokemon civilization. They function as a hierarchy, becoming increasingly austere as years have progressed. I supposed they can't be blamed though. A lot of them and their families faced causalities at the hands of Dark Type Pokemon," Sana oozed fear as she mentioned this.
"Dark Pokemon," Edge softly said, "They are your natural predators aren't they?"

She crossed her legs. "They never used to be as strong and ruthless as they are now. I remember being taught from our culture's historic achieves a particular lexicon detailing the superiority of Psychic Pokemon and claiming that Dark Types were merely an inconvenient mutation countering some of our abilities. 'A genetic anomaly posing little to no threat for the cultivated world' even. How incredibly wrong they were. Our ancestors I mean."

"Surely, they must have done something eventually? What about once they realized the imminent danger?" Feyera didn't need his psychometry to put the pieces together. Dark Types were certainly newer species of Pokemon, and many of their attributes served to defy other Pokemon and their extra-ordinary abilities through a mixture of cunningness and underhand tactics. Some even had powers of their own, although these powers often functioned as nihilistic, neutering the supernatural.

"No, it was too late. Dark Types reproduced endlessly, carrying with them the beneficial genetic mutation that first allowed them to subvert Psychic powers. By the time the First Psi Armada had mobilized, there was no way for the Psi Alliance to confront them. The strands of telepathic immunity ran thick in their genetic coding. To this day, we fear them because of it. They are able to oppose our strongest of powers without retribution. All the while, they can shred through our ranks unimpeded and often undetected."

Aghast, because of his own psyonics originating from a Psychic Pokemon he asked, "How?"

"They can cloak themselves. At least it looks like cloaking. By switching off their neural emitters," Sana callously said.

"So they vacate their mind and give you nothing to detect?" Feyera asked. He wondered if a Dark Type Pokemon could do that to him since he was at least part-Gardevoir. He wondered if Dark Types were to him as he was to Haunter.

"Not exactly. I know you are new to this so I'll try and make it easier to understand," Sana said. If Feyera had not felt her genuine care for him, he might have misinterpreted her words as patronizing him. "Let us say you are…umm…what do you humans call those things with the rails?"

Feyera seemed taken aback that she knew about human weaponry. Had she ever faced their brutality? His extreme concern only grew as he answered. "RAIL Guns? The Rail Aliened Ion Launcher? Sana, that's a weapon designed in response to…"

"No not that silly," Sana cut him off shaking her head against his shoulder. He sighed in relief. "The ones with the boxes that move on the rails and go fast in the countryside."

"Oh you mean trains!" Feyera laughed. It's funny how ever since the Industrial Revolution humanity had become reliant on using rails in its projects. Whether it's launching a particle cannon beam or carrying freight cargo across a great distance, parallel metallic rails somehow made their way into the schematics.

"Trains!" She tried to say the word in addition to telepathically communicating. "Trains! Ha what a ridiculous name! Trains…trains…Okay, so you are in a train. It's like a box inside right? But how do you know that you are inside the train?" She laughed every time she said 'train' and exaggerated her pronunciation of it. It made Edge want to laugh at her. It was amazing how she could understand his language, but even more fascinating that she was attempting to speak bits.

"Well, I'm in transit. The boxed car is moving. The train also makes a very distinct noise with its
whistle. If I look out the windows, I can see the scenery passing by. There might even be other people on the train who can tell me that I am on a train," he said winking. When he said "train", he leisurely pronounced it to her amusement. Sana's attempts at "saying" English words were humorous. He wanted to maintain that sensation of lighthearted humor with her.

"But now imagine that you have never been on a train before, there are no people, windows, or sounds on this train. How do you feel?"

He thought about it. "I would be a little uncomfortable. Sounds like I'd be freight carriage."

"If you have never encountered the situation before, you will panic. Maybe it isn't even a train! For all you know it could be anything. Think about that, Chris! That is what it is like not being able to use Psychic abilities when you are a Pokemon depending on them. The Dark Types mute the hints our keen perception requires. Without the informational relay, we are helpless. We cannot even see them."

"Why is that?" Feyera asked the Gardevoir. "You have eyeballs right?"

"I mean it's not like we're blind, Chris." Her tone paralleled his own sense of species pride when she was making broad generalizations of human empathy or lack thereof. "We have a great set of sensory organs. They are very similar to humans. It's just that...without premonition, by the time our sensory organs realize we are in trouble it's usually already too late. If we cannot see where we are heading then things become...complicated. As a rule of thumb we are a preemptive species," Sana rotated her ankles playfully. Her explanation, although vague, enticed him.

"If that is the case, why fight the Dark Types? Can't you make peace with them?" But Feyera already knew his answer before she even began her response.

"Peace! You are one to talk. Humans are notorious for their petty wars. They make those killing devices as if they were a form of salvation."

Feyera thought she may have been perhaps a little overzealous in her condemnation of human firearms. People had to defend themselves. Pokemon were becoming rarer after all. He was even more surprised by her claim that humans enjoyed making killing machines. "Sana, its natural. You Gardevoir have Psychic powers: heck 'radical instancing' seems like more of a weapon than any physical one I know, other Pokemon have their defense mechanisms, and humans carry guns," the trainer said straightforwardly.

"Guns? What about Pokeballs?"

"Pokeballs? Only licensed trainers can carry them. And even still with the DBC breathing down everyone's back, it's become so restrictive. If you're caught abusing Pokemon you'll have your card stripped and the League will put you under formal trial." Abuse covered a broad range; the only exceptions were Gym Battles since Pokemon had to be comfortable in engaging in them.

"People can be cruel," said Sana, taking a jab at Chris' former ways.

"I…I know…I'm not able to forget." Sana did not know his actual recollection of Progenitor had him experiencing the pain firsthand.

"Although we would like to live in harmony, you know as well as I do that all of those idealistic thoughts get abolished the moment someone close to you is killed..." She stopped midsentence, sensing Feyera's distress, "I'm sorry. I know you still consider yourself human. You don't need to tell me that, I can feel it. It's just that..." She looked at his chest shard, "You look so much like..."
"Don't worry." He knew. Yet he was not accustomed to it at all. How could he be? Even though he never did really fit in with the human crowd anyway—he was always working on lab research or studying something obscure that no one was interested in talking about—it was still impossible for him to see himself as anything but human. "It is just this body. I'll be honest with you. It hurts that I cannot differentiate. Converging physical traits have proved painful as well. I don't know when or if it will end. I don't want to lose myself," Once more Mister Feyera reflected upon his fading humanity. From the shard to his eyes, he'd been sure changes were taking place, first immediately and then gradually. The real question was: could it be stopped?

"Hey. Cheer up. You'll figure this out. I'm here to help you," She said tightening her hold on him. "Besides, Seph was by no means unsightly by Gardevoir standards."

Edge Feyera remained silent even though he thought he heard her laugh. His thoughts rapidly shifted directions. The internal turmoil. Just reflecting upon his condition worsened his disposition. Him, half-Gardevoir? It wasn't going to be pretty. It already wasn't. The blood, the noxious feelings, and even the uncontrollable desires were all detrimental aspects. It hadn't been clean, and time has a way of making a mess even worse.

What were male Gardevoir even like? Were they as violent as Sephiteos? He didn't want to know. Based on his researching days he knew only a tiny portion about the Ralts evolution line. They couldn't have been as dainty as Sanaria though. From the dream memory, it seemed as though Seph had been much less feminine than a generic Gardevoir categorized by the Pokemon database. Though not muscular like the typical male variant of humans, he was lean and agile. At the very least, Seph didn't wear a gown and was less shapely than Sanaria.

If only there was a way to go back. "Seph…" Chris Feyera stared at the low tropical trees, their verdure now illuminated by the day's bright and warm kiss, "I'll never know who I really am. I just cannot figure all of this out, Sana. You have to understand, I…would like to change things. If I were just given another chance…"

Sanaria quickly interrupted, "You were. You were supposed to die two years ago. But you didn't. Maybe all this wasn't the way you expected things to turn out…but you are here now—in this form. The only thing I don't understand is why you are giving up so easily. You're going to be okay. I'll help you. We'll help each other. That's a promise."

The trainer sighed. He felt better knowing that much. Although the questions kept popping up like Diglett after the rainseason.

"Chris, aren't you going to introduce me to the rest of your team?" Sana asked cordially.

"Umm yeah sure," said Edge. However as he soon discovered he could not do anything with her latching onto him. "Sana, I…"

"What?" She asked nervously.

"I need to access my Pokeballs if you want to see the rest of the crew," he awkwardly said while nodding his glance down to where she was sitting against his hip.

"Okay…I don't see what the probl…oh! I'm sorry," she said releasing him from her hold and inching back.

"No it's okay," Feyera spoke, "It was just a moment; I was trying to make you feel better, don't be upset."
"I'll lie and say I'm not," she smirked.

Slightly perplexed by that, yet not willing to inquire further, Edge reached for his pocket and retrieved his Pokemon capsules. Three in total. Even though she had moved back slightly the Gardevoir remained near him, just no longer against him.

"This is my first Pokemon, Brucie," Edge sent out Brucie and a brilliant flash of light illuminated the cavy antechamber upon his release, rivaling the daylight. The Charmeleon looked quizzically at Feyera and the Gardevoir at his side. His facial expression said it all. After their intriguing journey through Kanto, the young reptilian Pokemon now saw a model coinciding with Feyera's oddities. It was the very same anatomical Gardevoir shard!

[Hey Master Chris, is there anything I can help you out with?] he asked cautiously. He hadn't seen his trainer so close to another Pokemon ever. It wasn't just the striking similarities either.

"Nothing in particular. I just wanted to have a meet and greet. This is Sanaria. She's…she'll be joining us for…a little while," responded Feyera. He had almost accidently said "long term". Slip of the mind.

[Nice to meet you Miss Sanaria,] the Pokemon said excitedly waving with his paw. However, he dared not approach her.

"It's very nice to meet you, Brucie! I've heard about you from your trainer," she said respectfully. Although she had only discovered that he was poisoned by Toxic and significantly siphoned by a trainer not knowing any better.

[Well yeah, I suppose that seems about right,] the lizard nodded softly, still apprehensive as to inquire what exactly was occurring. He seemed to have been completely rested, and showed no visual signs of Koga's Toxic poisoning. [It's always good to expand the team right pal?] The lizard directed at Edge.

"Yes, very good. Now these are my two other Pokemon: Desperado the Gyarados and July the Gloom!" Feyera triumphantly released the remainder of his team. He did so with pride. He wanted to show Sana that he had a strong core of Pokemon already.

The massive Gyarados filled up a large portion of the cave's wide entrance. She may have been small, but everything was a matter of perspective. The large serpent bowed her head down and gave an exclamation only she'd be able to pull off, [Well butter my biscuit! Edgie, what have I missed out on?] Desperado or Des asked adopting her usual slang.

"Hello there, my name is Sanaria," Sana let out a weak wave. "Or Sana for short."

[Howdy. Well aren't you nice to finally meet, miss. I'll take a crack-shot: I reckon you're the one Edge's been talkin' about day and night?] The Gyarados inquired.

"Am I?" Sana asked the coiled up aquatic Pokemon. The Gardevoir then made a face as if she was trying to hold back laughter.

Edge blushed, "Listen, I wasn't sure who you were and I was willing to do just about anything to find out." His speech was mixing with telepathy at this point. His Pokemon were able to hear what his mind had his mouth say.

Desperado winked one of her large scarlet eyes, [More than willing I'll say. Try 'n count the number of times this lil rodeo star has almost gotten us killed and you'll be here till the cows come home. Chasing after you like his lil heart depended on findin' ya. Simply adoooorrrrrrrraaaable…]
Edge stammered, "It isn't like that!" He felt embarrassed. True, he had been completely driven by the prospect of finding her. Ever since that mysterious dream he had. But it was more of a matter of mysterious intrigue. Curiosity. Nothing more. He didn't know who she was. What she was.

"Why I'm flattered that I have been so...influential," She laughed. Her cherry eyes slightly dilated, just enough for Feyera to perceive, as she innocently smiled at him exposing small white teeth.

"Des can be really upfront about things; she's always been a blunt character," Edge sighed stroking his hair nervously, "she'll always be a great part of my crew though. Her powers saved me in the Pokemon Tower. I honestly thought I was going to die. And then that time in Celadon as well...it's just...I'm happy she's got my back".

[Daww Edgie,] the long sea creature affectionately gave him a wide closed mouth grin, [Well see here, I might not be the toughest Gyarados out on the range; after all, I am a little bit of a small fry for my species. I'm glad you can rely on me though, cap'n,] Desperado looked down at her trainer and Sana. Even if they were standing up, she was not much taller than them. She was only eleven feet long head to tail at best. Feyera could not bring himself to tell Des about the side effects of siphoning affecting her growth potential.

"Yes, and this is July," Edge said pointing towards his Gloom. Her diminutive frame was dwarfed compared to the Gyarados she stood next to.

[Hi there, very nice to finally meet you Sanaria,] July politely said.

"Well Chris, you really have assembled a nice group of Pokemon so far. Is there anyone else?" Sana asked him.

Edge suddenly felt paralyzed as his fallen companions came to mind. Lawrence and Jill would never see Sana. They'd never know. He felt a great deal of pain as he began to reminisce how the journey ruthlessly robbed him of their lives. To them, he'd just be an inadequate Pokemon trainer in way over his head.

Sana looked perplexed; she stared at his stoic face for a little while before finally breaking the silence. "It must have been difficult. Losing those close to you always stings worse than even the most potent of venoms," She stretched out her hand, as Feyera stared at the ground. Once her arm entered his visual range, he looked at it for a few seconds before grasping it with his own.

"I'm sad. They'll never understand. They died too early. If only I had been more careful. I don't know what else I could have done to save them..." Edge's voice trailed off. He felt his memories being read gently by her low frequency Psychic. Once again feeling vulnerable, he clutched her hand tightly.

"You did all you could, Edge. You can't blame yourself. You know that they would want you to not give up if they were still with you. Look at Brucie, Des, and July. Would they want you to just sulk from now on?" Sana sensitively spoke.

Edge looked at his Pokemon. They had stuck with him despite the fact that he was a mediocre trainer at best. They had also stood by his side when his uncontrollably and deadly power took command of him. "You're right. I can't lose myself to the past."

Sana pulled his hand close to her. She looked like she was about to say something. Her access to his emotional state seemed overpowering during times like these. How could he expect to not be vulnerable to her?
[We'll be here for ya, Edgie,] He heard Des say enthusiastically.

[Master, I'll keep you safe,] said Brucie adamantly.

He then heard July softly reply as well, [No matter what, we'll be with you at your side. Jill is still with us in spirit.]

Edge sniffed and felt his eyes watering. He did not want to appear weak, so he quickly took his free arm and shielded his halo-rimmed eyes from the sight of his Pokemon. Quickly and instinctually, he recalled them back to their Pokeballs as to avoid openly crying in front of them. But he could do nothing about Sana. She wasn't his Pokemon. Yet here she was, sitting next to him and closely observing his wilted body. Feyera pulled his legs to his chest and sat in silence holding back his tears. Feeling Sana rub his hair, he nodded slightly and lifted up his head whilst readjusting his posture.

"I'm happy. I'm so blessed. I've gone through too much for one person to bear alone. And it isn't going to end any time soon, but no matter what, we'll make it through together," Edge finally stammered out, still gripping Sana's hand. Feyera felt her happiness.

The sky was clear and the tropical vegetation a luscious green shimmered as the cyan sky above radiated warmth. The sun was dazzlingly bright here. The environment seemed much richer and more colorful than he had remembered. He decided to ask Sana since she seemed to know the area well. "Sana is this…?"

"It is because of your connection to emotions. It can change your perspective. If you pick up on enjoyable feelings, a beautiful day will become as beautiful as it can possibly be, complimenting nature in every shape. Disposition..." Sana tapped his right ankle with her slender leg, "Can change everything for a Gardevoir."

Feyera's smile glowed, he was finally beginning to understand why things were turning out this way. He didn't necessarily accept everything, but under these current circumstances, it seemed silly to introduce doubt to his blissful state.

Sana laughed as she stood up suddenly, pulling him with her outstretched arm. Their hands remained locked. Edge gasped and stood up with her. The two stood together side by side looking out from the cave they had made a brief residence in. They looked out at the tropical paradise. It was all theirs to survey. They had earned it. They survived together against all odds. Fate, it would seem, brought them back to this place.

"Chrono Island. Where time goes," Sana whispered. How true this was. The three of them had been present on this very island two years ago. And now the three returned, as two.

Past the earthy mountainous section, their gazes wandered to the north. In the distance, past the rocks and beyond the leafy plants, thick with their moisture from the humidity there was the beautiful meadow of flowers. The majesty of the brilliant auburn petals to the gentlest of lavenders all swayed in irresolute tranquility in the tender breeze.

Seeing them reminded him of when he first had his revelation. The sensation of being no longer alone in this world made him joyous. He needed someone to understand him, and Sana was able to. Her knowledge of his current form proved lacking at times, and yet, despite such weakness, her perseverance to protect Edge and remain at his side lifted a tremendous burden from his shoulders. As if she heard his thoughts, she turned from the view and looked at Feyera.

Edge could almost hear the faint sound of the ocean waves in the far distance. It was too
magnificent. It was the steady slapping of water on a beach out of sight, but not out of mind. The resonating frequency seemed to originate from some annex of his mind he had never tapped into before.

His eyes narrowed as he looked at Sana who had been staring at him. She quickly looked away, but only for a moment. Raising a perplexed expression as her stare moved from the ground up to his eyes, she also bent the arm which was holding Edge's hand. This drew them both together as she pleasantly sighed.

He impulsively held her other hand and the two of them stood there atop their world. It was a newly discovered world, filled with hope and mystery. If only for a moment, the world went far beyond the lofty mountain range, the stunning tropical blossoms, and the distant coastal waves. The world was here in their clutches.

From Feyera's perspective, her eyes appeared larger now because of how close Sana was. He could see her substantial lashes fencing her rich cherry eyes. Their nebulous color culminated in a glistening ebony center. She batted her heavy lids softly and her lashes quivered. The world started to spin as her eyelids closed slightly. Instinctually, Feyera followed suit.

"To see the world in a swirl of hues."

Time froze, but space seemed unimpeded.

Feyera felt a small tremor. He wasn't sure what it was. He felt a sudden rush of consciousness come back to him. Half realizing where he was, he opened his eyes before the next unprecedented tremor caused the pair to topple over. Feyera managed to break Sana's fall. He fell on a sharp rock against his back and cried out in pain. Sana exclaimed, "Chris, what's happening to us?"

Although resting on the ground, the earth had not ceased in its shaking and a few rocks from the mouth of the cave began to collapse. The earth itself was alive. "AHH!" he yelled rolling over with her as a huge rock fell from the top of the cave's opening. It had to be an earthquake. Sana held onto Feyera tightly out of fear, but he quickly pulled her up.

"Chris...help!"

As if following natural instinct, Edge started to run down the mountain, still holding a trembling Gardevoir in his arms. She quickly ran with him away from the danger of falling stone. A few large boulders accompanied them. The earth beneath them shook ferociously and Edge almost lost his footing more than a few times. He preserved however and was able to make it down most of the mountain without falling.

However, near the bottom the earth sadistically shook once more, Feyera finally miss-stepped, and nearly fell flat on his face. Sana stopped them from tumbling downwards and Edge promptly regained his footing in the brief gravitational lull.

She was gasping for air by the time they made it to the meadow. Once again, the earth trembled with intensity. It was unnatural. Something was very off, as if vengeance had stirred to rob them of their imminence. Chrono Island did not sit on a tectonic plate. Something else was causing this earthquake. Running a few paces further north, Edge finally set Sana down, but she still refused to let go of him.

Clasping his waist with all of her strength, he soon felt sapped of energy and he nearly fell on top of her. Hitting the soft ground next to her with a thud, he tried to regain focus but the world was growing dimmer with each passing second. They both stayed on the quaking meadow, hearing
some of the larger vegetation snap and tumble down in the nearby forest.

It seemed like hours had passed, but it was only a few minutes. Sana's heart was pounding faster than ever. Edge could feel it as she shuddered. He felt it physically since she was against him and hugging him for dear life, but also mentally. Her fear. It became his fear. Likewise, his own fear must have been doing the same thing to her. If this process did not end soon, they would likely both experience cardiac arrest from the synthesized and self-sustained potent emotional fright.

The whole world was disappearing around him. He could sense it. The blackness engulfed the parameters of his vision as color was sapped from sight. His heart was beating out of control. The swirl of red around his chest shard faintly glowed as it too grew dimmer.

In one desperate moment, he reciprocated Sana's embrace before all went black.
Feyera was trapped in the twilight of his mind. The substantial blackness blotted out all light and color. Nothing could be seen. Nothing could be perceived. There was only darkness. A thick hazy shade coated everything he once knew. The shadowy world was completely devoid and untouchable by sight.

But there was suddenly noise. A distant and faint ringing coming from within. Originating from the left of his head, the dull drone grew steadily louder. He lay completely inert wondering that the strange noise was. For what seemed like hours, he waited in absolute obscurity.

It was more than a steady buzz now. The anomaly was persistent and unwavering. There was still nothing to see however. The cloak of darkness veiled the external world for Edge Feyera.

Anxiety took hold. The ringing was nearly unbearable. What was it? It continued to crescendo as the pitch rose higher and higher endlessly. He hoped that it would go beyond his hearing threshold, however with each new pitch his keen ears seemed to become more adept at hearing its awful tone.

Time passed, and there was no escaping the overpowering sensation. It felt as if he had left headphones in his ears and was listening to some type of flat note rising in volume. The noise from within became louder and more pronounced. Its physical manifestation was not observable because the inhibiting darkness. However, even if there was light in this alien world, it would not solve the mystery of noise originating from inside of his head. What would there have been to see in the external world? Everything was within him. It was as Sanaria had said, he was enveloped in experience.

The relentless homogeneous sound had developed into a being of itself as it maintained and sustained its authority over the young man. There was no use in clasping his hands on his ears. The piercing sound came forth from a primordial part of him, buried deep within him. He was well past the point of mere concern. Soon, he felt as if the ringing would take hold of him and crush him beneath its seemingly endlessly sustained blare. It was like traveling through a pitch-black tunnel. Nothing could be seen, and yet everything could be felt and heard.

Then a frantic tug of consciousness. He felt an extreme rush of energy or perhaps an adrenaline kick. The energy surged through him as the ringing going through his head stalled multiple times. Its dissipation was sporadic yet welcome for the young man. Relief had been beyond his reach for long enough.

The darkness quickly retreated from the center of vision. A single blotch of pinpoint white in the center of his field rapidly expanded like a newborn star. Accompanying its frantic growth were a myriad of colors. This multitude of colors all originated from the center, and they warped to define their new places in his sight. Dark magenta swirled into tomato reds, turquoise spiraled into bright pink, as the blackness melded and morphed into light corn silk hues. Once the shades lightened enough to see, Edge let out a gasp as he realized where he was. "HUH!" Everything had changed.

"Chris! Chris!"

"Nuh…uhh…ow *cough* oh God…*cough cough*:" The man felt ill, as if he had just been
tossed into a centrifugal force spun paint can filled with innumerable colors.

"You're going to be alright, try not to move," the Gardevoir's voice insisted.

"Sana...? Is that you?" Edge's voice trailed off as he saw her blend into his view, her image distorting once or twice before fully ridding itself of any apparition-like qualities. He saw her pure cherry eyes first and then her beige face as warm and crisp as toasted meringue.

"Yes it's me; you're going to be okay. Don't panic," she said rather uncannily, possessing a hint of fright in her own voice.

"What happened?" he asked, trying to observe his environment. His narrow neck could hardly even move. Her face came in and out of focus once again. He felt his eyes straining to calibrate the images. Like stage spotlights, they darted around the setting. Eventually, by locking on to the Gardevoir's eyes, Edge was able to determine that he had been lying down on his side next to her. They were on the ground close to one another after whatever had happened between the two of them.

She too seemed to be in a state of disarray judging by her expression. Perhaps she was worried about his well-being. Speaking of well-being, now that the darkness was gone and the ringing subsided, the background world took on an unfamiliar form to the young trainer. Colors were all bunched up and miss-matched. The grass beneath him appeared dark pale turquoise, and the sky above seemed to be a hazy orange, almost a deep golden. It couldn't be right. Something was terribly wrong. He saw Sana squirm slightly on the ground nearby him.

"We fell," she sighed as the tense muscles around her mouth relaxed. She gave up on moving for now.

"What?" That was obvious; he was on the ground next to her after all. Why had she just been laying near him? Was she stuck like he was?

It was an earthquake! he exclaimed telepathically. What about the earthquake though? Chrono Island did not sit on a fault line and there was never any evident volcanic activity. None of the Sevii Isles did.

The Gardevoir mumbled something incomprehensible.

"It was an earthquake," Feyera repeated, this time having his telepathy meld with his voice once more. "That doesn't make sense though Sana. And of course I know we fell, that's why we're both flat on the ground!"

She shook her head, and her tired eyes revealed seeping anxiety, "No I mean we fell into a feedback fall." 

"W—What is that?" he asked her. Distraught beyond measure, Feyera didn't know the half of whatever "feedback" meant. Was it more nonsense involving the Gardevoir shard embedded in his chest? Or could it have been something he had done to her unknowingly while they hugged? He had an idea, but his ideas of how things worked and how they actually worked were shifting a great deal recently. Almost everything was spiraling out of his control. His mind wasn't always able to even keep up with it. Things were always changing, never staying constant for long. The variables were always new and more diverse. His mind was able to entrench itself with self-sustained emotion to generate wicked power, but such a thing had not happened for quite some time.
“It’s…” she sighed again, trying desperately hard to pick herself up off the ground. "It's when… Chris?” she asked worriedly as she fell back to the earth. As she fell on her back, Edge could not help but feel bad for her. It was a mixture of compassion, seeing her rise slightly only to fall, getting gray dust on her overwrought face. Feyera felt the quickness of pity overcome him. He wondered what had made her stop the explanation. Trying to push off the ground, his shaking hands gave out from underneath him and he planted right back down on his face. "Ow," he muttered following a similar path of failure. "What?" he barked in irritation.

"You're upset. I am too. But we can't stay like this; we both know hearts can change."

To be honest, he was rather embarrassed by the situation. If anyone had come to this godforsaken island they would probably have a grand old time watching the two of them struggle. They were like desperate children fighting off physical burdens that were simply unmanageable. Just one of them would have been a sad sight, but both of them in this weakened state was as pathetic as it was comical in some sadistic way. Edge laughed, trying to steady himself, but once again failing to do so. More dirt covered his face. He felt it mix with the perspiration gathering on the rims of his portrait. Being trapped stung. But more so, he was not trapped alone—as he had grown accustomed to—but with her. Once again he laughed, this time incorporating a cough into his expressed amusement. "Ha *cough* haha!"

She acknowledged his frustration taking the path of humorous humiliation, "Listen. You can't be laughing about this. I don't want to make this harder than it has to be, but you need to be more careful, Chris."

"Are you kidding me?" he shouted. Did she just assume it was him? He didn't want this! He didn't cause this on purpose. "I didn't do any of," he paused to look at her. She was in such a peaceful pose despite the turmoil felt all too recently. Was she immune to it? Seemed unlikely. Maybe she was merely resting and trying to recover. Nevertheless, she seemed to be more at peace than he was. She should be concerned with getting them out of this situation, not scolding him for some unpredictable natural disaster. It didn't make sense, there was no reason for this to have occurred. The wind blew her long green bangs into her eyes and she squinted in response. He had to explain to her that he was not involved. He did not want to have been involved in it. Feyera took a deep breath and rested his hand on the ground near Sana's hip. He thought about touching her, and while there was a desire, he needed to make sure the two of them were on the same page. They had to be on the same page about a lot of things in order for this—for anything—to work properly. Sublimely mellowed out, he went on, "Sanaria, I've done a fair share of destructive things, but I assure you I did not do…"

"I'm not talking about the earthquake, Chris," Sana said, stirring slightly. "Keep your massive ego in check or it might just float away."

Feyera blushed. "Oh that's what I thought you were trying to say," he histrionically said. Could he have caused it though? He wondered. He wondered about a lot of things in this bizarre world. Indeed, stranger things had occurred in the past. Maybe he was that powerful. She might have not wanted to give him credit. Could the Reilken Mercurius have made him this powerful? Sephteos? Being "close" to Sanaria? With too many variables, he decided to focus only on what it was he knew; but even then, he was still in a deficit. "Huff…huff…psyonics?" Edge finally asked, still short of breath.

"Psyonics?" she asked in confusion.

"Yes, psyonics. People Psychics. Ya know, like Sabrina of Saffron?"
"I don't know her...or any other people like that—like you."

"Well it isn't normal, but it happens. I'm not the only one," he felt as if he needed to inform her of the latter. He didn't want to be alone, he was convinced to portray to her that his powers did derive at some point from a human origin, even if it meant deluding himself. Whether he employed deception or not, Feyera had no idea how much sway over the material world psyonics had or could have. Human psyonics tended to be rare and highly controlled. The people he knew of with natural psyonics could be counted on his fingers.

"There are others like you? Since when?" she asked in confusion.

"There were others Sana, before the purges..." his tone adopting a slightly less rhythmic pace. "Back in the day, to possess any supernatural power whatsoever warranted burning at the stake or worse. Intolerance for people with 'gifted minds' ran rampant amid human generations predating the Great War, culminating in the period of time between the Terminal War and the most recent Industrial Revolution."

"What do you mean? I don't understand."

Feyera sighed, "The Darkened Ages were already filled with a lack of order, due to a lack of government, social structure, and even laws. You can imagine, with all that chaos present, people feared things that were extraordinary. In many ways, ganging up on a particular group was a way for them to release their own frustrations. Persecution, dehumanization, and even slavery were not out of the question for anyone expressing even the slightest form of elevated manipulation of the physical world." He felt ill just thinking about it.

"What?" she asked in disbelief. "You would do that to your own species?"

"That's the world we live in Sana. We have weapons, we fight, we have wars. Besides, you fight with other species of Pokemon don't you?"

"Of course, because they attacked us veh Feyera! It's about taking back what was ours. And what's worse than that is, we never used to fight amongst ourselves before the Dark types overran our home territory. And now look at us...nomads and gypsies. We can't even live in a stabilized society. It has to be militant, socialized. We..." she looked him dead in his eyes as if she were trying to get him to recall something he'd missed out on, "...the stress made us fight amongst our own species. We forgot how to truly live, that's why we left, remember?"

"So not just Pokemon in general, but Gardevoir?" he asked wondering if conflict was strictly unique to humans.

"You don't remember anything?"

"No, I don't have Sephiteos' memories, remember? I told you that already!" he lied.

"Fine then, but tell me more about your human history; why were they bad—the people with psyonics?" Sanaria asked with great interest. There was not much else to do, but explain since he was too weak.

"They weren't ever 'bad', heck they were hardly useful for things other than cheap magic tricks and spooking overly religious people. However, as time went on and irrational fear grew, to be associated with such a person became even worse than being in possession of such psyonics," he solemnly spoke. For instance, Chris remembered learning in history classes about people who tried to hide those with psionic abilities in their basements in order to protect them. "Yeah, people with
them were outlawed along with their protectors." How he despised the way people behaved.

"Really?" she said.

While in hindsight this concealment was an act of preserving dignity, the overly zealous people at the time did not see it in those terms. "People at the time were ultimately very scared, and with good reason following the cataclysmic Terminal War. They saw the existence of 'Psychic people' as a crime against humankind, a consequence of malevolent devil worshiping."

"Devil worshiping?"

"A few religious sects even deemed those who attempted to guard these people as heretics and anyone caught protecting a 'psyonic' would be executed on the spot, usually along with the rest of their family, citizens or not without a trial."

She seemed to be appalled, perhaps because she was considering what this meant for Feyera and herself by extension. "You cannot be serious?"

He sighed, straightening his back. "At first, it was just mere inconvenience. Being out in public and displaying any form of the so-called 'black magic' meant swift death. Of course, you would make the argument that this could be averted by simply not using any Psychic power."

"That's impossible," Sana said in disbelief.

Edge knew how difficult that was to do. In a way, it would be like severing your arm or gouging your eyes. Even the weak forms of psyonics expressed themselves through observable physical traits. "I never knew how difficult it must have been for them until now."

"Well you learn fast." She stroked her forearm in nervousness. "What happened to them? Where did they go?"

"Sana, it was impossible to hide indefinitely. For these reasons, many people possessing psyonics simply retreated underground during the purges. The oppressive crusade of struggling political powers and religious cults however turned to using Pokemon to sniff these so called 'abominations' out in a series of cleansings known as the 'Great Purges'."

Sanaria looked down at his chest as she asked, "What was so 'great' about them? Why do you call wars and evil 'great', veh Feyera?"

He bowed his head too as the off-color grass stroked his chin. She reminded him of an ignorant child when she asked questions like this. Wasn't her society facing the same types of indecencies? Nevertheless, her concern did make sense. Feyera could sympathize with her distress. He too had faced it at a younger age. When he was younger and undergoing a maturation of sorts during late adolescence he had similar questions concerning humanity. Why were things they way that they were? Why was he the way that he was? Surprisingly, those same questions became even more pronounced from being imparted with fragments of Sephiteos. Or perhaps it was just from being with an overly philosophical Gardevoir. Maybe he had tried to bury those existential questions too soon. They were rapidly resurfacing along with his emotions. He laminated being unable to control either of their fused properties as they broke out of him.

"Sana, I don't know why we call them that," he said honestly. Why everything awful was referred to as "great" went beyond Feyera's logic, and troubled him to a certain extent. "It was a very dark time in history, but then again so was the rest of history bookended by the Terminal War. Maybe it was a way of referring to a significant moment in time."
"Significant?"

"Yeah. Defining it."

"Defining something bad as 'great'?" she said in confusion.

"Sana, it doesn't make sense to me either. That's how history sees it though. At least it isn't that way any longer." Fortunately, Feyera was born into a time period that at least recognized psyonics. Following Silph Co.'s formulation of the first psionic-dampen- ers—and latter on psionic-inhibitors through Pokeball technology—the fear of people possessing psyonics diminished greatly. Even still, most Pokemon could easily subdue any human possessing psionic abilities. The law of the land had changed. Firearms were a much bigger threat to both people and Pokemon. Their invention alone caused the DBC to be created in order to protect Pokemon. Edge knew Silph was responsible for everything. The human world was their world and vice versa.

"Recent legalization by Silph made human psyonics more acceptable so long as they are strictly controlled. Overall, it's still a sensitive topic due to the inhumanity. All too often the concept of psyonics is enough to trigger excessive bureaucratic intervention—at least in the New Kanto Republic. I can't say much about other nations, but I know that I—as a man with psyonics—am safe in the borders of Kanto and her colonies.

"You're safe?"

"Yeah, I guess so. The persecution did help in that regard making everyone much more politically correct. Hell, I'm a rare minority now."

"You're rarer than they think though."

"That's just the thing though Sana—they don't know. They don't know anything."

"You never told anyone?"

"Well—" Feyera thought about Fredrick, "—it was mandated that all who acquired the rare gift required to go through a series of thorough documentation and minor surveillance to be allowed to live amid society." Feyera wondered if eventually he'd be forced to undergo a similar consecution. Was him running around the country illegal in the eyes of his government? He knew that some of the interactions he had with Sanaria were already pushing past those legal boundaries. Feyera gestured with his eyes at her own, and she sighed. Maybe she knew what he meant, or maybe she didn't. At least he had Fredrick as an ally to play as his avatar to the corporate supergiant. The IPF worked as Silph's personal executor branch. Surely, Mister Fredrick Irving could put in a good word for Feyera. Fredrick had even been willing to let him go rather than report him to the authorities. And why not? After all, he had secretly saved Lavender Town from Haunter. Being alone would be awful, and Edge was more afraid of what the organization would do to him if they found out just how dynamic and effectual his particular psyonics were. He told himself that it wouldn't be nearly as bad as whatever atrocious concatenations Cipher would perform on him if captured. Rallsen's warning paralleled Fredrick's own caution when dealing with the Orre-based scientific syndicate.

"Oh, but you wouldn't want to do that right? You want to be free."

"Exactly. Plus my psyonics don't really fit the mold of most human psyonics. I might be able to get by with grace—due to topic of persecution being so extreme."

"Why bother?" she hummed.
"I don't know. It would be the right thing to do I guess. 'Gotta cross every t, dot every i' ya know?"

"Heh, I don't," she responded truthfully at his expression.

"Right…Of course you wouldn't."

"But that's okay right?"

"I guess so."

Sana forced a smile, "Can you keep telling me the story veh Feyera?"

"Fine. Now, ever since the Great Purges the number of reported people possessing psyonics had shrunked significantly. Even still, there was not very much to control, quantitatively or qualitatively. Bending a spoon, moving a small object with your mind, brief mind reading based on similar psyches, that's usually the only things you heard about when reading the daily news about human psyonics," Feyera said with difficulty, he never meant to become caught up in the supernatural. His only work was to study Pokemon with Psychic powers, not become involved in human psyonics. After all, psyonics in humans were nothing in comparison to a Pokemon's power. Especially higher evolutions.

She chuckled, "That's what your people were afraid of?"

"Um yeah…afraid of. That's correct," he muttered, still thinking about how he fit into the schematic. Pokemon derived Psychic power might have had fewer boundaries. Edge already knew that it did because of his own experiences. Feyera was rather insecure about being related to a Pokemon, and even more upset about deriving Psychic power from one, so when referring to his powers, he always insisted on the terminology used to define strictly human Psychic powers: psyonics. "People were afraid of psyonics before they learned how to control them. It was similar to our ancestor's reaction to Pokemon in the first place."

"I thought you said your ancestors destroyed themselves in a big fight?"

"Ha ha…yeah you're right," he laughed. Her way of describing a distant apocalyptic war was incredibly childlike. "Yes. 'A big fight'. But after the Terminal War, we didn't really have anything to use for power and security besides Pokemon partners. Of course, without Pokeball tech, this was difficult."

"So if you cannot control things, they scare you?" she asked abrasively.

"Well—" Edge looked to his left and right taking in the strange environment, "—yeah. What do you think?"

"No, it does not need to be like that," Sana murmured through closed lips.

Edge questioned if human psyonics would even be able to do the things that he could if they were amplified enough. Probably not. The way Chief Ein had giddily responded to seeing the video footage of his malevolent creation over the Golden Bridge back in Luxaira made him feel as if the answer was obvious. His particular powers had no business belonging to a human. But what consoled him and made him feel more mortal were the traumatic side effects. Surely, it was unnatural to enter the stage of "emotional meltdown" after exerting enough of the psionic power. In his mind, that little detail made him more human than Pokemon. Gardevoir could probably use psionic power with impunity, whereas he could not. Feyera wondered when the last time he had a meltdown. Vermilion? Lavender? It didn't matter, he was long overdue. "Was what happened because of a melt-down?" he asked.
"No, of course not."

"Phew, I guess that's a relief. I still feel like I do after overexerting my psyonics though. And Sana, I thought I was strong enough to change the world with my powers? Don't you remember me telling you about what happened to the Golden Bridge?"

Sanaria rocked her head back and forth, visibly twinging in mild discomfort, "Of course I remember; I even FELT it to a degree, Chris! Seph was strong for a Gardevoir but he was not a god. Don't get in over your head just because you've gotten a new lease on life, veh Feyera. You're more mortal because of your unawareness alone. You're being foolish. Thinking foolishly. Feeling invincible because of your new lease."

"New lease?" he asked, as his gaze darkened.

"Yes Chris, it made you a better—person."

What was his life before Semblance, just a flash in the pan? Everything he was, everything he had built, had been deconstructed in a matter of moments together with her. She made it seem like he wasn't important prior to the aftereffects of assimilating Sephiteos. "That isn't true. I'm the same. Not better. Not worse. I'm the very same, Sanaria."

She repositioned her face so that she looked directly at him. He was less than half an arm's distance away from her scarlet eyes. "I'm not going to argue with you, veh Feyera."

Sanaria moved her arm slowly towards the trench of space in between them. The way it crawled snakelike along made it appear as if it were pressed down against the ground. Edge noticed it too. He felt it. The unseen weight surrounded him. The distorted colors enclosed him.

Stress building and the foreign color scheme made him feel strange. The sensation reminded him of what it felt like when he was underwater and unable to swim. The last time he felt this way was when Des saved him from the S. S. Anne tragedy. "Why is everything so heavy? The colors…why are they off?" he asked the Gardevoir.

Her arm had just gotten up to eye level and Feyera noticed her muscles clench as she tried to use it as leverage to push up. She did so unsuccessfully as the terrible pressure brought her body down against smooth earth. Purring softly, she seemed surprised to hear him say such thing, "Y—You can see it too? You can feel it?"

"Somewhat," he acknowledge more carefully now. "I mean no. Just colors are askew; it must be the Progenitor virus."

Sana made a sour face, "Remember what I told you about emotions? You can see them, just like me. Gardevoir can see them. It's part of the...experience."

"But you don't have my experiences. You just can't. You don't have a virus in your eyes, how do you know? You can't possibly see what I'm seeing," Edge responded, knee-deep in his denial. Did Progenitor have any other side effects? Would it further corrupt his life?

"Humph, a virus? Do you want me to describe it to you?"

"Do it," he ordered.

"Fine. I see shades of teal in the grass, cadet blue almost. The sky is a caramel chocolate color, reminiscent of rich goldenrod, and you veh Feyera...you're you," she solemnly spoke. "You have your cozy black coat on, with that pale seashell shirt underneath. The closer I get to looking at
Edge could not help but shudder at her explanation. It was exactly what he saw. Instead of seeing himself though, he saw her in unadulterated color. From her mint green hair to her pale beige complexion stretching from ear to ear, everything visual was right about her. Even her short gown had the familiar pure snow color to match the consistency. And her Gardevoir horn was perfectly matched in shape, color, and texture to his own. "Why is it that way? For you I mean," he hastily corrected.

Glancing back at his eyes, she said, "Because you opened a loop."

Immediately feeling blamed, he angrily retorted, "I did no such thing!" True, Edge's psyonic powers could create a brief gravitational well, but he hadn't needed to tap into that type of vicious power since the confrontation with Haunter. Furthermore, he didn't feel the usual way that he did when he exerted psyonics. Come to think of it, he hadn't felt that old familiar tug of influential power since Lavender Town. Everything had become considerably streamlined and natural, much to his introspective displeasure.

"I'm not scolding you, nor am I trying to praise you," she moaned uncomfortably. "What you did happened because you didn't know any better. You did it out of ignorance. I can forgive a little ignorance from you."

"Ignorance? Oh yeah right! I forgot to read the damn instruction manual, Sana," Edge said fuming. "I never signed up for any of this, remember? I'm not going to waste time trying to figure it out, you need to stop treating me like I'm part of your...your...Gardevoir...whatever you call it!" He could not bring himself to call it a culture, and it sure was not a lifestyle since that would imply attachment. An attachment he vehemently opposed regardless of the doors it opened.

She fought back a smile. "I think when you do that it makes you seem more like a Gardevoir. I like it. You're so emotionally appetizing."

"Am not! I'm a person, you're not! We're fundamentally different," he belted.

"Aw are we?" she brought her hand to her hair beneath her hair, stroking it. She didn't even need to look at their chests to imply what she meant, a simple gaze said everything.

"Yes. You're always manipulative! I hate it; your whimsical approach to everything sickens me. You don't seem to really understand what I'm going through! You can't Sana; you have your limits! You just don't know!" he frantically said.

Mildly feeding off his frustration, she replied, "Veh Feyera, at least I know my limits enough to not get us bound like you have!"

Feyera's eyes opened wider at her accusations lacking concrete definitions. "BOUND? What? What on earth are you talking about? I did not cause any of this!"

"Hopeless..." she remarked at his frenzied response.

"Hell, out with it, Sana!" he demanded. "What did I do? What warrants such a stupid after effect? Whatever it was, I sure as hell didn't mean it, and you're gonna fix it!" Feyera was more concerned than he cared to admit about it effecting Sanaria in addition to himself. He didn't mean to drag her in. Edge fervently fought the compassion possessing him, "Tell me!"

She remained silent despite his instigation.
The feeling of being out of control weighed equally as much as the invisible force oppressing him, while he stared into her stoic cherry eyes. He primed a barrage of rebuke, "Outright tell me, why don'tcha? Did I do something that makes the evil emotional Gardevoir spirits come after us? Or is it the emotional Gardevoir fairies this time? Oh no, it might even be the emotional Gardevoirian deity herself!"

She gave him a look of firm disapproval, "Keep on giving me that attitude and there won't be an explanation. There's a nice way to talk to me as your...a fellow Gardevoir. There's an even nicer way to talk to someone who's helping you out. Where are your manners, or have you also lost that human aspect?"

"Helping me?" he said with a look of astonishment on his face.

Sana nodded and squinted her eyes partially closed, ready to take his verbal retribution.

"HELPING ME?" he repeated in fury. "Don't frickin' give me that Tauros shit, you are in it because you need this," Edge gazed at his chest where Seph's shard spelt out between his lungs. The fiery glossy material—feeling like purely wired finely pressed metal leaf—jutted out of his shirt making for a display of his own duality. But was it even any more of a duality? He couldn't be sure. The division, it just was not there as much. Or rather than seeing difference, he felt similarity. Everything was slowly becoming less dualistic as time further tugged on the strings of his mediocre life. It wasn't fair. Feyera didn't want to lose himself, he refused to be erased.

Sana could not look away and continued to remain silent.

In a fit of torment Edge yelled, "You don't care what I am. It's never enough for you! You want to make me into what you need me to be and it's wrong!"

She blushed ever so slightly, much to his satisfaction. "That isn't true. That's not true. You're fantasizing now."

"Am I?" he asked, wishing he could force her to touch the thin red horn upon his chest. He wished he could prove to her own impure desires. This garnet metal was all she cared about. Sure, he would be in denial about it, after all it was his body. But what about her? What gave her the right to deny how her behavior presented her devilish possessiveness? Frowning, Edge shook his head, and his dangling amber bangs shook with him, mimicking his downtrodden expression. "Come on now Sanaria thas Ashiel, you know all this is as much your fault as it is mine!"

"You're dead wrong, Chris Feyera. Don't you dare talk to me like that! This is your burden. By grace alone I'm here for you—you ungrateful—ungrateful life form," Sana stammered. Edge saw her heart rise up and down faster, and his grin widened.

"Ouch that hurts," Feyera said sardonically, "That really hurts. 'Life form', what cruel terminology. You're really wicked in your choice of insults, Garde." He hoped his degrading nickname would sting her. Although it wasn't really degrading as much as it was corruption. Much like she had corrupted his surname into veh Feyera. He wanted to adulterate what she defined as herself much like his own self-perception had been contaminated.

She closed her eyes in anger, "I'm not going to give you the satisfaction, Chris."

"Satisfaction?" he asked. "SATISFACTION? Amuse me, Sanaria. Please. What is satisfying to me? Do you even know? No; all you care about is your OWN damn satisfaction. Guess what though? My satisfaction isn't your satisfaction. It never will be, you're not going to make it that way. Keep trying to and you'll find out just how callous I can be. I haven't forgotten how to be
myself. I haven't forgotten how to close off feelings. I'm a cold human first and foremost. A man married to reason alone! Use your stupid psyonics and read my lips Sana: 'I—DON'T—CARE'!

"SHUT THE HELL UP, VEH FEYERA!" she shrieked as her voice soared in pitch.

Feyera immediately backed off, and tried to inch back on his shoulder slightly. Her frustration melded into his own, and he felt significant resistance opposing the lid of his temper. He desperately fought to control it. Biting his lower lip, he nudged back to where he was before yelling, and bent down to stare at the off-color grass. Being close to her seemed contradictory, but he could not seem to help it. His mind didn't know what else to do. She knew about all of this, he was a foreigner in almost every sense of the word. Fortunately, she did not seem opposed to his physical proximity. Feyera's eyes proceeded to follow her figure, and eventually returned to her stare. Noticing this, she quickly shut her large eyes.

Here they were stuck in the least desirable of conditions. They didn't even really understand each other. They couldn't. Torn from different worlds, they were grafted together by fate or something worse. It was just that exactly, they were stuck. Utterly helpless with themselves and one another. Thrown together by guilt with an uncertain future, the variables defining everything they stood for seemed to multiply like bacteria in a petri dish.

"Well fine! If you don't want to tell me, we'll just sit here like the selfish people we are!" he blew out. But he couldn't turn his back to her. Edge didn't have the energy; everything had been sapped. He looked back down at the soil between them as the division grew.

"Te he," Feyera heard her laugh. It was faint and sweet, but absurdly inappropriate in his eyes. Especially after their falling out so recent that it still stung. It made him mad. He didn't even understand what was going on, what was she withholding from him?

"There isn't anything funny," he said to the ground.

Her weak laugh continued uninterrupted, "Heh...hah hah, you called me a 'person'; veh Feyera. I thought you said I wasn't a person though. And you even called my Psychic abilities 'psyonics'. That—that's what people call them."

He straightened his back, feeling the tight pull of wound up muscles along his spine. What were they clenched up from? Emotions? Were his emotions affecting his body once again? Edge gave her a hazy look, "You know what I meant Sana."

"Don't worry, I do. You always mean what you say; tee hee, you just don't always mean to say it out loud. That was very sweet of you," she said rolling her heavy lidded eyes. "This entire situation is getting us both down, wouldn't you say?"

Edge forced a brow raise, "No? Ya think?" he mustered sarcastically. He then peered long and hard past the inches of grass into her eyes with contempt.

She forcefully blew out of her nose and crossed her lanky arms around her chest. She knew how emotions worked, one always fed into another. "Chris, you'll want to at least try and be cordial. We won't be going anywhere fast otherwise."

"Oh really now?" he asked in disbelief.

She exhaled forcefully, "This reminds me of a nursery rhyme I heard as a Ralts, 'Round and round and round and round we go, when we stop only heaven can know. That's us right now," Sana said to him. "To answer your question; yes, you're impeding us. Let's move on."
He didn't want to be going anywhere, especially not with Sana in this newfound reprimanding mode she'd entered. However, being drained and trapped here was not much better. Having his hands tied made him question what she meant. "I'm impeding us?" he asked defensively.


He didn't like her manifesting attitude of admonishment. It made him feel like she was treating him as a child. Edge was pretty sure that he was older than her, even though he had been unsure of exactly how Gardevoir years and aging worked. He told himself that it was probably very similar to humans. "Well that's great. Just great," Edge said rolling his eyes. Even the tropical trees were not the right shade. He couldn't seem to remember what kind of green they normally looked like since it was all contaminated with rouge emotion. Pestered, he looked back at Sana and saw that her body was the only easily recognizable, and more importantly proper, colors in this bizarre environment. Why her? What made her special?

Sana knew exactly what to respond with, "You know...for someone who doesn't like to acknowledge his emotions, or acknowledge that he even has emotions, you certainly have a way with letting others know exactly how you feel."

"I'm stating the facts Sana. This whole state of affairs has me..." Edge started to say, holding off near the end and wishing he could real in the last word. He didn't want to be a part of the process. He wanted to isolate himself, but every avenue he had left had him admitting to being angry or frustrated, thus implying an emotional—personal—connection. In disgust, he threw his gaze back barking, "Argh!" Feyera was so obstructed. Puckering his lips, he pretended to blow steam out of his small curved nose.

"If you calm down, I'll tell you. Your behavior needs some work. You're acting exactly like an immature young adult; it's getting to be a little eerie actually," the Gardevoir said bowing her head. "In hindsight, I shouldn't have reprimanded you, that didn't turn out well for either of us because you happen to be overly sensitive."

But sensitive was the last thing he wanted to be called by Sana, second only to "veh Feyera". What did "veh Feyera" even mean anyway? Some endearment phrase used in Gardevoir language? A corruption of his surname? Or maybe it was just her being nostalgic of Sephiteos. She always seemed to look at his shard when she said it. Feyera thought she might have been crazy enough to name it. The idea made him sick; after all, it was fastened to his body, consigned even. Edge raised his hand in anger as if to try and cover the Gardevoir detail, "I am not overly sensitive!"

"See?" Sana pointed an incriminating finger at him, "Just like that! So much like a little Kirlia who hasn't gotten her way."

"Take that back!" he demanded. "I'm not a part of your sick little world; I'll never be a part of your sick little world!"

"You invaded this sick little world Chris! It's your world now. It's just as much your world as it is mine."

The trainer clenched a fist, "I won't let you try and control my life."

Sana coiled her arm about her cheek slowly, "Stop being sensitive, I'm just giving you my opinion. You should be thankful, I'm telling you what to do based on things I know. Quit being so lousy at taking advice veh..."

"No! What gives you the right? Oh! I nearly forgot, because you are the expert on how I work,
right? Am I right?" Edge wanted to stop, but his frustration had him on a roll, "You know eeeevvverrryyyything, don't you Sanaria?"

"No, I…"

He looked at the Gardevoir's body and let his eyes travel to his own aspects that paralleled hers. Seeing the mirroring horns gave him all the fuel necessary to irately release pent up anxiety. "You know about this and by your skewed thought process, that means you know everything about what goes on up here in my headspace. You know so much, that you can't even contain yourself. Why, you're even spilling over into me!"

"I know more than you do about Gardevoir, I AM one after all," she quipped back.

Feyera wasn't quite sure how to take that one. How did she see him then? As a person right? That was good if she honestly meant that. He prayed that she saw him as a human deep down. It would bring him peace of mind he thought. He sincerely wanted her to have meant that more than anything else she said. "Yes. Yes, you are."

"You should know how to recognize one by now," she placidly spoke. "You know what it is like to feel things like one. You have enough 'data' based on what happened between us."

The thought of what they shared made his eyes dilate uncontrollably with excitement. Sana smiled at his own emotion-driven helplessness when confronting their relatively newfound relationship. Was it even a relationship? It was subtle enough, and its human qualities were certainly not going beyond shallow affection. At least not yet. Feyera wondered if he even had the power to back away from her allure. He wanted to know that he could.

Sana knew exactly how to make it seem as if he were being irrational. He hated how she managed to diffuse the pent up anger, the belligerence he longed to discharge, and replace it with emotional vacillation. This newfound animosity boiled in his veins confiding about his chest like a stoked fire. He was now feeling reckless beyond words. And without physical power he could only lay in helplessness with Sana. He was trapped in too many ways, the feelings inside him craved to be set free. He tried to command his world once more, first with his tongue. "I know what a Gardevoir is…a Gardevoir is a Pokemon."

"Really?" she mocked. "I thought you'd never figure it out. Good job Mister veh Feyera. I'm so proud of you, what a grown up! Accepting it though, that's asking for way too much of you!"

Edge bit his tongue. He almost liked being difficult with Sana. It made everything seem realer. Enriched even. Was he losing his mind?

Sana beamed at his hair, looking up past his haloed eyes. "It doesn't simply end with me though, mind you. Oh no, it penetrates so much deeper than that! It's much more personal, wouldn't you say?"

Edge felt a sudden urge to jab at her belief system as a Gardevoir, and impulsively went with it, "You're the Gardevoir. And because you are a Gardevoir, you understand yourself. Or you are deluded into thinking that you do!"

"Oh? Enrich me with your knowledge dearest veh Feyera."

"Humph! Fine. I'll tell you the truth! You see, Sana, you think it's emotion, but it's merely states of mind your brain happens to put you in. Electricity, cells, chemistry, that's how these things work in the brain. For God's sake, it's all just neurons firing about! That's all you are. Functions! Plugged
together input and output tables! You're nothing but brain tissue sitting in the vat that you call your body. Nothing more, Sana! Nothing more!"

"Eugh!" she uttered in disgust. Shell-shocked by his untamed aggression she replied, "Well, you're no different then. By claiming we're all just working a certain way that happens to be based upon your stupid HUMAN schematic of the mind being just a lump of objects," Sana caught her breath, "you fail to allow for a difference between humans and Gardevoir. We'd be just the same that way! So nice job Doctor Feyera, I'm glad you want Gardevoir to be sooooo much like you."

His gaze dampened and he felt his chest shard pulsating. Like it or not, he was indeed drawing comparisons. Maybe not even on purpose. Could he be subconsciously trying to conquer Gardevoir ideals? Embrace them into his own? Would that even make sense for him to try and do? "I—sh," he stopped mid swear as she adjusted her body, basking in temporary verbal triumph.

Her eyes fluttered melodically while she made another effort to push off the ground. Needless to say she was unsuccessful, the distorted grass once again brushed against her soft ear cartilage. She grit her teeth in antipathy. Her short dress fluttered as she kicked one of her feet out straight and touched his ankle with it. Sana smiled harder, turning a once affectionate grin into one of infliction, "Or maybe, veh Feyera, maybe...haha, just maybe, it is that you want to be like a Gardevoir through some vile roundabout way. Isn't that what you are looking for? A sense of wholesomeness?"

Feyera shook his head, "No."

"Our life, our perceptions, you don't understand them, and you're afraid." Her eyes adopted a soft crimson glow, "Aren't you? You are. I know you are."

Edge's eyes appeared dazed. "It is this way for all sentient life," he darkly replied to her, not addressing fear.

"But you only know one example, Chris," Sana growled, her eyes now shielded by the aura of red. "It's yourself. Not a very big sample size, am I right? Hah...You, veh Feyera, you're the only sentient life with a human body and Gardevoir attributes...Gardevoir attributes longing to be freed."

A twitch of trepidation overcame him. "No...this is temporary," he said beckoning downwards at the Gardevoir shard. Sephiteos’ Gardevoir shard. How Feyera hated it being irremovable. How he abhorred the very idea of it suckling onto his once pure body, burrowing into his depths of his core, far too deep to dig out, far too melded with his very flesh to chisel away, far too him to break free of. Its rancid sensations coursed through his body in wicked permanence.

He remembered being told about how the shard was permanent—over and over along his arduous recovery. Every time he would forget and beg for answers as to why he was scarred amid delirious confusion, his aunt—Bethany Hale—had to perpetually remind him of who he was, and what happened after the Sanctum Robbery for a couple of months. Ceaselessly, she told him that the doctors believed it was Electrode shrapnel imbedded near his major arteries and anchored into his heart's perimeter. How wrong they were! They didn't know it was him; they couldn't have known it was a Gardevoir horn. Who would make the connection between the Electrode in the Pokemon Sanctum and Delta-two? Did Cipher even know? Rallsen and the Rockets? Fredrick? Whoever knew would shape the way he handled the rest of his journey to undo it. Whoever figured it out could change his outcome.

Seeing his eyes shift back and forth rhythmically in thought, Sana questioned his assurance with a simple, "Temporary...?"
"Yes. Temporary, Sana. Just a phase. A mistake. Not permanent, not lasting. Only a brief inconvenience. I'll get help on how to fix everything," he said in rapid-fire succession. But who would he even ask for help, the doctors that told him that Seph's shard was Electrode shrapnel? Even those doctors were in the dark. No one knew. It was too unrealistic, too crazy, too far in the outer limits of possibility. Physicians would laugh at it. Their confusion probably led them to shrug and release him rather than further investigate. It was much easier to dismiss as a piece of debris after all since they never truly 'felt what it was like' from their objective positions. No one would believe what it actually was. Especially not an educated person.

But then again he knew. Chris Feyera, renowned amid his peers at the Pokemon University by being selected to join the Evercrest internship for his dissertation "Concerning the Paranormal", honored academic, and scientist at heart, was forced to come to terms with a situation that made zero sense and at the same time explained everything flawlessly. This thought led to more as he continued to stare blankly at Sana while she sucked in her lower lip. Who could he tell? Would they be as willing to believe him as he was? After all, anyone Edge spoke to wouldn't have a shard of their own to relate to. Fredrick Irving came to mind as the first person he would trust with the information. The man was like a father to him. Chris didn't have the best recipe for paternal relations, but he knew how he felt about Fredrick saving him. Fredrick could probably tell the scientists and doctors at Silph Co. He had connections through the IPF after all. If the doctors didn't believe Edge, then surely a good word from Fredrick would testify.

And then it hit him like a ton of Golem-Grade bricks: maybe the doctors did know. Although it seemed impossible, this thought paralyzed him even further. Maybe they did not want to tell him. Maybe they refused to tell him. How would they even tell him? After all, it didn't make sense. What would they have said? How could they impart this knowledge onto him? The nature of this curse was to have everything felt subjectively rather than perceived through observation. He never belonged in a world like this one. In fact, he was the last person to belong in this world. A poet or a novelist would find his current position much more attractive. He was far too entrenched in reason, dogmatic methodology, and lust for universal truth. What a mess, he thought to himself, projecting it unknowingly to the only one capable of receiving.

"You've grown so attached to it though, you know? And it's grown so attached to—" She stopped herself halfway from touching his heart.

Feyera felt awful hearing the seemingly obsessive Gardevoir fight fondling possessiveness. Her struggle to hold back was easily discernible. He bowed his head and rocked his ankle so that her foot fell off. "Because I did not know better, if I had only known what kind of sordid—things I did to have this happen to me, I would have never been in any shape to use it."

Sana gave a half grin, filled with indeterminately charged feelings. "You gotta realize you're gonna mess up. One way or another, we all fall down to learn the more important lesson of managing how to get back up. You messed up. That goes without saying. You need to improve. That's life at its finest."

"Yeah, well, you're one to talk," Edge retorted.

She raised an eye, "Oh?"

"You messed up my memories, my life Sanaria."

"It was a necessary action. We went over this already. You had little chance of surviving the way my wish manifested."

"Mercurius…Reilken Mercurius," Feyera muttered, looking down at his wrist's ebony and dark
emerald armlet.

Sanaria didn't act like she even cared, she had gotten her "wish" and "wish" meant the partial preservation of Sephiteos. Edge believed it was the only part of him that seemed to matter to her frivolous heart. His core meant more than his identity. Little did he know—but to her as a Gardevoir—they were synonymous. "As I was saying, I had to help you before you died from pain. I took some of it upon myself. Gardevoir can do that you know? You should be thankful."

"The only thankful one here is you."

"You've lived long enough to have it be melded into how you define yourself. Even to the point of letting me reach out to you through your...he he...silly lust-ridden dreams."

"Dammit," Edge swore under his breath. Everything was Sanaria's fault. "Why didn't you just kill me?" But Edge knew why, she still wanted to keep a specific part of him intact.

She continued to stare at him, her cream completion growing steadily redder. She blinked and closed her eyes while gritting her teeth. "I wasn't able to. I tried to...but I realized that I had saved Sephiteos through an unconventional method," she gravely said.

"Unconventional. That's all you think I am. That's all you think we are," he said to her surprise.

"W—we?" She wasn't used to him outright admitting that they had a connection of sorts. She figured that he was referring to their long distant telepathy. Would Edge even admit to feelings of genuine desire?

Edge recoiled in his expression, unsure of what thoughts he'd planted in her overly enthusiastic mind. "Why can't everything be normal?" he asked.

She tapped on the ground between them with her delicate hand. Languidly she replied, "It would have been normal if Sephiteos was never captured by the men in the white coats. It would have been normal if you hadn't experimented on my mate. It would have been normal if you hadn't impaled him."

Feyera seriously doubted this. Sephiteos had "Instanced" onto him guilt, and Chris had injected Progenitor into the Gardevoir's eyes. Neither of them would be normal following the cold events of Evercrest. "I didn't—I wasn't the only one there. There were other scientists, why should I have to bear their sins?"

"What are you even trying to say? You're some kind of messiah taking on their misdeeds?" she eloquently asked, fighting off the urge to confront his rationalization with indignation. "Pah! You're more twisted than I thought."

"How is that twisted?" he asked. "I don't see any other Cipher scientists trapped in their experiment's bodies!"

"I'd be thankful you even have a body," she said to him keenly observing his face. He was human enough, just with a few attributes that made him seem off. Shallower chin, softer features, flocculent matte texturized hair, eyes that mimicked a Gardevoir crimson aura's when he employed his powers, light burlywood beige complexion. It was all there in small quantities. She wondered how he really saw himself deep strained herself to imagine him with three minute clippings rimming the edge of his ear's cartilage. If only there was a way to force it out. Just like Progenitor. Just like all other facets distinctively Sephiteos.

"What good is it?" he asked her, referring to his body.
"If it wasn't you, then it would have been someone else," she said referring to his situation instead. "This was meant to be since it happened. You paved the way for it to happen."

He gasped as his mind came to terms with a simplistic truth that echoed the final words of Sana's mate two years ago on this island's cliff: had he not joined Evercrest everything would have been normal. It was his fault for being involved in the first place. Chris Feyera's fault. His fault. There was no Edge without Chris Feyera. For once, he questioned just how closely he wanted to associate with his origins. "I—this is my fault. I did this. How can I change what I've done?"

"Listen. You'll be fine," Sana said. "You cannot change anything done in the past. Only the future remains in your arms."

The young man did not misunderstand her tone's gravity; it was exactly what he wanted to hear, but simultaneously the antithesis of his current situation. "Sure, I'll be fine," he sneered. She wanted him to accept this predicament; she had made that much very clear to him. What else did she want? Him to deny his humanity? Be denied by humanity? The emotional floodgates opened wide. It made Edge feel as though she enjoyed seeing him trapped in his vindictive circumstance. It gave her more control over his life.

And he was very much trapped. He'd be a dead man multiple times were it not for ridiculous grace. Such grace did not go unnamed either, it made its presence very self assertive through bizarre qualities. Everything out of the ordinary was given to him by Seph. The psyons, the Progenitor virus, even the sensations conferred upon him when his horn brushed against Sana's. It was him to a certain extent. Or at least a part of him. Every last bit of it—Seph—was assimilated seamlessly. There were fewer and fewer things separating Chris' own experiences from those his Gardevoir heart shard bestowed upon him. And it continued to command his physical attributes the more he relished in its swaying influence. The maddening sickness brought upon by it, the way it cultivated him like an animal, it was all a filthy disease. An uncontrollable disease breaking Chris apart, bit by bit, bone by bone.

At least he had a chance to undo it with the Reilken Mercurius in his possession once more. But something was very off about the entire situation. From the mysteriously rushed delivery of the artifact to the way that it clutched his skin, something didn't quite add up. Moreover, it actually looked different than the way Feyera remembered it during the dream memory. Maybe it changed forms when he impaled Sana's mate. It was a "Philosopher's Stone" after all. He didn't even know if he could trust the dream memory awoken in him by a scheming Gardevoir. She could easily pull strings, make herself seem like she was someone she was not. Like pretending to be Lorelei for instance. Who was to say that she did not infiltrate all of his oppressed dream memories? His eyes honed in on the Gardevoir's slow exhale as he thought further about the conditions of the dreams.

A small revelation made him shudder. There was always a girl in them resembling Lorelei. He caught his breath. Sana's eyes opened wide with a start, hearing his shortness of breath. "Chris! Are you okay?"

He hated how quickly she responded to his seemingly blind action of anxiety, she was too well linked to him. Barriers once paving his consciousness were being steadily replaced with beacons of urgent feedback relays. Edge took in a breath, trying to make it seem nonchalant. "Yeah…fine."

"What's the matter? You look like you just saw a ghost."

Maybe he had. Progenitor made him capable of that. It used to seem interesting or enticing even, but it too fell into the same category as his psyons because of consequences. The idiom, although accurately depicting his shock, hit home since he could actually 'see' Ghost Pokemon via acute temperature variations. "It's nothing."
“You can tell me if you want to.”

"I said it's nothing Sana. Stop prying!"

"I wasn't prying, veh Fey…Chris,” she said apprehensively and with a subtle lull. "I can't read your mind, just your heart."

Edge thought about how ridiculous she sounded. Of course she could read his mind. His emotions—or as she insisted his heart—were a part of his mind. "Semantics," Feyera coldly responded.

"No semantics, just how Gardevoir see things. If you don't trust me then you'll find out on your own in due time. Y—You're bound to learn sooner or later how things work."

"There's nothing to find out. I'm putting the brakes on all of this. Whether you want to help or not is up to you."

"That choice has been made already," she insisted.

"Then be more supportive please."

"What is it exactly that I should be supporting?"

Feyera thought about his. To tell her that he was trying to rid himself of Seph's attributes meant he—Chris Feyera—was also trying to kill her mate off once and for all. He wondered how to word it. "Separation."

"Of us?"

"Hardly; rather, it would be a permanent separation of Seph and Chris,” he said feeling weird referring to himself in the third person.

"You think you can do that?" she asked in wonder.

Feyera had no idea. "Of course I can. I have this after all," he motioned to the gift given to him by Fredrick. "This is the key to my—err—our salvation."

"It looks like a bracelet, veh Feyera. I don't sense anything special about it."

"But it's the thing that caused all of this!"

"I still think I wished it. You can't undo a wish."

"Whatever, you'll find out soon enough. Fredrick gave this to me, and I think he's trying to indirectly help me. He must know about my past. He must have figured it all out; he's a smart man, Sana."

"Okay…he's a smart man. So were you once upon a time."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"Te heh." She laughed again, "It's nothing, you're just very trusting, and I think it's cute. Not often do I see that behavior coming from you."

But he did trust Fredrick. Fredrick wanted to help him after all. Fredrick saved him and didn't want to take advantage of all his psyonic powers. He wasn't the most personable of guys, but neither was Edge's father. Deep down, Feyera longed for the International Police Agent to establish a paternal
relating him, in lieu of his father's absence. Where did he go though? Why did he give the artifact to Edge? Despite being somewhat skeptical, he forced himself to place trust in the man who saved his life from Archer Tevis of the Rockets. "I trust him," Feyera adamantly said.

She glanced down at the small black bracelet he wore, "Maybe you want to feel like you belong? Tell you what; I'll let you belong, veh Feyera. I'm letting you belong, right? Haven't I told you? Haven't I SHOWN you that I accept what you are?" Sanaria's glance traveled up his arm to his ribcage and back at that shard. Peering practically manically at it, she sighed while blowing some of her green hair out from the corner of her lips.

Edge thought about it. He wasn't accepted by her, his body was. The only thing she accepted about him was that stupid shard embedded in his chest. Had that not been there, Feyera would have been a dead man for killing Sephiteos. Could she be that selfish? Edge had no idea, Gardevoir were strange creatures. She waited nearly two years to reveal herself to him for some reason. Why? If she wanted to have Seph's shard back, she could have kept his body here on the island. The thought of it made him shiver with the uncertainty of her true motivators. What did she really want?

The glossy metal still shined scarlet in his sight's warped color pallet, somehow complimenting the atomic blue grass and deep yellow gold sky. Did this thing—this awful thing—make her lust for him just like he had lurking in the past? Was it the same as looking at an attractive woman? Studying her curved features until you became lost in the prospect of being one with her. Was that it? Feyera dared not recollect exactly what lust entailed for him and where it had led him, but his thoughts curiously prodded at what Sana's lust may have been like. He briefly entertained the thought of breaching her emotional substratum to see what she felt. What lust felt like for her, a Gardevoir. He was beyond curious.

Maybe she tried to keep him for herself and Timothy Rallsen along with the rest of the Rockets took him away from her? The thought of Sana's possessiveness fascinated him more than he'd care to admit. Was she trying to covet him for herself now? Was this plan B? Was he plan B? The questions ate at his frozen body.

"I didn't mean it like that," he finally said after taking in a deep inhale and smelling the nearby angel-wing begonias. Had they too lost their color? He turned to see only to find that their pinkish magenta had turned to sea blue.

Sana tried to follow his gaze, but could not turn around and see past herself. Therefore, she stopped and proposed, "If you promise to stop saying 'I didn't mean it like that', then I'll tell you what you did."

Feyera shrugged and rolled on his shoulder as his arm twisted beneath him. "Fine."

"Promise?" she insisted.

"I'll try to. I sincerely will," he said.

"Okay," she arched her back and winked at him. "You better not forget."

"Will you just tell me already? The anticipation is killing me."

She smiled like a mother would smile at her child when explaining something. "Feedback falls occur when a particular emotion felt by a Gardevoir feeds into the same emotion of another. It is an exponential effect, behaving a lot like peristalsis. One contraction leads to another stronger one, and it goes back and forth further gaining in intensity. Eventually the mind gives out from the ecstatic resonating."
"Ecstatic resonating?" Feyera raised a brow.

"Self-sustained unified emotion."

"Like an emotional meltdown then?" the man asked, already knowing far too much about them.

"I guess...heh if that's the only thing you can compare it to then you have a really shallow perception."

"My perception isn't that shallow."

"For a Gardevoir it is," she tried to console him.

"I—"

"But you see, it's more like a shared experience. It can be anything really, and that's the danger of it. It goes back and forth perpetually and once it begins, there's nothing able to stop it." Sanaria raised her hand and waved it like a rain shower wiper blade to demonstrate. "Back and forth, and back and forth." Eventually her hand moved too fast and she had to put it down to rest, although she made an effort to place it closer to Feyera's body.

"So it's like ping-pong?" Feyera asked feeling rather stumped.

"Ping? Pong?" she softly uttered aloud before laughing nearly uncontrollably. "Hehehe! What on earth is that silly name, veh Feyera?"

Edge forced a smile. He liked it when she learned new words. It was cute. Playful. Even he would admit that. "It's a game. You bounce a small ball back and forth on a table using paddles. The longer you play, the faster the game picks up since the ball moves quicker."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Does anyone get hurt?"

Edge laughed, "Ha, not unless you get hit with the ball."

Sana looked upset by this.

"I was kidding, the ball is soft. Besides, you don't try to hit the other person. That's not the point."

"Then why do you hehe 'Ping! Pong!'?"

"I don't know. I'm not good at games. I guess it's fun for some people since it takes your mind off real life," Edge thought of reality sometimes being a discomfort of life.

"That sounds really fun though...'Ping! Pong!'" the Gardevoir said. Her gleeful vocalization of "Ping" and "Pong" made Edge feel like he just had to laugh. He couldn't resist. "You don't play 'Ping! Pong!' by yourself right?" she asked him.

"Hah. No, you play with another person. How else would the ball come back to you?"

"Well you could use a wall to play 'Ping! Pong!' and then it would bounce off that."

"Clever, but the point is to be with another person."

"Will you play 'Ping! Pong!' with me?" she said smiling.

"Ha ha...maybe one day. I don't know," Edge said with a grin to match hers. "I promise you it isn't
painless like this feedback fall stuff."

"That's good to hear. I don't want to be hurt."

Her behavior was strange. She went from extreme to extreme. One minute she was chastising him for being a bad Gardevoir and the next minute she wanted to play a new game with him. She even made the silly game sound more interesting than it was. The name probably enticed her, just like 'trains'. The most bizarre thing was to hear her actually vocalize the words. It made Sana seem more human to him.

His expression turned serious. "How do I not get us trapped in a feedback fall? Is it permanent?"

"Well it already happened, so there isn't any real way to undo it."

"So we're stuck like this?" Edge asked in disarray. They would be dead for sure if they couldn't move.

"Time usually helps us recover from the physical weakness."

"Well that's a relief. What can we do to get out of it? Just wait around?"

"Just not straining your emotions will do wonders," she suggested. "That's what got us into this. You fed off and back into my fear from the earthquake."

He lay there, his gaze fastened on her own, too weak to budge a muscle. The last time Edge had felt this way had been north of Cerulean City. And that time he didn't have any idea what Gardevoir could do. Now at least he had a clue, and still he was blundering about putting himself and others in danger. It made him sick. He looked down at his body, "Always a consequence. Always another damn consequence..." he felt his eyes grow misty. The approach of tears made him struggle to conceal them all the more. Failing to do so, or being merely unable to, made him sob.

"Hey. It wasn't your fault. You didn't know better right? I could have done the same thing to you," Sana said, pawing her hand up to his forearm, eager to see his display of emotion.

He struggled for a few moments, trying to fight back the urge but eventually it made itself present in mist-filled eyes reaching their capacity. "Sana, *sniff* n—no. It's not what I did."

"What do you mean?" she endearingly asked.

"You said you could have done the same thing to me right? Pulled me into a feedback fall right?"

"Right, but I know better; things like that are not meant to be shared without a moderate amount of experience. Plus it has to be between two Gardevoir that are—"

"No! You aren't listening to what I'm trying to say. Yes, I'm stuck here on the ground, and you are too. But it isn't about just being stuck here in this moment. It's about me and how I came to be here. It is about losing one's self to circumstance, and how it is no one's fault but time's. Sana, you can't blame the sell out who breaks with it."

"Veh Feyera, you don't have to say such things. I was mad at you but I forgive you."

"Don't you listen? It isn't about forgiveness anymore. It is about being confined and because of that confinement being ultimately overshadowed by meaningless things! *sniff*" Feyera could not contain the anguish any longer. He'd been weddings and funerals but never wept as much as he did now. Even after the passing of his mother, he had never fully come to terms with death. Oddly
enough, this seemed somehow worse than death. As he sobbed softly, he felt Sana place her arm over his shoulder, palming his hair. The thought of her seeing him like this broke him down further. His eyesight became too clouded to see out of and he felt completely vulnerable.

"Meaningless…things?" she asked gently. He heard her try and lift herself up with a small grunt and moan. "Ow."

"What caused us to fight Sana?" Feyera said sniveling.

"You got emotional. That takes some getting used to," she said while trying to lean on her outstretched arms in front of him. "You never used to be emotional and now you are, Chris."

"I don't want—I'm emotional?" he said without making much sense. His thoughts were all jumbled up.

"Think about it, that makes two of us with emotions."

He shook his head and fought back more of the awful warm tears. "They are meaningless. It was meaningless. It's all meaningless in the end."

"What's meaningless?" her cloudy form asked him.

"If we had no emotions, we wouldn't have fought. That's why they *sniff*—emotions—are meaningless."

She suddenly fell down upon him and braced tightly. Feyera, not expecting to need to fully support her, stiffened his posture instinctually. "Don't say that. It isn't true," she said forcing herself to lay against him. Her lanky arms locked around his frail figure.

"Sana," he said, his face against her soft cheek, "look at me. I'm a broken man. There's nothing left to be proud of, I'm helpless here and it's all because of stupid emotion I can't control."

She pawed at the back of his hair, "It is better to lose your pride with someone you care about rather than to lose that someone you care about with your useless pride. Remember that."

"You don't understand though. You're not helpless like I am."

"I understand your frustration. And I've been helpless too. It's okay, but you have to be able to move on. At least you aren't alone."

He thought about just how alone he was. No one in the world was like him. He was unique to the point of everything familiar becoming alien. "I'm alone with myself."

She tightened her hold on him, bringing herself closer. "You're not alone. You have me."

He stopped his soft crying as she pecked his cheek. The freshly shed tears moistened her lips. Edge felt himself yield to her. Feyera hugged her and tried not to further disrupt whatever was happening between them by holding off on sniffling. She softly rolled her head to the side and pressed her smooth pale floral face against his. He thought he may have had an inclination to kiss her back, but willfully suppressed the desire.

She continued to keep him in her embrace, despite his subtle movements. His back was starting to hurt, along with his horn. The sensation of pressure and distorted colors had faded, and Sanaria's warm Gardevoir body had replaced them. Edge tried to bring comfort to his back by turning slightly, twisting his spine. She would not relinquish him however, clasping tighter onto his
clothing, even to the point of clawing. Bemused, but not angry, he rolled onto his side with her against him still. Her head moved off his cheek, and she looked up into his eyes with enchanting eyes of her own. With their bodies against one another, Feyera laughed softly as she wove her legs through his.

She bent her head down. At first, it seemed as though she longed to look at his shard, but she surprised him by instead using her fine spring green hair to dry his face. Feeling its softness made him take in a deep inhalation to smell it. Imbedding his gently curved nose in her thick hair, he smelt fresh, brisk, green, floral and sweet. It reminded him of the pretty amethyst cattleya orchids that grew in the area. And her beauty was as marvelous as the flower's.

He patted her back, gently groping her gown. She softly let out a hum, as Edge brushed his fingers along her less tense muscles. As he lowered his hands along her spine, she softly shook her head when his fingertips graced the part of her he did not share in common—her Gardevoir shard's posterior. While much less pronounced than the piece between her tiny breasts, it was still a similar substance, and very smooth to the touch. In an unprecedented lull, Edge watched as she pulled her head back fully. He still held on tightly to her lower back. She put both her arms on his shoulders and stretched backwards. After arching back, exposing her figure, she rushed back towards him.

Pressing her forehead aside his own, she nodded softly. Their hair, damp from the heat of the tropics, intertwined slightly. Feeling lightheaded, Feyera steadily stroked her back. She continued to stare at him with glossy cherry eyes. Those eyes longed for more from him.

"Whatever you're a part of, I'll be a part of too." Sana insisted.

"Okay," he softly said bringing his lips to hers. They impulsively locked in a kiss, though it was evanescent in every sense of the world. For when they parted, both Feyera and Sana longed for more from each other.

In earnest, Feyera kissed her again, pressing his mouth to hers. She seemed reluctant at first, even incapable. Perhaps she was trying to fight her own feelings. His lips ran against hers, growing slightly damp. Eventually, she reciprocated, although reserved. Her movements mirrored his. Edge thought about how quickly sorrow turned to pleasure.

He broke their kiss and kept his mouth close to her as the single link of watery substance connecting their lips broke. "Sana?" he asked.

"Mmhm?" she asked gently.

"What were you going to ask me before the earthquake?"

She beamed, "Oh that—" she pecked him on the cheek "—I think you already answered that for me."
"Feyera?" Sanaria softly said to Edge as she slowly backed away from his body, still mildly trembling.

"Yeah Sana?" Feyera responded to her gentle voice. The tone he used completely reflected his own uncertainty. What had he done? Why had he done it?

She brushed her mint green bangs out of her eyes. "If things are this way now, are they going to stay like this?" she asked with a raising pitch.

"Umm…" Feyera hesitated, wholesomely unsure of what awaited him no matter what response he provided. He enjoyed his time with Sana for various reasons; things had changed ever since her presence in his life. She gave him a newfound purpose and identity. Her information proved insightful for his own quest. For once, he knew what he was dealing with concerning his peculiarities. And what a harsh truth it was. He was in a complicated mess involving a Gardevoir. Two Gardevoir in fact. Ironically knowing the truth made it harder to swallow such terms. Despite the natural draw his mind had to truth, he was strangely paralyzed by implications.

But "truth" did not stop with him discovering Gardevoir attributes remained anchored to his body as a consequence of Semblance. Sana was methodical enough to make his mind come to terms with it on his own. Feyera was accustomed to having knowledge and truth release him from doubt and uncertainty, elegantly replacing them with fortitude and conviction. The discovery did not set him free however; it only served to bind him further to the Pokemon he'd killed—accomplishing the very antithesis of his original intent to be liberated.

Because of this, Feyera felt the urge to break out from the inhibiting shackles locking his life in a vice grip. In particular, her vice grip. He wasn't entirely sure of what exactly she wanted, but practical wisdom told him that he wouldn't be able to offer it in the long term.

"We'll see," he said motioning to his arms as he pushed off the ground and brushed some dirt off his shoulders. He noticed that despite his short black bomber jacket being relatively cheap, it still retained its crispness. It was a pleasant surprise to find it was holding up nearly as well as the Alterieno boots he adored.

"What do you mean 'we'll see'?" She was already ahead of him, sitting up by now. Her figure shone in the peak sunlight, causing light to reflect in dazzling ways. "What does that mean?"

"I told you, we'll see," he said irritated. Edge wasn't about to make any promises he couldn't keep. He didn't even know what all of this meant for himself or for her.

She backed off and rose off the ground effortlessly, signaling to Edge that the feedback fall had ended. "I want things to be like they have been, but—" she beckoned at him to get up, but he refused. The denial remained, rearing its ugly head whenever their bizarre infatuation lulled.

Deep down Feyera wanted it to continue. At least under his terms. The infatuation was too great to dismiss. Even if he wanted to dispel it as a passing phase or an instance of spiritual weakness, the fact remained that he had kissed her. But what was the part of him that had made the plunge?
Chris? Seph's shard? A blend of the two? Could that part even be defined? The questions of responsibility and blame racked his brain.

He wanted the best of both worlds. And unfortunately, Sana and he—Chris—were not in the same equation. By sheer fundamental facts they couldn't be. He was a human and she was a Pokemon. One would eventually need to be sacrificed. Until the time came when the Mercury Relic allowed for a reversal, he assumed that he could fill both margins.

And that meant figuring out how to save whatever was left of himself. Or rather whatever he identified himself as. For the entire series of events starting after his seemingly innocent Pokemon journey appeared to be forcing him to recount who he was and establish an identity. The trial in this was none other than its own simplicity; he was exactly who he considered himself to be. He was Mister Chris Feyera who used the pseudonym "Edge" to protect his identity. The nickname stuck innocently enough; Feyera was used to things sticking to him. But a simple name did not actually change him, did it?

He clenched a fist and pulled on some of the nearby grass, which had fully regained its rich green color. If his original identity were to be preserved, it mandated that he determine how to undo the Mercury Relic's curse. Was it even a curse? Of course it was, he told himself as he yanked on the plants reveling their shallow roots. However, the creeping anxiety came from the fact that such a curse had allowed for whatever happened between himself and Sanaria to take place. Few people would call a sensation like that a curse. Yet Feyera would; he had to for his own sanity's sake.

"—I don't know veh Feyera." Sana made a soft growl as she watched him play with the earth.

"—It's—" he started to say, but soon closed his mouth. Whilst streamlining his response, he observed the retreating Gardevoir with yearning eyes. She backed off, gliding on her rail thin legs sheathed in tight fabric of purest white. The way she floated from step to step, uninhibited by gravity made each bound look like she were about to take flight. Every movement was beyond graceful; she was overflowing with elegance. Such elegance could never be his.

He was happy to see the feedback fall's pressure had worn off on her. Feyera was feeling better too. The air felt less dense. All the colors had returned to normal. He knew a priori that he could actually support himself should he decide to get up. For without even budging a muscle, seeing Sana effortlessly raise herself up meant the feedback fall was over. Even with all of the negative repercussions of the emotion-filled feedback fall, Edge had a side that was thankful for that kiss they shared because of falling. It had made him happy. It was pleasurable. Such affection had never occurred before in his life.

His life had been unwillingly divided into two sections: before and after Semblance. Both were lacking in any physical contact with a member of the other sex. Pre Semblance, he'd always been busy with research with Evercrest and university work, and after the Sanctum Robbery, he had occupied himself with attempting to remember who he was rather than try and pursue a relationship. How would he have even gone about trying to start a relationship?

The thought of the endeavor was preposterous. He was a broken man. A shell completely stripped of his research knowledge, drained of what made him important by amnesia. Vacated of whatever lead him to write "Concerning the Paranormal" he was just an average man. Devoid of all professional intellect and needlessly frightened of being attacked by Pokemon, he had to work at Alex Prevoy's Coffeehouse.

Of course, he could fool people he hadn't known long, like Lorelei and Oak, into thinking he remembered his Pokemon research, but it never lasted very long. Eventually it would become apparent that what little memory he had left did not grant anyone the necessary confidence in his
own ability to recollect data he supposedly wrote. In fact, it made it appear as if he had stolen Chris Feyera's dissertation and assumed the hardworking researcher's identity. It was awful to have so much taken away from you when you considered yourself an esteemed academic. It castrated him. Insecurity imprisoned him. He blamed Sana for doing it, she should have known better. But then again, he should have never joined the Evercrest program.

Edge shook his head and gazed over at the pale seashell buds to the left of where he sat. There had never been a moment like this one in Feyera's life before. Whether she was a Pokemon or not became secondary to the fact that she was his first kiss.

It was a desire filled kiss too. All the times he had wanted to be with a woman, or lusted over a woman, culminated in the few seconds of ephemeral bliss. That spur of the moment decision made his world become lighter for a few moments. And it served as a vent for all of his newly emerging emotion which he so desperately sought to be rid of. To be perfectly accurate, it was a pure outlet of impure intention. Sanaria became his outlet, fulfilling that role flawlessly simply by receiving.

"I'm bearing emotion," he said dryly and as apathetically as he could muster.

She gave a lighthearted laugh. "That's obvious. Anyone can see that."

"Humph." Feyera rocked on his bottom by bringing his knees to his chest.

The truth of it was whether he liked it or not, Feyera had emotions. He hated them, but they were here and very possessive until he could undo whatever the Reilken Mercurius had done to him: initially and over time. If he did not do something with them, they would eat at him from the inside. Meltdowns, loss of control, even feedback falls were not out of the question. This naturally occurring self-destruction fed into his own self-doubt as a person. Ironically, it showed him just how powerless he was with power. Only when highly emotional did he ever ask the questions, "How can I undo this? When will I be able to become normal again?" or worse, "Is it even possible to undo?" For emotions forced him to question himself and his abilities, much to his self-assured side's displeasure. They carried him on a chariot to lofty, emotional, angst-ridden heights.

The other facet to the cause for such affection was Sana's own availability. She had made it very clear to him that she liked him. Or at least what he had to offer. Since he did have a Gardevoir shard embedded into his torso, it was obviously his most valuable asset when dealing with her. It saved him from her wrath after Semblance and provided ways for her to communicate with him through LDT.

Scratching his head, he wondered if Gardevoir shards even varied from Gardevoir to Gardevoir. They couldn't all be the same. Maybe they were like human fingerprints. Although how they could be with such polished exteriors puzzled him greatly. It wasn't like there were discernible details or etchings on their surface. He had spent enough hours of his own time looking at his own piece of "shrapnel" to figure that out. Maybe the individual details were microscopic.

He brought his eyes to her chest and stared at the piece, something he wouldn't be caught dead doing to a human woman. He told himself that he didn't see her that way so it didn't matter. It wasn't like she had large breasts either. The two small mounds split by the protrusion made him think of a rather poorly endowed woman. Definitely feminine, just not over the top by any means with that flat of a chest. Still at this point, comparisons were completely subjective; Edge knew nothing about what made Gardevoir attractive. Their society remained an enigma. Yet they had some human elements to them, or at least Sanaria did. His burrowing thoughts paused for a moment. Why was he even trying to make such connections? It shocked him. He made a face and Sanaria tilted her head in response to seeing him grimace.
Feyera told himself that he was only trying to figure out the similarities to rationalize why he felt comfortable kissing her. She raised her hand slightly blocking his view of the red metal and melodically stroked her hair back, tucking it behind her ear; arching her narrow neck back as she did so. Sana's and his own horn were exactly alike. Same color, same texture, same shape. It was like looking into a mirror and the longer he stared, the more mystified he became. She turned slightly, perhaps disturbed by his seemingly vacant face ogling her, and Feyera managed to avoid a disapproving glare in response to staring.

If he could manage to juggle the commandeering emotions with Sana's obvious interest in his own offerings—being derived from Seph—for a little while then why not give it a shot? They canceled each other out. And besides, it wasn't like anyone knew what went on between the two of them here on this relatively uninhabited island. Once again Edge was mildly fantasizing, the prospect of being somehow able to actually kiss someone else made his mind drive in far too many directions for him to possibly count. Doors had opened and light shone in through every orifice.

He shook his head as she crossed her legs and placed a hand against her hip. She gazed past him at the mountains in the distance. He didn't care about the mountains though, or anything else on this island. There was obsession and then there was this. He just had to figure it out; dissect it.

Throughout his adolescence and young adulthood, Feyera imagined doing what he did with her, women such as Lorelei unquestionably attracted him, but never before actually had enough emotion to "pull the trigger" as they say. Or perhaps he never had enough emotion to allow himself to even get to that stage. Sana was different though. And not only because she was a Gardevoir. It was seemingly so easy for him to do in the moment's passion. Impulsively he allowed desire to manifest in the way that it did. It was all a blur from the first time they had shared a kiss to now where he had to actually step back and face what happened. Little did he know, but Sana was also undergoing a very similar form of introspection. Tragically, neither of them could bring it up though.

Fighting off the gratuitous embarrassment that came with realizing his first kiss was with a Pokemon—and that he hadn't had a kiss in twenty years of life—he told himself once more that it was because of the circumstances he had been put into. The shard on his chest gave him a lot of unusual quirks, this was one of them for sure. There wasn't a chance that he would have done this—that he could have done any of this—if Reilken Mercurius hadn't seamlessly grafted over one or two of Sephiteos' features. Did desire transfer over as well? That didn't make sense, he still had his mind. But then what about the addition of psyonics? Feyera felt dizzy.

"Like I said, we'll see what the future holds, why don't we just—" he made a face like he had just eaten a tart lemon "—keep this between us?"

In a way, what they shared was a darker secret than his psyonics. Or how he got them. Or what he did with them. Or anything he had ever experienced really.

"I'm not going to promise you anything unless you tell me it will be like it was. The way I had wished for," she sighed. "I need permanency. More than you can imagine."

"Fine, look why did you have to get up like that?" he asked her in confusion. Just her moving away from him seemed like an insult in his amplified emotional state. For even though he had less than a fraction of what most Gardevoir had for emotional perception, it was still far greater than any amount a human. At times, it was unbearable enough to force him to collapse, such as the times when he became sentimental.

The feelings, the sensations, even the insight could probably trump an artist's emotion. He felt as if no person would be able to ward off a Gardevoir's frivolous ambitions indefinably. Especially a
science-minded man. They were too numerable, too influential. And as far as Feyera knew, Gardevoir emotions were expansionists by nature. Ever growing, they were like a runaway train. They had conquered him in more ways than one. Their most recent procurement was making him actually kiss her. It was an action like any other, and Edge predictably refused to take responsibility for its consequences.

"I don't know any more. Veh Feyera, I just don't—can't know. I can't know with you," her restrained voice said. Was she also trying to come to terms what he had done? He wondered why she was so distraught. It was worse for him to have been kissing a Pokemon than for her to be kissing a human after all. He could be thrown in jail or worse. His mind quickly shifted gears before recounting the horror stories of Pokemon abuse. It was nerve racking and he'd rather be dead than caught for the charges of 'molesting Pokemon'.

"Yeah well get off your high horse and join the club. Does it look like I know?" Feyera retorted in anguish. Confused, his rational side wished he could take kissing back nearly as much as his impulsive side had wished for it to have happened in the heat of the moment. But time had made the action infamous, engraved in both their minds.

And now that it was written into their individual histories in permanent ink, it had done exactly what happens to all things, specifically it—the sensations, the uncontrollable desires, the irrationality—had passed leaving room for reflection. Everything that had happened became much more real and pronounced in the absence of a distraction. In essence, by removing their contact with one another they were forced to come to terms with why there was even such an encounter in the first place. This was especially troublesome for Feyera, who could not seem to be able to wrap his head around the occurrences. He wasn't who she thought he was. And yet he shamelessly used that to deceive her. Why? Was his desire for a kiss worth such deception? What did that say about him? He hated the introspection.

"You should know. I trusted you. I trusted—trusted your intentions."

"You trusted me?" he asked pretending to be shocked. Of course, she trusted him. She trusted him enough to kiss the lips of a man who murdered her mate. Feyera tortured, tormented, and eventually slaughtered Sephiteos. Sana was trusting enough to kiss him back. If that wasn't crazy what was?

"I did. Didn't you feel my trust?" she asked childishly.

Feyera nodded his head. "Yeah it's not a big secret Sana."

"In your heart I meant."

Edge rolled his eyes, "Here you go again with hearts. It's anatomy Sana, an organ relays to the brain."

But she dismissed his rebuke by ignoring it altogether. She seemed to be in deep concentration. "I don't know if you are what I wished for."

"It wasn't a wish, will you please cut that out?" he said through closed teeth.

She rocked her head back and forth wondering if he was getting used to being in permanent denial. It seemed like he was making so much progress to her, and now for him to have finally shown affection made her squirm with anticipation. With whom was she sharing contact? He eyes fastened onto his face, then traveled down to his chest. "It was...what it was."
Edge straightened his posture. "If it was a wish then—" but he trailed off. What was he trying to say? He didn't believe in genies, djinn, or even 'Jynx' for that matter.

"Then what?" Sanaria asked him. "It wouldn't make sense?" she asked sarcastically. He of all people should know that what happened to him didn't make any sense.

"Nothing makes sense." Feyera was talking about more than just the Gardevoir's 'wish'. The whole coming into affectionate contact with a Pokemon defied everything he knew as normal. It just felt so wrong and right, pulling at two parts of him.

"I told you that you'd acclimate," she said, once again trying to allude to a dormant being within him. "Believe that you can and you will."

Edge thought about her words. Maybe there was some truth in mind over matter. That was exactly the problem though. As a painter or poet could possibly acclimate to the heightened emotional constitution due to coming from walks in life where such emotion made itself present. Having emotion for Chris Feyera was like giving him another set of limbs. A set of very uncooperative limbs.

"Acclimate? You want me to acclimate?" Feyera asked. "How in God's name can I acclimate?"

"God?" she asked puzzled.

He felt silly saying 'God'; God was a man Edge had lost faith in long ago, but that was a different issue entirely. How he hated how her words brought out the strangest things. "What do you even mean by acclimate?" Of course, Edge was referring to her forcing something down his throat that he didn't want, rather than her attempting to address Sephiteos.

"Acclimate to your new bod—I mean life. Seph—"

"New life?" It simply was not true. There was no Sephiteos inside of him other than the Gardevoir horn. He knew better than she did in this regard. The shard didn't talk to him. It didn't command what he did. He didn't have two identities as far as he knew. He had one life that took another's and seemingly absorbed its physical qualities.

"I thought that what happened between us would have helped you," she said swallowing.

"Yeah so why did you stop?" Feyera asked in curiosity.

"Because I'm tired of this. It isn't working," she said flustered.

Sanaria was behaving strangely. Ever since she had shared her first kiss with Edge, it was a matter of trying to make things as they once were. For a while, it seemed to be working gradually in her favor, but she had recently come across a wall. Chris Feyera's wall. He was the wall. Needless to say, she wanted to dismantle it swiftly and proceed to further 'uncover' Sephiteos. What led her to believe this was possible in the first place occurred immediately after she discovered Feyera on the beach below this Island's cliff. That was the first sign that Seph was trapped inside of a different body. Then once Feyera began employing Seph's psyonics and she felt it through latent LDT, it became obvious. For her it was a game of cat and mouse. Alluring at first, for the charm was the challenge, but at this point, she was unsure of just how deeply embedded Seph was in the man who had killed and assimilated him.

"Why Sana?" he asked, trying to pry out the real reason for her hesitation to be close with him. It was almost as if she'd grown tired of being with him suddenly. Something was definitely on her mind. "Were you trying to deceiving me? Again! Why is this happening? What is not working?"
"Everything," she replied, still locked in contemplation.

"It was for a little while," Feyera felt the cold chill of potentially losing this newly found vent for his emotions. "Why won't you—?"

She cut him off, "Because I'm not going just allow you to try and take advantage of the—situation."

"What 'situation' am I taking advantage of?" he asked in confusion. His situation seemed to be hardly exploitable. She was coming onto him after all. Not that he ever had any actual experience with women before. Nevertheless, he knew how to tell. There were behavioral patterns. Dependency in the most elementary of forms of attraction, observable through anxiety and desire. At least this was true for humans. But then again he had been duped by Lorelei's flirtation with him back in Pallet.

"It isn't a situation you've found yourself in before?" the Gardevoir asked him, referring to their kiss.

Stupid, he thought reminiscing how he had fallen for the wine red haired woman. She made him feel like she wanted him. How could he have been so shallow minded? Was it a lack of experience? There was something that she did to him while they were talking that gave him the 'sparks and fireworks' as they say. It could have been simply something she said giving him praise. Or it could have been her sustained interest in whatever stupid nonsense he was spewing out. He didn't care, her body reflected something. Moreover, he wanted her body to have reflected interest in him. And yet he'd been fooled; played like a fiddle. Feyera was always being manipulated. Even with everything he knew about principle psychology and he couldn't use it to harm a fly. Whatever he knew about women or people in general neglected to give him any field experience. It was just academic psychology after all. He had no clue what actually went on in their heads, and his psyonics could only penetrate so deep before he himself became invested into the other entity's emotional state.

"A situation? This?" Edge asked motioning to his chest.

"Everything," she said with conviction.

"Everything?" he repeated slowly.

Sana nodded.

"Well if that is the case then you'll need to be a nice Gardevoir and explain it to me." He nodded gradually. "Piece by piece," Edge said for good measure.

She twisted her lips, unwilling to answer the invisible taunt. "You know what it is you're trying to do."

"What? Replace Seph?" he volleyed at her upright body. She gave a perplexing glare that just reeked of being forced. Bingo! he thought. Hit the nail on the head. "That's what you are trying to do. Isn't it?"

"Don't make me laugh." Sana coiled her arms around her shoulders and twirled slightly, making her short skirt billow. As far as he could tell, she had a similar concept of clothing to people. The way it adhered to form fit to her slim body made it appear as if it were attached to her. But when she spun even a little or shifted her posture, the white silken fabric would waft, expanding in the breeze, contradicting the preconceived notion of it being a part of her anatomy.
"I'm not trying to," Feyera languidly said, "I'm stating the things I know to be true based on what I study; I'm awfully good at it—you should try it sometime."

"I—I don't need your empirical methods." She straightened her back. "You have to experience things for them to be true."

"Wrong! Knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it arises from experience," Feyera said smiling at his own wit.

She grappled against a nearby tree's crusty bark as she backed off from Edge who was still resting on the ground. He was so obstinate. That was the problem. She didn't know how to fully fix the problem of his intransigent nature. The young Gardevoir sighed; she would have to be creative to a degree. "You're doing it wrong then."

He sat up, happy to find how simplistic it was to respond to her. "What am I doing wrong exactly Sana?"

She rocked her head and played with her hand, rotating the slender wrist in a semi-circle.

"I don't have everything figured out, but the things I do know are valid," he said to her.

"You are still looking at things through eyes that should have closed years ago," she said tapping her fingers on the small palm tree's bark.

"Are you calling me childish again?"

"No." She wasn't trying to refer to him as a Ralts or even a human child for that matter. She was talking about the aftereffects of Semblance and Seph's essence. "I'm calling you stubborn and unwilling to change."

He sighed. "Listen, I'm not going to change just because I have a few temporary additions spouting out of my chest."

"Doesn't it make you change though?" the Gardevoir asked quietly. "Hasn't it made you change over time?"

"I—not like—"

"I know your life has changed since it happened. You know it too. The way you see things…the ways that you see things. Colors, emotions, desires…"

Feyera shook his head. He knew that it had. If he denied that then he would have to admit that he would have kissed Sana regardless of having a Gardevoir horn of his own. Once again, her unsharpened tongue was filled with unprecedented cleverness. She was the opposite of him in that regard; Edge always sought to display his sense of truth blaring trumpets at its presence, whereas Sana seemingly slipped it into delicate words akin to a Trojan Horse. The stark contrast was always building tension between them. Like an active volcano, such tension perpetually searched for an escape.

"I never got a rulebook along with my extended life membership," Edge said expressing discouragement.

"Do you really see life that way? As a membership?" she tried to pronounce 'membership' but it came out sounding just wrong. Like 'meanbarship'. 
Feyera stated to laugh. "Hahaha!"

"What's so funny?" she asked with concern.

He decided not to tell her about the butchered pronunciation. He still saw it as cute. "Think about it. What on earth do you ever sign up for? No one asks to be born. Life's a process Sana. You have to understand that we're only here temporarily."

"So you learn to cherish it. Since usually you only have one chance."

"We all die sooner or later though. People sometimes say about life: 'No one gets out alive!' Ha ha. That means you gotta take what you can get to a certain degree."

Sana's eyes widened, "Take what you can? From who?"

"I don't know. Just in general. Take out of life. It's a messed up world." Edge looked at her garment's frilled edges and remembered how she was trying to salvage her relationship with Sephiteos through him. He raised a brow, "What you aren't an opportunist?"

"N—no it isn't that." She stammered, "W—What you are saying and what you are implying are two very different things."

"I'll tell you what you don't sign up for: a filthy frickin' metal horn sticking out of your chest."

"Don't call it that," she sternly ordered.

"What would you call it? 'Veh Feyera'?" he asked her.

"No. It's not bad." Sana clutched her own shard with both her hands. "It isn't filthy...it's—it's beautiful."

"Well maybe to your species as a Gardevoir, but for a human, it's awfully inconvenient. Do you know how many times I've gotten caught in my clothes because of it?" Edge said in irritation. "Far too often. I have to ruin fabric by cuttin' holes in my clothes and wear button ups so it can stick out."

"How it looks is not how it wor—"

"Oh wait, I'm not even there yet, hold on just a minute now Sanaria, don't get ahead now!" Edge said raising a hand signaling 'stop'.

"First, let's talk about all the people who think I'm a nutter for wearing it, you know how many sob stories I have to tell a day? I get creative: sometimes it's a battle scar, other times an amulet, and I've even tried to once say that it was a new type of fashionable tie! Haha!"

Sana shook her head, when he got like this nothing was nice. His emotions were far too concentrated since he kept them under lock and key for such long periods of time. "You need to not vent so viole—"

"Hold on! Oh wait there is so much more, being on the run for possessing psyonics, creating gravity wells left and right that slowly destroy my body, oh even siphoning my Pokemon slowly into a state of helplessness!"

"That's your fault not your heart's—" she stopped suddenly, realizing what she had said. The Gardevoir gasped and put both her hands over her tiny mouth. "Eep."
Smiling at the delicate cord he'd inadvertently struck, Edge grinned manically, "But it's here. It's mine isn't it? My 'heart'; all mine." He brought a hand up to where the piece joined with his pale flesh, first touching the metal, then slipping a finger beneath his shirt's buttoned lip where a tie would normally rest. A delicate stroke gracing both human and Gardevoir anatomy made his mind quiver. The way it seamlessly adjoined to his body—not as an invader, but from within—caused a maddening tingle to rocket throughout him. It had never felt this way before.

Sanaria, seeing him do this to himself, became extremely irritated. "It wasn't yours to take—" Sana clenched two fists "—it never was!"

Hearing his own words come from her petite mouth satisfied him. Here she was confirming that Feyera was in fact different from her mate. So long as she knew he was Chris Feyera, he could live with the rebuke. But maybe not that sudden rush of pleasure he had just felt.

Pausing, he lowered his hand, grimacing. How was he able to do that? Why did he feel that way when he touched it? The sensation really frightened him. He felt like what he was doing was very off. His hands still shook from an unprecedented rush of blood to his extremities. "I—I know."

"Stop trying to pretend you have a right to things you don't, give it back over to who it belongs to."

"Who? You? You want this back? Take it; I'd love to be rid of it Sana! That's what I want; we're on the same page!"

But that is not what Sana had meant by 'giving it back'. "You—you can't be rid of it," she said as if it were some kind of disease. "It doesn't work like that."

"Oh but I will be. Don't you worry. I will undo it," he motioned to his black armlet. The glowing green pattern on it had dissipated over time. Was it running out of power? Did the ancient artifact even use power? Was it sapping his own power?

"You are uncertain; I can tell." She said, trying to force back a smile. "I've been uncertain too. I know the signs."

"Not uncertain, just planning my next move." Edge craggily said, "I have so many options."

He didn't. The only option would be Fredrick.

"How do you plan for something that gives you no recourse? It would be like me trying to say that I don't want to have my green hair."

"You can always change attributes about yourself," Feyera retorted. "You can dye your hair if you really wanted to. It isn't stuck like that."

"Dye hair?" Her eyes widened.

"Yeah, change its color. It isn't a transplant so it would still be—" Edge paused to remember what it felt like against his nose. The aroma and the texture all came flooding back to him just by this tiny exercise of recollection. "—still be yours."

"What color would I make it?"

"Well you can make it any color really," Feyera said uncertain of whether or not Gardevoir hair was like human hair. He'd never been close enough to a girl's hair to find out what he found out about Sana's, however it seemed close enough to his own hair. "You bleach the hair with a peroxide and then use dye to impose a new color on it."
"You can force a new color onto it? Onto the hair?" she asked mystified.

"Mhmm. It's an easy procedure. You take the original color out then put a new one onto it."

"What is it called in between?" Sana asked.

"What do you mean?" he grumbled.

"Like before it is the new color but after it is no longer the old color."

"Nothing, there is no name for the transition period. It is just not complete."

The Gardevoir smiled. "Incomplete?" she said aloud this time nailing the correct word.

Whenever she spoke aloud like that, he would recoil. It was her same telepathic voice, just her lips would move and it would echo in his ears rather than be relayed once. "Yeah…not finished. It would be white and able to absorb what you put onto it."

"But white is a color."

"Yeah but it is light enough to absorb other colors. Besides white hair means you're old!" he said thinking about his aunt's silvery aging hair.

She padded her milky green hair. "How do you change the colors, can emotions change them?"

"Ha, emotions changing colors?" He shook his head. Sure Gardevoir could see emotion, and it usually came across as a color. But it wasn't ever permanent. The longest emotional colors remained for him was during the feedback fall they shared.

"Yeah like if you are angry would you have bright crimson hair?"

"The colors we see are simply a degree of how much of this color present in light is reflected," Edge muttered. "To be completely accurate, a color reflects the wavelengths in the nanometer range that retinal cones in the eye respond to. The medium is the process of reflection of the wavelength of the color. The receiver is our eyes which receive the wavelength of the color and tell the brain what the wavelength of reflected light is."

She didn't seem to care much for his explanation, and instead focused on implications, comparing Feyera to a blank slate of sorts just like bleached hair. "So you can actually pick the color that you want to see?"

He had no clue why this was so important for her, but rationalized it as just interest in human culture. Edge knew the anthropological inquiry of their different cultures was not mutual; he could care less what Gardevoir society valued. Still, he saw there was little harm in exposing his own culture to her.

"Sure, you could even have the same color hair as me if you really wanted to!" Feyera said brushing his auburn hair and twirling it about his index finger. He imagined Sana with a similar shade of hair to his own and chuckled at the thought. What a silly musing, a Gardevoir with light golden-brown hair.

"So that means humans can change their body?"

Feyera shrugged. "I guess. People undergo cosmetic changes. Sometimes even surgery in order to get the right look. It just becomes exponentially difficult the larger the desired result is."
"Well maybe—"

Assuming what she would suggest, Feyera interjected, "Tried getting this thing removed before. They wouldn't do it." He'd been tempted to have surgery remove the Gardevoir horn before, it was just not feasible for whatever reason. Possibly due to the deep conjoinment or the strangeness of his case.

"Stuck?" she murmured aloud.

"For now," he answered, not flinching as much this time.

"You understand what it is like to have it as a part of you though."

"That's not completely true. I shouldn't have to understand this. I wasn't meant to."

"What if it is forever? Will you continue to try and remove it?"

"Nothing is forever Sana. There isn't a single thing on this planet that is forever," Edge said with a scowl.

"But if it is then—"

"Trust me. I know best, there's never a dull moment in my life. Ah well...as they say, 'No rest for the wicked.'"

"You are okay with that?" she asked. Her jaw dropped. "You're fine with being 'wicked'?"

Feyera thought about the few Pokemon and people he had grown to care for. Was it all about utility? "It is a saying, but it contains a degree of truth. I might not be wicked—"

"Not anymore," she whispered.

"—but I'm a human being first and foremost."

"...no..." the Gardevoir said mutely to herself.

"A persistent one too!" Edge rolled his shoulder. "And I don't know how it works for Gardevoir but 'kissing' gives humans various degrees of pleasure."

"You say you know about pleasure? What is pleasure for a human? What you did?" Sana really didn't need to ask him any of those questions since she knew all of their answers. He kissed her because he found it pleasurable. His pleasure made it pleasurable for her. She was riding on his surge of emotion. She believed that acute bursts of emotion would serve to somehow further unleash Sephiteos from assumed imprisonment. Edge's explanation of the way hair dye worked seemed to further her theory.

"Pleasure," Feyera said with a dry smile, eager to define it. "To be pleased by the circumstances. Activation of chemicals known as endorphins. Why do you think certain things give us states of euphoria? The body likes it."

"Likes it?" she asked.

"Yeah, quit acting like this is weird. I know you like how the Gardevoir horn feels for instance," Edge said. "You've made that obvious! Heck, even me—'an unperceptive person'—felt its surge of endorphin."
Sana shook her head and her hair wobbled back and forth. "You don't know love. You proved that to me when you said that nothing lasts forever. Love is forever."

"Ha, love?" he said with a scoff. "It's a pleasure principle. Things feel good, motivating the organism to recreate similar future situations. Gardevoir can have pleasure; your species' horn is proof of it!"

"That—" she gasped "—is the furthest thing from love."

"How can you be sure," he said jaggedly, "you repeated what you—your body—had just found pleasurable didn't you?"

"I—" she gasped.

"Now I might not be a neuroscientist, but you definitely were not opposed to the idea. You didn't stop me. Hell, you pretty much initiated."

"What you're doing wrong—," she paused and looked left and right at the rich jade tropical scenery, "—is you are trying to fill a void...with the wrong things."

"That's what you wanted isn't it? I don't get you." Edge shook his head, "One minute you're snoggling and the next you're trying to say I'm wrong because I found that enjoyable? Pleasure is pleasure, Sana."

"It is not! Chris veh Feyera, you shouldn't be finding it enjoyable. You're not Seph."

"Of course I'm not Sephiteos. I'll never be Seph. You're wrong to think in those terms; it makes you sound desperate." Edge let out a groan, still very uncomfortable with himself in general. He ached all over at times, and his muscles frequently grew sore. At least his eyes were not in pain. Although thinking about his eyes made them sting. Must have been mind over matter.

"I'm not desperate," she said unconvincingly.

"He's gone," Feyera said. To be honest, he was unsure of how true such a statement was. The memories were there. Seph's memories were awakened somehow. Maybe it was a part of the instancing's aftereffects, but it seemed to be more probable that by bearing a few of the Gardevoir's traits, Feyera was somehow able to absorb memories. He wasn't sure which was worse: the haloed eyes or knowing where they came from. Sadly, the similarities didn't even end with Progenitor, nor did they begin with the grafted Dark type virus. First the initial emergence of the creature's shard, then the eyes after using psyonics, shortly after the memories became apparent through Hypnosis, what was next for him?

She closed her eyes tightly. "Do you think even for a split second you can empathize with how hard it's been for me to track you down, get you to come back to this awful island, and find that you hate Seph? Yourself—hating yourself?"

"You should know better, I'm not him. No matter what I'll never be him. I appreciate you saving my life, but you only saved me, Chris Feyera."

"I—you have his heart. You have to be—deep down—" Sana said stammering.

"You don't get it. It's not your body playing host to this foreign piece," he said looking down. Maybe it was the reason why he had kissed her. Did Gardevoir even kiss one another? "Rather it is a collection of events that brought me here and now I'm only doing the best with what I got."
"So now I'm just, 'what you got' Mister Feyera?"

"Well you seemed to be open enough to the idea of kissing. I never thought you'd be so good at something so distinctively human."

"I don't believe you! You're nothing more than a pig!"

"Hey easy now, I'm a pig with feeeeeeeeelings now right?" Edge snidely said.

"Y—you're disgusting me! Feelings aren't given to pigs. Not even Grumpigs. They shouldn't have feelings."

Feyera gave her a leer, "Aw think about all the lil' piggies out there that you are demeaning Sana. They wouldn't take kindly to your insults."

"You cannot demean something if it doesn't have feelings to hurt. They wouldn't care, their ugly, stinky, fat snouts are always buried in the dirt, sloshing around for grubby worm-infested filth. Euuuuudghh!" she made a face like she had just smelled a nose bending odor. "I hate it."

"So that would be your worst nightmare? Haha," Edge chuckled to himself. He took mental notes, was her distaste due to being unable to command their emotions since they had none? It made sense. "No feelings; not a chance for an emotion dependant Gardevoir."

"I—I'm not afraid of them. They make me sick," she said twisting her mouth and making a pout.

Feyera laughed at her childish response. No reason, no logic, pure unadulterated emotion. He had no clue why she hated pigs. Perhaps it was a simple as an aversion to ugliness. There was no use trying to flesh out why she despised the creatures. Edge could not unearth a deep philosophical reason as far as he could tell. Feyera did like it when he found gems like these buried in her language, it gave him the upper hand since he could play off her irrationality. "You'd be powerless I'd imagine."

"It wouldn't be as bad as facing a Dark Type Pokemon," she said shivering.

Edge ignored the baggage of her past completely; a trait that came in handy at times but also could be beyond debilitating. "A Gardevoir fighting a pig, or a Grumpig for that matter!" He mused the thought over and over in his mind, "What would you do anyway? Try and make the pig feel bad about being a pig? What would you say: 'You are a filthy earthly creature, unable to use its hind legs, stargaze, and have emotions!'? That's just mean; they're pigs. Chubby little suidaes without anything else to do in their lives but be a pig!"

"They're repulsive veh Feyera, I don't understand your obsession over them. I wasn't meaning to compliment you by calling you a pig."

"You had me fooled," Feyera said rolling his eyes sarcastically. "Speaking of pigs though… Have you ever had bacon?"

"Ba—bacon?" she asked aloud. "What is that exactly?"

"Oh it's cured pig meat! Delicious in the morning with some eggs," Feyera said smiling. He hadn't had a good breakfast in such a long time. He missed out on the complimentary hotel one before challenging the Fuschia City Pokemon Gym since he was sick. Come to think of it, Seph's shard had been the one to make him nauseous. Of all the rotten luck. He didn't even know when he'd find a decent place to eat again. Ever since Chris' Pokemon journey began, it had been only granola bars and protein blends for sustenance. Flavorless yes, but all a body needed. At least they went
down easy. Although swallowing the same thing over and over became a bit of a chore as of recently.

Sana's small jaw dropped, "You eat pigs?" She shrieked in disgust.

He swallowed and his saliva coated his esophagus. Come to think of it, swallowing in general hurt more than he was used to. "Yup! The juuuuuuuicy—mmmmmm—succulent fatty parts tooooooo!" Feyera said trying to make it sound as disturbing as he possibly could, exaggerating every vowel beyond measure. She may have tried to attach him to Gardevoir culture, but by hell, he was going to try to make it seem like his world came along no matter what endeavors she took to stomp it out of him.

"Ewww. Stop talking veh Feyera. That's vile."

"Delicious." He even attempted to make a slurping noise but to little avail with a dry mouth. It wasn't necessary, he was already going overboard. With a wink, he looked over at the Gardevoir.

Sana looked like she was going to faint. The expression of horror she wore on her face was absolutely unrivaled. She frantically shifted her eyes under her light mint green bangs. They darted about in a multitude of directions. Eventually she pulled her hands to her mouth and gasped. Were those lips she'd touched, Chris Feyera's, were they also the same lips that relished in eating pig's flesh?

"I think—I think I'm going to be ill..." she said holding her tummy.

"Speaking of such FINE delicacies, I'm hungry. I—" he felt his flat stomach below his shard, "—I haven't eaten in a while."

She gazed at him from a few paces away and turned her head on the side, "Oh you're hungry? After talking about something that morbid?"

"Ummm...yeah. I really am. Not going to lie. It was really appetizing." A half truth. Chris never gorged himself, he just enjoyed a hearty meal every once in a while. It showed in his figure. Or maybe that was just Sephiteos. He wasn't positive but based on pictures of his younger self he'd always been on the leaner side. Now however it was slightly exaggerated. He was just bones and narrow undefined muscle.

"Well then, why don't you go fetch some food and be useful?" Sana said tightening her gaze on his face. "You'll be pleasantly surprised to find how much fun foraging for real food is."

"Real food? On this island?" Feyera thought about how difficult that might be. Then again, Sana had stayed here for God knows how long. She could probably tell him exactly what he needed to get. "Where do I go to do that?"

"Use that head of yours and figure it out."

"I'm not going to go around trying toadstools and leaves if that's what you think. I don't want to be poisoned."

"Yes, it would be like a growi—I mean learning experience," she said teasingly. "You might even find a wild boar if you're lucky."

"What are you going to do, just stay here? What happened to 'whatever you're a part of I'll be a part of too?'" he asked mocking her.
She blushed to his pleasure, "I—I got caught up in the moment. I was thinking of you as someone—I remember—someone you happen to vehemently deny."

"Whatever, ugh," he said getting up, "God that was difficult." As he rose up, everything slowly wobbled in his visual range, making him feel dizzy. His body had very little stability whenever he first stood up. Edge wondered if he were still under the influence of the feedback fall's awful repercussions. He outstretched both his arms in an effort to maintain balance. "I got this though," he said assuredly.

Sana continued to stare at him, uncertain of what to make of the situation. Then she rolled her heavy lidded eyes in distaste. At times he was full of charm and brimming potential and at other times he was base overflowing with conceit. How she wished pulling out the attributes of Sephiteos would be easier. A little affectionate interaction here and there did not seem to be doing any favors. She laughed to herself. It was probably a remarkable experience for Feyera, but he had no idea. To her, he was just the unwilling host her beloved was trapped within. To stir the emotions and further push Seph outwards would be difficult now that Feyera had constructed a wall of sorts by proclaiming he would not accept assimilation.

"What's so funny?" Edge asked.

"You," she said gritting her teeth.

"Me?" Edge wondered. Maybe he had gone a little over the top with pigs.

"Yes. You're funny sometimes."

"Well I think you're acting funny."

She shook her head. "I think you should stop playing little Ralts feedback games and go fetch us some food Mister Feyera."

"Ralts feedback games?"

"Child's play." She said rather unenthusiastically. "Where one child says, 'you're silly' and then the other one says 'no you're silly'. While a game, it does serve a purpose by teaching them the dangers of feedback falls."

"That sounds like children to me," Feyera said. He never really liked children. It sounded mean but it was true. They were always yelling, screaming, and crazy. An absolute nightmare for anyone serious about scholarly work. Truly disruptive. "God help the people who take care of those rascals."

"He he. Yes, children seem to be very similar in both our cultures. That's a good point of transitioning, wouldn't you say?"

"I don't want you treating me like a child though Sana!" Feyera exclaimed, unaware of what she meant exactly by 'transitioning'.

"Why would I do that? You are such a big adult," she lampooned. "Now prove it by showing me you can go out and get your own food."

"Humph fine. You coming with?" Feyera asked somewhat longing for her.

Sana stretched her arms towards the afternoon sky. The colors of the environment had returned to
normal, and were brilliant. "I think you should go on your own."

"Alright fine then. If that's what you want," despite his façade of tolerance, Feyera did feel a little vacant now that she was pulling away from him. "How about you tell me what you want to eat?"

"Feyera, does this look like a human city to you? We're in the wilderness; try and be resourceful. Think like a G—"

"Forget it; I don't want your help." Edge angrily retorted. If she didn't want to come with him she didn't have to, he told himself. He wasn't desperate. He wasn't like her. He refused to be like her. "Listen, I'll be back no later than sunset."

"You don't want to stay out later than that," she smirked.

"Why? Ghosts gonna come after me?" he asked feeling sort of adamant in the same way Jill used to be when confronting all things supernatural. Poor Jill, he thought.

"No—" she paused and looked over her shoulder at the dense tropical forest "—just don't."

"I told you, I don't need your help Sana. Sheesh, just wanted company. I lived out in the wilderness before."

"When?" she asked.

"On my Pokemon journey around Kanto. What did you think; I slept in the Delcatty Suites every night of the week?"

"Ha, Delcatty? That's a Pokemon veh Feyera, you can't sleep in a Pokemon—"

Feyera moaned, "It was a joke Sana; Delcatty like dainty things I was eluding to their high maintenance by naming a fictional hotel after them. Sheesh."

"I get it, you don't need to explain your human ways of expression to me like that," she replied quickly. Deep down she did like it when he did though. Especially when he did it with a smile. She liked seeing him try to attach to her. It was one of those things that reminded her of Seph. He had come from a very different part of the Gardevoir hierarchy after all. He was always explaining things to her, giving her witty expressions to use while they lived in the somewhat dysfunctional Pokemon community.

"Oh okay then…" Edge mumbled.

"I don't care where you slept when you were doing your little errands around on the mainland."

"Some of those errands involved finding you, princess."

She gawped. "I'm not a—"

"I was only cracking a joke," he hastily said.

Sana didn't like how he ceaselessly resorted to humor to deflect his feelings. It was charming at first, but the implications made it grow stale. Almost as stale as his dogmatic rationalist thinking. "This island is not large but it's easy to get lost on since the trees all look the same. The ones with the big bright green leaves with tiny diamond spots of hoary on their veins only grow on the northern side of the island."

"Yeah well then why don't you come along and be my navigator Sana?" she asked, hoping for her
to oblige to another one of his offers.

"No. I—I'm tired from the feedback fall." Sana straight up lied to him. "That shouldn't have happened. Everything—"

"You're being weird now, whatever happened to everything we had going on?" he asked frustrated.

"Chris you're—ah forget it." She made a really sour face.

The trainer wobbled over to her, careful to maintain his balance. She flinched slightly as he approached. Once he was an arm's distance away, he stopped. Blowing some hair out of his eyes, he looked at hers again with desire. "What happened? Why won't you tell me?"

"Because!" she said flustered. Her head turned away.

Edge reached out to grab her hand but she shook him off and backed away. "Sana, what's gotten into you? I thought you were happy! I thought what happened made you happy."

"I—I was happy," she bowed her head and looked beyond the trees at the mountains in the background. "I could have been happy."

"Tell me," he asked affectionately, trying his hardest to make it seem genuine. He knew that deep down their existed a ravenous hunger to possess her. To be with her. It had to have something to do with the Gardevoir horn in his chest.

"N—No. Learn how to perceive no," she said to him as if he was a little boy.

"I'm a person Sana; I can't penetrate your emotional substratum to read your mind."

"You aren't doing any mind reading; you're supposed to be reading hearts. But you'll failing at even that simple task!"


"I can't wait for you to learn...," she whispered.

"What was that?" he asked.

"Oh nothing, go off and find some food. You must be starving with all that heavy thinking you do."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

She crossed her arms and looked at a few of the light orange blanket flowers by her feet.

"Humph. You want to make me go off all on my own? Fine. Who's to say I'll come back though?"

She suddenly looked at him with both her eyes and he could perceive the worry instantly in their nebulous cherry glow. "You wouldn't do that."

"Oh? Better come with me and make sure right Sana?" At this point, it wasn't just a matter of keeping her in his clutches and gaining some control, Edge also wanted assurance that she would let him go. Everything was riding on this. He believed her naivety would let him go, but at the same time, he questioned just how deep her trust laid root. Did she honestly think he was an incarnation of Sephiteos? A pure incarnation? A wish? Some angelic life form?
"I told you I'm not going and that's final, veh Feyera."

"Daww. Will you at least please tell me why?" he begged sarcastically.

"No." She kicked the stem of a bleeding heartwine flower causing it to wiggle in an artificial breeze.

"Then how can I fix it?"

"I told you already. I need time alone. All this…it's starting to weigh on me."

"Like you're the only one it's weighing on! Always about you!" He threw his arms in the air. "What about me?"

"I don't know what you are sometimes. Just leave me alone and go find some food. I'll be waiting here," she said thinking about how difficult this fracture would have been if she could not discern his emotion. At least she knew he had emotion. That was the only consoling factor to her. The Rocket who had killed her mate could not have possibly had emotions. It was a crucial change. First the exposure of the Gardevoir shard, and now the introduction of emotion, he really was different she insisted. Becoming different. This whole occurrence was development. His metamorphosis. She had to direct it.

"It's always going to be about you right? What if I don't find enough food for the both of us?" he asked playing devil's advocate.

"Veh Feyera...just go...this isn't about the food anymore," she knew it wouldn't make a difference how much food he brought back. It didn't matter. "It's about as you eloquently put before: separation."

"Separation? You're the last one I'd expect to hear that from."

Why was he surprised? Sana took it to heart when he said that he wanted to split himself apart. She couldn't forget that. Now that she knew, no amount of affection would cover his exposed intentions. She just couldn't seem to win him over, make him remember. Nothing was working. The frustration ate away at her already broken spirit. "Why? You didn't want this if I recall correctly," Sana said referring to their limited physical encounter.

"So now I'm just a toy that gets put back on the shelf when you are finishing fondling my Gardevoir horn?"

"YOUR Gardevoir horn?" Sana shrieked in rage. "You don't understand the half of it. And what does that make me? Some human girl you could never get a hold of because of your own lack of emotion? You kissed me like you would a human girl."

He was taken aback by this, "I—a human girl?"

"Yes like 'Lorelei'. Lorelei, Lorelei, from your stupid dreams," the Gardevoir softly growled saying the Elite Four member's name loud and clear. "Both times. I was made into a replacement for what you never had—what you could never have without emotion."

"You went along with it," he said trying to force an innocent smile. Her words really did sting Edge more than he'd care to admit.

"I followed your lead, read your heart in the heat of the moment. Both times. You don't understand what affection is for a Gardevoir yet. You have no idea of the things Seph and I shared together,
no memory of—" Sana caught her breath, her chest was rising up and down rather quickly from nostalgic pleasure, "—your human desires, the way you show affection, are nothing in comparison."

Edge wondered why she kept saying both times, but he dismissed it as a quirk of hers. "So you are telling me you didn't enjoy it? Because it sure as hell seemed like you did."

She contemplated. Perhaps she did like it. Especially when it was done suddenly and unexpectedly. An unprecedented nature made it worthwhile. Sana never expected it, and she did find it to be enticing despite its oddity. Sana wasn't completely one-hundred-percent sure though.

"Affection is typically much different amid Gardevoir. Kissing and pecking are not by any means uncommon, but in humans additional nerves on the lips and tongue make the action feel more… personable."

"You could feel it?" Feyera asked in rapture. How was that even possible? She made it sound like she didn't have the human nerves. Did she use his? This was all becoming very confusing.

"Of course," she said as if it were a secret. The extraordinary thing about it all was how much she was able to take out of his experience. Following the initial shock, she felt his pleasure activated and hers linked to fit seamlessly around the eudemonia like a glove.

"I don't believe you. You had me convinced otherwise. You seemed natural." Edge had no idea what a natural kisser even was.

"Well you are hardly perceptive enough yet to…"

"There's no goal. I'm not trying to become perceptive; I'm not trying to become a better Gardevoir. Because I'm not one."

"Exactly. What I don't enjoy is what you've been doing behind the scenes. You're sneaky. Snakelike. You have an agenda and I mean to expose it before I get hurt."

"Don't call me those names. I'm genuine. You saw me—" Feyera winced at the thought, "—show emotion."

"I don't know what you're trying to say," she said. Although she knew exactly what he was trying to do. Enter in through her compassionate side; reflect that he had good intentions paving his path, or rather, that good intentions could be utilized to pave his path. As sly as ever.

"I showed you emotion. What more do you want? Hell, I even cried in front of you. If that's not genuine enough I don't know what is!"

"It isn't that simple. Just because you have emotion doesn't mean that—" she paused again taking a deep breath, "—doesn't say anything about your identity."

"I thought you said that identity is determined by your heart? I thought you said for a Gardevoir to determine an identity—"

"Yes, for a Gardevoir."

"Well I think I understand now," Edge replied stone-faced. He didn't want to understand. Instead, he insisted that it was Sana's fault. She was manipulative. She tried pulling him into her world, tried making him feel things in ways he never felt before only to have those sensations pulled out from underneath him like they were now. It was all done in order to manipulate him. To make him
addicted to following her orders. To make his mind as vacant as a starlit sea.

"Do you? Can you?" she asked. She wondered if he could try and become more like her. More like Seph. More like who he was supposed to be. More like his horn wanted him to be.

"Yeah. I understand perfectly fine," Edge said with a touch of malice in his raspy tone. "You have double standards. Your kind's the worst."

"What are you saying? 'My kind'?" she huffed out straightening her posture. Was he insulting her species? Didn't he see the firebrick shard jutting out of his own body day and night testifying his own connection to the Gardevoir species?

"You are a hypocrite!" Edge yelled. "Things that are okay for you to do I have no business in doing. What? Do you want to be in charge or something?"

Secretly she did. She was very similar to Edge in this regard. Life had also dealt her a poor hand, and she found herself always seeking to command what she could. Where she differed though were in her methods. They were much more intricate than the brute force employed by most problem solvers such as Feyera. She saw no need to use such blunt methods with manipulation as a possible avenue. "I'm like you then," she offered in response. "Or rather, you are like me. Personally, I like saying the second one better."

"I'm not like you. I'm nothing like you! I don't use manipulation to mess with people's heads," Edge stammered. He thought about when he had used psyons to try and read the minds of others. They were few and far between, growing less numerous as time went on. At least he hoped that was the case. What constituted as manipulation? Reading people's names like Allen Ross back at Celadon's Pokemon Gym? Determining people's emotions to see if they were threatening to him or his friends? Talking to his Pokemon when they had similar emotional frequencies to keep them company? Those weren't too bad, they were harmless.

"Sure you are. You think that 'psyons' are a part of you right?" Sana said 'psyons aloud startling him. The irony of it all. A Gardevoir using Psychic power to say a human word that referred to the last thing his own powers came from. His powers were not psyons; they were stolen Psychic abilities from Sephiteos.

He clenched up. His haloed eyes sprung about in a dance of disarray as he came to terms with things. The manipulative mind reading, used on the late Agent Kelvin and Fredrick. But it did not stop there. He also had the manipulation over gravity, the manipulation over his Pokemon in the heat of combat. Those were the times where he felt most confident in his abilities. Or to a certain degree his psyons fed back to him the sensation of cottony comfort. He could not deny that phenomenal comfort. The only matching sensation was how he felt whenever he was in Sana's embrace. He locked onto her own heart shard.

She stared at his eyes, now paralyzed. "A reeeeeaaaaaaaalllll nice part. Don'tcha think veh Feyera?"

"F—for now," he spat out.

She immediately spun around hearing this and began to walk off.

"Wait, where are you going?" Edge asked running up next to her. She made a grimace and turned her head away from him.

"Away!" she angrily shouted.
"You can't do that Sana."

"Veh Feyera, just understand that I need some time away from you. Don't make this more difficult than it needs to be!"

Edge, more distraught than ever at her difficulty or the fact that he wasn't getting his way, stumbled slightly. She refused express that she cared. "You are being overly emotional. What did I do wrong?" Things had been going well for him.

"Chris veh Feyera. Go. Now!" She ordered without even looking at him.

"And if I don't?"

But she kept walking away. "I know how to deal with that."

He was curious to find out. "Oh yeah? Just how are you going to 'deal with me'?" he exclaimed using his arms to make air quotes.

She stopped mid step and bowed her head to look down at her gown. "There are ways to shut you down for good." Sana knew she would have to use little more than pronged vocabulary to inhibit Edge. There was no point in even employing Psychic power other than their latent emotional tether to bend him to her will. The best thing was if done correctly, he would do most of the work for her. Her own security was assured no matter what.

"Oh? OH? But then what about this precious little heart you adore so much Sana?" he fondled it, gracing his narrow fingers over the glossy rim. The action, along with the level of emotion he was currently discharging gave him a momentary high. Something that felt incredible. His eyes rolled backwards instinctually and dilated. Sana felt it too, through the bond and she instinctually rubbed her heel on the soft ground in response. Using a great deal of energy, she fought off the urges it gave her. Coming to a full stop, she made it seem like she was thinking. It was exactly what Edge had hoped to see.

She believed the less he knew about it the better. What worried her was how much of a scientist at heart he was. If he wanted to learn about how Gardevoir hearts worked, he would have no problem. He had a sample embedded in him—as him already! Fortunately, his own denial of such aspects had worked in her favor by keeping his voracious search for knowledge at bay. She knew the potential outcomes, and she dared not think about it for too long. If Edge gained too much knowledge, he could even subjugate her to his own emotion. Much like in a feedback fall, he could pull at her own emotions. With a linked heart however, it was much more control oriented, and it was sweet control which she savored as an ace in the hole.

"I lived without it for two years. Now that I've had a taste of what ill wind is attached to it I must reconsider my options..."

"You'll reconsider nothing. You know it!" he yelled with swollen irises from the recent elation. The whole world seemed to be pulsating with his heartbeat. Each thump made his eyes madly swell. "You can't be without it."

She ran a delicate hand through her hair as she continued to walk south bound. "Aw, but neither can you though."

"Lies. I was fine without it before and I'm going to be fine without it again. I told you this is temporary. It's not a big deal for me. But for you, it's your everything!"

The Gardevoir stopped again, this time outstretching both her arms arching her back. "The typical
thing for someone in denial to do is simply deny the fact all together. That's the conventional psychological defensive mechanism's path. However what you've done with your rationalization is resorted to minimisation."

"What?" he said surprised to hear such a deep explanation from her.

"It's not a big deal right?" she mocked. "Your—your predicament."

"Course not. I've got resources to fix it," Feyera lied. He had grown quite good at quipping back with deceit. The deceit came from himself. He had to keep convincing himself of what he wanted to believe in. In reality though, he had nothing but his self-fed lies. And a stupid hallowed out bracelet, the shell of the Mercury Relic. No amount of fluff could save his rational mind from the physical facts. All he had was a prayer and Fredrick's semi-intangible aid.

"I'm glad you do. Really. If you didn't that would be just awful, now wouldn't it?" she caricatured after an infallible read of his insecurity.

Edge looked down at himself. "You're sick. You want this for me? You want me to be stuck like this!"

"Hah!" she exclaimed gleefully. It was already working; he had given control up a while ago.

"You do don't you? You want me for yourself!" he exclaimed.

"I want YOU for myself?" she exclaimed. Then she dropped the big one, "What constitutes 'you' veh Feyera?"

"This," he said playing off his own Gardevoir attributes once more. "This is all that I am to you."

"Apparently it's not."

"Oh?" he asked in wonder. "What else could you possibly see in me besides this horn?"

"That attitude for starters. You also have some other nasty sides to you that could use some chaffing." She muttered, "Totally unacceptable for a budding Gardevoir."

"Who are you to judge me? What gives you the right to say anything about how I live my life?" Feyera said stomping his foot on the earth, feeling indignant.

"Why are you following me then? Why are you asking for my advice on how to forage for food? You should be moving on to go figure out how to use your resources and fix everything," she said purring.

"Fine. I'll go. And you'll never be sure whether or not I'll come back!"

As Edge Feyera stormed off in the opposite direction, he thought he heard her faint telepathic laugh.
Deep Concerns and Unruly Aftermaths

Chapter by Solar

Feyera had made it about several hundred paces before he actually began to look around. Undoubtedly, he had been seeing where he stepped along the wooded path, but hardly with his eyes. He was livid. It was all just a blur. So hazy was his vision, that prior to this moment he could focus on nothing except Sanaria's behavior.

It took a physical toll on him. His vision was clouded in deep rouge as he proceeded further north. The figures of passing trees and small flower bushes were not even recognizable. He felt like blinders had been placed over his eyes forcing him to look ahead. Beyond angry at the way things had turned out, Feyera could not imagine doing anything but getting away from her. By doing so, he felt as if he were endorsing the force cogently persuading him to teach her a lesson.

It was simply unbelievable. She was unbelievable. Guile and emotional, her nature alone shattered any hope he had of feeling comfortable around her.

She was an emotional roller coaster. Always fluctuating, never permanent in her intentions, and, worst of all, irrational to the point of mild insanity. She was as evanescent as the wind itself. And like the wind, she wanted him to fold to her will like a sail. Everything had escalated way too fast and spun out of his control. From the impulsive kiss to the way she made him feel threatened, one thing was clear: she was out of his control. But was he out of her control?

Feyera kicked a small rock in frustration, sending it rolling on ahead. It bounced once then twice before rolling to a stop in a small bush of dahlias. Their twin blooms were blood red, a quality they had not had before. They were supposed to be rosy.

"Argh!" Edge said as he pulled on his light auburn hair in frustration. The world was being altered around him. The world was out of his control. It always had been, he'd been deluding himself. Yet how could he ever hope to confide in anyone ever again after the way Sana had mistreated him?

Anger had taken command, and whatever little control over his emotions he had left seemed to waiver away and flee into the still air. How had he gotten caught up in this mess? He sincerely thought things would become better in time. Sanaria seemed beneficial to him at first.

"...So...manipulative..." The problem was that things would become better, but only on her terms. She had led him to her. Sana had guided his actions through LDT dreams. When he met her at last here on Chrono Island, and they shared a hug everything was better for a brief moment. His shard stopped hurting. She gave him comfort. He knew things had been taken too far in such a short amount of time following that embrace. It was just that he never felt this way about anyone, the cacophony of various moods and emotions was utterly mind numbing for someone as inexperienced as Feyera.

He felt sick just from the exposure to such a volatile and manipulative creature. Everything about her screamed danger and he still had stayed with her. Why didn't he just leave when she first told him about Sephiteos? Why did he stay with her? What did he think that would accomplish? He could have pretended nothing happened and gone back to the mainland with Lorelei.

Then it dawned on him: would Sana have even let him go after going through so much to bring him
here in the first place? Was she even letting him go now? Could he escape her possessive clutches? Or would she continue to antagonize him? Obviously she wasn't going to rip Seph's horn out of him. Heck even the best doctors couldn't do that. But did she have something worse planned in deceptively naïve mind?

Quickly, he spun around but saw nothing behind him save a few fruitless palm trees coated in rose from his recent anger. When colors overtook the environment, he knew that he was being emotional. Though he'd never admit it to someone who would take it upon himself or herself to exploit it—like Sanaria for instance—he did see things similar to the way the Gardevoir described as perceiving emotion. His own and those of others, it made no difference.

Feyera believed at best he could possibly try and reason the colors as being a part of his own emotions. For to say that he could read other emotions put him further along the path of empathy and similarity to Sana's species as a Gardevoir. And that was the last place he wanted to find himself, willingly or unwillingly.

"People psyonsics probably have a similar effect," he grunted remembering how Fredrick was convinced that Feyera possessed human psyonsics. "After all, Gardevoir and human beings, they even look alike!" Saying this served two purposes, it helped him to reason out why he had kissed her and also provided him with some assurance involving the root of paranormal powers. If humans like Sabrina of Saffron City could possess psyonsics, then they must be linked somehow to the original mutation occurring in Psychic Pokemon. There had to be a connection somewhere. It was a stretch, but maybe the Reilken Mercurius did indeed graft a section of Delta-two onto preexisting undiscovered psyonsics. Not bulletproof logic, but it was still better than the swiss cheese rationalities given to him by Sana.

Feyera's mind, switching gears to rationalization, became comforted. This is where he wanted to be, in a state of knowledge. Or if not in possession of said knowledge, at least on the pathway to obtaining it.

He lamented silently. If only he had his research notes on Psychic Pokemon. If only he could remember how to read his research notes. Then maybe with a little luck, the kind of luck he was all too due for, he could find the common denominator. But even that was out of reach as of now. Not just physically, after all the texts were stored in Pallet Town, but mentally he did not have the academic expertise to dissect the notes. He'd have to relearn everything from scratch as if he were back in undergraduate work. Once again, he was back to blaming Sana for clearing his mind of relevant information. Rubbing his sore eyes and feeling the stingy tightness behind their cavities, he arched his neck back and turned north again, stretching his arms out and letting out a loud sigh.

If she was following him, he wanted her to know that he did not approve. Edge wanted her to have meant what she had said. "Separation is necessary in so many ways," he grumbled. Displaying a small fraction of her larger agenda harmed his perception of her innocence.

Feyera tried to remember what he knew about Gardevoir as a species. Next to nothing. They were pure Psychic types and humanlike. Four limbs. Bipeds. Wore clothes like people, even though the attire was strange—uniform almost. They also had green hair. And…That's it. That was all he knew. He couldn't remember researching them during Evercrest thanks to Sana. And he was not about to admit that he was a fair sample of their species, even with his characteristics that said otherwise. How would he even categorize the anatomy on his chest? Where would he begin?

Feyera imagined presenting a thesis titled "Gardevoir Horns: How it Makes Me Feel" and nearly burst out laughing at the ludicracy. Ha...haha...Now that would be quality dissertation material, Chris.
Making jokes was not going to get him anywhere though. *Think, Feyera…think. What's she got over you?* he thought to himself. *Come on. She's only a Pokemon. I'm a licensed trainer.* Licensed wrongly thanks to his little stunt back in Celadon but that was fine, he still earned five League Badges just not conventionally.

She was absurdly light and lithe. If Sana wanted to, she could probably shadow him for hours and he would never know. Her quick and quiet stride had startled him in the past. She could even gently float off the ground for brief periods of time, and her feet were designed in a way to make as little noise upon impacting the ground: narrow and thin, totally incased in a tight white leg guard further cushioning blows. Another strange anatomy. He looked down at his black boots. Even though they came to a slanted blade like toe, they were quite different insofar as they supported a fully horizontal foot. Although he did have rather narrow feet. Fortunately, Alterieno brand boots were mostly thin leather straps and metal hoops allowing for various levels of tightness and— consequently—foot sizes.

Edge wasn't nearly as stealthy, but he had been able to benefit from not being overly clumsy thanks to his psyonics. They at least gave him some form of visual spatial enhancement. He was not sure if he had been naturally clumsy prior to unlocking his psyonics in Pewter. If he was, then little carried over. He thought about Prevoy’s. Had he been a klutz there? Maybe at times, but then again he was much more apathetic during that point in his life.

Regardless, the use of psyonics depended entirely on his emotions, whether or not he admitted it, so if he was feeling enraged like he did now, they were inhibited. Or rather channeled down a certain avenue, much like his vision. Controlled. He felt debilitated, as if he was forced to manage feelings in order to use all powers he had grown semi-accustomed to employing.

Edge rolled his haloed rimmed eyes, "And aren't these psyonics just lovely?" He mimicked Sana's obvious infatuation with power.

Sana probably knew how difficult it was for him to maintain control. She' be more than likely to take advantage of it, like she had before. The question was: did he have any defense against her? Maybe not when she was in close proximity, but acute clairvoyance had alerted him in the past.

Feyera figured that it would be possible to sense her emotions if she got close enough to him. Or maybe there was something else that helped her locate him. Looking down at the shining Gardevoir heart, he scratched his head. Could that function as an extremely primitive shortwave radio? He wondered if he ever even had privacy anymore considering how 'linked' she was to Sephiteos.

It felt wrong to call part of himself a different creature. Especially now when it was giving him sensations of its own. *Argh! He's dead I told her. She can't be linked to him if he's dead. Only physical anatomy remains. But even that… "Argh!"* Jarring his head to the left, he found himself questioning exactly how he operated. How he, Chris Feyera with a Gardevoir horn, operated.

Edge took a small breath of air in. He really was clueless. It did not take a genius to identify that was the problem. The important provision to his cluelessness was that Sana was not clueless in any sense of the word. She might even be playing some kind of twisted game with him. He would never know. All he could do is take her on her word and keep moving. But that didn't stop him from questioning whether or not she was trustworthy.

Maybe by pretending that he knew she was following him, he could ward her off. "I told you, I'm leaving for good!" he shouted at the trees. But there was nothing to be heard save the soft breeze and faint drone of insects buzzing amid the broad palms and ferns.
"I know you're following me Sana, but it's over! You can stop now!" Feyera said; his pace quickening. Uncertainty took control of his frail body.

Still no response. Maybe she had really just let him go. He didn't quite know exactly how possessive she was, but he knew that at the very least his human nature gave her something to worry about. Perhaps even something to fear if he played it off correctly. Based on their confrontation, she did want to be rid of his human nature one way or another. How she wanted to accomplish this remained an enigma to the man. She had kissed him after all, sending him through a myriad of pleasurable sensations. However, what was the purpose? She made it sound like she was trying to correct him to fit into her world or something. But he knew he didn't belong there.

Recalling primitive psychology, Feyera reflected on how Sana was probably well beyond being a little emotional following all the devastation she'd been put through, even before being a Gardevoir. "*Sigh...* No family, killed spouse, probably forgotten about entirely by her species. That's sure to screw with her head in more than one way. No wonder she kissed me." The various parallels to his own life were uncanny. Of course he never had a partner like Sephiteos was for Sana, but he could understand where she was coming from. Sympathy was another component that emerged as part of his essence.

But that was natural for Sanaria to be emotional, that's how she was as a Gardevoir. What worried him was how her mental psyches came out in sharpened ambition he'd never seen outside of a mirror. In many ways, this unprecedented revelation of her strangely organized motives without rationalized thinking was part of the reason why he feared her as a Gardevoir. Plus it had even rubbed off onto him to various degrees. Feyera even compared his own "bearing emotion" as if it were some type of ailment imposed onto him. It may have been initially triggered by the events of Semblance, and maybe further perpetrated by being with Pokemon and using psyonics, yet he was sure that Sana exacerbated the emotions.

Feyera spat on the ground, growling deeply like an Ursaring as he did so. A pain in the back of his throat pricked him, reminiscent of the sensation of swallowing something with a bad taste. There was no way to tell what exactly the flavor was, it just tasted rancid. Pungent even. Spitting up more of the stale saliva in tiny loogies, he groaned as his neck knotted from the perpetual hurling motion.

Darn it. Just gotta get something in my stomach.

He thought about the kiss they had shared and vehemently rocked his head back and forth looking down at the mushy brown soil. Stupid...what the hell were you thinking! he asked himself again and again. Idiot.

She was a Gardevoir. A Pokemon! He had to keep his hands off her in every possible sense of the idiom. It was so sickening that he had done such an atrocious thing that he managed to cause himself greater nausea than he was already experiencing.

"Bleh!" he said, picturing the kiss being spat up. He didn't want to have enjoyed it. Unable to physically retract what he'd done, systematic denial was the only option remaining for the overly rational ex-researcher.

"It was only a stupid act. I thought she was Lorelei," he said to the trees as he trudged along the sunny path. To a degree this was true, Sana was charading as Lorelei in his dreams and on the way to this island. Every time he came close to stomping out the action, a new possession of feelings overtook him and he felt everything from self-denial to guilt. It was as terrible as the unforgiving earthen taste deep in his mouth.

"I didn't know better...I never kissed before...that's why." He had denied himself long enough of
any romance and that drove him to kiss her. After he rationalized that by saying his lack of memories gave him no option to be romantically involved in anything, he became swamped with the idea of being inappropriate and allowing his once sturdy fortitude to be overcome in an instance of lustful desire. Did that lust come from Sana's innocence? Did he find the childlike nature of her species attractive? What did that say about him if that was true?

"Why her?" he asked the ground, peering past his bright firebrick horn. It could have been that, he thought. Did the horn possess him to do that? Was it even possible that he could be controlled by it? If anything, it was intricately connected to his brain. It would take more than suggestion to control him.

"Sana isn't like that…she wouldn't want to…would she?" he asked in desperation. The whole time he knew her, she seemed innocent. Why? Was he simply trying to find someone as innocent as himself when it came to affection? Was he that pathetic? He could not be sure why he sought after such things.

Sanaria was not even fully chaste considering her history with Seph. Were they married? Did Gardevoir even marry? Have families? Why did he keep on comparing them to people?

"They're Pokemon," he told his Gardevoir heart unaware of how tongue-in-cheek this very action was. "Not people, not me."

His boot heel got snagged on a small weed's lengthy tendrils and he tugged out of it with a grunt. "Even so, they're not…innocent." Of course, Chris Feyera hardly knew the definition of innocence, but he could at least discern what was not innocent. "First Principle of Falsifiability, *sigh* thanks a lot inference logic."

As far as her innocence went, that could go in either direction with Feyera now knowing how effectively manipulative she was in response to wanting things a certain way. Her way. The way she seemed to present him as a mere means to an end made Feyera become wary of her intentions. She was not; she could not have been completely innocent. Edge could sense Sana wasn't telling something to him. What would she do with him? Anxious, he shuddered and pulled on his jacket's fat bronze metal zipper. The light bomber jacket's wide flaps opened and closed as he walked. He couldn't even fully close the front thanks to his exposed horn. It just was so wrong to be put through this as a person.

"Ugh…" he muttered as the collared shirt snugly caressed the base of it where it met human flesh. The more he thought about it the less he thought about food and vice versa. Feyera did not know which was worse. Both antagonized him physically and mentally. His ailments, his bliss, and his everything were always unified. Mind and matter, they could not be severed.

"At least she didn't make me like this. How can she be that foolish to believe in wishes?" he asked the Gardevoir shard, which incongruously defied all reason in and of itself.

The fact remained that Sana was a full Gardevoir, a pure and unblemished member of her species. She had no physical scars, but the psychological ones ran deep. Those were in all likelihood the more important of the two. Feyera was the exact opposite. He had been corrupted, tainted even. Scarred physically to the point of it effecting his emotions. The thought of being a part of something he didn't want to be drove him furious. Being somehow contained by his body's relatively new features harshly struck a very delicate part of his psyches.

Human in just about every way save for his Gardevoir heart and rimmed irises, Feyera remained confident in his ability to change the outcome of his inexplicable curse. The former attribute was certainly anatomically correct for Gardevoir, but the latter had been wrongfully inflicted upon
Sephiteos—the Gardevoir whose shard he now bore day and night according to Sana. Maybe if it were just a generic horn she'd be off his case, but the young Gardevoir spoke with conviction that the heart emerging from his chest was Sephiteos'. And perhaps not only just an aspect of the late male Gardevoir, but also him as an entity.

"So what does she honestly think? That I—me Chris—I'm just a shell for her mate to live in?" he said clenching a fist and rubbing his knuckles against the foreign invader that had emerged from within.

"And she took advantage of my own insecurity too." Pride ran deep in Feyera's personality. It could be attributed to years spent in Academia. But all that pride could not help him here, and he foolishly let her know that. A major mistake for the researcher.

"It was only a freaking moment of self-doubt…" he said. He shuddered when he acknowledged his lack of confidence. And he had only let his guard down in a brief moment of sincerity and look what she did to him. All it took was a brief moment of weakness following the feedback fall. If only he hadn't ventured. If only he had been able to keep a lid on his wretched emotions.

"Damn," he gruffly whispered as the sentimental rush overcame his body causing him to involuntarily shake. This coupled with ravenous hunger made him wince in pain.

Worry set in. Would his psyonics even be able to detect her? How did they work as far as revealing went? In the past, he only had acute hints of clairvoyance. Usually it was just a type of navigational skill akin to an internal compass of sorts. Did humans have a similar sense of direction that psyonics amplified? Or was this something different entirely like a Pokemon skill? He just didn't know. How could he?

Regardless of the augmented perception, it was in all likelihood a skill that required synergy with emotions. Everything did. That's how it worked. That's how this species of Pokemon worked. And that's how he was slowly finding himself to work. It was a curse in every sense of the word except for being an actual 'hex'. No one gave this to him, there were no magical incantations, the furthest he'd push it would be to say that the Reikken Mercurius had some type of radioactive properties forcing a strong psychic and eventually physical graft. A convergence as Fredrick had eloquently warned him of when dealing with the Mercury Relic now wrapped around his wrist.

"According to the First Law of Thermodynamics, matter cannot be created or destroyed, meaning all this could be undone. Nothing gained, nothing loss. Just need to put forth the correct amount of work into the Equilibrium equation," Edge said gritting his teeth. Science at its best.

Feyera thought about how lovely it would be to study Gardevoir from a laboratory setting rather than firsthand, but then again that was the mentality which brought him to his current predicament. Sana was definitely right about calling it a predicament. It was a dilemma with a seemingly little definitiveness. Would he be able to undo it? The one thing Feyera never questioned was time. He always figured that he had all the time in the world to fix it; he was resourceful at one point, if anything, he could learn how to be resourceful again. And why wouldn't he? It wasn't like his body had undergone any radical changes since Progenitor manifested in his outer limbic rings.

The worst is over, he told himself again and again. The Gardevoir shard was out and not hurting like he remembered it during the dream memory of Operation Semblance. He'd been forced to remember Progenitor from a first person point of view, seen the massive splicing needle before its spokes drove in precise formation into Seph's eyes with jagged sawing razors. The thought of it still gave him the chills, and he dismissed it in rage, once again blaming the state of affairs he had been put into by the twisted hands of fate rather than what he had done to place himself in those situations.
"Relics…ancients…" he looked down at his left wrist encased in the gunmetal black armlet. The smooth caressing curve and shape of the bangle did not seem the same as he had remembered from the imposed memory. "The Reilken Mercurius…no…..no…they…shouldn't…they don't…no…"

He began to pant as his sweat glands unleashed flooding upon his smoothly curved face. His eyes burned as his face's natural contours allowed the deluge to freely enter them. With bangs now soaked, he sniffled uncontrollably as more of the warm bodily fluid dripped into his eyes. At least it wasn't his blood this time.

Feyera sure didn't believe in fate, but he was not willing to rule out the possibility that some sadistic being above him had been toying with his life. It could have been the Rockets, could have been Ein, heck it was easiest to say it was his father. Things were always done to him, rather than done by him. It was his own way to deal with responsibility. And it was a simple step: pull far away from it. Moreover, it was easy to do with all the tribulations he'd been put through. But for Chris Feyera to admit there existed a God, even a malicious one, went too far beyond the reach of rationality.

Grumbling, he felt his stomach which—in tandem—mirrored a similar gurgle. Why was he so hungry? When had he last eaten? In Fuchsia? At Doctor Fuji's house? Everything was a blur. He tapped the flat area below the shard. His stomach's complaining became more intense as he massaged the area.

"Damn," he whispered again, this time louder. Looking around he saw nothing familiar. Just tropical trees, indigenous flowers, and some low mountains in the distance. Feyera wasn't sure just how large Chrono Island was, it had two sections to it and right now he was in the northern one. Unsurprisingly, this was the part of the island he was least familiar with. The Evercrest facility had been located to the south west off the bay by the cliffs. Those cliffs—the same ones he fell from two years ago—were constantly pelted by the Southern Sea's powerful and warm Oceanic Stream. Here on the northern part of the isle, it almost felt like a wooded environment barring all the humidity.

Edge continued to walk north. His pace slowed down now that he was beginning to overcome rage. Why had she switched like a light? What was the big deal? Questions racked his brain. He felt like he was going crazy. Being by himself made him twisted.

"Alright, enough is enough. I'm not going to be alone like Sana. I've got my friends," he snidely said to himself. Reaching for his belt holster, he released his trusty companion Brucie. A bright flash of light followed by the conjuring up of his first Pokemon made him smile. The Charmeleon darted about for a few seconds, acclimating to the environment. Eventually he looked up at Edge.

[Master Chris?] the young reptile projected.

"Hey Brucie," Feyera said making a face.

[Where is Sanaria?] he asked, going right for the jugular of questions.

"She's well…umm," Feyera hated how right away the Charmeleon asked about the Gardevoir. He supposed it was innocent enough. All things considered, the scene in the cave was peculiar. "Well she's back there." He pointed south with a thumb as if he was hitchhiking.

[Why?] the Pokemon asked.

"Uhh…Well, we're taking a break Brucie." Edge nearly smacked his face in how coated in romantic scandal that statement was.
"We're?" he asked picking up on his trainer's discomfort.

"Um yeah you know..." Feyera's gaze averted his Pokemon's large blue eyes.

[I don't sorry; is she coming with us like you said she would?] Brucie said, referring to the introduction he'd been given to the Gardevoir.

How strange it must been for Brucie to try and comprehend what his trainer was going through. Edge let out an extended exhale, tightly gripping his belt with a free hand. His elbow snapped at the ninety-degree angle.

"Yeah. You know. She's like..." Edge trailed off in confusion. What was she to him?

[Did she let you use a Poké Ball?] his starting Pokemon asked in wonder.

"A...One of my Poké Balls? Umm...what do you...? OH!" Edge felt like an idiot. He had forgotten completely that she wasn't really a person. The fact that she was similar to the Charmeleon he spoke to now made him woozy. Or it might have just been his hunger turning into delirium. He told himself the latter.

[Yeah...?] Brucie said leaning close to his trainer's knee.

"I guess she's like my Pokemon," Edge said with a false grin. He hoped that wouldn't come back to bite him, but in the moment it didn't really seem to matter. Whether or not he could go back to her was still up in the air. But he was leaning towards not doing it.

[You caught her?] he asked in surprise.

Edge knew he was lying but how else would he explain it? "Uh...yeah. Listen, caught is maybe not the best way to put it though..."

[Yeah like with me! A Poké Ball is like a home, when you go inside it's like sleeping for a long time.]

Feyera quivered at hearing this. For starters, it was one of those things he never really thought about on a regular basis. What was it like being in a Poké Ball? "Does it hurt?" he asked.

[What?]

Edge tugged on one of his short hair locks. "Going into the Poké Ball?"

[Hurt?] Brucie asked as he continued to walk softly ahead of his trainer, fire tail wagging innocently.

Feyera scratched his arm feeling a bug bite under his forearm. "Y—yeah like when we battle." He recounted how strange it was to link minds with his Pokemon in the heat of combat. He felt their pain while directing their motions.

[No, it isn't like that. It is a warm safe feeling, but when you take me out sometimes I forget what happened last.]

Edge froze up and stopped walking. It was just like his amnesia. How terrible.

[Hey, what's the matter Chris?] the lizard said as he turned around to face Edge.

"I...It's just that. You are okay with that?" Did Brucie even know any better?
"The next battle?" he asked in confusion. Would there even be a next battle? All things had been turned topsy-turvy recently. Was he still a trainer? Feyera's face grew paler with each passing second.

[You don't seem to be acting yourself. Where's the usual Chris itching for the next mission?]

Feyera figured now was a good a time as any to tell him. "There is no next mission."

[But the dreams? You mean Sanaria was only a dead end?]

He thought about the possible validity of the statement. Crunching a small potential outcome table in his mind, it seemed more than probable. He couldn't go on with her as things currently stood.

"Yeah, no more next mission stuff. Now we need to focus on just surviving until…" Feyera trailed off. What was he even saying? Survival? Was this becoming some kind of game to him?

[I thought you wanted to find out more about yourself, that's all. I thought that battles made you happy, boss.]

"Brucie…" he patted the lizard's head and touched his horn. The skin was taut and a little sweaty from the humidity. His species probably preferred the islands. Except during monsoon season. "…It made me happy for a while. The answers I got though, they make me wish I didn't know."

[You were a researcher though. Don't you want to know things? This is all coming across as uncharacteristic of you,] Brucie made a soft growl, [what happened?]

"I know it seems that way," Feyera started walking again. "But for now I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place."

[So you're underground?]

"Figuratively speaking."

[Then why don't you just reverse Dig?]

"Reverse Dig?" It took Edge a few seconds to realize what his first partner was trying to say.

[Yeah like how Sandshrew go underground and then come back up! If you are stuck under the rocks, do the second part,] he said with a smile. [Simple. They do it all the time.]

Edge looked at his Pokemon in wonder, was he always so connected with nature? It seemed contradictory because of Oak's domestication, but who was he to judge? Only recently had he begun to tap into a more emotional Chris Feyera. But then again it could have been a steady and long-winded process finally making itself known. Were emotions always there for him, just suppressed? Or had Seph's attributes taken hold of yet another part of his life?

"Since when do you know so much about wild Pokemon, Brucie?" asked Feyera.

[I'm observant. Oak had me raised on his reservation. There were all types of Pokemon there.]

"Oh," Edge said, neutering the flow of conversation.

[In any event, why don't you try and be more keen so you don't find yourself in a hole in the first
"Eh… I don't know Brucie. Sometimes it isn't that simple. I feel like I've been put here. Someone or something did this."

[Well I coulda just said if you don't wanna find yourself underground then don't go digging, but since you are already there…]

Edge shook his head in disapproval, "Brucie, it is an expression. 'Stuck between a rock and a hard place' means to be trapped, frozen, unable to cope. Not literally trapped underground."

[Oh I know that, master. Haha, how would we be walking around if you were buried underground?] the fire lizard laughed. [Silly.]

Edge nodded, "Sorry I'm just hungry now and as snappy as a Krabby on hot sand."

[I can tell, you don't have any more of those delicious canned beans do you?] Brucie said sarcastically.

The trainer rolled his green eyes. "No. I was an idiot and left my bag with Lorelei."

[Oops.]

"Yeah, shame right?"

[Say, what's the deal with you and her anyway?] asked Brucie.

Edge blushed, "What do you mean?"

[Do you like her?]

"Who Lorelei?" asked Edge. As if there was someone else in his life.

[Yeah, is she pretty like Sanaria?] Brucie suggested for comparison's sake.

"Pretty?" Edge asked with a certain lag in his tone. "You think she's pretty? Sanaria?"

[Well yeah, she has no battle scars and is graceful. You're lucky to have caught her.]

Feyera fidgeted nervously. How could he "capture her"? The fact that if he really wanted to he could make him feel even worse about the lust-filled kiss they shared. To be fair though, she would probably not go down without a fight. The thought of him flinging Poké Ball after Poké Ball at her only to have them psychically reflected made him chuckle.

[What's so funny?] asked Brucie.

"Nothing, just… ah, don't worry about it."

[Why did she go away? I wanted to talk to her. Did you send her off to find food all by herself?] lampooned the Charmeleon.

"No!" Feyera exclaimed. "Of course not. That's not true. She's just off doing Gardevoir things now and I'm off doing people things, rather than Pokemon things."

[So that's why you released me? To do people things, rather than Pokemon things?] the lizard skeptically asked.
"*Sigh* Um...hmm. Well more like Pokemon trainer things."

[But isn't she your Pokemon? That means you are her trainer.] said Brucie.

"Umm, it isn't like with you and me. She's different."

[How?]

"*Gurgle!*" went Feyera's stomach, almost perfectly on cue.

"Just...different. I don't know. We need to go find food to eat for ourselves."

[But what about—]

"Brucie, I said don't worry about it," Edge insisted, his tolerance slipping.

The young Pokemon did worry though. One minute his trainer seemed to be warming up to a new Pokemon for their crew and then the next she was just gone. The only other time this had happened before was when Jill sacrificed herself to save them from Haunter without even a goodbye.

[Okay then, what do you know about this place?] Brucie asked with a childish tone.

"What? You think I've been here before on vacation?" Feyera snapped.

[Hey easy, I was just making conversation. We need to get our bearings straight if we want to find food.] Brucie apprehensively said. If Feyera wasn't behaving rationally then something was definitely off.

"It's hopeless...this place is practically deserted, the DBC cleared this place for ecological reservation and research."

[I'm sure something will turn up.] said Brucie. [You might have to get your paws dirty if you wanna find some grub.]

Edge adamantly shook his head in disagreement. "This is ridiculous. I'm not foraging like a Pokemon. I don't have 'paws!'"

[It was only an expression.]

"Ugh...Go, July!" Edge released his Gloom in a flash of white light.

[Hi Feyera,] she said with clarity.

"Hi July."

[Say—] the Gloom looked to the left and right of Edge [—where'd Sanaria go?]

He felt like he was going to lose it. "Why does it matter! She's doing her stuff and I'm doing my stuff!"

[Why?] she asked.

"WE'RE DIFF—ER—ENT!" Feyera belted, spitting slightly.

[I think he's grumpy and hungry July,] Brucie whispered behind an open palm.

[Yeah that or he misses her. Imagine what Despie would have to say! Ta ha!] she chuckled.
It was good thing Edge was too busy thinking about hunger to hear his Gloom's remark. "Are you going to help me or not? I'm starving." Edge's stomach groaned as hunger cramps overtook him forcing him to clench his gut.

[Sure we will boss, this is what we're good at doing right?] Brucie answered.

July smiled, [Yeah, I can find you some plants to eat if you would—]

"Ugh…plants? I need something more hearty than that July, I feel like I could eat a Ponyta".

[Haha I don't think those live here, Mister Feyera.]

"It. Was. A. Joke." Edge retorted, his patience at an all-time low.

[Alright. Alright. Let me think.]

"Take your sweet time; we got all day long…" Edge whispered noticing the sun slipping in the afternoon.

July tapped her root leg on the ground. [Well there might be some dwellerberries. Those are good. High in protein too.]

"I don't really care anymore; please, let's just find something," Edge said, "and soon."

They nodded. Then the two small Pokemon gracefully frolicked through the underbrush as the team marched north. He thought about releasing Desperado, but she'd probably tear down half the forest with one fell swoop from her seven foot tail. Plus taking her out of stasis would mean another mouth to feed. A big mouth too.

A few minutes passed and July was out of Feyera's sight. Brucie was staying much closer to him. That was just a display of their friendship dynamic. Edge knew Brucie longer than July. He confided in Brucie more than July. He loved them both dearly as his friends, but there was always a special something between a trainer and his or her first Pokemon.

The three of them together looked awfully out of place in the tropics. Actually, a Charmeleon and a Gloom could pull it off quite well. The real laughingstock was a skinny man wearing calf high black boots, dark denim jeans, a seashell collared shirt stained in sweat, and a black licorice bomber jacket. Culminating at the center of his torso was Seph's horn; gleaming and reflecting sunlight like some sort of anatomical mirror, completely contradicting the rest of his subdued attire. What a sight this must have been if anyone was watching. Especially Sanaria. He had been so miserably pathetic in the wilderness after all.

"Any luck?" he called out.

[Nothing yet,] growled Brucie.

"July…?"

[Hey, I'm still looking for berries and well there really aren't any around here,] she answered with a delay. Telepathy could sometimes lag based on physical distance. An oddity to be sure, but so was the entire concept of psyonic powers.

"What? I thought you said there would be dweeble berries or something," Edge groused.

[Ha ha,] he heard July laugh. [They're called 'dwellerberries', Feyera. They are called that because
of the way they dwell like little hermits under their thick leafy stems.]

"*Sigh* Whatever July," Feyera snorted.

[My you're crabby.]

Edge bit his tongue; he was at the point where even he did not want to be with himself. The frequency of that feeling increased the more he found out about his past. The man was getting sick of himself.

[Oh! Okay here are some!] he heard July exclaim.

Edge ran over to where her voice came from, nearly knocking over Brucie as he rushed towards her. Edge squatted next to the bush his Gloom stood next to. She was not much taller than some of the stubby stalks.

They were small round burgundy berries, no larger than a thumbnail. They had hooks on their branches where the fan like green leaves emerged. The berries themselves were not numerous, but their white and carroty flowers certainly were.

Eagerly, he snatched a handful and shoved them into his mouth.

[Hey you don't want to eat them—] July said in vain. It was too late.

"Bleh!" They were hard and tasted like sour Miltank milk. Edge spat them up. "Ew what the heck July? You said I could eat them."

[I was trying to tell you that they were not ripe.] She shook her large head, [You have to find the ones with a wrinkled exterior, those are the ripe ones.]

Edge grumbled. "Can you find some ripe ones?" he asked the Grass Pokemon.

[These branches are picked over, guess the other Pokemon living here have already gotten to all the good ones.]

"Other…Pokemon?" Edge said. The thought had not crossed his mind. For a brief period in time, Sana was the only being that mattered on this island. She had all the answers. She had ways of making him comfortable. But it was all not meant to last.

[Ah wait here's one!] she said in excitement.

The Gloom picked up a single berry. It was burgundy, almost a deep red wine color. The stem had corroded slightly, but the fleshy substance looked tolerable enough.

"Thanks," Feyera said taking the single berry, half expecting more. He popped it into his mouth and tasted it. It didn't taste that good. In fact it reminded him of an expired snack from the bottom of a pantry. The kind you forget about and neglect to check the expiration date before eating it. The trainer made a face and Gloom knew he wasn't happy.

[Umm how is it?] she asked in trepidation.

Edge chewed tasting the heavy floral notes and then swallowed. The creamy orangy juice stained his lips slightly. As the morsel descended down his throat he felt marginally better, at least his stomach would stop feeling like it was eating itself. "It was…umm…okay. Thank—"

Feyera closed his eyes as he felt queasy. His face flushed as the morsel's taste stung, mixing with
his throat pain.

[Hey, you don't look well, master,] said Brucie.

Feyera felt rather sick. All the warmth in his cheeks suddenly dissipated. "I'm…urgh…urf…I'm fi __

His face turned paler than a bleached bed sheet and he coughed up the berry along with thick saliva. "BLEH! *COUGH* UGH!" The man fell to his knees as he helplessly threw up.

With nothing in his stomach to begin with, he barely made a mess. Still both his Pokemon backed off unwilling to get Feyera bile on them.

[Hey take it easy boss! Maybe these aren't for you,] said Brucie patting his back after he had finished coughing up the minimal contents.

He shuddered. Did his psyonics now dictate yet another part of his life? "Guys I need to find something I can eat."

[We'll getcha something tasty buddy,] insisted Brucie.

Panic set in. "I think I'm starving."

[Don't be silly master,] July said trying to conceal her fear. He did not weigh much to begin with, and the fact remained that Edge hardly took care of his nourishment ever since his psyonics emerged. [We'll get food.]

[Yeah. Let's just think this out rationally right?] suggested Brucie, playing off his master's original strength.

"I—shoot," Feyera said, acknowledging how difficult it was becoming to remain reasonable and sovereign. His rationality was fading and it wasn't just because of the hunger. Yet so long as he had an inkling, he would never relinquish the power of logic. "Need to think…need to think!"

[Where is Sana? Maybe she knows where we can get food.]

"She doesn't know! She doesn't know anything Brucie!" shouted Edge.

Brucie put both his paws in the air, like a criminal, revealing his own skinniness. [Hey I was only trying to help ya. She's from around here right?]

"It doesn't matter; she doesn't know what I like to eat. She's a Pokemon I'm a human, there's a difference."

[How do you think we know what you want to eat then?] July asked with a sharpened tongue.

"I—I," he stammered in confusion. "Y—you guys don't understand." Edge felt tormented. Strapped between two worlds. Pulled and spun on a torture rack. Feyera half-expected knives to be tossed at him next.

[Obviously we don't!] Brucie stomped his fire tail on the ground. The young Charmeleon thought about bringing up how close Chris and Sana were in the cave but decided against it. He may have been immature but he wasn't stupid enough to walk into that trap. Best not to open that can of worms.

"I got it!" Feyera shouted and his voice cracking.
"What?" asked the two Pokemon.

"We go back to the yacht. *Sigh*" He patted his shoulder feeling the thin horn against his forearm as he did so. "Obviously. Lorelei must have a ton of food there. Even if she doesn't my backpack is still there."

Feyera had left his supplies in Lorelei's yacht before disembarking. He could probably pick them up if she was still there. That would show Sana who was the best at foraging. Edge might have had zilch connection to nature, but he was beyond resourceful as a human being. Problem solving was his specialty. Personally, he considered himself a problem eliminator. It was part of the reason he loved equilibrium equations.

[Why didn't you think of that sooner?] Brucie asked stupefied by the sudden seemingly apparent solution.

"Well I," Feyera began. "*Gurgle*" interrupted his stomach. "I—I can't think when I'm hungry." It was true. In times like these, his brain would usually think quicker but his hunger impaired him a great deal. However, there was another component. Ever since meeting Sana he never really considered the possibility of leaving Chrono Island. Things seemed too perfect here with her at first. He blamed first impressions and the fact that she had infiltrated his dreams through LDT since he left Celadon.

Feyera snapped his eyes shut and got up. How wrong he had been. Once again he had been duped into believing in a reality that did not exist. It was becoming quite frustrating for the young scientist.

[Well whose fault it that?] Brucie said, rubbing the site where he had to have the Toxic antidote administered—right below his appendix. [C'mon. You gotta eat master.]

Feyera could not take it any longer. "Do you honestly think I haven't thought about eating?"

Yet it was true. He hadn't been able to think about eating.

"I can't eat because of my—my—" he didn't know what to say. What caused the nausea? Was it the Gardevoir heart? Had his body begun to destroy itself even without using his abilities? He feared an exponential effect.

July padded Feyera's calf, right above his boot with her stubby arm. [It's alright Edge. We know.] she said pretending.

[C—Chris, you'll be okay. D—Don't worry.] But Brucie's lack of an even tone made him worry. It was as if the trainer's worry rubbed off onto his Pokemon. They had to struggle to perpetually overcome the frequent instances of repudiation he underwent. He was unstable and in hopeless denial.

Neither of them knew. Edge refused to tell them. How could he even tell them? They'd have to figure it out on their own, just like he had. He thought they already would have connected the dots. Maybe they just weren't as intelligent as him.

Hadn't it been obvious? Especially after that little scene when Sana was against him when they were introduced to her. Heck, even if they were not so close together, it still was obvious. They had exactly the same chest anatomy. Well maybe not the same. She was a female. The horn was the same though.

"I don't know. I'll tell you what I won't tell Sana. Brucie, July. I might not make it."
"[Make it?] asked July.

[What?] Brucie exclaimed. [What are you talking about? You took down Haunter, you're a hero.]

[Our hero.] July tacked on with a lighthearted smile.

"It isn't about being heroic. The outcome of my life is uncertain. If I cannot find a way I'm afraid —"

[You aren't going to think in those terms bud. Psyonics won't kill you.] Brucie insisted. [They haven't yet.]

"It's not only psyonics, Brucie," Feyera said solemnly.

[Oh then what's the excuse this time boss?] Brucie asked, advancing towards his trainer. July tried to stand between the two of them.

Edge just stared at his approaching Pokemon's bright blue eyes, and he felt his own eyes quiver.

[I just wanna talk with him July, move out of my way.] Brucie gently shoved her,

[I said what's the excuse now? You cannot control them? Because that's a fat lie, I've seen you do it. I know you can do it Mister Chris!]

"Brucie," he graced his palm against the lizard's horn. It felt hot to the touch. Inflamed even.

[Don't 'Brucie' me. You aint gonna die. You know better than to say that kinda crap, Master Chris.]

"But…"

The Charmeleon pointed with a sharp nail to his trainer's belt holster, [Don't make me tell Des what you're saying or she'll have a fit.]

Feyera forced a laugh. It was true; Desperado practically adored him. She treated him like a mother would. A very overbearing mother with three-inch fangs and a blue serpentine body.

[We've been through worse.] July insisted. [Way worse.]

"Yeah I suppose you're right—"

[Just be honest with us why don't you?] suggested Brucie.

"I can't," Edge lied through his teeth. "Guys, I don't know what the truth is. I'm not sure what's happening to me and if it is permanent or not."

[Permanent?] they asked in confusion.

"Yeah, like what happens to me in the long run."

[What do you mean?] the two asked. His phrases sounded off; it wasn't like him to be so pessimistic when concerning his own abilities.

But the thought of being stuck was ransacking his mind at this point. "I—can't be sure. At least not yet. My mind is all jumbled up now."

[That's what hunger will do,] said Brucie. [Let's get to the shore then. Looks like the sun is going
They continued to walk further through the thicket and Edge heard a twig snap from behind him.

"AH HA!" he yelled turning around. "Sana—!"

But it was not who he had expected. Not a Gardevoir. Not even close.

"A-RAIDOS!" A massive spider had snuck behind the small group. It's large white pincers clicked together as it twitched its huge body. The orange red flesh contrasted with the Pokemon’s elongated legs. The spider's abdomen was thick and fat, dragging along the jungle floor. It hissed and clattered as its numerous joints snapped along.

Feyera felt like he was going to faint. He hated bugs. But especially spiders. The way they crawled around along their silken webs never failed to frighten him.

"Ahhh!" he screamed like a girl. Backing off quickly in fright, he fell back over an exposed tree root, rolling straight onto his back with a loud "thump!".

The Ariados seemed to be enjoying his prey's extreme fear. It eagerly bounded closer to Feyera making sure to lift its large abdomen, juicy with silk, over the roots as its fine legs navigated it at lightning speed.

"B—Brucie, torch it!" he shuddered in fear as the Pokemon brought its rounded head up to his chest.

[On it!] shouted the Charmeleon next to him.

Ariados tilted its jointed head ninety degrees right before Brucie unleashed a lava hot stream of Flamethrower. In under a millisecond the large spider, whipped one of its front legs at Feyera's Pokemon. It was surprising how much reach those things had.

Brucie, ejecting flames at this point, spat them high into the air, way off balance thanks to Ariados' timely counter.

"JULY, Stun Spore!" Edge ordered.

Yellow green spores, countless as the stars, plumed out of the Gloom's bud. The Ariados seeing their approach quickly leapt into the air and scurried up a nearby tree. Its hook like claws dug into the chalky bark and the tree groaned as it supported the massive spider's weight.

Brucie released more fire from his maw, sending the creature higher up in a hurry. A few of the branches caught fire, but all the moisture of this environment counteracted the torch.

Ariados' large body squirmed and it quickly climbed higher than Brucie's flames could reach. The last thing they saw was its massive abdomen, seemingly ready to burst, filter into the upper canopy.

Feyera looked at the tree, frozen by being startled and helpless. An onlooker might have thought the Stun Spore hit him. It didn't even occur to him to use psyonics. The fright was too much.

As his breathing resumed his jaw quivered. He had no idea big Pokemon like this one lived on Chrono Island. It was an unpleasant surprise. Then again, the whole island was a reservation for Pokemon. That one was a monster though!
"Haa...haaa," Edge was mildly traumatized. The arachnid had stealthily snuck up on all of them. That meant one thing, his psyonics were shutting down. He was growing weaker.

[And stay up there!] belted Brucie. [Hey, everything all right Chris?]

"Y—yeah *huff* fine. I just wasn't expecting that," Edge rasped.

[Neither was I.] said July.

"This place really gives me the creeps."

Feyera pondered how Sanaria had stayed here for so long. She must have known about all the Pokemon that lived here. Furthermore, for her to have survived long enough and without any scratches was testament to her own abilities as a Pokemon. Edge paled in comparison. His Pokemon could do little more than ward the creature off by tag teaming it.

"What if it comes back guys?" asked Feyera.

[Yeah. I think we gotta keep moving. You know what they say about spiders.]

Edge was almost afraid to ask. However, his pride got the best of him; he didn't want his Pokemon to know he was afraid of them. "What do they say about spiders, July?"

[Well, wherever there's one, there's bound to be more. They multiply like crazy with all their babies,] July said making an audible "pitter patter" with her feet.

"Ugh..." Edge groaned. That was the last thing he wanted to hear. Insects in general were numerous. It was a fact he seldom had to confront inside buildings. The tropics had the highest number of bugs.

[Yeah, you're telling me! Being a Grass type, insects are quite a nuisance. They lay their eggs on your petals and if they stick to you, you're done. They'll hatch and if you don't have natural Poison typing it's all over before they even get to feeding.]

"OHHHH really?" Edge asked sarcastically hoping she would shut up. He had no interest in knowing about Ariados. Or any Bug type for that matter. But especially not arachnids.

July clearly did not pick up on his aversion to the subject. [Yeah did you see the size of that one's belly? Probably thousands of little baby Spinarak in there waiting to...] 

"CUT IT OUT!" Feyera commanded. He fought the urge not to shriek at the thought of countless insects being birthed from Ariados' oversized womb. His whole body shook.

July stopped and looked down at the ground. [I was only trying to tell you about the wild Pokemon.]

Brucie shook his head, [Not now July.]

Edge never really liked insects; the way they crawled around just made his skin coil in revulsion. The more legs the worse it was. It was a miracle he even got through Biology without passing out when they dissected insects. A highly irrational fear to be sure. Brucie knew about this well-hidden fear since he first met Feyera. During their very first adventure in the Viridian Forest, a Weedle made Chris nearly jump out of his skin. When they were in the Pokemon Tower and he fell into a web, Brucie knew just how deep Feyera's fear went. It debilitated him.
"Let's go. C'mon Mister," said Brucie extending a paw.

"Listen," Feyera said as he picked himself up, "I'm not scared or anything. I just wasn't expecting a wild Pokemon to come out of nowhere like that ya know?"

[Yeah don't worry about it,] Brucie said with a closed mouth smile. [She's gone now. You scared her off.]

They began to walk, and every few seconds Edge would nervously glance back at where the Ariados had jumped them.

[You still seemed frightened master,] July pointed out.

"Yeah well July," he desperately tried to find an excuse. "That was only because my psyonics weren't working. I can't detect a thing…since I'm hungry." This may have been a half-truth but it accomplished what it needed to do. July and Brucie had no idea what psyonics were like. The closest thing they could relate to was natural intuition. By comparing psyonics to a malfunctioning predator sense, he managed to avert further inquiry. "That is dangerous for all of us, but especially me. I don't belong out here."

[Was this the way back?] asked his Charmeleon, smoothly changing the subject.

"I—" Feyera looked left and right but the canopy of trees clouded his vision "—I think so."

The last thing he wanted to do, besides admit his fear of Ariados, was travel through the meadow he met Sana in. He wanted to cut off all ties. She'd revealed too many of her motives. In fact, she really only had one. It was the only one that mattered. The Gardevoir's ambition was to possess him as Sephiteos and be rid of Chris. That would be akin to killing him. Not all the blissful interaction they shared could compensate for her scheming.

[You seem confused now,] his Gloom observed from his emotions overflowing.

[July, he's delirious from hunger,] said Brucie. [Don't you ever get that way?]

[Well yes, maybe when my flower bud does not get enough sunlight.]

[There you go then. That's like what Master Chris is going through now.]

[But he's a mammal right?] asked July.

[I think so, but well I don't know. Do I look like a researcher who knows all about the world like Master Chris?]

[Ha, no, he's so much taller than you Brucie.]

Brucie laughed and then asked Feyera, [Are you a mammal?]

Feyera bobbed his head, "Yeah. Homo Saipan."

[What does that mean?] asked July.

"It means *cough* yes, July! Human beings!" the researcher clarified.

[But do the 'Homo Saipan' have your powers?] she asked, unaware of pluralisation.

[July, he told us no they don't. Why do you think he's so nervous?]

Homo Saipan.
[I always thought he was going to find someone like him. That was the goal, not to be an outcast right?]

"So that's *cough* what I am now, an 'outcast'?'"

Sensing his trainer's distress Brucie tugged on the denim jeans. [But wait, you aren't an outcast you have friends like us.]

"I never said I was an outcast," Edge lied through his teeth.

[What if he is just looking for a way to fit in again with the humans and it isn't working because of his powers?] July asked Brucie.

[Way to pick up on the subtle cues, July…] Brucie sighed.

[What? He doesn't tell me anything, 'Your Excellency King Bruce'.]

"Just…stop arguing guys," Feyera said. "I don't have the energy…any…*pant*…more…” The heat was getting to him and he begun to feel a fever setting in.

[Okay.]

[Fine.]

"Thanks *cough cough*"

The walked further along and eventually found themselves by a large toppled over tree. There was a huge path carved into the woods.

"Hold up everyone," he wheezed. Putting his arm in the air, he ordered a stop.

The Pokemon curiously peered down the path. Charmeleon went a few paces stumbling into a massive footprint as he went along.

[Whoa, what could have done this?] he asked reorienting himself.

It was like the forest itself had been bulldozed straight through. The trees were knocked out of the way and treads and footprints alike flattened the ground. None of the larger prints were human, but Feyera was pretty sure that Pokemon did not drive automotives. At least not that he knew of. Judging by the size of the path's width and the way trees were seemingly bent over like paper, it had to be something huge. What could be that massive? One of Cipher's vehicles?

Feyera leaned on a nearby palm, causing it to crack and bend further over. He recoiled before it snapped with a loud "Crack!".


The Pokemon continued to look at the mysterious recently made roadway.

Feyera brought his hand to his rather undefined chin and tapped it anxiously. "I don't like the looks of this guys."

[Do you think Despie could do something like this?] asked Brucie.

"No. Not unless she was in a rage and even then…” he put his hand over his eyes and peered into
distance where the path led. "It must have been Cipher. They're the only ones on this Island."

"Cipher?" asked July.

"The bad guys," Feyera muttered for simplicity's sake. He could not remember whom he told and whom he didn't. His stories were becoming blunter as time went on.

He gripped the Gardevoir horn on his chest. "They caused all of this."

His Pokemon thought that he meant the pathway, but he was referring to the situation as a whole. If it were not for Cipher there would be no Evercrest, there would be no Chris Feyera working for them, no experimenting on Delta-two, and most importantly, no Operation Semblance mission giving him these repulsive Gardevoir attributes.

"Oh. Are they people?"

*What a silly question,* thought Feyera. "Yes of course they are people July. What did you think they were? Pokemon?"

Brucie spoke up, rubbing his paw on one of the deeper footprints that was at least as large as his tail, [But some of these trails are made by Pokemon. Big ones. Unless Cipher's got some kind of machine with hooves.]

Feyera shook his head. This island was more dangerous than he thought. It was a big surprise that he hadn't run into Cipher yet come to think of it. At least there was something working in his favor.

"Wait, why did you ask if they were people?" asked Feyera suddenly realizing that his Pokemon might have been on to something.

July bowed her head and shrugged, [Well they probably have food. Like people food.]

"July, I don't think you understand. Cipher did bad things to—him—me," he said awkwardly. It was true in either case really. Obviously, Cipher had given Sephiteos the Progenitor virus, and by extension, Edge. However, they had also hired Chris to work under their wings in the Evercrest Programme.

[Bad?]

*If not for that then none of this would have...happened to me,* he thought. "Very bad. Inhumane even."

[Did they do experiments on your psyonics?] the Gloom asked her trainer.

Brucie answered for Feyera, [No July, Chris was just a normal trainer when I met him.]

"*Sigh...* You know Brucie, July is kinda right."

[Wha—how? You never used the powers before did you? Or do you not remember? I sure as heck don't remember you doing any of that Psychic Pokemon stuff when I met you at The Professor's laboratory.]

"Psyonics, Brucie, they are called psyonics," Edge insisted unwilling to become further tied into the Pokemon world. "Since I'm a human, that's what it's called pal."

Brucie nodded, and July shot the Charmeleon a glance. She whispered sarcastically, [Right, I forgot so many people have them.]
He pretended not to hear her. "They might have been the ones who gave the psyonic powers to me."

[So? Why don't you have them help you out?] asked July with a faint grin.

Edge thought about Ein. He would certainly not be helping Feyera unless the definition of helping out had suddenly changed to 'conducting ruthless and inhumane experiments on'.

No, Edge could not rely on 'Ein'. Even Team Rocket wanted to protect Feyera from Ein and his clutches. The jury was still out on whether or not there was an ulterior motive to this seemingly protective nature.

Edge didn't trust the Rockets, but they were essentially an assimilated section of Cipher ever since Semblance. Although he did wonder exactly where both organizations fit on the scale of evil. Was one worse than the other? He hardly knew anything about Cipher except that they were scientists and he had worked with them. He knew a little more about Team Rocket due to actually encountering their operatives in Kanto. While Brad, Laurie, Engelhart, Archer, Drew, Jeffery, and Regina were without question malicious people, from what he had heard, Cipher was worse. That seemed impossible.

The young trainer grappled with his belt for a few seconds. He could not determine where everything stood in the grand scheme of things. Everything he had come close to an answer, it was sadistically snatched away. He knew that he was doing all he could though considering his circumstances he had been unjustly thrown into.

"They are all bad guys," Feyera said dryly. But could that be for sure? He had witnessed his own change of heart through the dream memory. Rallsen had saved him too, and judging the dream memory, Tim was not the worst member of Team Rocket out there. Maybe he was like Chris in that regard. Ever since his father had left him, Feyera always was trying to find paternal relationships to satisfy the lack of one in his life. Fredrick was the closest person to filling that role, and yet he had screwed that up by using unshackled psyonics to tear into the IPF agent's mind.

Feyera knelt down and analyzed the trail up close. It seriously looked like whoever had made it was in a hurry to get somewhere. Judging from the direction of the footprint's nails, the caravan of beast and machine was heading south. Feyera thought about Sana. His mind literally forced him to. …South, that's where Sana is.

[Sana?] Brucie chimed in, happy to hear the Gardevoir's name.

"Yeah. But we are going to go north and find Lorelei's boat."

[Are you sure? What if she's in trouble?]

Feyera shook his head; just how much he was fighting the urge to turn back caused his clenched fists to shake. "She'll...she'll be okay on her own. She lived here for two years, maybe longer. I'm sure she knows how to deal with anyone who gets in her way." Edge thought of himself. She had antagonized him to the point of forcing himself to leave her. She didn't even badger him, she manipulated his thoughts. "She's a Pokemon."

[Feyera, she's YOUR Pokemon though!] shouted Brucie. [These contraptions might really hurt her.]

"She knows how to lay low...she's a clever little girl."

[Girl?] asked Brucie.
Feyera coughed, "Female Pokemon. Like you July."

[You never called me a—]

"Forget it! Hunger is making me delirious. Let's get to that freaking boat for Pete's sake," Edge said getting up unsteadily.

[O—okay.] July murmured.

[You the boss, boss.]

"If we don't get some food soon, there will be no one left to call boss, Brucie," Edge quipped.

[Hey, quit talking and save some energy then? I can almost taste the ocean. Hmmmm!]

Edge nodded, forced a smile, and clutched his gut with two hands.

The small group went back into the thick forest, leaving the trail behind them. Along the way, Feyera felt the oppressive humidity begin to dissipate. It could have been the approaching night. He thought about Sana's warning to not stay out past dark. While he did not like the idea of going back into the forest and running into more spiders, he never intended to go back. Even if he did, then it would be after a nice comfortable night on the Elite Four member's yacht.

What was he thinking? He couldn't go back.

The trainer then realized why the humidity was beginning to wane. A crisp ocean breeze buffeted trainer and Pokemon alike, shaking the foliage as well.

"We made it!" Feyera shouted as the deep blue sea, aglow from a recent sunset came into sight. The team ran onto the sand dune and began running towards the water. Brucie and July followed close behind their reinvigorated trainer, dodging a collection of Shellder-sized white seashells.

Once they got to where sand and sea kissed, Feyera gasped. Nothing was in sight. In fact, the ocean was completely vacated. Edge had figured a high tide would allow the grounded yacht to be pulled back into the water, but he must have been mistaken.

[Where's the boat Chris?]

"*Gasp* I…*pant*…don't' know, Brucie," stammered Feyera.

[I thought you said Lorelei was here?]

"I—she was. Darn it. Where could she have gone?" Edge pulled on his collared shirt's excess fabric near the horn.

[Do you think we're on the wrong part of the beach?] Brucie pondered.

Edge shook his head. "We're at the northern point. There's a meadow to the south, we skirted around it on our way here. I'm pretty sure this is it."

[But this is a big island, maybe we are just a little off?] suggested July.

"Okay, wouldn't be the first time I screwed up…I have an idea then."

[You do?] asked Brucie.
"Go, Desperado!" Feyera exclaimed releasing his Gyarados into the mild water. She dove into the water.

*Blub* *blub blub* A few bubbles surfaced from where she had submerged. With a loud clap, she leapt out of the water with a grand splash. [Aww gee that feels great! Howdy there Edgie, how's your day goin?]

Feyera forced a tight smile. At least she didn't ask him about the Gardevoir. "I've been bette—"

[Say where's your lil friend, Miss Sanaria?]

Spoke too soon.

"Des, argh…*grumble* I need to find food, I'm starving."

[Well what do you want? Fish are off the menu, I'm not sure what I can prey upon down here in the tropics.]

Edge stamped his Alterieno boot into the sand in frustration, "You can't be serious…*gurgle* You're a Gyarados. You're a predator. You're 'The Harbinger of the Sea'. You're on top of the food chain, Des!" Just saying the word food made his mouth water.

She gave him a bighearted smile. [Aw thanks sugar. Suppose you must be hungry based on your cranky mood. Maybe I can fetcha a lil morsel of Remoraid.]

"Listen, no fish, just find us a big white yacht."

[Excuse me? Pardner, what is a 'yacht'?]

[Des it's a big human boat!] exclaimed Brucie.

[Like the S. S. Anne?] asked July.

"No, much smaller than the S. S. Anne. Maybe about as long as mmm…say, three of you, Des."

[I'll be! That ain't small! Well that shouldn't be too hard to find. Ha ha, although I haven't been growing all that much. I'll reckon some Gyarados out there are about the size of a 'yacht'.]

Don't remind me, Edge thought, now aware of Synchronize's less desirable consequences, namely, siphoning his Pokemon's strengths every time he exerted psyonic control over their bodies.

[Huh? What was that?]

"Err…nothing," Edge said sweating, "don't worry about it. Listen, the boat probably ran aground. So just swim up and down this beach and see if you can find it before it gets too dark to see."

[Tee hee, okie dokie. Not a problem my lil captain,] she said plunging into the water. Her long body graciously danced with the tiny wavy crests. The way she curved in S shapes, entering and exiting the ocean, made Feyera think of a mystical dragon.

"Thanks Des," he called out as the Gyarados headed east.

July tugged on one of her trainer's flared leather bootstrap. Alterieno boots had two of them projecting from both ankles. Fashionable yes, but also for size adjustment.

"What is it July?" Edge asked.
"You can eat those," she pointed to a few palm trees that bordered the perimeter of the beach, where shore met jungle.

"Those?" Feyera asked quizzically. He looked up and his jaw dropped. For even in the evening sky, his eyes could see the rich chocolate hair surrounding them.

"Yeah…" the Gloom gave him a funny look. "You like coconuts?"

"Like coconuts…?" Edge said dreamily. The truth was he loved coconuts. Everything from the way they could be made into milk, juice, or even dessert flakes. And it wasn't only their taste, they also made great soaps. However, the trainer especially loved the smell of them. It didn't take him more than a second to remember the beautiful aroma that Lorelei wore. That coconut cream perfume was simply decadent temptation. It made his olfactory senses go into overload.

With a start, he ungracefully rushed over to the nearest tree, stumbling in the uneven sand, buried in desire.

[Guess he does,] snorted Brucie.

[Ta ha, yeah,] said July.

Edge was far ahead of them when he reached the tree. He clutched the flaky latte colored bark with both his hands, almost possessively. Ravenous hunger made him yearn for nothing more than to eat one of his favorite foods.

But then he was confronted with a problem. A big problem. His face drooped in disappointment and he pressed his bang covered forehead against the tree's rough hide. "How the heck am I supposed to get up there?"

"You can always use your Psychic Pow—I mean psyonics," July said correcting herself a little too late.

"I—" Feyera started to say, remembering the time in Celadon where he had tried to manipulate a slot machine into making him win. "—I'm afraid I can't do that."

[How do they work?]

"They don't work like that. I cannot just move things with my mind Brucie," the trainer said with a scowl. Saying this made Feyera uncomfortable because that was usually what 'human psyonics' entailed. In fact, manipulating the physical world usually got you in trouble concerning the authorities. True he could, but it was less refined. He wasn't about to rip open a hole in space to eat a measly coconut. Or maybe he would at this level of hunger. He fantasized it, and then remembered how solid steel I-beams were crushed by the gravitational vortex. Plus they destroyed him just as much as they destroyed everything around him.

[How do they work?]

"Umm…" Feyera nervously kicked some sand with his toe.

[Magic?] July asked. Edge hated that word. There was no such thing as magic. Every trick, every illusion, always had a cause. Psyonics were no exception. Fredrick seemed to have been convinced of that when they met in Celadon. If he could just reach the stage of academic enlightenment he had before Sana cleared his mind then perhaps he could come up with a suitable response to why psyonics actually manifested. Until then, he could only resort to the shallower understanding behind their existence.
"…Emotions," Feyera admitted, rather shamefully.

[You say it like it's a curse.] said July.

Brucie made a growl, [Is it like when you're talking to us?]

"Yes, *cause it is*," Feyera whispered, "and yes."

July chuckled, [Emotions…He he…Why don't you use your crabby mood to get the coconut then!]

Edge looked up at the tree and squinted his eyes. He saw his target. A group of coconuts, at least nine in total. They were about twenty feet up in the air, at most twice the length of Desperado head to fin.

"F—fine. I guess I can try. Umm, back up a little guys, I dunno what this will do."

[Okay sir.] shrugged July as she moved backwards, swaying slightly.

[Hey, have some confidence boss; what it'll do is get you a nice milky coconut!] said Brucie as he played off his trainer's apparent desire for this particular food.

"I spy with my little eyes…" whispered Edge, as glistening ruby ink began to cover his sight. Its silken form closed in from the perimeters, encapsulating the man's eye sockets with a translucent sunglasses-like shield. When his sight became fully blanketed, he felt a rush of energy hit him in the chest and expand outwards, feeding into his mind and then to his extremities like heated blood. It surged forth in vigorous pumping, infiltrating every part of him with the Gardevoir horn's expansionary power, drenching him with the heart's heat.

He lifted his left arm into the air, towards the batch of coconuts.

July and Brucie watched from nearby, their mouths open in awe and with dazed eyes eager to absorb the spectacle. The spectacle of their trainer using Psychic Pokemon power. It didn't matter what he referred to it as, this was clearly not driven by any human derived abilities. Instead, it came from emotion, as purely raw desire begging to be satisfied in the physical world.

The bracelet-encased arm reached higher and higher until Edge fully extended his reach, pointing straight up at the coconuts. His eyesight honed in, tightening on the exact thing he wanted. The peripherals were the first to disappear from view, and soon the rest of his sight narrowed and focused to a very specific geometric locus.

Smells gradually heightened, Feyera could almost taste the brine water from behind him, and feel the mighty pulse of the ocean. The branches shook from shore wind, but also rattled amid themselves for another reason. His right hand groped the tree's bark and he continued to point his piercing gaze at the succulent drupes beyond physical grasp, but not out of psyonic grasp.

As he stood there like a statue, he felt himself becoming closer to the tree, percolating its essence to the point of finding a strange unity with it. It no longer felt like a separate entity as he continued to focus on the fruit it bore. Within their secure dry husk lay hidden treasure. In this moment, Feyera could pay attention to little else in the world.

Suddenly, there was a loud snap from overhead as one of the leafy frilled branches bent towards the ground, facing down towards him. Drawn to him.

Brucie and July simultaneously jumped back in surprise.
Edge tried to maintain concentration, but the glowing aura coating the area directly outside his physical eyes began to reverberate. He would almost call it a humming noise, although since the crimson aura was pressed right up against his eyes, he actually felt the gentle purr of power. This paved the way for increased amounts of feedback reconnaissance in the annexes of his mind. This search for positive feedback proved fruitful, and soon Feyera was experiencing the self-sustaining pleasure of feeling the same things over and over with increased attention to every detail each time. A simple biological action had metamorphosed into a beautiful crescendo. The sensation rubbed into his mind, and the images continued to coat themselves in an inflamed scarlet majesty.

"…!" Feyera gasped but no air came out as his left arm began to vibrate and twitch uncontrollably. His fingers seemed to be clattering against each other, violently bashing their joints together. Eventually the numbing tingling became too much to tolerate.

Edge took his eyes off the coconuts for a moment to see what was going on with his left arm. As he did so, the aura immediately shifted with his eyes, and a vicious pressure seemed to surge forth from behind his eyes. Everything blurred and faded into red mist. He felt himself fall backwards.

The second his rear hit the soft sand, the thud resonated throughout his body. It was beyond a mere fall; it was a tremble that had his body feeling everything as if it were some type of feedback relay. He felt like he had just activated every nerve in his body as the plume of impact spread into every crevice of his essence. Over and over the reverberation of collapse coursed through him.

Next, the images in front of him came back sharper than ever. They flooded in from all directions. He blinked a few times, utterly stupefied. His eyelids were contained inside of the aura, as he did so. The aura began to dissolve, folding upon itself into the corners of his eyes until it vanished and regular unblemished sight returned.

"Urgh…" he moaned. The flood of sensation racked his brain, and he struggled to keep up with the racing thoughts and emotions they evoked.

Feyera intuitively raised his left hand to eye-level and gasped in undiluted horror.

"…!"
It was burning, tearing, and multiplying all of its prior constraints. The sensation of encapsulation was completely localized and its bond made for a seemingly permanent connection. Time lingered, and fear grew.

"ARGH!" Feyera shouted as he took his quivering left hand and pummeled it into the sand, trying to rid himself of the heightened responsiveness of the freshly activated nerves there. His entire arm shook in periodic convulsions. It was a steady flow of thick tingling, accompanied by a tight tenderness that seemed to be very out of place. It reminded him of the sensation of a limb falling asleep, only the difference was: with each and every burst of prickling pins, there were amplified residual sensations echoing the first. It was wonderful and awful all at the same time. What he felt was knowable, yet undefinable.

The Reilken Mercurius caressed the Pokemon researcher's thin wrist. The ancient relic was aglow with bright neon green, the type of piercing light that Feyera had only seen before in the gambling signs riddling the alleyways of Celadon City. Its sleek stealth fighter black contour was covered in multiple rivers of the mysterious chemical-like light. The lighted lines were all perfectly straight, intersecting each other at perfect angles. Amid their numerous tracks lay multiple cubed lakes of the glowing green light. His eyes could see it unadulterated by his current emotion and trepidation. Although not having his sight forced to be influenced by emotional perception was a nice feeling, the young researcher remained buried in his fear of the unknown.

Edge winced as he looked at the device; it seemed far too complex to figure out how it worked, or why it was doing this all of a sudden. One thing was for sure; his hand was violently shaking in spasms and the burning feeling would not subside. What did it do to him? What was it doing to him?

[Boss, you okay?] asked his Charmeleon, who soon was by the trainer's side, patting his bony back with a small hand.

"Brucie…?" asked the trainer in confusion. Edge gasped for air, feeling as if he had just run the Fuchsia—Celadon marathon, "%Huff% Ha! …Brucie… *huff* W—what is going on?"

Pokemon and trainer both looked at the armlet Fredrick had retrieved. If this was what did everything to him, then Feyera had a problem bigger than merely figuring out the complexity of the device. For suddenly, it had begun attacking him. It had only done this one time before, and that was when he innately got it back south of Lavender Town after vanquishing Haunter. When he was in the Sanctum, it never hurt him. At least he did not remember it possessively clutching onto him. Did everything change when he impaled Sephiteos?

[I don't know. Ever since you put it on you haven't been able to take it off right?] Brucie said, reminiscing how his trainer had first put the device on as per Fredrick Irving's suggestion.

Feyera let out a long exhale. He rubbed the perimeter of the artifact to find that it was sealed shut, only faintly reverberating every now and again.

[You think that you screwed up by doing that?] Feyera's Charmeleon recollected the time where
Edge had told him that when donning the Reilken Mercurius, it was Brucie's responsibility to 'kill him' should things get out of line.

However Feyera did not even consider the possibility. Instead, he thought about how he had tried to obtain the coconuts and failed. "Yeah. *pant*, mess—messed up," he said whilst gasping in uneven intervals. Edge felt lethargic. He had completely forgotten why he had invoked his psyonics. The action seemed foolish in retrospect.

Feyera looked up at the palm tree he sat under. Even in the evening sky, he could still see those coconuts thanks to the moonlight reflecting off of the Southern Sea and illuminating the shoreline. They looked delicious, and were tragically so far away. However, the strange thing was he had lost his appetite almost completely. Feyera felt fulfilled, nourished even. Of course, he would still eat a yummy coconut if he hadn't miserably botched up using psyonics. If he ate one now, it wouldn't be out of necessity, only out of desire. How quickly his circumstances had changed was unusual to say the very least. Nevertheless, the trainer paid little attention to this oddity in his stomach and instead focused on the Reilken Mercurius against his wrist.

[Y—You think that maybe there is a way to slip it off now that you made it go all glowly and bright?] feebly asked July.

"I…hmm," Feyera reached down and clutched the material with his right hand. Did he even want to slip the device off? Would it spoil his chances of reverting back to normal? Had he already moved past a point of no return? These questions made the young man's palms start to sweat uncontrollably with anxiety. "Can I?" he asked himself.

As he made contact with the bracelet, it issued a dull hum. It felt smooth. Very solid too, though light as a feather. And really warm. The bright green glowing sections were not divots in the perfectly curved ebony metal. Strangely, the tributaries of light only appeared on the surface of the material, but then again the item in question was bizarre to begin with. Edge had never seen anything like it. Even his dream memory, courtesy of Sana, had little recollection of the Mercury Relic. The only real thing he could find as the artifact's common trait was the hooped chakram-like form it took. Rationally Edge concluded that either: it had changed a lot since impaling his experiment, or he did not properly remember it in the dream memory. Doubt crept in; maybe Sana had altered the memory. Feyera shook his head in disgust, he truly knew nothing.

Now the item in question was pitch black with bloody lines of green tracing ambiguous patterns and flowing into exactly eight small squares of denser looking green light. Each block of green light seemed to be a source for the lines of light connecting the eight of them together around the perimeter of the amulet. He touched one of the lighted tetragonal parts with his right index finger. It was perfectly flat and as smooth as the black metal surrounding his wrist.

Feeling brave, he tugged softly at the piece. This caused his unexposed skin to become tense, as if it were connected somehow to the armpiece's interior.

"Urff…" he groaned, tightening his grip on the device and narrowing his eyes. It gave a little bit along with his less taut epidermis. The slight wiggle startled Edge; he was expecting it to have been latched on to bone based on his experience with the Gardevoir horn. That was preposterous. Just because he felt bound by one said nothing of the other. The two were not the same. The Gardevoir horn was hideously organic and the Reilken Mercurius was probably synthetically refined Mercurius. In curiosity, he brought his wrist to his eye and tried to see what was between the metal and his flesh. He squinted. As far as he could tell, it was conjoined tightly, but only at the surface. Closer inspection made him freeze up further. The worst was seeing a hue of mint green partially buried in his slightly translucent skin, bordering about an inch on either side of where the
Worriedly, Feyera took his right hand and took his ring and pinky fingers and slid them slowly along his radius bone from about midway on his left forearm. As he inched along, his skin grew finer and paler as it approached the pulsating relic aglow with spectacular irrigated emerald lights. He shuddered as the soft skin's sensitivity gradually rose as he graced his hand along, feeling the membrane's temperature rise with his meager advance. Feyera stuck his tongue out slightly and bit down closing an eye as he did so to offset the foreign feeling.

"Mmmm…ahhh…" he cooed as he touched the narrow trench where his flesh had adopted a color to match Sanaria's complexion. He stuck his pinky finger into the would-be crevice where metal met skin. The short nail barely dug between the two, before it was stopped by a taut fleshy substance whose tenderness that rivaled Edge's ocular cavities.

"Ooooo! OUCH!" Edge recoiled, pulling his probing finger back in shock. "Ow…What the heck! Sensitive as sin!"

[Boss, don't hurt yourself!] Brucie grabbed his trainer's flailing left arm.

"Hey did it look like I was trying to buddy?" Edge yelled. He was angry. Not just because of the sensitivity. He felt trapped. Out of control. Frozen. What was happening?

[Well I…what is it exactly?] Brucie asked, glaring at the bracelet.

Feyera tugged on the armlet and made a low-pitched growl. As he vehemently pulled, it didn't hurt as long as he refrained from trying to touch where it latched on. "I don't know how it works."

[Why not?] July asked politely.

"Argh…I c—can't!…Get!…It!…OFF!" Edge bellowed in disgust.

[It will be okay boss,] Feyera's Charmeleon reassured.

"How do you know!" Edge snapped at Brucie. Feyera's deep doubts periodically surfaced during times of stress and uncertainty.

Brucie tried to be positive towards the trainer. Sometimes that worked. He did feed off emotions after all. Though Brucie would not tell him that during a time like this. [Well, you've been through tougher stuff.]

July added on, [Not only that, but you're made of stronger stuff, Chris.]

"No. This right here," Edge continued to grapple with the relic, "this thing here is stronger."

[Stronger?] asked July.

Feyera nodded and shut his eyes, concealing the mist accumulating there. Could he beat it?

Brucie shook his head, [That's fine but what is it exactly?]

Feyera tugged on the piece again, wary not to disrupt the inflamed and slightly laxer skin beneath the armlet. "I—umm—shoot. GRRRR! HRRRUUUMMMMMM! Ahh…*gasp*

Both his Pokemon could do little but watch as their struggling trainer continued to wrestle with the mysterious artifact. However, it was a fruitless. The bangle stuck to him like processed Cradily secretion glue. When he had first put it on, it had tightened to fully possess his thin wrist.
Fredrick…Thanks but how the heck do I make it work? Edge asked himself. Or in my case, unwork? He entertained the thought of clicking a simple switch and having his eyes return to normal and the infernal horn oh his chest disappearing. It was probably impossible, but the man had hope that there was a way. Pipe dreams, thought his mind.

[You don't have any idea?] asked July with a soft voice. [Do you?] "Of course I—" Edge looked left and right whilst considering the facts, or lack thereof, "—Of course, I do. It is a piece of radioactive material."

[Huh?] both Brucie and July asked.

"RAIDACTIVE!" Feyera screamed, still squirming with the uncooperative piece. The last thing he wanted to call it was magical or ancient or anything that would not be explainable. Even calling it a Philosopher's Stone seemed to be giving the bracelet too much credit. There had to be a reason hidden in the material's annexes. "Mercurius, or 'Mercurium'—once known as 'Ununseptium'—it's a super heavy transuranium radioactive element."

[Radio…active?] Brucie said wide-eyed, trying to absorb all of Feyera's terms.

Feyera grunted. "Yeah! Yeah, it's something like that." He could hardly comment any further on the matter.

[Ta ha, what is that big word supposed to mean?] July asked humorously, [some kind of mood changer?]

"Kinda," Feyera hated how he had to explain everything with feelings and isolated subjective perception. It just felt so wrong for him to conduct any conversation this way. Yet it was the best he could do in his pathetic state.

[So it's a mood ring?] Brucie excitedly said putting both his hands together as if in prayer.

"NO!" Edge retorted in anguish. It was rather ironic that he denied emotions he exhibited with such fervent passion. Everyone that knew Feyera long enough knew this paradox existed and could be easily summoned by even a mediocrely thought out taunt. The thought of Sana seeing him behave like this, especially with the new hue of faint green on his wrist, made him feel nauseous. But then he thought about what his Pokemon had actually said. There was something curious about how his Charmeleon knew about human apparel, even if it was something as silly as what teenage girls wore. "Say what? How do you even know what a mood ring is Brucie?"

[Oh, Lizzie used to wear one,] Brucie replied jovially. He wiggled his nails together.

"Who is Lizzie, some kinda name for your lizard mama?" Edge quipped. As mature as he wanted to be, he still was not immune to childish tendencies. Of course, Edge contributed such behavior to circumstance. It was his way of dealing with the stuff outside of his control.

[Mister Chris…] Brucie said quietly, [I was raised in captivity. I never knew my mother or my father.]

"So you are like me then?" Feyera bluntly said. He tried to be apathetic, but he had seemingly lost that ability weeks ago.

[Like you?] Brucie repeated in confusion. [Um…I'm a Pokemon.]

"No! I mean were you an orphan?" Feyera clarified; once again, upset by the direction the
conversation had led them. However, being an orphan was only half-true for Edge. He knew his father and had lost his mother. His father was as good as dead to him though. Maybe not physically but emotionally. And seeing things through the lens of sheer emotion was becoming all that mattered to Edge whether he acknowledged it or not.

[Yeah. I like to think they are two big Charizard somewhere up in the sky.] Brucie pointed up to the cloudless late evening sky at the bright crescent moon, [Maybe…maybe one day I'll be able to fly and go find them…]

Edge felt his heart go out to his Pokemon. All this time and he had been too concerned with himself to even ask about his Pokemon partner's pasts. Brucie wasn't all that different from him. Maybe that is why they got along so well.

"I'm sorry bud. I'm sure you will…one day…yeah…one day…" Edge said lying. He knew that the antidote to Koga's Toxic poisoning would inhibit Brucie from evolving into a Charizard. His psionic siphoning had helped to guarantee that. His own deceptiveness made him feel sick, but withholding that information was the necessary evil. He could not tell his friend that he'd been responsible for sealing the Charmeleon's fate. His sentimentality welled up inside of him, but he refused to release it, taking every negative thought and systematically placing the blame upon the status quo.

[Hrmm…So yeah, Lizzie was the nice Pokemon Breeder who took care of me when I was still an eggling!] Brucie said, ignoring the solemn expression in his trainer's green halo rimmed eyes. [She wore a bracelet that changed based on how she felt.]

"I didn't know you were so perceptive to things like that," said Edge half expecting this to be a conversation he was having with Sana. She at least knew some things about human beings. Mentioning trains and bright city lights for instance. Edge wondered about her past.

Brucie cut off his trainer's venturing thoughts, [Well Lizzie used to talk about it. Every night, when she tucked me into my pen, I remember it turning a bright orange when she put her soft hand over my belly.]

Feyera pointed a finger at his Charmeleon's tummy. The trainer said with a smirk, "You're kidding, right?"

The Charmeleon delicately caressed his stomach, [It was so warm. She always used to say it turned that color when she was happy.]

"That's because 'mood rings' work based on temperature. Body temperature to be specific," Feyera said putting both his hands into the air. "It doesn't know the way that you feel, just the heat of your body causing the chemicals to react."

[Oh. That's not what she told me though,] answered Brucie, who still clutched his abdomen.

Feyera blew air up and caused his light bronze bangs to loft, "*Huff* Well she probably was an airhead, Brucie."

Brucie made a sour expression and rubbed his knee. [That's not nice Mister Chris. I liked her.]

"Fine," babbled Feyera, "the mood ring can change with your…feelings. *humph* The temperature of your body can change to various degrees based on where blood is being pumped thanks to your brain ordering it around."

[Really?] Brucie asked in excitement. The Pokemon knew that his trainer was at the forefront of
understanding emotion, whether he liked it or not. Of course, Brucie had hardly known Sana long enough to learn about her perception of feelings as a Gardevoir. For now, his trainer essentially filled that role, though quite defiantly.

Edge continued to spew his derisive venom-laced words, "Of course! Lizzie was a very smart lass. And also probably an expert in Applied Thermodynamics along with Entropic Theory. Maybe even a Cardiologist slash Neuroscientist on the weekends to banish the inevitable boredom that all too often plagues such esteemed intellectuals. *sigh* Feel better knowing that?"

[No,] his Charmeleon admitted.

[That seems like a lot of smart people credentials to wear a ring like yours Feyera,] July said hardly noticing his acerbity.

"This isn't a mood ring, July!" Feyera scolded. "And besides you don't need to be an intellectual to wear one."

[But I thought you said Lizzie was—] 

"Just…drop it July," Edge suggested with an involuntary low growl ensuing his words.

[How did it do that to you Feyera?] Brucie pointed to the recognizably different tone in skin immediately adjacent to the Reilken Mercurius. [Was it the…rad—radio—radioa—?] 

"Radioactive material? In all likelihood. It caused a mutation." He looked at the pale green flesh near the relic's grip. It certainly was not normal. Too fine, too soft, too unnatural. "DAMN IT!" he shouted at the object.

[Why did you m—muh—'mutation'?] asked July.

"I don't know," Edge said. "And don't be calling me 'mutating'!" He grew angrier by the second, and his forehead began to sweat from stress.

Both his Pokemon looked skeptically at the contradiction their trainer wore on his metaphorical sleeve.

"Because…I haven't done any of that!" Feyera belted well aware of how his eyes had been recently altered with Progenitor. The pyramid of lies he spewed out became a very psychologically unstable house of cards.

[Thought you'd know why there was a mu—] July began.

"What the hell do I look like to you, July? I don't have a doctorate in—" Edge froze up. He did. It was sitting in storage. Encased in a nice cherry mahogany frame was his PhD in scientific study—Genetics to be specific.

[In…?] they both asked drenched in curiosity.

Feyera thawed his expression, "—In subatomic physics dealing with the radioactive decay of Mercurium." This may have been true, but he was being very specific in the field of study he described.

[What?] they both asked simultaneously.

Feyera sighed, trapped in his lies.
[What are you talkin' bout boss?] asked Brucie.

"The science behind it...*sigh* I don't know why the chemistry is the way it is and therefore I don't know why this material is radioactive. But radioactivity does cause mutations given enough time. But why and into what I cannot say..." Edge said glowering at the relic.

[I thought you were a researcher Mister Feyera; ummm, don't you know how 'The Science' works...?] asked July.

"I'm just not sure about the specifics," Edge forced an inauthentic carefree shrug. "I do know a lot though."

[Oh? Can you explain something about 'The Chemistry']? asked July. Once again, she had a comical tendency to butcher nouns. Probably due to her lack of understanding what it was she even was talk about. How could an intellectually deprived Pokemon understand the intercreate nature of human language?

Nevertheless, Feyera was more than ready to educate her. "Sure I can!" he said with a faint smile. "In fact, I'm happy you asked."

[Oh great here he goes...] muttered Brucie seeing the bright twinkle in his trainer's haloed eyes.

"Let's start with the basics shall we?" Edge raised his swollen palm, "Life what is it? July, you should know this..."

July tapped her fleshy root feet anxiously feeling put on the spot by her trainer, [Umm you and me? Brucie and Des too.]

[Err yeah I suppose what July said,] Brucie said in agreement.

Feyera smirked menacingly knowing that his Pokemon had fallen for the obvious answer, "Wrong. Life is Carbon." He then wagged a single finger through the air in rebuke.

[Car—bon?] repeated July. [Really?] July said. [That's 'The Chemistry']?

"Sheesh, it's like talking to Sana...Carbon is an element present in everything living on earth. Millions of combinations make life happen the specific way it does. That's why we call it 'Organic Chemistry'," Feyera said, subconsciously padding his knees in delight.

[Wow. Are those like Pokemon?] July asked his disheartened expression.

"Humph..." Feyera said with a frown, "No they are elements."

[Elements?] the Charmeleon asked scratching his head. [Oh so like Pokemon types? I'm a Fire type —]
—I'm a Grass type!— shouted July.

[And Despie is a Water type! You've got all the good ones!]

Feyera nodded his head. "You're right, Brucie."

[Mhmm!]

[Say what type is Sana?] asked July. [Is she like you? What type are you?]

Edge was displeased to hear the Gardevoir's name come back up. The trainer was even more annoyed by being compared to her. "...She's a Gardevoir making her a Psychic type."

[I knew I'd get it,] July said gleefully.

"Yeah...sure they are," Feyera said softly trying to dismiss the relationship being constructed by his Gloom.

[So there are all different elements—types!]

"They are as you said: different types of matter. I learned about all of them back in classes at the Pokemon Academy," Feyera said. He had learned so much more than mere elements yet had forgotten all about the more important constructs. He just had the building blocks. This lack of knowledge mirrored the predicament he now found himself in.

Brucie repeated the term, [Chem—istry?]

"Yes it's science!" Edge yapped.

[Okay.] He nodded.

Feyera leaned back slightly. "...Or at least a type of science. Or maybe a part of science depending on how you look at it. I see things as all being related."

[Is that why 'The Science' tells you everything?] asked July.

"Of course!" Feyera said proudly. Finally, he didn't have to put up with Sana bashing his outlook with her foolish Gardevoir perspective. The ex-researcher then continued to steamroll out his long-winded response, barely even stopping for air. "There are many different fields. Sometimes they overlap. Then you make new fields by doing that. But it all goes back to mathematics, the mother of all the sciences."

[M—Mother?] asked Brucie.

"Yeah like an origin you know? Without math, you cannot have logic, and without logic, you cannot have anything. So there can be nothing without logic," Edge said, rubbing his jacket's fabric.

[That sounds...complicated,] his Pokemon admitted.

"Oh trust me; it isn't so bad once you accept it. Things make more sense as you go along with the rules, I promise," he said adopting a moderately dogmatic tone.

[Umm okay,] his Charmeleon said, losing interest.

"So what was I saying?" Edge scratched his head, "Oh yes! Before I was talking about radioactive..."
chemical interaction at the nuclear level…that's a combination of the science of Chemistry and the science of Physics…"

[Psychics? That's like your power…] started July.

"NO! P—H—Y—S—I—C—I—S!" Feyera said spelling out the field of science. " Not like my Psychic, uh—shoot…I mean psyonics!"

July smiled childishly, [They all sound the same to me.]

"Well they are all very different from each other. You need to pay attention to the details…" Edge made a discomfited face. "Even being only one letter off can make a huge difference. It can change everything," he said burying his hands into his denim pockets nervously.

[What is a small thing that makes a big difference?] July asked.

[Yeah, can you give us an example, boss?] said Brucie.

"*Sigh* It's like when you have a chemical compound that is normal, but if you change even one small aspect of it becomes ionic and volatile. Everything about it changes. Mutations. Free radicals, unstable compounds, decay, all that lovely stuff that…" Edge clenched his jaw in frustration. He cut himself off from saying "…I don't know about anymore."

[Sounds like someone we know…] July whispered to Brucie, obviously referring to Edge Feyera himself.

"What? Does that make sense to you?" Edge asked.

[Sorta,] Brucie said pawing the sand with his feet.

[Is it like your moods?]

"No it is not like my moods, why do you keep bringing those up, July?" Edge said feeling antagonized.

Brucie defended her, [Well it's hard not to when you're always giving them to us!]

"I…I'm giving them to you?" Feyera asked in confusion.

[Yeah,] Gloom said as she rocked her head back and forth rhythmically.

[Mmhm.]

"Sorry. I don't know why I'm doing that to you…" Edge pointed at the Gardevoir horn, "…it must be because of this…this…thing…"

Brucie pointed at his trainer, [Hey it's okay, just keep it in check.]

[It's kinda fun to see the world through your emotions Mister Feyera,] July said pleasantly.

[As long as they aren't so darn negative,] Brucie added on as a caveat.

"Emotions are not the world!" Feyera belted. He imagined Sana apparating next to him with a Teleport just to statistically twist the verbal knife by saying something cruel like: "They are YOUR world now, veh Feyera!" or "You know what the world is now for a Gardevoir!" even "This is what you deserve, and it's forever." Knowing her, she would even use a voice that was angelic to inflict
such provoking perceptions concerning his predicament. She could make it sound like it was permanent. Sana could be a monster like that; she had already slipped up and revealed that.

[Huh?]

[You make it feel that way sometimes boss,] Brucie said. [Especially in battles.]

"Argh…you can't understand," Feyera said, now clearly angry at where his rouge thoughts had taken him. "Brucie, July, you've never studied the physical world in all of its beauty, nor have you seen how it all works together seamlessly as a fluid system of pragmatic equations…"

[Sure we have, we grew up outside and enjoyed it!] Brucie insisted.

[That is true,] said July as she thought about her life on Cerulean Cape.

"Not the same. You don't understand how it works just by experiencing it," Feyera said as he adamantly shook his head in disapproval. "You gotta study it. Dissect it. Find out the little components entombed inside and bring them to the surface." His explanation raised a haunting parallel to his Gardevoir shard, but it was a similarity he quietly dismissed.

[You know an awful lot about science. Are you sure you aren't a doctor like The Professor?] Brucie asked referring to none other than Oak.

"Well the truth is, I did earn my degree. I just forgot everything I learned. Like it was there one day and then gone the next."

[You don't say?]

Feyera whispered, "All of it…gone…" Edge tried not to recollect the expulsion of the horn from the dream, but that is where his mind had already brought him.

[Say Mister Chris…] began July.

"What?" snapped Edge still fighting with the truth.

[You are reeeaaaaally smart right?] she asked in a pitched tone that stroked his ego.

Feyera automatically smiled saying, "Yes. Yes I am."

For him, 'smart' was a relative term. If July was referring to intellect, then yes, he had that. He could crunch basic equations in his head, make impulsive choices based on outcome tables he ran through in his head, and even calculate probability in his head, so long as his repugnant emotions did not interfere. His mind was a sponge, always absorbing new facts and information. It would adapt to changing variables to solve problems orderly. And yet, as if to spite this seemingly perfect system, his feelings sometimes took precedence and caused him to behave irrationally. Chris Feyera hated that more than the disfiguring Gardevoir horn on his chest. But were the two one and the same?

If however July was referring to academic knowledge, then Feyera was severely lacking—much to his displeasure since he always valued a strong institutionalized and controlled means of measuring worth. Especially something as mint as intelligence.

[Since you are so smart…Can you find out how to fix everything?] she asked innocently.

"Of course." Feyera gave a thumbs up with his bound hand. "We've been down this road before.
That's the new mission."

Brucie's ears perked up intuitively hearing the 'M' word. [We got a new mission?] he asked, full of excitement.

"Yeah, yeah." Edge shrugged, "Find out how to fix this with science. I need time though."

Brucie cracked his neck, eager for adventure, [Why do you need time?]

"I have to remember how to do science…or find someone who does…" Edge thought about Ein.

[You coulda fooled me, boss. I think you know an awful lot.]

Edge tightened his grip on his pocket's fabric. "Brucie, the things I know are elementary in Academia. Everyone with half a brain should know them. My memories that deal with the kind of stuff I am in need of solving are fractured."

[Did you ever find out why they went away?] asked Brucie.

"Well my dear friend…Sana wiped my memory," Edge said prodding his Alterieno boots together, tapping their bladed tips together like fingers.

[Wait what?] they both exclaimed.

"Oh I didn't tell you two that lovely little detail?" Feyera asked with a devilish smile.

[N—No what?] July stuttered. [Mister Feyera, you don't tell us a lot!]

Brucie looked appalled. [Why on earth would she do something like that to you Mister Chris?]

"Well it is a long, hmmm…actually very long story. She's responsible for me forgetting most of my post graduate work," Edge said as he clenched a fist with his left hand. His undefined knuckles turned white. "And there are plenty of nasty things she would do to me if given the chance…"

[Wait hold on, you knew Sana before we met her here?] July asked, putting the pieces together at a Slugma's pace.

[That would make sense July!] Brucie exclaimed, [That's why she's the dream girl!]

"Please…” Edge huffed full of conceit, "she's hardly either of those things."

[Well you know what I meant. I know she's not a dream cause I said 'hi' to her,] retorted Brucie.

[So did I!]

"*Humph* She is most certainly NOT a girl either," Edge fumed. He was still angry about what they had done. But mostly what he had done. He wanted it to have been justifiable, but it wasn't no matter how he approached it.

[Why do you call her a girl though? You never call July that.] Brucie said bringing up the discrepancy that had been addressed on the pathway to the coconuts.

"Well—" Edge said as his face began to grow beet red as he remembered his justification for the kiss they had shared.

[I got it!] shouted July as she tiptoed over to Feyera's other side.
Edge froze up, afraid of her spilling the beans. How could she know about the kiss? "You—you do?"

[What is it July?] asked Brucie, eager to hear at least someone else saw the hidden relationship between his trainer and this new strangely absent member of the team.

[Well I think because Sana looks like him, he gets confused.] she offered as she unfolded her small hands up into the late evening air.

Brucie nodded, [That seems reasonable.]

Edge rocked his head back and forth. "She just is not exactly like me," he stammered, aware of how ridiculous his lies were becoming.

[Yeah but she has the 'Homo Sapien' stuff,] July proudly said.

"What do you mean?" Edge asked, almost wanting to hear the Gloom find a reason for why he had kissed Sana, "by 'Homo Sapien stuff'?"

[Well you are both tall, have the same features, and—]

"—S—Same features?" Edge stammered as he held onto the horn on his chest partially concealing it.

[Yeah,] Gloom said eyeing the part of his anatomy he half obscured.

[She's only trying to be polite, Chris,] insisted Brucie.

"Yeah I know. It's just that…we aren't really that similar are we?" Feyera asked the fear in his voice evident.

[Well if you had given us enough time to actually get to know her then maybe we could tell you for sure. Humph!] Brucie said scowling and crossing his arms.

"I told you, she's off doing 'Gardevoir things'," Edge said.

[Well then what about you? What are YOU doing? You have to eat still right?] Brucie asked as he stomped on the sand in frustration.

Edge smiled in the dark evening. He hadn't thought about food ever since his struggle to obtain the coconuts. "Yeah I needed some food." Strangely, that hunger had been quenched by whatever he had done.

Brucie widened one of his sapphire blue eyes, [Doesn't she need to eat too?]

"Why are you so darn obsessed with whatever Sana is doing Brucie?" Feyera asked.

The Charmeleon had had it. His trainer was being ridiculously emotional. He belted, [Alright, you want the truth? Do you wanna know what I think Master Chris?]

Edge fought the fright of truth valiantly with arrogance, "Hit me."

Brucie showed his fangs, [Fine. Boss, I think you screwed up.]

"What?" Edge shouted at his Pokemon. For Pokemon to disobey their trainers was not uncommon, but to actually hear his Charmeleon's condemnation made it exponentially worse.
But his very first Pokemon did not recoil. Rather Brucie went on to say, [Yeah. I think you messed up and you're just too afraid to say it.]

Edge had to clutch his horn in defense, an action Brucie did not fail to see, before lying, "I'm not afraid."

Brucie gave him a dark leer, [Sure you're not.]

"I don't care bud, listen she is just off on her own. She's wild, untamed, c—confused…This is 'her island'," the words stung Edge's lips as he spoke.

[I think you do care and you're running away again. That's all you know how to do. Run, run, run!] Brucie yelled at his trainer. The young Pokemon took both his arms, stretched them out below his waist, and leaned in towards Edge.

"How dare you talk to me like that!" Edge said, trying to sit up.

Brucie tapped Feyera's shoulder with a clawed hand. [Please listen to me!]

Feeling the pent up aggression, Edge relaxed. "What? What do you have to say?"

[Boss, I'll respect ya and all—] his put his nails against the bomber jacket's material and it made a soft squeak [—but you gotta respect me back.]

Feyera's eyes hurt as he stared at his first Pokemon who was now confronting him. "I—I do respect you Brucie. I always have."

Brucie rocked his small head back and forth, [No you haven't.]

"Lies," Edge retorted. He stroked his precious bronze hair.

Brucie growled as his trainer frolicked through his human hair. [Grrr…] It was a ferocious and feral noise. The unprecedented nature of it startled Edge.

"Then tell me how I'm not respecting you. I always talk to you; do you know how many trainers out there cannot converse with non-Psychic type Pokemon?" Edge asked. "You are blessed to find yourself with a trainer who has psyonics and can talk to you!"

[It isn't about just talking!] Brucie shouted.

Gloom backed off, allowing the two to continue and work out their differences.

"Then what is it about? Battling?" Feyera bluffed, hoping Brucie wouldn't call to attention 'Siphoning'—Edge's way of controlling his Pokemon in battle at the cost of their potential being sapped away by his psyonics.

[Battling?] asked Brucie as he bit his lip, [N—No. Why would you say that? We make a great team! You tell me what to do, and then sometimes you show my body the way.]

Edge relaxed realizing the bullet he had deftly dodged, "Okay then what else could it be?"

Brucie sighed and lowered his arm, [Start with being honest.]

"Honest?" Edge asked.

[Yeah. I'm not asking for much, boss.] Brucie kicked the sand. [You're still my master. I'll do what
"Then I don't see what the big problem is—" Edge said stroking his chest nervously.

[Will you just let me finish!] Brucie bawled.

Feyera tried to be apathetic, but was unsuccessful. "F—F—Fine. *Huff* Yes, go on."

[Will you just let me finish!] Brucie said with a small tear in his eye, [I just want you to be my friend. Friends *sniff*... friends trust each other with their problems. They don't run away from each other.]

Feyera did have a tendency to trust no one except himself. It was the aftermath of a long series of situations in the man's short life. Starting off in a family that was broken, seemingly because of him, he could never recover his self-confidence. Everything had always been so good when his mother was alive. After she passed, his father could no longer take care of him. He was weak. Pathetic. A disgrace. It all rubbed off on young Feyera and molded his future, paving each brick of the man's life-road with negativity and malice.

Starting in the Pokemon Academy boarding school, Feyera had become convinced that he was a nobody. Being abandoned gave him all the rational to do this. Over time, a lack of close friends from a young age made things difficult for Chris. He grew steadily colder. Lost respect for others. Lost respect for all save himself. He could not confide in anyone. Things became purely understood through their functionality. And given enough time, people became things.

Following his induction into the Pokemon University, he became so obsessed with research to the point of becoming academia incarnated. It infuriated those around him when his lack of friends allowed for Feyera's success in schooling. After all, he had no distractions. No reason to stop his work. No family. No ties. It was perfect for his line of work.

"I..." Feyera said fighting back tears that were not exclusively his own, but certainly provoked by retrospect, "I've had a difficult life, Brucie."

The Charmeleon forced a stern grip on the trainer's sleeve, [I know, but it's s'all right.]

"No. No it's not. I had everything taken away from me. Everything is still being taken away from me," Edge said pessimistically. His Pokemon like Jill. His humanity. His world. His life. Crucial components.

[But you have us now.] July chimed in from behind the trainer.

Edge bent his neck back saying, "I know, and thanks for being here for me."

[But you've gotta be here for us too!] Brucie requested.

[Yeah!] July said gleefully.

Defensively, Edge responded, "I am though!" Feyera thought about all the times he had cooked for them, taken care of them, made sure they were safe. He realized that sometimes he was indeed lacking as a trainer, and even more so as a person.

Edge played with his hand in the sand, dipping it into the soft substance. He picked some of it up and allowed it to pour out of his semi open hand. He watched the millions of granulates fall. He was just like them. Nothing special at the end of the day. He had extra-physical powers, but they weren't rightfully his. And strangely, without them he'd be nothing. Just another trainer. A dead trainer too. He was already a man without a memory and without a certain future. For the first time
since before meeting Sana he considered what he was losing because of the Gardevoir attributes. What would be the next to go? His humanity? More of his body? His rational mind? All of those were damaged already by the heart's infiltrating ivy tendrils. To what unfathomable reaches would Sephiteos' attributes burrow?

Brucie broke the silence and consequently Chris' deeper thoughts, [Then you have to go find Sana!]

He punched the ground. "What? Why?"

[Because, Chris, she's out there on her own! What do we do for our friends? C'mon buddy!]

Feyera fumed and beat his chest to the right of the Gardevoir horn with a loose fist slightly coated with loose sand granulates. "I'm not perfect."

[No one is,] Brucie acknowledged.

Edge sighed, "Not a perfect person either."

[Homo Sapien!] cried out July.

Both Brucie and Chris shared a laugh over July's overzealous recollection of what Feyera classified himself as. Not because it was untrue—since it clearly was a false statement—but rather because it was funny to hear her telepathic voice shout something so irrelevantly relevant.

"Yeah. But to be honest with you, I'd—" Edge said, and then trailed off. For him to even say 'honest' would be like Sanaria talking about 'Modernic Predicate Logic'.

Frustrated, Edge bent his head back and looked to the crisp sky. His muscles ached as he did so. He didn't want to tell his Pokemon everything he knew. They couldn't help him. Only he could help himself. He was the researcher, he was the one able to figure out things as complex as Reilken Mercurius. That was his strength. His gift.

The only thing Feyera's Pokemon could do to benefit him was be on the receiving end of his denial. The longer he could keep things under wraps the better for his own sake. He used the opaqueness towards his Pokemon to conceal his own creeping anxieties when handling the truth. The first rule of deception is: "Fooling yourself begins with fooling those closest to you."

Then he suddenly thought about something. He wondered whether or not truth and honesty were synonymous terms. Edge thought about what truth meant. What it entailed would often yield results. For instance, knowing something could assist a scientist in many different ways. The entire Baconian scientific method was based off of the premise that knowledge led to power. Feyera knew he needed a different type of power, one not to be confused with psyonics stemming from the whimsical emotions. The power he yearned to have was lost two years ago. The power of unadulterated rationality. That power was slowly being stamped out by the splice. Even if it was replaced with another, this other power did little to comfort him in finding a way out of his predicament. Reading the emotions and minds of others gave Feyera no information on how to remove the Gardevoir attributes from his body, and—by extension—his mind.

Or maybe it was the other way around? Did the brain cause the bodily changes? No, that was impossible. Preposterous. That was 'Sana thinking'. Feyera convinced himself that bodies were only bodies. Nothing more. There was no so—called 'mind' transcending space, only a physical brain. Yet this very idea made zero sensed based upon his psyonics. How he hated the forced dissonance. It was so much a component of him at this point.
Edge vehemently pulled on his light bronze hair. "ARRRGHHHHH!" he shouted at the moon above the pristine Southern Sea.

[Whassamatter?] asked July.

"I ugh…this…THIS is the matter!" he shouted at the heart projecting out of his chest. It took him a few second to admit to it, but it was his own body now. That's how he treated it. More importantly to his logic, that's how it treated him.

[Hmm?]

[Your body?]

"Nuh…no…this…" Feyera tugged at it feeling the sensitivity grow, and his own emotions blend with it allowing for new cascades of responsiveness to take place.

[That?] asked July.

[Your scar?]

"All of it."

[You've had that since before I met you,] said Brucie with a dry tone.

"True—"

[WAIT A SECOND!] Brucie yelled.

Feyera’s eyes opened wide in surprise. His Pokemon had startled him. It was like someone screaming in his ear. "Huh?" asked Edge, feeling a little dizzy.

[Sana has the EXACT same scar! Why didn't I think of that before?] Brucie cried out, feeling incredibly oblivious.

"It…it's not a conventional scar…" Feyera admitted. He wished he could supplant the awful sensation. The sensations it gave, were not awful—they were quite the opposite—it was just so awful to have such sensations part of who he was and who he defined himself as. Edge could only change the latter. He did so with denial.

[What do you mean?] Brucie asked warily.

[Yeah…?] July reached her small hand up to try and touch the material. Edge instinctually pulled back from her.

"D—Don't touch it!" he ordered at his Gloom.

July brought her small hand back, [Um—okay. Sorry. It is just so smooth and shiny even in the dark. I like it; it is pretty almost like a jewel. It reminds me of Misty's Staryu!]

Feyera felt ill. The very thought of him being forced to bear it made him queasy. "It's——" he suddenly imagined Sana caressing it with tender strokes calling it beautiful "—it's just awful," he said with a repugnant undertone that was hardly subtle.

[You always used to say it hurt you,] said Brucie. [The baddies…hmm…the Rockets gave it to you. Did they give it to Miss Sana too?]
"D—doubtfully…" said Feyera.

July interjected, [But you said it was Cipher. The guys here on this island.]

"Yeah. I know." Edge wasn't about to admit that he could have been the one to cause it. "And there was nothing I could do…it was put here."

[So why are you getting so angry about it? It's the same as hers. Just talk to Sana about it and she'll know what to do!]

"She…she doesn't know what it is going on here," Edge said to Brucie, "with me I mean."

[Well maybe you didn't give her a chance to tell you. She has it too, so why wouldn't she know?] Charmeleon struggled with how his trainer claimed to be rational and yet could not be when it came to sensitive topics like these. He was a hypocrite.

"Brucie," Edge looked down at the beach, "I don't know if she knows. And if she does, I might not want to know…"

[You're—I mean it's practically radiating as bright as my tail!] Brucie said cutting off Edge's lamentation.

"I'm what? Radiating?" Edge said gripping the shard tighter, hoping that its glow would dissipate. Brucie seemed to not care whether or not his trainer held the Gardevoir horn, [Yeah like crazy, I don't know what else to call it.]

[I—I see it too,] said July.

Panicked, Edge looked at his hands. Still relatively normal, barring the infuriating Reilken Mercurius locking onto his left wrist they were human. However, his fingers were softer than he remembered them being. Almost like a pianist's.

"What? I don't see any glowing radiation!" Edge called out at his body.

[That's weird,] said Brucie. [I look at you and all I can see is anger. I feel it.]

"Well maybe because I am angry. That ever cross your lil' mind?" Edge said, as the evening sea breeze blew through his hair, messing it.

[It did, but only because you are being such a projector.] Brucie said gripping Feyera's arm.

"P—projector?" Edge stammered.

[He's spreading it around, right Brucie?] asked July.

[Exactly, that's what he does all the time!] Brucie nodded at his partner. [He is so good at it. But why? Why do you have to be so much of a projector?]

"Well, I—" Edge stammered. "What are you talking about 'so much of a projector'? That hardly makes any—"

Brucie cut him off, [You have a way of making me angry when you are angry. It isn't really fair. I can't help it, boss. I don't know what it is. I try to fight it but…]

"*Gasp* that's…" Edge's mind began to race uncontrollably. Did he instance now too? Now that he
knew about where his powers had come from, did he indulge in them too much? Were there consequences for doing so? Both his hands instinctually caressed the piece, amplifying these doubts by flavoring them with various hums and vibrations.

[And every time I try to help you figure out why, you push me away,] Brucie said with a faint nod. [Do you know how upsetting that is to me? Do you even know how that feels—?]

Brucie had not even finished his sentence but the moment he said the word 'upsetting' Feyera's emotional perception automatically honed in on his Pokemon's discomfort. He hated how it was becoming second nature to focus on such things; however, in this case, it was surprisingly detrimental. The Charmeleon's displeasure became as crystal clear as pure spring water to Edge and he immediately felt the involuntary tug of sympathy.

And it was the type of sympathy Feyera could never feel as a human being. Or if he could have, it was never brought to the surface in all of his years. At this point, the inundation of sentimentally had embraced his essence. He struggled to murmur a sentence, "I…ugh…no…I…"

[Boss…?] asked Brucie.

He looked into his first Pokemon's clear blue eyes. Help…I…nuhhh…too much…I… Edge thought in psychological agony. How could he even begin to describe what he felt to his Pokemon? How did he even exist? How was this all even possible? The stress continued to bulldoze through his consciousness at every support structure, casting him further into radical angst.

[Huh?] Brucie asked, oblivious to the infliction he had forced upon his trainer. It was the gift of empathy, but it came at a high price for one incapable of unifying with the embodiment of emotion itself. And that was exactly what Edge was, he was spliced with the epitome of sensation: a Gardevoir.

"*Gasp* Ugh…I…B—Brucie…" Feyera sporadically vocalized in pain. For he felt everything. His Gardevoir heart forced it upon him. He was helpless in every sense of the word. What he now had was a completely shared experience. An emotional manifold, penetrating both of their psychological substratums. And his mind kept looping it back to him. He was nearing the point of a meltdown, and he had barely even felt the conventional trigger of stress. There was no Team Rocket member pulling a gun on him and no ghost murdering his Pokemon. The usual push was not there. It frightened him. How could this be happening? How could everything be so out of his control? He did not know why, but he knew how. Alas, he could not stop it. His mind would defenselessly add on new anxieties and repeat the imposed impression of inadequacy. The unprecedented experience was spiraling out of control, snowballing into a riotous synthesis.

[What is it Master Chris?] his Charmeleon insisted, blissfully unaware of what it meant to touch feelings as powerful as these. It was a completely subjective experience to have them bluntly forced into you and manifested in internal physicality. The phenomenon was akin to a square peg being rammed repeatedly into the round hole of Edge's mind. Nonetheless, even that rational idiom began to lose meaning as Feyera's mind was vigorously lashed by the horn on his chest.

"I…ughh…I…" he began to speak. Feyera felt paralyzed. He could not escape from his body's demands. His hand touched the horn and consequently froze up in distress. The scarlet metal conjoined to his body was too sleek, too smooth, and too foreign. The anxiety had begun to take upon a life of its own. It assimilated new feelings, those he had repressed, those of his Pokemon, and even those he believed Sanaria had.

[What?] pressured Brucie.
"*Gulp*" Edge could not control the tormenting rheostat on his chest anymore. It was no longer just on his chest, but in his chest. Inside of his body. More importantly, it had infiltrated his brain. The repeated driving pain of the allegorical square peg was coercing a new shape for his mind. "I…I…*pant* no…" Edge weakly said.

[He's acting weird,] July concluded.

[You just don't know him as long as I do, July,] Brucie said with a smirk.

"P—please…just stop…" Edge muttered as his body began to shake thanks to the overwhelming sentimentality.

July shrugged, [Well at least he's not making any Psychic vortexes this time…]

The fact that those even occurred also fed into the well of discouragement that now took physical command. "M—make it stop!" Edge hollered at the piece of foreign anatomy. In vain, he cried as if it would listen to him. The anatomy had one purpose and one alone. Feyera was unable to control it. He was unable to wield it. Instead, it directed him, growing more adept with each new experience it shared with its unwilling host. It was a grand finale of surging emotion. He was digging himself further and further into a feedback fall of his own creation. "Na—na—NO MORE!"

[Boss, are you all right? What's wrong!] asked Brucie, who had just become aware of his trainer's spasms.

"N—n—NO!" Edge screeched; he simply could not contain it anymore. It was possessing him, controlling him, and making him into something he did not want to be.

July made an apparent gesture to Brucie as she spoke, [He's losing it Brucie. Something's got him.]

Brucie looked at July and clawed at his neck in nervousness. The Gloom did not express her anxiety as visibly, but Edge could sense anxiety radiating off of them and he unwillingly consumed it, allowing it to snowball into his own. It was out of control, like a Rollout attack.


[Hey, boss,] said Brucie trying to steady the flailing trainer. [Mister Chris Feyera…?]

Feyera shuddered hearing his true name. "I—I… *gasp*!" he said lurching forward. The heat was too much, the sensations too vivid. Edge felt his mind breaking, torn asunder by the lack of an ability to stop the sensations. He could not remove either of his hands from the heart; the crescendo of feedback inhibited him.

[Must be anxiety, that's what I feel at least,] said Brucie dryly. [Plus it's what he's projecting.]

Feyera broke contact with the horn at last, freeing his right hand. He then manically clutched at the sand as if it were his life, but his fingers could not grasp it, "H—haaah—help…"

[He's really making an awful lot of ruckus…] July said looking behind her at the mirror-like Southern Sea.

At this point, the Gardevoir shard was burning infiltrating into his visual field, making the world around him tattered by crimson solar flares. All of his senses were elevated. "I—ugh—it hurts—IT HURTS!"
"Give him a hand Brucie," exclaimed July in fear.

"What do you want me to do?" Brucie asked as he patted his trainer's back with a soft massage. "I don't know what's wrong with him!"

"B—Brucie…where…where is Sana…?" he asked in desperation.

"Sana…?" Brucie repeated in confusion. Things must have been especially bad if he was thinking about her following all the running he'd been doing. "She's not here anymore, remember? I thought you said she left to do Gardevoir things."

"N—no—what she needs…what I need ah—" he held the horn on his chest and his hands began to quiver with the pulsating rays of unshackled projected emotion. It flooded, it drenched, and it assumed command of who he was. Plumes of heat billowed up flushing the trainer's horror-struck face.

"What!" demanded Brucie, still holding his trainer's back and shoulders unaware of what Seph's shard did internally to the young man. "What do you need?"

He knew what he needed. It was something he could not obtain. Always out of reach, and always slipping further and further away from him. It was too much. Edge gasped as the air in front of him retreated. Eventually he found the strength to tell his Pokemon exactly what he wanted. And more so what he needed.

"All I wish for is to be rid of this…ARGH! Nugh…! *Haaah* This…OBSESSIVE…EMOTION!" Feyera screamed as he fought the impending darkness of unconsciousness with his two eyes open as wide as they would go. As he did this, twin soft reverberating scarlet auras greedily caressed against his eyes, coating his vision in warmth. They flickered, waxing and waning as convulsions continued.

All his Charmeleon could do was watch in helplessness. His trainer's body had begun to buckle and collapse from exhaustion. It was the same as his meltdowns, and yet there was seemingly no trigger. No gravity vortex, no use of pysonics, but instead simply unshackled emotion.

Edge was nearing the peak of what his body could endure. His mind was splitting in pain. He took the hand encased by the clutches of Reilken Mercurius and wrapped it around Brucie, applying pressure to the fire lizard's neck base for support. The trainer, nearly knocked out at this point, brought his mouth to his Pokemon's ear. Brucie shuddered as Feyera's trembling jaw drew close.

"*Pant* Brucie… *wheeze* F—Find her…!" he whispered to his Charmeleon. "…please…"

And then Edge went completely limp. His eyes closed and his once tense muscles relaxed. The man's breathing continued rhythmically.

In fear, Brucie delicately held onto his trainer's head. July had leaned close to her trainer's torso as well in the last moments before his untimely knockout.

[Boss! Boss!] Brucie exclaimed at the lifeless trainer.

Edge's body quivered causing the Pokemon to drop him on the sand. He landed with a soft thump on the white sands below the coconut tree.

[D—damn it. CHRIS! CHRIS!] yelled Brucie in agony. [Get up boss! C'mon!]

[He's not dead,] July said to Brucie. Feyera still radiated warmth, especially from his center.
[But he might be if we don't find Sana soon! July, he told me to go and find her. You need to stay with him and keep him safe from the wild Pokemon.]

[Brucie, the island isn't safe!] July said recollecting Ariados' ambush. There were undoubtedly countless more in the forest. [You can't go in there alone!]

[Does it look like we have a choice?] Brucie hollered. He pointed at Edge's sleeping body. [Our boss is in trouble. He hasn't eaten in days and now this happens to him!]

[But to get to Sana, you'll have to…!] July said thinking about the countless other Pokemon that called this island reservation home. At least on the Kanto mainland human settlements and trainers alike kept Pokemon populations in check. There were never grossly powerful Pokemon permanently living there, and if any appeared, usually the Pokemon League would intervene.

[I told you already, I don't have a choice! This is too important.] July clutched her master's stiff hand. She sighed, [What about Des?]

[What about Des?] asked Brucie, turning his head and facing the ominous forest. [She's out on reconnaissance.]

[She could help you if we wait for her to come back, maybe she'll find the yacht. Maybe she'll find help, Brucie. You don't need to do this.]

[I…I can't wait,] Brucie spun back around and looked at his first friend's motionless form, […he, Edge, can't wait.]

[Brucie, no…don't go. You aren't strong enough yet. There are monsters in there that are too powerful for you to take on!] the Gloom said worriedly.

[Then I'll avoid confrontation. Besides, who's afraid of some dumb spiders?] Brucie somewhat mocked his trainer's fear, something he could never get away with while Feyera was conscious.

July shook her head and her flower's gently curved leaves rustled. [Brucie, they are nocturnal, the spiders will outnumber you. They might fear fire one on one, but you are outmatched against a group. The one we saw was pregnant too.]

[So? Who cares, I'll fry the lil swarmers!] Brucie said angrily, mimicking Feyera's occasional bursts of self-confidence.

[There are usually mamas and papas…unless the mama gets hungry and eats the papa. But even then they always have lots of mouths to feed.]

[July, I have to be strong for my friend. Chris needs me. I know him. He's my pal.] July scolded.

[Then don't throw your life away just because he told you to do something in delirium!] July shook her head. [The thing is July, Edge and I, ya see, we're pals.]

[I know that,] July said nodding. [You two have something special.]

[Yeah,] Brucie looked over at his comatose bound trainer, [*huff* between you and me, I see him as the big brother I never had. I don't know if he looks at me that way—like family and all—you know since we're different species and all. He's a person and I'm just his Pokemon…]
July pointed at the unconscious trainer's exposed glossy heart. The once uncontrollable anatomical feature mirroring Sana's now rhythmically rose and fell with the man's shallow breathing. He looked peaceful, though his journey to such a state was certainly unpleasant. She sighed, [You know, people and Pokemon, they might not be that different. Maybe he sees you as his little brother, Brucie.]

[He might be a jerk sometimes and get all jumbled up in emotions or science depending on which way the wind is blowing. But the thing is, he's my friend. When he puts his life on the line to help me, you know that I'll be willing to do the same for him! And do you know why?] Brucie turned and shouted at the dark jungle in front of him, [Because I care about him!]

[Brucie…] July forced a smile, [please be careful.]

[I'll be back in a flash.] the young Charmeleon said with unparalleled determination. He spat a small wad of fire on the cool sand reminiscent of the time when he had gone on his first walk with Feyera. He snorted and bluffed at the odds, [How hard can it be to find her?]

July could only nod at his bravery.

Feyera's starter Pokemon jumped onto on fours and proceeded to run into Chrono Island's dense tropical forest. He bolted forth with blinding speed, his bright flame tail casting out the darkness as he left the moonlit shoreline. Brucie knew that his Pokemon trainer had asked him to do something, but that was irrelevant. Anyone could take orders. The important thing—and all that really mattered at this point—was that Brucie's friend needed his help.
"Okay' is a rather broad term, Brucie. He'll live though if that's what you mean."

[By his standards, I could not hear him saying 'I'm okay with all this'.]

[Now that there's the funny thing about it.]

[What is Des?]

"Fun—funny?"

[Yah huh. Junior can't handle the facts. Much less, accept them.]

[Mister Feyera? He's always so factual to the point of pragmatism.]

[At least he attempts to be, July.]

"What you believe in and what you feel can be totally separate things. Especially when there are emotions attached to the individual’s identity in the way that they are for your trainer."

[Identity?]

"Veh Feyera's identity—or rather his coming to terms with such an identity—brought him to this phase, and I would imagine it is significantly harder for a human to undergo such a unique stage of our psychosocial development."

[Our?]

"Yes as Gardevoir it's given to you and what you do with it is entirely up to you."

[You mean like a name?]

"I'm afraid it is a lot more radical than a name for a Gardevoir. Think of it *sigh* as quintessence. An essence always carried with you, perpetually taking in and giving out. See...?"

[Well I'll be darned. So it is a part of you physically.]

"Yes Des, it is. Here. Look. Mister Feyera, your trainer, has it too. On his chest; just like me."

[Now that you mention it, that was always a peculiarity he shared with none of his people friends.]

[Does Mister Feyera even have any people friends?]

"*Sigh...* That's because what he tells you isn't the truth but rather what he wants to believe as true."

[That's mean.]
"Why does he lie?"

"He doesn't know better; eventually his empathy will catch up to his deceptiveness...if it hasn't already."

[So none of the Homo Sapiens can have 'The Empathy'?]

Feyera, now clearly hearing voices, remained too buried in his own recovery. He wanted to regain consciousness, but his strength was all but gone. The conversation his Pokemon were having seemed to be far above him. He felt as if he were underwater. Everything occurring on the surface world took place opaquely through a foggy lens of thought-waves. He could not distinguish the murky telepathic noises. He didn't even feel embodied any longer. Everything felt completely foreign. The slight tension he felt against his left wrist was the only thing he could remember, much less feel at this point.

"July, I'm sure a few people are gifted with empathy. They are some of earth's creatures with the most similarities to us as Gardevoir."

[Really?]

"Yes. In fact, some of us think that we are related to one another through a distant ancestor."

[Told ya the two of them had the same Homo Sapien stuff!]

"Humph. So that's how he sees it?"

[Huh? What's the matter Miss Sana?]

"It's an awful shame his insecurity-driven lies transfer over to you. The truth is he takes after me, not the other way around."

[Don't ya be feelin' bad now Miss Sanaria, Edgie's got the insecurity of an Octillery hiding out in his underwater garden.]

"Ta ha, thanks. I've never met an Octillery but I'll take your word for it Des."

[Aye. The trick is not letting it rub off on you. And if it gets ta be too much fer your heart to handle, just go back into the Poké Ball. No fuss, no muss dearie!]

"Has he been projecting his feelings onto you?"

[Absolutely.]

[Like all the time.]

[The lil' guy hardly knows how to do anything else sometimes. Ta him, must be as natural as roundin' up the cattle at the end o' the day!]

"Well I would say that certainly isn't nice of him. Instancing is made so we can defend ourselves. Outside of that, Gardevoir only use it to positively influence and buff their closest friends. I hope veh Feyera hasn't given you a bad representation of our species as a whole."

['Course not! After all, you're nice Miss Sana!]

[We can deal with him though, we're a tough bunch of Pokemon.]
"You are, especially you Brucie. He's closest to you as a friend."

[Well I don't like to brag but I've known him the longest time. No one else knows Master Chris as well as me!]

"I may have known him sooner than you. However the 'Doctor Feyera' I knew from two years ago was hardly able to empathize with even a fly. Much less a Pokemon."

[Yeah I don't know why he didn't tell us that he knew you outside of the dreams.]

[Hey July, remember how he had MEMORY LOSS?]

[Yeah Brucie, but Miss Sana said it wasn't permanent and could be fixed gradually.]

"Memory loss or not, he's in denial. And the only good thing about being in denial is that it is a step in the process as a whole."

[Process?]

[What's that mean?]

"A transformation of sorts. Growing up. Development."

[Evolution?]

"Ta ha, though he's a scientist, he would not take kindly to that term when referring to himself. Humans make up funny terms to differentiate themselves from the rest of nature."

[M—muh—mutation?]

[He didn't want that either, July!]

"Well he might not want it, but it's already happened to three parts of his body."

[What physically?]

"Yes…his heart, his eyes, and now…now this."

[What?!]

[Wait, no! So he's going to change completely?]

"One can hope. *Sigh* But regardless of what occurs at the corporeal level, I think the mature mentality needs to come first."

[So like acceptance?]

"Exactly, July. That paves the way in our evolution."

[How far along is he?]

"I—I don't know. Unless he did some serious soul searching since he ran off, not very far. Like I said, there is a physical manifestation of my species attributes...It was a wish I made so that he could live. I just don't know, but I want to help push it along…"

[What are you touching his wrist for?]
"It's just so…so much like…Hmmm, I hope he wakes up soon."

[You said that he'd be conscious in no time though.]

"I know, but he isn't recovering from it as quickly as I thought he would. Probably since he cannot channel emotions properly yet. It's too bad; but like I just said, at least he's made some progress rather than no progress. Still he's unbelievably delicate."

[What happened to him?]

"As far as I can tell, an anxiety attack took hold of him and was amplified by his heart. It could have also been an aftershock from employing his Psychic powers without a proper ground."

[Why?]

"Or perhaps it was an existential crisis? Sometimes being on our own can do that, and it leads to anxiety in adolescents."

[I knew it! So it was anxiety.]

[Well yeah, he practically had a bright neon sign displaying it, July.]

[Anxiety eh? This lil' squirt gets those a lot, don't he?]

"Des, I know what it's like for him. I get anxious too. None of us are immune to it. It's a threshold feeling activated on the way to adulthood. Angst, sensing emotion, coming to terms with what one is can be scary. And can be a rather painful process once you realize the responsibility such a purpose demands. I know all too well…"

[Because he's like you right?]

"Yes. He is. It is something he'll continue to deny until he wakes up and realizes what he's done."

[Do you mean literally wake up?]

"I was speaking allegorically, but yeah, once he sees the physical ramifications of using his—and I quote—'psyonics' as well."

[I thought he already saw the repercussions?]

[Yeah after the coconuts!]

"Coconuts…?"

[He tried to grab the coconuts from that tree with his psyonics, because he loves coconuts.]  
 [Ha yeah, oh boy those coconuts…my oh my!]

[Miss Sana, you should have seen the crazed look in his eyes!]

"Teh he, oh does he now? That's…good to know. Very good to know."

[Yeah but he couldn't do it.]

[Whoa now, hold up there pardner ’n lemme get this straight: Edgie can take down a ship's chimney but not a measly coconut?! Argh, blimey the catastrophic satire is too much for me to
"Huh?"

Yikes…All I'm talkin' 'bout dearies is how he's got more to his name than he can use properly. He's got those psyonics, but ain't no way ta employ em practically 'n all.

Oh!

[You're right about that. He was dying to eat the coconuts.]

"Aww the poor thing...how tragic..."

He tried really hard.

"He must have been so blue in sadness."

Sorta.

[Yeah—huh. Then he collapsed…]

[—Like always!]

[…and that happened to his wrist. See? First his mood ring got all weird and glowing green then his wrist changed in color and texture!]

[We think the mood ring did it.]

[We're sure of it!]

[But he said it was 'The Radioactive' and tried to tell us all about the magic of 'The Science'!]

"Magic? You don't say? He he..."

[Haha they are like magic spells: 'Mercurius!' 'Mercurium!' 'Ununseptium!' 'Abra, Kadabra, Alakazam!' Poof!]

[Yeah, he brought out the big words and tried to confuse us.]

"Well that certainly isn't nice considering you put your lives on the line for him day after day."

[To be perfectly honest Miss Sanaria, I think he only wound up confusing himself.]

[He had the look he always has when he gets into things that are over his head!]

[Aw by goodness July, I know THAT Edgie-look like the back of my fin!]
"Yeah, and then all this happened."

"...Veh Feyera has little experience in dealing with emotional embrace. He has no defense, no training. Initially thrust into it, but that will change in time."

[You really think so?]

"Mmm. Oh yes. Seeing this has proven it. I try to have faith."

[Well I'll say just be saying this lil tidbit: that sure sounds like our 'ol galoot of a trainer all right. Ya know, feller's always complaining about getting thrown into things that are more than he can handle, but he always winds up pullin' through! Heck, he spends almost as much time trying to attribute blame as he does fixing problems.]

[Mmhmm!]

[Yeah, imagine if he didn't waste so much time doing that *sigh*.]

"That will go away once he realizes some things are his own fault and cannot be undone."

[I think Mister Feyera has grown up a lot. Think about hit, he wanted me to find you!]

"Hmm...he sent you right? Lord knows if I ask him whether or not he sent his little champion out to find me, he'll aggressively deny it."

[To be fair he has memory loss.]

[Yeah and you did it!]

"Brucie, I told you already, that was unintentional, I only wanted to help him. He was in deadly levels of pain at the time. Besides, I'm sure it isn't affecting him any longer."

[Maybe, I mean he remembers our names and attacks just fine.]

"I'm working hard to give it back to him in his new life."

[New life?]

"Ummm...I mean...what I mean to say was...umm...a new life amnesia free! Yeah hah ha..."

[I personally think Mister Feyera hides behind his amnesia.]

"He he, well he cannot do that forever. Especially with all of these...precious components he now has bursting forth."

[Precious?]

"Umm...Nevermind that. So you were told by him to find me?"

[Yup! He knew he was going to fade out so he said in his scary voice, 'there's only one person who can save me, and that'd be none other than Miss Sanaria herself']

"You're making me blush...Did he really?"

[Well it was something like that! He knew we couldn't do anything but since you are just like him, he knew deep down inside you had to help!]
"Deep down inside?"

[Yeah he had a lot of faith in Brucie finding you.]

[We're like brothers after all!]

"He even used a scary voice?"

[Well kinda, what I meant was that he was dead serious.]

"Scared?"

[Oh you bet. Like a 'just startled by a Bug type Pokemon' kind of scared.]

"Typical. It's like dealing with a Ralts who happens to have all the powers of an adult...*sigh* save the most important: control."

[Control?]"There is a reason why we grow up in three stages. As a child you learn right from wrong, as an adolescent you learn how to do what is right and wrong, and finally as an adult you figure out whether what's right is actually right and what's wrong is actually wrong through controlling your actions."

[We?]"Gardevoir and humans for that matter. It's one of our numerous overlaps."

[What da ya reckon will give him a dose of that adult mindset?]Feyera began to softly stir. He heard the conversation, but could not manage to pull himself out of the half-dream. His body felt tight and compressed almost like an overly crowded bookshelf. Everything: his thoughts, feelings, and even physicality, was so packed into a very small frame metaphorically speaking.

"Nothing short of development. Time. And me... The types of things he runs away from."

[Mmm you are right; he does love to run away from things. I can only think of a few times where he actually confronted his fears.]

"But he can change, I've seen it—no I've felt it."

[Physically?]"I would hope so. They are related. If his mind makes his body change..."

[Then can't you help him out? Since you are already a grown-up Gardevoir?]"Well I'm not all the way grown-up yet. I... Well I suppose that isn't true."

[What do you mean Miss?]"What I meant to say is...*sigh*...I'm not a full adult any more. I was at one point, but a cruel man took that part of me away. He was a person who did not know right from wrong."

[How terrible!]
[Who would do something like that?]

"Like I said: it was someone cruel."

[Aw dearie, I'm sorry.]

[Did you get payback? Maybe Mister Chris Feyera can help you out!]

[Yeah the boss loves to fight Team Rocket! He'll put the bad guys in their place when they mess with him or his friends.]

[Heck, he even takes them on for fun sometimes!]

"Ha…I'm sure he appreciates your praise. However, the one who took away my 'thas' no longer inhabits this world."

[Oh so the bad guy died?]

"I…hope he did."

[Well you don't have to worry any more now that you're with us! We'll keep you safe from any harm, us and Mister Feyera will protect you!]

"Thanks."

[You know Miss Sana, you seem to be pretty grown up even though you were hurt by the bad guy.]

"I appreciate hearing that Brucie. Despite my own personal loss, I still think I have your young trainer beat in maturity."

[He's catching up if his arm has anything to do with it.]

"You…you're right. I pray that he sees it."

[How could he not?! It's the same color as yours Sana.]

"Unfortunately, for Gardevoir it isn't always how something looks. I mean colors are important, but even those are contingent upon how we feel."

[Ya don't say!]

"Feelings come first. But his humanity—or whatever's left of it—should be able to connect the dots."

[Darlin' don't be holdin' yer precious breath on Edgie.]

[He'll say one thing and then the opposite.]

[Yeah he's a basket case. Thanks to all those lies he spreads out onto us like his rouge emotions.]

"Well he is a basket case with true friends, that's for sure."

[Sana, I think you are his friend too.]

"Huh? You really think so, Brucie?"

[Definitely!]
"Between you and me, I'd like to find out if that's true. I would need to feel it. Though what I've already felt tells me something different..."

[Say guys, I think he's finally coming too!]

[Naw Despie, he's just doing the thing where he clutches at his chest again, he's done that all night long.]

"Lucky for him I know what that means. *Sigh* Poor little baby."

[Yeah he's doing that 'moaning and ugh the agony!' routine with his body.]

Indeed Feyera was doing exactly that. With eyes closed tightly, he groaned, looking for the energy to wake up. Occasionally he would reach out a trembling hand only to have to collapse back to his chest from exhaustion.

"Hmm...aw, what's the matter veh Feyera?"

[Sana, what are you doing?]

"Looking for something? Well maybe if I give you just a little..."

Feyera felt a rush of energy enter his core as Sana knelt against him and graced the rims of their hearts. The contact sent visible sparks soaring in between them. Edge jumped as if he were being resuscitated. The adrenaline had fully kicked in, creating a huge amount of vigor. Feyera didn't know what he could do with it, as his internal heart thumped louder and more frequently.

He started by opening his eyes. What he saw came as little surprise. An effeminate Gardevoir loomed over him, her eyes closed and mouth half open in concentration.

"SANA!" he called out.

The Gardevoir's eyes whipped open and she smiled. She held her heart moving the piece away from him, and breaking the treasured contact between them. Sana said nothing and just hummed. Then the radiant scarlet aura covering her eyes disappeared revealing her cherry irises.

[Boss!] Brucie exclaimed from off to the side.

But Feyera's attention was solely focused on the Pokemon in front of him. He tried to take his eyes off her, but could not find the willpower. He could not help but grin, he was happy to be conscious again. She backed away, taking with her the angelic comfort that had recently pervaded his essence via his core. Behind her, the midday sun was brightly reflecting off the great white arched clouds. Their base's cottony gray shadows complemented the fresh blue sky. He could hear the ocean rhythmically lapping against the sand nearby. It was a new day.

"I knew that would work," she said playfully, "always did on Seph."

"What?! What did you do?" Edge shouted, immediately becoming defensive. "I knew you followed me here!"

"Followed you here? Quite the contrary 'Mister Chris Feyera'," Sana said stroking her heart's brim where it had touched Edge.

Edge looked down at his own crimson shard and saw that it too was pulsating with a similar type of verve that matched its mate. "Y—you did, I knew you couldn't let me go, you desperate Gard..."
"DESPERATE?! HA! Desperate?!" Sana hollered in half-laughter. "What were you going to say? 'Desperate Gardevoir'? Because I see only one of those here on this island, and he's in fetal position groveling in the sand at my waistline."

Feyera tried to move and stretch his limbs outwards to avoid being called out on his pathetic state. However as he did so the lack of muscular strength proved debilitating. Harsh gravity pressed against his important joints. He could only outstretch his arms and legs in Staryu shape form. It was rather fitting since he was still on a sandy beach. A small shell pricked the side of his left arm by the Reilken Mercurius, causing him to yelp in pain, "Yowch!"

Sana peered down at the inch of green flesh surrounding his armlet. Feyera desperately tried to take her eyes off it, and pushed his entire arm against the sand in a futile attempt to bury it. However this only served to feed the numblingly intense levels of sensitivity as the coarse granulates abased the flesh. He hated how one sensation led helplessly into another more powerful one. Tossing slightly to the side, he continued to lie on his back, looking directly up at Sana's gentle face, whose pristine gaze would not leave the man's wrist. He quickly spoke, "This is just how I sleep, get over it!"

"I'm not so sure about that." She wagged a small finger playfully, "...But if how you slept before was a sham and this is the real thing, te he, then that makes it even more adorable."

"N—No," Edge tilted his head and saw his team of Pokemon near his side. Thank goodness they were all there. Brucie, July, and Des. They were all watching him in awe. "GUYS!" he shouted at them.

[Master Chris!] Brucie ran up to his trainer and pet his shoulder. The young reptile had some scrapes and bruises on his face and lower torso. They were black and blue, and stood out against his warm red leathery hide.

"Brucie! Are you okay? What happened?" Feyera said as he instinctually reached up a hand bound by the Reilken Mercurius towards his partner's wounds.

[*Cough!* Just a scratch bud. I found Sana for you.]

"You found her?" asked Feyera in feigned confusion. "She was following us right? Stalking us! What a sneaky little…"

[Don't even go there,] said July as she walked parallel to his body.

"What do you mean?" asked Feyera childishly. "I haven't a clue…"

Sana reached down and tapped his Gardevoir heart with a hand; her own frustrations were pushed into his mind unwillingly. They rammed into him like a freight train, widening mental corridors and fracturing walls of his essence.

"OW! N—noooo!" he cried out as the surge of emotional energy flooded his identity.

Edge squirmed for a few seconds before merging to her feelings. His mind's thoughts became a catalyst for each and every one. She then spoke very placidly, "Listen Chris, you can lie to me cause I'll take it."

"Guh…what?" Edge babbled as his mind traced the Gardevoir's every sensation and made them part of his own, automatically synthesizing everything between them.

She continued to tighten against his crimson shard speaking sternly to match her current clutch
over his essence, "I'll actually put up with your nonsense while I wait for you to grow out of your old ways. But your friend here—a friend you don't even deserve, mind you—just risked his valuable life so you would wake up without being hung over from emotional exertion."

"Hung over? What? I don't remember," Feyera began to lie automatically.

[See what'd I tell ya!] said July.

[Chris…don't…don't lie,] Brucie said. [Please don't boss.] He wasn't angry surprisingly. Just tremendously sad to see his trainer buried in such deception.

July continued to clarify exactly what had happened. [I was right here by your side when you told Brucie to go find Sana because you needed her.]

More plumes of emotions continued to bridge the link between trainer and Gardevoir, uniting them in robust psychological integration. The connection's wrought iron beams expanded as Sana pressed further against the core's flat side with her hand and subsequently into Feyera's mind. It was pleasurable, but also traumatizing to have every thought, every sensation, every neuron be efficiently joined to those of another. Its tethers, no longer his and hers, but rather theirs, forced Feyera's mind to shift into higher levels of cognition.

Seeing his green halo-rimmed eyes dilate uncontrollably from the imposed bond she said with a grin, "If you want veh Feyera, I can make you remember through Hypnosis. Although I must warn you it is an emotional experience and because of that you are obviously inept."

"*Gasp* I am not inept! And you're one to talk Sanaria, because of you I cannot remember things! This is your fault!" Edge barked.

"My fault?" Sana said raising her voice. She strained tighter on his shard; she had subconsciously lowered herself to the level where their hearts touched. Mental separation had ended moments ago, and soon physical separation stalled as the area of heart contact grew rapidly. His eyes began to glow a faint scarlet, coating his vision and mimicking Sana's eye aura. Just then, a minor feedback began to start up. Edge felt emotions that were originally his, but had gone through her, come back into his psyches amplified. Their fuel was this crudely formed connection of minds. Quickly, Sanaria pulled away from his core with a desperate tug and the potential feedback fall was neutered. She gasped sporadically, her mind now totally occupied with how the situation nearly spiraled out of control. Her control.

"Huh?" Feyera asked at her almost panic-driven action. Why did she have that timid look in her eyes?

Sana, unwilling to let him know what bullet they had both just dodged, then insouciantly ran a soft hand through her mint green hair. "This is how you thank me for giving you life?"

"You didn't give me life. I was asleep; I even heard your little banter with my Pokemon." Feyera blushed, "Which by the way was totally uncalled for. Don't believe what she says guys, she's too emotional."

[Well now that there's the pot callin' the kettle black, Edgie,] said Desperado.

"She understands emotions more," Feyera huffed. "Cause she's not logical. I at least have the logical side covered. The only reason I needed Sana was to understand the emotional side of an infection I have."

July caught on and pointed out, [Ah ha so you do remember then!]
"Sorry, I got spooked guys; I thought the anxiety attack was worse than it actually was in the heat of the moment. I didn't need Sana to wake me up." Edge tugged at his jacket saying, "She didn't resurrect me."

"Veh Feyera, for once you are right. I didn't give you life just now, I gave you emotion. It may as well be the same though."

"No. Life's..." Edge held off, what was he trying to say? What was life? What else could it be besides what he had just felt?

"And you liked it enough to consume it. I'd be hard pressed to call your delighted Ralts—like grin a consequence of an 'infection',' said the Gardevoir whilst giving a lighthearted laugh. "It's a lot like eating right? But so much better for you than the vile...ugh...pig meats you're used to."

"C—consume?" Feyera repeated in horror. What was happening to him? "No! NO! I won't...!"

"Yes, but that is just the way things for you now aren't they veh Feyera? Gotta take good care to keep your body healthy so that you can grow up big and strong right?" She sarcastically went on, "You want that yes? Regardless of what you say, your body told me that moments ago."

"No—I'm not eating emotions, that's impossible!" Feyera said kicking the sand with the toe of his boot. "You cannot eat thoughts and moods. They aren't even physical. There's no nutritional value to them!"

"But they are so nurturing!" Sana quipped.

"What the hell is that supposed to even mean?!" Edge yelled his rational side aflame. "I don't want to eat those!" he passionately affirmed. His rationality and emotions were blending, converging on the same pathways, forging unprecedented intersections in the mind of the young man. It was traumatizing to find how much ground they now shared in his mind. He wondered what had triggered this sudden unprecedented unification.

"I could tell you, but for a Gardevoir, it is so much more enriching to actually feel something rather than try and dilute it with words." Sana tilted her head to the side and said, "In any event, I was talking about when my wish saved your sorry life two years ago."

"No...no. Wishes don't exist. She's totally gone off the deep end guys. This is why I had to get away from her everyone. Don't you see?" Edge said directing an incriminating finger at Sana's face. "She's manipulative."

[The only one around here manipulating is you,] July pointed out.

[Yeah, all you do is lie mate, we think you might have a problem,] said Brucie. [Why couldn't you trust us? After everything we've been through together?]

"T—Trust you?"

[Yeah like give us something back. Reciprocate. You know like what you do already with your moods.]

Feyera struggled to conscientiously respond to all present parties. "First of all, this is all very temporary; I thought you wouldn't be interested."

"Temp—temporary?" Sanaria said aloud.
That echo from her speaking twice never ceased to startle Edge. He answered carefully, "Yes in fact I think I know exactly how to fix it."

Brucie bombarded him asking, [How?]

"Fix it?" the Gardevoir impetuously asked.

[This sure ought to be good...] Des sighed.

Feyera pushed his neck up, and looked to the beautiful sky, "I'm going to break into the Evercrest facility."

[What?!] they all exclaimed in unison.

[Chris, when you tried something that stupid in Celadon with the Team Rocket Headquarters, you almost got us all killed had your mysterious guardian angel not shown up to save the day!] shouted Brucie who was obviously referring to Fredrick—the enigmatic International Police agent none of them save Edge had met. For all they knew Fredrick could have been a hallucination, or worse yet another pathological lie.

[The bad guys won't let you do it twice!] said July.

Edge forced a rouge smile. "I know. That's why. It's a crazy enough plan to work. They'll never expect that I'll do it again. Team Rocket is collaborating with Cipher after all. They're one and the same according to multiple sources!" However, the only real sources he had were his dream memory and members of Team Rocket like Timothy Rallsen.

[Okay let's say by some miracle you can infiltrate the base, why? What's the point of risking our lives?]

[Lil Brucie brings up a good question,] said Des as she rocked her serpentine body on the sand, getting parts of her wet scaly body covered.

Feyera looked down at his wrist. The bracelet had stopped glowing, but his flesh immediately around it remained off beige green, pale, and sensitive. He hated it. "It all started there, and that's where I'm going to make it end."

"Make it end?" asked Sana with a look of worry in her eyes.

"Yes." Feyera grunted, "I'll break even at least on the moral scale."

[Break even? What's that mean boss?] questioned Brucie at his trainer's side.

"What about who you are? You have to figure that out first before you..."

"What's the point in figuring it out? I'm going to fix it," Feyera exclaimed.

"You can't!" Sana insisted as worry filled her mind. She wasn't ready to lose something that she had held onto for so long.

"And now look who is being overly emotional. Look regardless of what the objective is, one thing is for sure: we need to stop Cipher."

[And you want to play vigilante?]

Edge grinned and nonchalantly responded to July, "Gotta do what you are good at!"
[You're pulling us all into one big fight.]

[Yeah who's to say you won't wind up finding out more stuff you don't want to and break down like last time around?]

"How bad can it be? I can't sink any lower. My past is out in the open, I've got nothing left to lose by doing this."

They all grew eerily quiet hearing Edge say this.

"Chris, if you want to make amends I'll go."

"Sana?" Feyera said perplexed, "You're the last person I thought would be on board with this mission."

She chuckled at Edge calling her a person but did not call it to his attention. "I have faith in you. You can make good."

"Um…right. Yeah sure. Make good," Edge said scratching his head. He knew what he wanted. If doing the right thing coincided with what needed to be done to remove Seph's attributes then lucky him, he'd be considered a benefactor as a bonus. Of course, this role of hero was secondary to his own ambitions.

"And besides, if you want to use any Gardevoir abilities you'll need me at your side." Sana pawed at her left wrist anxiously wanting it to feel the same way Feyera's felt when she touched him there in his sleep.

"Psyonics," Feyera automatically corrected. He paid no attention to what she meant by saying that she needed to be at his side. He assumed she would rescue him if he fell into another one of those pitfalls from over expending his powers. "And I intend on blowing up the God forsaken place when I get what I want."

[Blowing it up?]

"Yeah 'sucking it apart its structural integrity with a gravity well' just sounds wrong; plus, too many syllables, causing the feeling…I mean the meaning to be lost," Edge said as he began to sit up slowly. Sana helped him slightly. "Thanks," he whispered to her.

"Mmm," she nodded cooperatively.

[Ya coulda just said destroy it pardner.]

[He can't destroy it though, Des. He'll hurt himself and maybe others.]

"Relax, Brucie," said Edge. "There are no innocents in there I need to worry about inadvertently killing, that's for sure. And that takes a big burden off my chest from the get-go."

"It does?" Sana asked excitedly.

"Um yeah…I don't see why you're an eager beaver all of a sudden Sana."

"Ah well…I'm enchanted by the prospect of doing something I always wanted to do ever since they took Seph away," she said falsely. For she was not a typical creature of vengeance. The men and women inside the Evercrest facility were expendable. Killing them in anger would not bring her mate back. The only important thing was right here in front of her, Seph's successor. If she had to
fabricate a way to get him to employ more of the heart's power then so be it. The ends justified the means. "Prior to this moment I never had the armaments to even consider an assault on the place."

"Oh. Well, there will plenty of time for doing just that," Edge said, his heart racing with the thought of taking down a group of sadistic scientists he once associated with. Having memories of Progenitor gave him plenty of fuel to want to tear the place asunder. In fact, the predicament he found himself stuck in now took place because of them.

The Gardevoir nodded. "Of course, as long as we do it together veh Feyera," she said slyly. Sana wanted him to be forced into further accepting who he was. What better way than for him to see the atrocities he committed as Chris Feyera? How else could she command him to become repulsed by what he once was and guide him to paving a road into what he would become? It was perfect, she didn't even need to plant the seed in his mind, he'd come to this on his own, and would accept it. If she told him to do something a certain way, he'd childishly grow all defensive and uncooperative. But playing along with his little vigilante mission would be a crude way of making him accept his new role. Really, the only thing she had to do was force him to evoke Seph's shard as frequently as possible since that seemed to have caused the mint green tone of skin to appear on Feyera's arm. The thoughts and expectations caused her to blush and conceal one of her eyes in anticipation.

Feyera on the other hand began to worry about Sana's attachment to him physically. She was still endearing as ever. He wondered if she had told his Pokemon about everything the two of them shared, including that spur of the moment kiss. "Listen, we're going to do things together as a team Sana," Edge said trying to downplay their awkward relationship as much as possible.

"Of course, veh Feyera, of course," Sana said meekly.

[Just when you think it can't get any crazier…]

[You're telling me Brucie,] said July.

Although Edge and Sana were not showing any affection, it was obvious that the two of them were dancing around the past. Their shared past. It was the type of past whose roots kept it coming back even when the stalk was shaved to the ground.

Edge said happily, "Guys, I'm feeling really good about this."

July asked, [How do you even want to get into the base?]?

Feyera smiled. "That's the simple part; they already carved a road for us to take. Talk about easy!"

"So you want to take the path of greatest resistance?" asked Sana.

Edge scratched his head and said, "What does that mean? Don't you mean to say 'take the path of least resistance'?"

Sana pawed at her garment. "If you take the road then we'll be forced to contend with the patrols."

"Well I'm not going through the forest!" Feyera said thinking about the spiders again.

"I can show you the way, I've been here long enough you know. The Pokemon here are tough, but very manageable." She grinned, "And with a Gardevoir heart at my side it will increase my strength exponentially. You could use the experience too."

"No. I'm not going to fill a role for you with my psyonics, Sana!"
"You already have thought!" she sniggered.

"Doesn't matter. Whatever they were hauling around in their little cavalcade was big. Big enough to warrant the use of tanks. We follow that road and I guarantee you it takes us right to the chief of operations," Edge said happy to find that his rational gave him a pathway to Ein. Who knows maybe if Ein helped him undo the Reilken Mercurius' power he'd spare the scientist's life. He did not dare tell Sana this hidden agenda.

She murmured softly, "If that is what you want to do then."

[I suppose we're all on board with you Chris!] said Brucie.

[Well hey now, hold up there pardner! Who died and put you in charge Brucie?] asked Desperado.

[S—Sorry, I just thought…man it feels like old times all over again,] the Charmeleon said smiling ear to ear and clutching the air with his paws.

July smiled, [Yes I know what you are saying. I'm glad to be on an adventure again.]

Brucie looked over at Edge and Sana, then back at July and Des. [It's a mission guys! Chris Feyera and the gang have a new mission!]

Edge beamed at his Pokemon. Sana sat politely at his side smiling to herself. He didn't seem to care. They would be working together and that was all that mattered.

Feyera then beaconed for Sana to come close, and the Gardevoir complied. She brought her tipped ear to his cheek. He asked her in muted telepathy, "You didn't tell them anything about…us right?"

She smiled; Edge could feel every muscle in her face at this close range as she spoke, "What do you even mean?"

Edge paused, wondering if it was all just a dream or a hallucination. Had their kiss really even taken place? "Um I mean…"

She took a quick inhale, and then laughed nervously. "Hah…No. What about 'us'? Stop that. I don't know what you're talking about," she said in short bursts, fully aware of what he meant.

"Exactly," Feyera said. Oddly, he felt it difficult to pull away from her face. Still he managed to do so when considering the challenge ahead. Though it definitely was a struggle, almost like tearing off a bandage. "Right so on to logistics: Brucie are you hurt from trying to find Sana?"

[Not really boss. It was actually her who wound up finding me.]

Feyera's jaw dropped, "What are you talking about?"

[Um boss,] Brucie looked down at the sand between his legs, [I messed up. Got lost and was surrounded by the wild Pokemon in no time. The Ariados were going to eat me. I tried using my Flamethrower like always when we're in battle but it just wasn't the same. I was just looking forward. I got flanked.]

Feyera became nervous about how dependent Brucie was on his psyonic control. However, he continued to listen to his Pokemon's tale rather than unveil the repercussions of siphoning.

[There were ten, maybe more of them. All very hungry. My flame tail must have given me away. They roughly me up first, to make sure I was tender enough to eat.]
"That's awful!" said Feyera. His fear of insects in general was not aided by Brucie's little anecdote.

[Yeah packed quite a wallop with all their spiny legs. I was getting hit from all directions. And then the big Ariados was about to sew me up in string to feed to her little babies when I shot fire right at her face as she coiled her body around me.]

"Good job!" Edge said, trying to fight off his squeamishness.

[Yeah but there were still like nine others Master Chris! Just when I thought it was over for me and my goose was cooked, I saw a faint purple glow cut straight through one of the larger spiders.]

"Purple glow?" Feyera asked, looking over at Sana who smiled crookedly in response. Her mint green hair bangs flopped in front of her eye closest to Feyera as she tilted towards him mischievously.

[Yeah I thought it was you at first boss!] Brucie said with overactive body language, [But that didn't make sense since you were out cold when I left.]

Edge shrugged, "Well Sana can use some powers similar to my psyonics."

"Hey," Sana nudged Feyera in his side playfully with her elbow. "I think it's the other way around actually."

"My Pokemon have known me longer than you, so I'm the standard!" Feyera argued childishly.

"Oh so now you want to be the stock Gardevoir?"

"NO! I'm a person."

[Whatever you two,] Brucie growled, [point is she saved my hide!]

Feyera looked at the bruises and scratches riddling his first Pokemon's body. This was real. None of this could have been made up. He slanted his neck to face Sana and forced a "Thanks."

The Gardevoir smiled and nodded quietly.

[I was done for if she didn't help me out.]

"It was really nothing. Their partial Poison typing makes for short work," Sana said modestly.

[Yeah but you handled them all Miss Sana! I had a type advantage too by being a Fire type, and look where that got me!] Brucie looked at his Pokemon savior with awe, [You're amazing!]

"Brucie, all I did was give them something to fear," she looked menacingly over at Edge, "For a Gardevoir, emotions are your best friends, but can also be your own undoing."

Edge felt as if he was being targeted. He tried to bring her down a few pegs by saying, "So you used Psychic and spooked the spiders. *Huff!* Big deal."

[The big deal is she saved my life, boss!] Brucie shouted in defense of his rescuer.

"No veh Feyera, a small field Confusion attack followed by surgical Psyshock sufficed just fine," Sana said, trying not to brag. "A full out Psychic assault would be overkill."

Edge looked at her in astonishment, and recoiled slightly. She really was powerful despite all the times he'd try and diminish her. "Full out…?"
She gave him a leer as he backed away from her body, "What's wrong? You haven't learned those moves yet?"

"I don't learn. I order. That's what Pokemon trainers do," Edge growled feeling surprisingly insecure.

"Of course you do," the Gardevoir satirically said. "You definitely have the very first part of your little 'Pokemon Trainer's Mission Statement' figured out."

[Yeah he's good at it,] said July oblivious to the Gardevoir's hidden jab at the Gloom's trainer.

"*Sigh*" Edge breathed out softly, unwilling to take the criticism's bait. "Next order of business, Desperado?"

[Hmmm? What can I do for you to make yer day?] the ferocious looking Gyarados asked. The thing about Des is she was impossible to judge based on appearance. Although small thanks to siphoning, she was still a killer. The thing was she happened to be a killer with a big heart.

"I'm guessing you couldn't find the yacht."

[Nope not a chance, sugar.]

"Darn it…" Edge whispered. Everything was riding on them finding the boat. That was the only foreseeable way off this island barring infiltrating Evercrest and stealing a vessel. Now it looked like they had no other choice but to break into Evercrest in order to even get a chance to leave Chrono Island. Edge considered all the supplies he had in the boat. His clothes, his badges, and even his wallet were in the knapsack. But most importantly, Brucie's medication was there too. If they couldn't get back there in a week, the Toxic would resume its effect. Hopefully Lorelei had just traveled back to her nearby home island of Floe. Feyera frowned at the unlucky turn of events.

[But what I did find was sumtin 'else entirely!]

"Really?" Edge asked the coiled up sea creature in hope.

She nodded eagerly, [Oh yes!]

"Well what was it?" Edge gasped, hoping she had found a small village or resort he'd never heard of. It seemed unlikely, but his emotion backed fantasy trumped the reality of the island being a Pokemon reservation.

[Well now, listen here nice n' close. There were these really big gallopin' tracks going into the woods south west of here, and my word they were unlike anything I've ever seen before!]

Feyera released his held breath in discouragement. "I know Des; we passed through them on our way to the beach. I'm putting money on them belonging to Cipher."

[Ya sure right? I'm just lettin ya know they went all the way out to the water's edge! Do ya think it was them ridin' out into the ocean?]

"Absolutely, who else would be on this island?"

[Well I dunno honestly. It seems like you're off makin' assumptions again!]

"Your trainer is right Des; the scientists are the only people who live on Chrono Island," said Sana. "At least as far as I know."
Edge tugged on his bronze hair. "So what we know so far is that Cipher's mobilized recently. They obviously went to the water here and back. And it must have been important if it made them rush to the shore like they did, toppling over trees and whatnot."

[What do you think they're after?] asked Brucie.

"Beats me. I mean it could have something to do with the earthquake."

[Earthquake?]

"Yeah," Edge said deep in thought. "The whole picture doesn't make sense. We're missing a key component. Chrono Island doesn't get earthquakes; the closest fault line is Cinnabar Island's inactive volcano far to the north of here."

Feyera looked over at Sana who promptly said, "Don't look at me! I don't know!"

"Okay, well that's fine. We're gonna find out. That's what good scientists do, they figure things out! I think that takes care of everything—*grumble*," Edge found his concluding remarks interrupted by his stomach growling.

"Haha aww are you hungry still?" Sana teased.

"Obviously," Edge said holding his stomach.

"Well..."

Seeing where she was going he interrupted, "I don't eat emotions. I'm not like that."

"Aww sure you're not," Sana said as the Gardevoir twirled some hair hovering above her shoulder.

"The only thing I use emotions for is to summon psyonic energy. And to talk to my Pokemon. That is all," Edge abruptly decided.

"Oh?" Sana released the strand of hair and it bounced back into place, "Then why don't you grab a scrumptious coconut up there with your 'psyonics'?"

"I—I...hrm coconuts..." Edge said fighting off the desire his body naturally projected. They were appetizing. He may have grown full after doing whatever it was that he did before being knocked out by anxiety, but the temptation to eat fresh coconuts had not diminished one bit.

Sana grinned in delight seeing the soft rose tinted waves emerge from his core. "I bet they taste... mmm...delicious."

"N—no! Last time I did that my arm got all messed up. I'm not going to do that again. Despie, topple that palm tree with your tail now! Thrash attack!" he ordered.

[Roger that cap'n!] she said soaring through the air and taking her strong scaly tail to the palm's bark.

She walloped against the base of the tree with a few swipes, getting her aim right. Edge and company backed off as she continued to wreck loud havoc on the pristine beach.

[Timber!] yelled the Gyarados. After a strong hit, with a loud snap, the tree came toppling down onto the fine sand.

"Thanks Despie! You're the best!" Edge said rushing over to the leafy part of the tree. He greedily
grabbed onto one of the ripe coconuts and begun to smash it against a nearby shore rock frantically.

[Aw, anytime pardner,] said Des. [Hope I didn't make too much of a ruckus!]

Brucie put his hands on his hips and said, [Boss really wants to eat a coconut.]

[Yeah haha he looks like a Mankey!] said July.

"You're right July, he does sorta," Sana said as she gracefully walked over to the struggling young man.

Edge was completely tuned out to his Pokemon and focused on one thing. He wanted to prove to himself that he could find food on the island, and his stomach urged him on. Of course, Edge also wanted to eat one of his favorite foods. The young man continuously slammed the fruit upon the sharp rock, waiting for it to split and reveal the milky goodness within. "Clunk! Clunk! Clunk!"

[Need some help there, pardner?] Des asked as she approached her trainer cautiously. [I can give it a good ol' Bite…I'll pretend it's a Gastly!]

Edge shook his head, refusing to take his eyes off the stubborn drupe in his trembling hands, "N—no! I got this. If you chomp on it all the yummy juice inside will spill out."

[Um okay,] Des said looking back out at the sea.

"Almost got it…" Edge said biting his lip. His left arm had grown weaker than his right so he had to compensate slightly, using the left to aim and the right for power.

"Veh Feyera, there is a better way to…"

"SNAP! Crack!"

"Ah ha!" said the trainer. He began to pant, for the constant whaling on the coconut had worn him out. He didn't have the stamina to do anything physical for very long. Even something as menial as swinging his arms up and down repeatedly tired him.

"Good job, now make sure to drink all the juice before it pours out."

"Sana I know how to eat a coconut. For goodness sake," he muttered. Here she was telling him what to do and treating him like an imbecile.

She laughed to herself keeping what Brucie told her about Feyera's adoration for the fruit a secret for now. "Oh I know you do," she whispered.

Edge pulled apart the shell and raised his mouth to the crack; however, nothing came out of the coconut. He shook it a few times waiting for the watery substance to pour out. It never did, the fruit was hallow. "Hey what gives!" he yelled at the fruit.

"Hmm?" Sana asked. "Something wrong?"

"Yes, this one's empty! How the heck does that happen?!" he bellowed, tossing the pieces to the side and picking up another one.

"Oh my, that really is strange," Sana acknowledged.

Edge smashed another coconut on the rock, and this time his frustration helped him to split it right
open with a loud "Snap!" He puckered his lips and put them up to where he had broken the fruit, but once again nothing came out.

"You... have got to be kidding me!" he yelled at the fruit. "Des you knocked over a bum tree! This one's fruits suck."

Des pouted, [Well hey now I just did whatcha asked me to do Edgie.]

[At least she did a better job at getting them than you did when you tried,] July said honestly.

"That's the thing though, if I knew they were empty then I wouldn't have: A, tried to use psyonics to bring them down and B, told Des to topple the tree...! *huff*" Edge grumbled, "And now I'm hungry again."

[Well quit being grumpy otherwise we don't want to be around you since you impose that bad temperament upon us,] said July.

[I'm with her on that one, Edgie sorry pardner but you're bringing us down with your attitude.]

"Whatever. Okay return," Feyera said drawing July and Des back into their respective Poké Balls.

Sana walked over to him and knelt down to pick up the fractured shells of the coconuts he discarded. "Chris, you can still eat the fleshy parts inside. You don't have to toss away the whole thing just because it doesn't have the milk you want, don't be foolish."

Edge looked at her in bewilderment. "Did you take it away with your Psychic powers?"

"What?! What are you talking about veh Feyera?"

"I think you did, you are trying to teach me a lesson aren't you?!" Edge scolded. "It's another one of your stupid Gardevoir tricks!"

"What? No! You're acting crazy now. Why would I do that?"

Edge shot daggers at her with his eyes, "I can think of several reasons why. How's this for starters: you want me to be stuck consuming emotions! Well that's not going to happen, you'll starve me first!"

"Listen to yourself veh Feyera! You're hungry and need sustenance. Especially if you're so uninclined to consume emotion." The Gardevoir nudged the fruit near his mouth saying, "Come on, try it."

Edge peered at the interior of the fruit half she held in her hand. Inside, it was covered in a chalky white layer of solidified coconut jelly. His mouth began to water. The smell alone was enough to make him salivate.

"Go on, take it. I'm not going to feed you like a baby!" Sana laughed.

Feyera reached out and snapped a bit of the fruit's core out with a precise fingernail. Trembling, he put the warm piece to his mouth. It tasted delicious. Feyera couldn't believe he had gotten all bent out of shape about just not being able to drink the coconut milk, eating the fleshy fruit was as Sana had said, just as good. Edge never really ate coconuts this fresh. They were always transported from plantations, so it was a real treat to taste one this fresh. It was right off the branch! He took the rest of the shell half and began clawing into it to retrieve more of the succulent fruit.
Sana watched as he gobbled up the rest of the fruit and wiped his mouth with his jacket's sleeve. "Feel better?" she asked full of wonder.

Edge nodded. "Lots better." He felt happy. There was no nausea like there was when he tried to eat the Dwellerberries.

Sana handed the trainer the other half of the first coconut he had broken and scooted close to him. "Here, there you go."

"Thanks," Feyera said with a smile. Finally, things were going well. "You have no idea how good these are."

He took another bite or two and then Sana asked him, "How do coconuts make you feel?"

Mouth still full of food, he looked at her and raised a brow. Swallowing, he answered as simply as possible so he could resume eating, "Good, they are tasty."

"Are they now?" she asked. "Don't they make you happy?"

"Err…yeah I guess they do," Feyera replied not really wanting to be interrupted by Sana's prodding. She could tell that he was happy. It was getting to the point where whenever he didn't complain chances were he was happy. Like July had said before, he was frequently grumpy.

Edge put another piece into his mouth and was about to swallow, when he felt a tightness in his chest. It pulled and tensioned his whole torso. "Huh?" He looked down to see Sana resting a finger on the Gardevoir heart. The constriction of his chest made him worry. "What are you doing Sana?!"

"Oh nothing, just showing you how easy it is to eat without being wasteful."

"What are you talking about? Get your hand off me," he ordered.

Brucie looked on from afar, easily just as confused as Edge was right now. He let the two of them continue whatever it was they were doing, figuring they would work it out in time.

"Off…you?" she asked with a devious grin. "Is this really you?"

"Not me, I mean it, this awful thing on my chest!" Edge corrected.

"Just relax," Sana said as she stroked its edge. "Your happiness is feeding yourself. Don't you feel it? You only need to eat a little bit of something that makes you feel happy and then the heart amplifies those feelings to make for a full meal."

"I—what?" Feyera squirmed. "NO! I told you already I'm not eating any emotions. Just food."

"They are the same for us. One leads to the other," Sana said as she twirled her wrist. "Let me ask you: are you still hungry?"

"Umm…" He certainly did not feel as hungry. It was very strange. He hardly ate a single coconut and felt as if he'd had a three course meal.

Sana could tell by his expression that he felt satisfied. "See? You just have to be picky about what you eat since your mood corresponds to how well your body amplifies its nutritional effect."

Feyera tapped on the sand with his free hand. "That's…"
"Not possible?" Sana joked, removing her hand from his heart with a swift flick. "You know how it feels now—I feel it through you—so how can you say otherwise?"

"You tricked me. I said I didn't want to."

"Listen, I didn't trick you. I just didn't want you to starve to death, and you were being difficult!"

"No, before too, when you took the milk out of the coconuts!"

"Will you stop accusing me of such silly things veh Feyera? How can I even absorb milk out of coconuts?"

"You're a Gardevoir! You can do weird things!"

"Here we go again..." Sana stroked her perfectly sloped temple, "The only 'absorbing' I can do deals with your emotions through the union of our hearts. Be glad I'm not asking for payback for feeding you my own emotions back when you were sleeping!"

Feyera's face went white as a sheet in fright, "Y—you can do that?"

She gave him a half smile, "Of course I can. Did you think it was just a one way street? We provide for one another, even in the small ways. For instance, when I touched your heart just now, I tasted exactly what you were tasting."

"I—I don't want to..."

"Humph, you don't feel like sharing?" she asked crossing her arms.

Edge shook his head and muttered, "N—no. Please, you've done enough to me."

"Have I?" the Gardevoir raised her hand and slowly inched it towards the man's chest.

[Hey, easy does it you two!] Brucie said walking over to them.

"Thanks, Brucie, things were about to get—" he peered at Sana's innocent face, "—a little out of control."

"Oh you have no idea," she whispered.

"What was that?" Feyera asked in alarm.

Sana smiled softly and clutched her heart with both hands saying, "Let's just do what you said you wanted to do now that you're fed and happy."

"F—Fine! But it all ends soon so don't be getting attached," Edge said full of hostility.

Sana looked threateningly at his shard. "Oh don't worry; I won't be getting anymore attached to your humanity. I have my standards."

"I'll remember that..." Edge mocked knowing full well how their kiss had made her feel. Either she had changed dramatically in her preferences or she was lying. Based on the way her body radiated liquid ruby desire when they kissed made it evident that the attraction was there. Times like these caused him to appreciate his Gardevoir derived psyonic powers. He liked when they gave him insight and knowledge.

Feyera tossed the other coconut to Brucie. The Charmeleon ate part of it and frowned. [You really
like these things?"

"Of course I do!" Feyera retorted. "How could you not like them?"

[Hmm to each his own I guess,] the Charmeleon said puckering his lips.

"I like coconuts too veh Feyera, they are delicious."

"You do?"

"Yes, but now I've gained a new appreciation for them," Sana said like a ghost. Feyera could only imagine what that entailed. Had she truly taken pleasure from his pleasure? It was possible. Once again, the dastardly occurrence of her mate's attributes melding with his own had to be thought of as only temporary in order for Edge to function. Seeing it as long lasting made him dizzy. The thought of it being permanent made him nauseous.

In spite of all of his buried anxieties, he mustered enough courage to face his next challenge, "Alright guys, it's time to move out."

[Give us the play then,] said Brucie excitedly.

"Okay, so I'm going to recall all of you to your respective Poké Balls. It will help you conserve energy for whatever resistance we find once we get to the Cipher base."

Brucie keenly observed his trainer only possessing three Poké Balls in his hands. One for each of them, but not for his newest companion. He struggled to say, [What about Miss Sanaria though?]

The Gardevoir blushed. "What about me?"

[You are not going to rest in the Poké Ball?]

"I erm…" Edge fretted as he desperately searched for an adequate excuse.

"Oh, he he, I like to travel out with my Pokemon trainer."

"You err…what?" Edge asked her gentle face in confusion. He wasn't her Pokemon trainer. At least not that he knew of. She didn't have a Poké Ball. Feyera didn't even have a spare Poké Ball on his person thanks to leaving his supplies on Lorelei's yacht.

She winked at him with a heavy lidded eye, "Yeah don't you remember how you endearingly told me that when you 'caught me' veh Feyera?"

Edge Feyera grew beet red as his lie caught up to him. His brow began to sweat. Brucie must have told her the propaganda he'd been spewing after their falling out.

"I'll always travel with you as my companion,' you said." Sana rubbed her rail thin knees as she got up, "Besides, that's only customary. And I'm happy you've embraced that part of our culture, Chris."

[Customary?] asked Brucie.

"Yes Brucie, for Gardevoir. We have to stay...close to each other. Very, very...close." She giggled girlishly, "Otherwise things like what happened to veh Feyera last night occur. And none of us would want that, now would we?"

Edge shook his head in disbelief, she was so conniving.
[Oh...I see,] Brucie said. He could never tell what was going on between his trainer and Sanaria. One second they were bickering, and the next they were trying to spend time together. It was definitely a complicated relationship. The likelihood of it being romantic wavered with the wind. Only one thing was for sure, there was enough tension between Chis and Sana to cut through with a Slash attack.

"Um, yeah...so Sana—um I guess she's going to be accompanying me that way Brucie," Feyera said afraid to find out what he might have unwillingly signed up for. "You know, until this is all sorted and fixed."

Sana nodded and revealed her small pearly teeth, "Protectors protecting each other. That's how it works."

[But I protect Mister Chris too!] Brucie insisted.

"Oh I know that you do Brucie. You do so in more ways then he'll admit. Don't feel so bad, he's just a grumpster."

"You know I'm sitting right next to you Sana!" Edge interrupted.

She nudged him playfully with her knee. "...But he needs a certain someone who is just like him so that he can find his way."

[Just like him?]

"Err...Brucie, what she means to say is because we are both fully grown up, me a human adult and her a Ralts-line adult, we have a mutual responsibility as grown-ups," Feyera said in desperation. "Sorta like the leaders of our respective species. You know...the ones...umm...in charge of things."

Sana pierced him with a dark gaze, "Yes exactly...the ones in control of the situation."

Brucie showed his fangs with a smile, [I want to be an adult too so that I can travel with you! I can be the Charmander grown-up of your pack!]

"You'll get there one day bud, I promise," Edge lied through his teeth.

[Okay great!] Brucie closed both his eyes and grinned in eudemonia, clenching both his paws in excited fists. [I can't wait! We'll go on missions all the time then.]

Feyera fought off sorrow by looking at Sana. She seemed to acknowledge his fib. She even answered for him, "Brucie, Chris veh Feyera loves you dearly and wants the best for you."

[Aww, I know that Sana! You don't need to tell me things like that!] Brucie said as he grabbed at his tail and played with it joyfully. [Pah, singing me praises for doing my job...keep that up and you'll wind up making me slack off!] However, the truth was Brucie did like to hear that his trainer cared about him, and he liked it even more when Edge respected him. The former was always easier to see than the latter.

"Yeah, so don't worry; I'll be calling on you first if I need anything. You're someone I can depend on!" the trainer said.

[Thanks! Good luck Mister and Miss.]

Edge deftly returned his Charmeleon to the creature's Poké Ball confides with a quick swish and
click on the sphere's exterior button. "Mister and Miss', what the hell is he thinking…” muttered Feyera.

"I thought it was rather cute," she said stroking her short garment's ridges.

"Cute isn't the first word I'd use to describe what you and I did back there…” Edge said speaking of their impromptu kiss following the feedback fall yesterday. At least she hadn't told his Pokemon, but that didn't change the fact of the matter that they had kissed.

Sana's once pale cream cheeks flushed rose, "Listen, we need to talk."

"Agreed," Edge said as dryly as possible.

She seemed to be surprised by his willing cooperation, but paid little heed to it since her mind was going a million miles a minute. "What we did back then, before our fight..."

"Yeah?" Feyera wiped away some perspiration from his upper lip. "What about it?"

The Gardevoir looked at his chest, "That was just me seeing you as Seph."

"And that was just me seeing you as Lorelei!" Edge retorted. He was happy to have his excuse primed, for if he had paused it may have given her the wrong impression, revealing that he was not one-hundred-percent sure of where he stood.

"Okay, *phew* so this isn't awkward right?"

"No of course not," the trainer lied. Of course it was awkward. It was probably the most awkward thing he had ever done. Kissing a Gardevoir. Why if the authorities caught wind of that, he'd be representationally crucified for Pokephilia. But legality aside, it was still uncomfortable as sin in retrospect. It was strange, it felt so right in the moment, but now looking back it was completely insane.

Sana sighed, "I'm glad. Okay, so we can just move on...right?"

"Yeah the way I see it is we were both just delirious. You were masquerading as my love interest after all!" Feyera thought about how he could practically smell Lorelei's coconut cream perfume when Sana imitated the Elite Four member in his dreams. But also when they had kissed. "Must have been delirium."

"Agreed," Sana said aloud exactly like he had not less than a minute ago, mimicking the same dryness.

Edge stood up straight, ready to employ his mastered skill of denial, "Let's pretend it didn't happen!"

She poked him affectionately and put her slender arm around his shoulder. Sana asked innocently, "What happened?"

"Haha, exactly!" he laughed, but still felt mildly uncomfortable by her sporadic physical advance. It was almost as if she were contradicting herself. One minute she pushed him away and then then the next she was on the road to embracing him. Maybe that was just how Gardevoir behaved. They were touchy feely because of all those emotions. As long as he didn't start acting that way, he was willing to accept that oddity.

"So are you ready to go, Feyera?" Sana asked him, only taking her eyes off his face for a moment
to look at the jungle to the south.

Feyera nodded, "Yeah, you bet Sana! Let's go!"

She hummed softly in agreement and the two bolted towards the humid forest in hopes of finding the mysterious pathway made by Cipher. That road, so full of promise, would lead them both to exactly what they wanted.
Sana and Feyera deftly moved through the thick jungle plants in the northern part of Chrono Island. The humidity and moist leaves alike pressed against them as they cut though the underbrush, and headed south in search of the cryptic thoroughfare.

It had not been more than a half hour before the two of them were walking together on the pathway amid large Pokemon footprints and tread marks alike. The forest around them was disturbingly noiseless. Not even the occasional insect buzzed. Their respective footwear, Edge's black Alterieno boots and Sana's white leg guards, made the only audible sounds, occasionally snapping twigs and leaves as they walked along side by side through the soft earth recently disrupted by Cipher's cryptic machinery. The automotives Feyera knew about were not able to cut through the thicket in the way these tracks suggested. They were practically on a highway in the middle of nowhere. And that nowhere was a reservation for wild Pokemon. Or at least it was supposed to be by the standards of decent folks; Edge knew that the Evercrest facility was here. That meant one important thing, no contact with the outside world. He anxiously took his eyes off the substantial trail and looked over at his Gardevoir companion.

Sanaria seemed to have calmed down a fair deal since they were reunited. She wasn't antagonizing him and that made Feyera felt good, positively feeding back to him because the last thing he needed was her bickering with him. Unfortunately, his mind wandered back to what he would have done if she were in fact able to manipulate him. Such thoughts disturbed him, for he had already seen their repercussions through her use of his heart. Strangely, like him—and Brucie for that matter—Sana seemed to be very mission-oriented. It was bizarre, but who was he to argue with extra help? He needed all the resources he could get ahold of. And for such resources to be employed successfully, they had to be working in harmony, much like the different components of a piece of machinery or even a body for that matter. Though Edge cringed at the thought of comparing his body to a "piece of machinery" since it gave out on him so often thanks to no other reason besides the deplorable Gardevoir traits. At least Sana seemed capable of using Psychic powers. That was a good thing; he did not want to have to rely on his psyonics for multiple reasons.

Feyera exhaled loudly. So what if she had tried to show him a few things Gardevoir did? It was not the absolute worst thing in the world. Thanks to her, he wasn't starving. He felt like his mind was trying to rationalize everything that had taken place, and marching along near her gave him all the time to do exactly that. He smiled, willing to at least make conversation with the Gardevoir, an action that previously felt impossible amid the emotional turmoil coming along with realizing his growing dependency on her. For now, she would at least be there in case he messed things up, as he was so very prone to doing.

"Say Sana…" Edge said quietly.

"Yes, veh Feyera?" she answered with a hum.

What was he even going to say to her? What could he say? He wanted to be comforted; the unusual environment had put him on edge. Granted, the likelihood of them encountering Ariados was slim, but it was still strange to be traveling this far away from any civilization. He thought generically and asked with a tight face, "Is it always this quiet here in the jungle?"
She pushed a few leaves out of the way, as she walked along the uneven earth next to him saying calmly, "Depends on where you are. The meadow is always quiet."

Feyera thought about how he had learned nearly everything about his past in that meadow. The experience as a whole was completely eye opening. From his previous lifestyle to Sana's consoling abilities as a Gardevoir, everything overwhelmed. He felt overrun, hit by a freight train, drowning in the revelation and emotion that accompanied it. And yet it was sublimely bearable. Just thinking about all the positive feelings they shared made him wish that they never fought. A stubborn side of him would not let this feeling become vocalized, so instead he murmured, "Mmmhmm yeah the meadow…that meadow."

"The one where we met," Sana clarified. She was stating the obvious. Perhaps she felt the same way he did. For both of them it was a bittersweet moment. Not one that was easy, but necessary.

Edge's gaze darkened, "Yeah. I know. Though you could have said we met two years ago on the cliffs of this island."

"True. But did we really meet there?" she asked.

Feyera brushed his sweaty bronze hair back, considering what she could have meant by saying that. Did she think that he remembered meeting her as Sephiteos? "Yeah. Yeah we did. Where else would we have met?" he said nervously.

"I guess you're right," she grumbled. It was endearing to hear her adopt such a distinctively personal emotion. "Well I like to associate with positive memories. Don't you?"

Edge nodded, "I guess. Who doesn't?" He never liked to think about bad things which occurred in the past. Getting caught by the snares of inadequacy was all too easy, especially with his dark past. And many of these dark actions were triggered by things that were beyond his control. He had all but forgotten the death of his mother. Mister Feyera compartmentalized aspects of his life to deal with pain. Only recently, did he begin to question whether or not this was really right for him to do. It didn't make the bad things go away, it just hid them. But how else could he cope? It wasn't his fault, he was just a man trying to deal with a card deck stacked against him. It was worse than Celadon's Casino Strip. In life, the house always won.

Sana saw that he was thinking hard. "Well it is especially important for Gardevoir to focus on their good experiences."

"Why is that?" asked Edge, who didn't outright deny for once out of curiosity. Besides, dealing with past experiences was something they shared. It wasn't strictly a Gardevoir trait. As a human, he had memories, even though a lot of them were shattered by none other than Sana.

Sana seemed to be stunned by his lessened animosity. It was unusual for Feyera to carry a conversation this far when dealing with his Gardevoir attributes. She focused her gaze on the road ahead as it narrowed slightly saying, "You gotta look between the lines veh Feyera. It about growing up as someone who's permanently anchored to emotion. People have this aspect too, don't they?"

Edge thought about how true this was. Perhaps some people were really in touch to their emotions, but they were usually artsy and uncoordinated. He on the other hand was a scientist, and a darn good one back in his glory days. That's what made everything so difficult. It was the embrace of emotion, the steady creeping of feelings and perceptions not completely foreign, but amplified to their unnatural extremes.
Edge huffed in some moist air. "Hmmm…You know, I bet you're right. But the only problem is the people that are typically emotional in human society are loony."

"L—loony?" Sana repeated aloud.

Edge still jumped when she did that. She sounded different. He wondered whether all Gardevoir could talk like she had begun to. It was certainly a mystery since he hardly knew anything about the species. Considering their parallels to human beings, it seemed not too far out of the ordinary. Plus, they were Psychic types, able to link to minds and learn new things at fast rates making the entire concept of how he had begun to relate to her seem less farfetched. Of course Feyera was not willing to at least acknowledge the possibility that the horn upon his chest allowed him to become closer to her. He was the center of things.

Edge said frailly, "Yeah 'loony' like as in the moon: crazy. Loony people are the types that think we can go to the moon. They get all these wild ideas and expect it to just magically happen!"

"Ha ha! Go to the moon?!" Sana squeaked. "Why on earth would you want to go to the moon?"

"I don't know," Feyera shrugged. "It would be interesting I guess. Even though it's a stupid dead rock, it still has objective value."

"You think so? I think it's pretty."

"Yeah I know how you feel about the moon. Remember we talked about it at length before?" Edge said feeling fond of that conversation. They didn't have to get along, but he was happy their past wasn't totally drenched in hostility.

"Te he yeah I do. That was a nice talk," she said agreeably.

Edge gave her a faint affirmation with a tilt of his head.

Sana read his body language seamlessly and asked, "Say, veh Feyera, you're a scientist—or at least you used to be; do you think earth looks like the moon when you are on the moon?"

Edge thought about it. Barring the ridiculous concept of being able to make it to the moon, a creative side of him allowed for him to imagine it. "Umm…I have no idea. Earth is probably a lot…bluer. Cause of the oceans 'n all."

"It must be pretty then. I would visit the moon just to see that!"

"Yeah, there's a problem though. Theoretically, it's absolutely impossible to send a rocket ship that far away. The earth's gravitational pull is too much to overcome," Edge said with a frown. "The amount of fuel you would need to carry in order to launch a ship that far out of the atmosphere would weigh the craft down too much, and you would be backpedaling before even leaving the stratosphere. Granted, once you were in actual outer space, you could probably go anywhere you wanted to since there isn't any more of ol' Isaac holding you down."

Sana saw Edge pondering and answered, "I know the feeling."

"Ha! You aren't a rocket though Sana," Edge said imagining her dressed up as a member of Team Rocket. Even though that's not what he had meant, it was still a funny image for the young man. He thought black and red would suit her for some strange reason.

"Hmm," she looked skeptically at him, as his eyes wandered, "maybe not. But as a Gardevoir I can feel the pull of the earth. Sometimes it even lets me go for a little bit when I jump. But it is always
Feyera looked off into the distance and said, "Of course. That isn't restricted to just your species though. What you are talking about is called gravity. It's a universal force measured in 'Newtons'. On earth it's nine point eight one meters per—"

Sana abruptly cut him off, though she did so gently. "I know what gravity is. It's how heavy something feels on you," she said with conviction while giving him a small bow of her head.

Feyera huffed out of his nose, aware of the circular logic she would inevitably turn to should he condemn her subjective experience, "Whatever. Listen, I'm not trying to say you're wrong…"

Sana chuckled, "Oh you're not? Well that's new! You never cease to amaze me with your changing ways."

She spoke the truth. Edge was always shifting in his moods, similar to her. Sana's unstable base for her moods was due to a condition she had been subjected to for two long years. She considered how close she had come to filling the void placed into her life by Chris and his associates two years ago. All these rouge shifts in demeanor would diminish in due time if she could keep Feyera close to her. If she could successfully do that, it would only be a matter of time before the 'Equipoise' returned. At least now that she had her other half with her it wasn't so much a race against the clock, though she did hope the progression of Seph's attributes would continue exponentially.

Sanaria did not know exactly what triggered them. In her mind, it could have been practically anything based on the wish she had made. She danced in her mind with the potential possibilities. Maybe it was the armlet Feyera wore which advanced the growth. Or perhaps it was the young man invoking Seph's powers. It could even be something as simple as being around her even since she considered herself to be the cause. Then again, the Gardevoir doubted it was simply just a single one of these things and instead contributed the slow metamorphosis to his embrace of emotions through integration of their constituents. Namely, their inflaming passion guiding his behavior. And that was seen constantly because of both parties lacking an equilibrium. Though they would argue with one another, this was better than him remaining apathetic and consequently pausing the overall process.

Feyera vented his pent up frustration by stomping on a fallen tree as he clambered over it. "Listen, Sana I'm trying to be…civil. There is a way to logically understand everything is all I'm trying to say."

"Are you certain?" Sana lightly shook her head. She was happy that he was at least not trying to deconstruct her perspective. It was probably because he wanted something out of her still. That utility-based-understanding-of-the-world aspect of Chris Feyera was exactly what she had hoped was on his way out. She wondered exactly how it would work. Would he just wake up one day as her mate? Even if he had a human form that wasn't the worst thing in the world. But at this point, that did not look like it would be the case for much longer. Perhaps she could not control exactly how the process went, but if her senses told her one thing, the traits of Sephiteos were apparent enough to give him discomfort. It was amazing that he had actually begun to not incorporate this anxiety into the conversation they were now having. Regardless, she feed off this subtle concord her 'self-proclaimed trainer' had adopted. "Veh Feyera, tell me, when you use your 'psyonics'…do you think about gravitational constants and the Newtons?"

Edge rubbed his brow fighting the urge not to laugh at 'the Newtons' since it sounded like July talking, "N—no. Why would I need to? It's mental power, evoked by my emotional state seeking balance according to Fredrick, not intellectual recollection."
Sana gave him a big smile with her tiny mouth. She knew the best way would be to have him come to terms with his Gardevoir attributes rather than ramming the truth down his throat. She could brusquely inject him with her emotions, forcing their moods to meld together, but she could do very little concerning his psychological acceptance of the facts. Though she did enjoy seeing his eyes light up in evident biological pleasure from feeling her emotions. They needed a home after all.

"Exactly," she said faintly. "That's all I'm trying to say veh Feyera. As trainers, you use Pokemon to battle and protect yourselves. Ordering them in battle and understanding them are different right?"

"Well…" Edge wanted to match wits with her but found himself unable to. There really was nothing he could do to counter her radically subjective worldview. Like him, she would deny things that she disagreed with. More so, he really did not want to fight with her again over something petty like this. He had learned that when they had fought before. They were rooted in different ideologies. Separated by philosophy. Even if their respective species had the most overlaps, it was still a matter of culture. She would never fully understand.

Feyera played with his wrist. That's what separated humans from Gardevoir. Gardevoir did not build rocket ships capable of flying into low earth orbit. Space voyages were an impressive feat unique to humans because of their focus on objective truth. Numbers and figures made the dreams of partial space travel possible. The folks in Mossdeep really knew their stuff. Though the idea of strapping a crew of people to thousands of gallons of highly flammable liquid oxygen and liquid hydrogen and taking a proverbial match to the Roman Candle was highly impractical, it could be overcome with meticulous objective understanding of how things worked. One mistake and the whole mission would be jeopardized! Especially with all those explosives that made Electrode seem like little bungers. Times like that—times that changed history—did not allow for feelings, only rationality.

"Okay so what do you have to say about your psyonic powers? Don't you like to use them?" Sana asked her telepathy pitching higher in shameless interest. She prayed he would excitedly say yes.

Feyera slowly exhaled, deep in thought. Edge knew just how much pleasure was generated when the psyonic powers from Seph overtook him completely. They altered his perception. Transformed his world into a new one. No other human pleasure he knew of could match it. To be fair though, he had not had much experience with any sort of deeply emotional activity.

However, with his recent stunt of attempting to grab the coconuts backfiring completely, and causing his wrist to change in color and texture, he knew the consequences were now taking over his humanity. He wondered if when his eyes had adopted the Progenitor serum on the Golden Bridge, it was a taste of things to come. It certainly seemed that way. He looked down and fondled the tight bracelet, subtly touching the skin alongside the relic's contour as he did so. The epidermis was so charged with sensitivity, relaying the seemingly insignificant sense of touch back to his brain over and over, that he could barely stand to stroke it for long without feeling like he was going into a light ecstasy.

Sana saw him pause to do this and figured he was up to something. And who was she to stop him? He had every right to now that a narrow portion of his wrist had altered irreversibly. It was a part of his body that had changed in response to something that remained to be seen. The Gardevoir gave him a small gesture to signal that she knew something was definitely different about what he was feeling. It didn't take looking over at Feyera's crooked facial expression, Sana could simply feel it radiating in peachy waves originating from his chest.
"Guh…I think they are useful, but their use has begun to run out," Feyera said as he snapped his attention back to reality and away from the Reilken Mercurius' neighboring flesh. Of course, this was anything but the truth, he had begun to control them enough to not evoke them every time he felt stressed and that was a big step in the right direction if he wanted to use them properly. However, the trainer now wanted to cut off all ties with the Gardevoir derived psyonics. There were always consequences, and using his powers was no exception.

"Run out?" Sana asked in a pique of interest.

"Yeah. I'm not going to use them any longer," Feyera adamantly said. Even if they hadn't affected his body physically, he would question using them again. They were untamed and wound up controlling him more than he controlled them. Plus his meltdowns coincided with overextending them so there was always that resting in the back of his mind. Limits existed even in psyonics.

Sana froze up in anxiety, holding her breath. "What?!" she exclaimed louder than she had hoped.

Edge jumped in surprise and looked over at her warily.

"What?" she repeated, softer this time to conceal her worry. If Feyera inhibited them then he might never get to the place where she wanted him to be. She coughed softly and went on to lie, "If you don't use them though you might get hurt!"

"Not anymore!" Feyera winked at her. "That's why I have you. You're the Gardevoir here to protect me."

"But, but…" Sana said childishly, fully aware that her master plan had begun to weaken. She should have known better to build upon something as amorphous as Feyera. He was like sand, completely unstable. But then again so was she. It was the pain of being unable to continue to support equilibrium. She felt it more than he did, but was he feeling it too? His mood swings certainly confirmed this. She considered explaining the importance of equilibrium, but decided against it. She wanted him to be too far along when she revealed that crucial component to him. She wanted him to be unable to turn back. But had he already reached that point? Was there a point of no return? Who could be sure?

"Don't you want to help me along?" he asked curiously spewing her own words back in her face.

Sana said honestly, "More than you know."

"Humph! No need to be sarcastic with me. I'm doing all this for Brucie. He needs his medication and if we don't get to civilization soon he'll be in deep trouble." Edge said. It was half true. Though he cared a great deal for Brucie, he also wanted to fix his current problem. And why couldn't he have both?

"Veh Feyera, I wasn't being sarcastic. I really do want to help you. Why else would I go along with you?"

"Hmm…I suppose you're right. I mean there is this thing," he looked at his chest. He remembered when they had impulsively kissed. This piece of anatomy was the reason why. It was the reason for a lot of things he did not understand. "But if I don't give you a reason to become attached to it then everything should work out."

"We're friends now," Sana said, knowing that it wasn't completely true. They were associates working together at best. Or as she had put it rather eloquently, "protectors protecting each other". And even that seemingly selfless way of describing it had a built-in terminal point.
"Yeah…friends…gulp," Feyera said still feeling rather mentally animated based on reflecting upon their lust ridden kiss. He no longer questioned if a part of Sephiteos had caused him to commit such a deplorable crime against nature, but instead questioned how much he associated with such an aspect of the presumably dead spouse of Sana's. This piece of anatomically correct Gardevoir inside of him made those decisions happen. That's what it was wasn't it? He didn't know anymore and it was driving him mad.

"So friend, what do you say?" Sana said as she outstretched an arm into the air between them.

Feyera looked at it in confusion. "What do you want me to do, shake hands with you?"

"Shake…? Hands…?" Sana asked perplexed.

"Yes. It is a human gesture. Like this," Feyera gripped her hand and delicately shook it up and down, 'Ha, 'pleased to meet you'."

"But we've already met, twice," the Gardevoir insisted reasonably.

"I know, Sana; it's just something you say when you shake hands."

"So this is a handshake…?" Sana asked, refusing to let go of Edge's hand.

"Yeah. What did you want to do?" asked Edge.

"Oh…that. Chris, Gardevoir have a way of frolicking our hands together when we meet. It is like our body's way of saying hello."

"Frolicking…?" Feyera asked. He remembered doing something similar when he first met Sana subconsciously. They played with their hands together; it was essentially a unified set of motions. Whatever had possessed him to do that must have once again been either Sana's Psychic control or something primal buried inside of him.

"Yeah like this," she said dancing her fingers through his with a carefree smile. Their hands moved up and down intertwining fingers through a set of seemingly automatic motions. Feyera would hardly call the feeling abrasive, but it was strange to feel like his body was doing something with hers. Almost as if they were working together as one. "See…? Good right?"

Feyera recoiled and broke contact. "Okay, that was strange," he said grimacing.

Sana winked and politely said, "Well...he he...it might have been 'strange' but now according to society we aren't 'strangers' anymore, and that's because we remember doing this."

"Funny," Edge said. He knew they already did this "frolicking" when they had met in the meadow. The feeling was all too familiar. By doing it again, his mind had taken him back to those exact moments when the meadow had exploded with color, right before they grappled instinctively with their hands. He could even recall the exact color pallet of the scene embedded in his mind. It was uncanny how he could remember everything that happened based on the first interaction they'd had together.

"You find it funny?" she asked. "I always did too."

"Yeah, it really takes you back." Edge tried to make it sound more scientific saying quickly, "Seems like you use your body language to display how you feel."

"Humans do that to! Shaking hands. It isn't all that foreign to you right?"
Edge felt his chest grow tight. He told himself that he could not be comparing humans with Gardevoir. Every time that he did, he felt himself slip closer and closer to losing the ability to differentiate between the two. And possessing physical attributes of both, allowed for countless shades of gray only his introspective Gardevoir emotion-reading sight could see when considering his identity.

"No…but foreign enough…” he gasped as the pressure on his chest worsened. He held his head down in sorrow.

"Are you okay?" Sana asked, looking worriedly at his heart shard.

Feyera arched his neck back taking his eyes off Sana and peering up at the broken canopy's moist green foliage above them.

"Fine…” he whispered. The absent thick leaves did little to block most of the sun, making the high temperature and humidity worse. Edge could feel his body's perspiration coating him from the midday heat, but he wondered if all this sweat was triggered by his creeping anxiety as well. His coat had grown slightly saggy from a combination of abuse and humidity. "Let's keep moving."

"Okay, just be careful. You're delicate, remember."

Feyera spun around, tired of being called such demeaning terms by Sana. "I'm not delicate Sana. Look I'm tough as nails," Feyera boisterously claimed as he thumped his Alterieno boot on the ground causing some dirt to plume in the air. Something in him had snap, and his mood turned sour. Delicate was something you called a flower, not a person.

"I didn't mean it like that," she lied, knowing how insecure Feyera felt. Sana did in fact mean it the way she had said it to a certain extent. Gardevoir may have had exceptionally high mental fortitude, but their physical bodies could handle little abuse. Feyera was slowly realizing this as his body underwent a steady atrophy. It was nothing that happened instantly, nor was it causing him to look inhuman. If anything, it was just a gradual movement away from dependency on muscular strength. In many ways, it may have mirrored how Gardevoir as a species had evolved over hundreds of thousands of years as they differentiated themselves from humans.

Sana looked Edge over carefully as he resumed walking. He was lanky for an adult human male. Few would argue with the fact that he was physically weak. And that was to be expected. Even before Semblance, he was never bulky and muscular. But afterwards, his thinness became more pronounced especially along his recent journey across Kanto. It was inescapable. His current bulky attire helped to conceal the man's willowy contour, but in the end, it was only a shell he wore much like a Cloyster. The way the black bomber jacked opened like a thick shell in the front revealing his heart shard made this allegory even more relevant.

"Veh Feyera…” she said as he pouted and crossed his arms above the red biological horn. It was impossible for the trainer to deny. Gardevoir were weak. He was becoming weaker. There was a correlation going beyond the shard on his chest, the virus in his eyes, the tinge of green on his forearm. It depressed him. He despised it all.

"What?!" he barked in aggravation. He played with the coat's frills nervously. "I'm pissed off! Think you can read that emotion!?”

Sana pawed at her chest shard. "Of course I can. Listen to me, Chris, this world is dark and demented and will try to push us down. More so, as beings embodying emotion, we can feed this cycle by reflecting on the dark and negative. It's like a feedback fall, but so much worse since you do it to yourself and no one can rescue you. No matter what, keep fighting those things off. Don't
let the dark forces: depression, hate, and greed encumber your indomitable spirit. There's strength in that."

"Deep," Feyera tried to play it off as sarcasm, but the way he said it made him actually feel interested. He slowed down to a soft march and Sana followed suit.

The Gardevoir picked up on this subtle hint of mawkish acceptance and continued, "Life's quick. We have a limited amount of time on this earth so make the best of it. That makes sense no?"

"Ha! You're telling me," said Feyera sarcastically, knowing that he should have been dead at least twice. Psyonics had saved him. Seph's attributes had saved him. "I should be twelve feet under. But instead I'm stuck trying to solve the mystery of my life."

She looked at the piece on his left wrist, trying not to become mesmerized by the subtle green hues visible through his skin. "Time's an odd contraption like that."

"Time?" Feyera asked her. "I wouldn't call this thing on my wrist time. Though it sure fits like a watch."

Sana shook her head, "No. I'm afraid that thing wasn't what I was referring to."

Edge tightened his gaze on the Gardevoir's eyes saying, "Well it sure wasn't a wish you made Sana."

"I told you what I think, but if you don't want to believe how I feel, why don't you come up with a better way to understand why you have Sephiteos—my Seph—bursting out of your body?" Sana impishly pointed at him.

"I am. That's why we're heading towards...*huff*...I mean, it could be any number of reasons," Edge said dryly. For none of them could make any sense to him. "I hope to find out why in time."

Sana ignored his initial rescinded thought, saying, "That's exactly it though, veh Feyera. Time is a medium."

"A medium? What does that mean? Someone who communes with the dead?" Edge smiled, knowing that Progenitor could allow him to see the traces of Ghost Pokemon through acute changes in temperature. This infrared detection was almost like an expanded visual perception on top of his emotional senses. Come to think of it, it was one of the few attributes he could employ without additional repercussions. For his eyes had already changed. They were like his Gardevoir heart in that regard. Exposed, and vulnerable to the world. There wasn't anything worse that could happen to them, since they had shifted nearly entirely. His eyes remained green, but presented the gold rims of Progenitor. And when he used psyonics a shield of red covered them. He wondered if Gardevoir had different colored eyes.

Mister Feyera was always unique as a human possessing green eyes. For that was a mutation. Probably one inherited from his father's side, nothing good came from that man. Did it even work that way? Was eye color a particular chromosome? Was it like gender and passed down by a certain parent? Come to think of it, he could not even remembered how such a characteristic took place. All those years of studying the science of Genetics, and he couldn't even explain why his eyes were not brown or blue. Though rare naturally, contact lens—popular with the girls—could alter eye color. So Chris usually didn't feel out of place back in boarding school since there were plenty of posers to blend in with. Lots of people wanted his natural eye color since it really stood out, especially with light hair. Sadly, the unsightly thin bioluminescent circle ominously surrounding his limbic rings from Progenitor sapped even that rare human component away from
him. He rubbed his eyes vigorously, wishing he could just make it go away. As kaleidoscope colors appeared on his closed lids, his hands fell straight down, only to be stopped midway down by connecting with the shard on his chest. He wished all of it would go away.

"No, by a 'medium', I mean it is all around you." Sana quickly looked to her left and right waving her smooth hands, "Time's a construct that allows us to appreciate what we have. Do you ever wonder about how we can see time?"

"See time?" asked Feyera. He thought he could only see space.

"It's the temporalizing of temporality; it gives way to how our life is meant to be interpreted."

"Temporalizing of temporality? Huh?" Edge asked whilst scratching his head.

"You're a being in time, right silly?" asked the Gardevoir with a shadowy grin.

"I—I guess I am…" Feyera admitted slowly. "What does that have to do with anything?"

Sana rocked her head back and forth and her hair followed her childish motions, "All you gotta do is look at the time going by around you, and use that as fuel to decide what to do with the time you have! Simple."

"Well, not especially. Time is a pretty constant variable in my book," Edge lied. He knew that when he was put back up against the wall, he could practically feel time slow down as heightened neurological functioning took command of his perception.

"Doesn't time itself reveal to us what we are?" she said stretching out both her arms. "Doesn't it embrace you?"

Feyera exhaled extending both his arms out in front of him in an awkward stretch, "Now I know why they call your species the 'Embrace Pokemon'; you sure like to throw that word around, don't you Sana?"

"Hehe," Sana laughed, "well nothing else can really transfer feelings like an embrace. It is a common metaphor in our culture but a powerful one at that since it corresponds to nearly all of our higher emotions."

Edge rubbed his temple and realized a discrepancy. He asked her, "Your culture? I thought you and Seph were on your own?"

"You remember? I guess we were." Sana giggled effeminately, "Tee he come to think of it, it all started with those washtubs…"

Feyera asked with a smirk, "Huh? Washtubs…?"

"Oh yes, he he…the washtubs, it was one of our first adventures together! We had a great time running away as children. Though Seph was always the one who got into a lot of trouble for running off with me. He was a very bad Ralts," Sana shrugged nonchalantly, "but then again so was I. He just had to put up with a lot more of the officialdom. Or as he liked to call it: official-dumb! Tee he. That always made me laugh."

Feyera sighed. It made him feel queasy to have part of Sephiteos' memories in his mind. In fact, the Gardevoir's remembrance of the Progenitor Procedure frightened him as much as the emerging physical traits upon his body. He hoped that he wouldn't suddenly remember whatever Sana was talking about the next time he was under Hypnotic influence. He tried to play his worry off cool,
but his voice cracked, "K—kids r—right?"

"Rals," Sana corrected in a similar fashion to how Feyera would usually when discussing a scientific component. It was rather strange how she did the same exact flick of the head upon making the initial correction followed by a quick blink and then the inevitable expansion, "But it is the same."

Edge forced a smile at her actions. Whether they were intentional or unintentional didn't matter. True he was frightened, but the idea of actually learning about a Pokemon species so similar to human beings intrigued him. If he could do it from a completely ascendant, autonomous, and external perspective then that would be ideal. "You know, if I weren't busy trying to rectify my past actions, I would like to at least study you."

"...Study me?" the Gardevoir asked in confusion. Did he now see her as some green beaker to be analyzed for chemical composition?

"Err...sorry that came out wrong. I meant to say: scientific inquiry of your culture would be interesting. You know, for the Pokédex and all..." Edge said. He hadn't used that word in so long. Imagine if Oak could see him right now. Goodness, how shocked The Professor would be. At least Feyera was still trying to learn about the world, though this whole slew of events was certainly unconventional. Then again, unconventional was the perfect term to describe Edge Feyera.

"Y—you'd do that...?" Sana asked in disbelief. This was impossible. There had to be a catch. That or Feyera did not understand the implications of what he had just said. She hoped it was true. Maybe that was Seph speaking through him.

"Yeah," he said halfheartedly. To Feyera, it was one of those things you say to people and wonder how far they will take it. Like future plans you make with a distant friend to hang out, but never actually make an effort to see to fruition. It was really just small talk. Something said to bridge the gap. Apparently, Sana had bought into it quite a lot. Regardless of whether or not he upheld his end of the bargain, it at least seemed to make her more comfortable. He could feel the positive vibes exiting her core in warm yellow hues. Besides, that would only come to fruition if he was somehow saved from the advancing possession of Pokemon attributes on his body.

"You would do that with your time?" she asked absentmindedly.

"Well I mean I used to study Psychic Pokemon, and even helped write a dissertation titled 'Concerning the Paranormal' before you took away my memories. So it would be like old times, except I'd be more compassionate. I feel like I've learned my lesson," Edge said with a twisted expression. He fantasized saying the magic words 'I learned my lesson!' and everything being fixed and put back to normal. Unfortunately, in Feyera's schematic, a 'God' capable of such omnipotence did not exist.

"Veh Feyera, you would really do that?" she repeated in a feeble echo.

"Yeah when I'm better. Once everything's fixed. How's that sound? What else is there to do besides spend the time you're given the way you want to?" How the irony of this statement burned. He wasn't doing what he wanted to. He was doing what he needed to do. Edge was fighting an uphill battle to rid himself of Seph's parasitic clutches. But was it really Sephiteos the Gardevoir? Or was it him now?

Sana prodded at him saying, "Of course, you're going to make mistakes, veh Feyera. But you gotta live and learn the most important thing...unconditional love."
Feyera rolled his eyes spitting, "Yeah, the sloppy sorta thing you find in soap operas right?"

"Soap operas?" she asked aloud, causing Feyera to flinch impulsively.

"Nevermind. It's a human thing," he said scratching his bronze hair anxiously. "What were you trying to say?"

"Ummm…unconditional love means loving someone no matter what, no matter how bad things get. It gives you a firm grasp on life. It helps you to know so much about life: where it's from, where it is, where it's headed…"

Edge stopped mid stride and asked her, "So what?"

Sana stopped with him. It was almost like she knew that he had paused in his once quick pace without looking. "Listen, veh Feyera, it isn't a requirement, it just…enriches your perspective. That's all I'm saying. Remember your friends. Remember who you are. Don't let anything in life influence you otherwise. You love your Pokemon partners don't you?" she said peering down at his belt holster.

Feyera instinctually clutched Brucie's Poké Ball located over his right hip with his hand; the ball was sealed closed and he knew that in stasis Brucie was sound asleep. "Yeah, why wouldn't I? They always help me out! I care about them because they take care of me."

"But why?"

Feyera repeated her question in confusion, "Why?"

"Why do you love them if all they do is fulfill a function for you? How can you love tools?"

"Huh? You're acting weird now Sana."

"Well just try and remember…"

"Easy for you to say Sanaria, I don't remember who I am because of you!"

She wagged a finger in the air. "Who you are is not nearly as important as whom you see yourself as. That's called your identity."

"No." His left leg felt like it was falling asleep and began to tingle. "Sana, my identity has been all about me, Chris Feyera. Who I am always has been and always will be."

"That sounds awfully unscientific, Doctor Feyera. How can you categorize something if you only know who someone is?" she giggled.

"I—I'm not sure. I had to make sure of who I was before I can do the more important thing of defining what I am."

"I can help you though…with your identity. I took it away, but now I can give it back. I can give it all back. I promise you in time."

"Maybe…" Edge circumspectly muttered. Would she be able to ever let him relearn everything? He'd have to undergo a whole lot of Hypnosis.

However, what Feyera thought Sana meant and what she actually meant were very different.

The two of them continued in total silence, reflecting upon what lay behind them, imagining what
lay ahead of them, and grappling with where they found themselves—in between past and future.

The wind began to blow softly from behind them. Edge continued walking, but the Gardevoir next to him came to a stop and turned around.

"Get down!" Sana ordered shoving Feyera to the earth under her slender green arm. He hit the soft moss along the machine treaded pathway with a light thud, and the Gardevoir immediately fell on top of him. Deftly, she rolled off him and pressed close against his side.

"OOOF! The hell was that for!?" demanded Edge with moist leaves in his face. Their organic sogginess brushed against his forehead's curtain-like bangs.

Sana brought her finger to his lips and sternly ordered, "Shh!"

Feyera complied, greeting her finger with a tight frown. He lay completely motionless, aware of how close Sana was to him, feeling part of her short off-white skirt against his leg; covering his flat hip in its satin fineness. His eyes went down. There was about a foot's length distance between where her white garment ended and where the leg guard rode up to on her thin leg. In between the area right above her knee and the skirt's raised rim, he could see her exposed pale legs.

Seeing his gaze travel there, she quickly pulled down on the skirt, blushing as she did so. This caused the skirt to billow slightly and press against Feyera's waist. Simply looking at it allowed him to feel its fabric through his jeans. His focus was soon distracted however as the distinct sound of whirling rotors was heard from behind them. Feyera looked up to see a sleek black helicopter pass them overhead. It was traveling in the same direction as them with the path, but much faster in the air obviously. Its broad blades spun, whirling quickly and quietly wits a steady "Thith thith thith thith thith…"

When the stealthy helicopter passed them from over the jungle canopy Feyera said to Sana's frightened expression, "Talk about calling in the cavalry! Ha ha! Looks like it's going to be a real party at Evercrest!"

Sana patted his shoulder endearingly. "What do you mean by that? I didn't see any Drifloon."

Feyera giggled, "Heh heh."

"Tell me!" Sana squeaked.

"My, that thing's gotta be the stealthiest piece of equipment on this side of the Flower Paradise!" Edge said referring with delight to the helicopter Fredrick used. It had snuck up on him twice now.

"Veh Feyera, c'mon tell me," Sana whined. "I've never even seen something like that before."

"There's only one man I know with a copter like that one. And he's in cahoots with the International Police Force, Sana!" Edge said proudly.

"It was your friend Fredrick?" she asked nudging him with her ear's soft tip. "That was his… his…?"

"Helicopter," Feyera said flicking his hair back and batting an eye, "they are a type of aeroship."

"Helicopter..." she said aloud.

Feyera didn't want to get up even though the danger had passed. He was far too comfortable next to
Sana's warm body. "Exactly! He's the best. In fact he's the best of the best!"

"What is he doing here?" Sana asked as her curiosity grew to palatable levels.

"Good question. I'm sure it's important business as usual for him," Feyera said feeling like his friend from the International Police Force was a secret agent spy or even a superhero like the amazing Gligerman.

"Hmm..." Sana purred. She wondered what it would be like to fly in a helicopter.

"Maybe he's come here to finish off Cipher! It would be like old times." Edge smiled, putting the pieces together. Lorelei probably found the black communicator in his backpack and contacted Fredrick after the storm's passing. Fredrick might even be looking for Feyera right now. "Taking out Team Rocket and now Cipher!"

Sana stroked the soft terrain below her heart and asked, "What did he do exactly when you last met him?"

"First of all, he gave me this, here." Feyera looked down at the bracelet clutching his hand. "Told me that it belonged to me. From two years back, this is the Mercury Relic. I mean I'm lucky to have it back I guess since this is what originally did everything. He seemed to be pretty confident that I can fix things with it since this is what was caused all the—" he looked down at his personal emotional beacon, "—weird stuff to happen to me."

"But you were the one that caused the incident," she said speaking about Evercrest as a whole. She leaned against her elbow and continued to rest on the soft earth near Edge.

"No. This device did Sana," said Edge referring to his forced merger with her mate. Was it even a merger? He could not be sure. He still felt distinctively human, and unless Gardevoir always felt this way, he would never know. A few unusual sides tended to command him, and those were blatantly attributed to Seph's Gardevoir nature, but where was the line in the sand? Being pragmatic, when Feyera could not ascertain a definitive split between his personalities, he begun to worry obsessively. It was as if a blending had taken place and he had no idea how far it would go mentally or physically. It made him wish for two personalities, and yet the closest he came to that was his mood swings, a characteristic he shared with Sanaria—who as far as he knew wasn't bipolar, just wildly emotional.

"Attacks don't kill, Pokemon do," Sana insisted. The Reilken Mercurius was only a means to an end instead of an end in and of itself. Her knowledge of her own species evolution made her fairly certain that Feyera's mental states influenced his physical ones. How else would the pale mint green skin tone appear on his arm? Then again, it did not seem to be something she could impose. He fought her off. His mind fought hers off. Even when she flooded him with emotion, he defensively forced it into a feedback, putting her at risk. The best she could do was hope that he would see the light on his own terms.

"It's neither of those things. And besides, you got it all wrong, the expression is: 'Guns don't kill, people do!' In either case, it's wrong. Blunt trauma kills," Feyera snorted. "That's the body's weakness."

"Whatever you want to call it," Sana said blowing her hair out of her eyes with a quick upwards exhale.

Edge went on, for he wanted her to know that he cared about the details of his circumstance, this was his life after all; besides, she believed in crazy nonsense such as wishes, "It's important to be
clear; for instance, you don't die from falling, you die from hitting the ground really hard."

"And aren't you the EXPERT on that?" she said mockingly. "Ta ha! You should get a doctorate in falling from high places; you would be a natural professional, veh Feyera."

"I—" Edge couldn't really respond to that. He had fallen far too many times to call it dumb luck. First after impaling Sephiteos here on Chrono Island's cliffs. Then once again in the Pokemon Tower after vanquishing Haunter. His acute manipulation over gravity—a skill Sana repeatedly insisted was unique to her species as a Gardevoir—was his saving grace. It slowed his acceleration down enough to make the impact not deadly, though it cost him a great deal in ways he still had not figured out yet. The ex-researcher dumbfoundedly answered the latter half of her taunt, "They're called skydivers."

"Skydivers huh? I'm glad you're my little skydiver then."

"What does that mean?" Feyera asked the statement that was dangerously bordering affection. "I'm not your little anything, Sana."

Sana realized that she was being a little bit beyond just friendly and quickly rescinded, "I'm trying to say that I'm happy you survived falling."

"I told you already! Argh! You don't survive falling, you survive the impact! Falls don't kill you! Hitting the ground does!" Edge shouted.

"Tsk tsk, keep those emotions under control veh Feyera. She playfully stroked her hair and a few of its strands mingled with Feyera's own, blending mint green with light auburn. As much as he wanted to argue, the faint tingling sensation made him calm down. Sensing this, Sana changed the subject, "Why don't you tell me what other wonderful things Fredrick has done for you?"

"Oh okay, fine. Finally, something I actually like to talk about! Okay, well when I broke into Team Rocket's Headquarters he followed me close behind and made sure that I lived to tell the tale. Saved me by killing Rocket General Archer in the nick of time!" Edge said now seeing Fredrick as a strong muscle bound guardian angel. "He's awesome with a legendary RAIL-grade gun and powerful Pokemon too!"

Sana smiled brightly, "You really do admire him."

Admire was not a strong enough word to describe what Feyera felt. He saw Fredrick Irving as a foster father. He was the father he never had. A real person. A man who put others first. A man who knew so much about Mister Feyera and yet did not use him, nor report him to the authorities because, well obviously: he was the authority. And Fredrick was a man bent on doing what was right, no matter what, even if it was dangerous. So what if he was eccentric at times? Fredrick was a bright light Kanto needed desperately with the dark criminals like Team Rocket on the loose. All things considered, it was no wonder he always studied in direct sunlight.

"I do, like a father; and he respects me for who I am," Feyera said unable to escape the creeping anxiety that Fredrick might figure out Edge's prior affiliations with Team Rocket.

"Who you are...?" Sana looked down at the narrow cavity between their bodies, "You told him about Seph's shard?"

Feyera froze up. He did not. He intended to avoid mentioning it when he got back the communicator in his knapsack still with Lorelei's yacht. "Relax. He believes that my psyonics stem
from emotions, and that's the truth. He even gave me a nice academic response detailing why they do what they do, and manifest in the way that they have."

"So," Sana paused, "he knows about Gardevoir?"

"I'm sure he knows a thing or two about your species," Feyera said. "The man's a genius; must study a ton based on the size of his library."

"Study…?" Sana frowned and snidely said, "Well if he met you then I'd expect him to know about Gardevoir firsthand…"

"—I have nothing, NOTHING to do with his perception of Gardevoir. I'm just a man with psyonics to him. They might derive from my emotional state, but who's to say someone like…say Sabrina of Saffron City doesn't have a similar type of human psyonics activated by her various moods?" Feyera said, fishing for potential excuses. The last thing he wanted to do was have to introduce himself as some kind of freak to his friend.

He imagined saying, "Hey Fredrick, remember me from before? You know the guy you saved from Team Rocket Headquarters? You brought me back to your flat, you helped me remember some of my past, and you even gave me a wad of cash because I was strapped. I tried to read your mind and really hurt you, sorry that was unintentional. So yeah, 'hi, it's great to see you again!'. Oh by the way, forgot to tell you: truth is I'm an ex scientist from Cipher's Evercrest Programme and member of Team Rocket on the side; yeah…come to think of it, I'm partially responsible for the Pokemon Sanctum Robbery. What's that? Against the law? Oh, I think I've been punished enough, ya see…I'm also bound indefinitely to a Pokemon…Gardevoir? You know, girly lookin' hominoids, green hair, white garments…prance around, and talk about emotions. You've heard of them? Good. Oh, you studied everything about them and read twenty-five books on them in your spare time? Even better! So right, let's see now, because of that little detail that may be where my psyonics derive from. Just thought you should know, pal. Anyway, buddy, thanks to that device you retrieved for me I'm entangled, my body now playing host to attributes of a Gardevoir's spouse that I tried to kill two years ago. Yeah sorry I didn't fill you in sooner; my body was too busy destroying itself!"

She forced a weak smile. Then she crooned, "Well fine, why don't you deny it some more and maybe that will fix everything?"

"What's that supposed to mean, Sana?" asked Feyera as he gnashed his teeth together hopelessly. He was telling her not only what Fredrick believed but also what he wanted to believe. It was a battle he was losing.

The Gardevoir against him grinned, "It means if you want to change something you have to accept things first. Otherwise how is your big smart brain supposed to solve problems when it cannot even accept that there are problems to begin with?"

"Uhh…umm…I…" Sana had him in this one. She was becoming seemingly more rational the longer he spent with her. That or he was becoming more emotional, making her appear to display more sensible arguments than his own. He prayed it was the former not the latter. Rationality was the last thing he wanted to lose in this internal battle he fought day in and out. Maybe she took upon herself some of his precious logic just as she had begun to speak human language in tandem with her telepathy. It was certainly possible that he influenced her. And that was okay. What he was not willing to accept was the possibility of the opposite taking place—Sana rubbing off on him. She was the Pokemon and he was the trainer.

"What's the matter veh Feyera? Meowth got your tongue?" she said as her short skirt billowed up
in the tropical breeze.

Feyera looked down at his left wrist swollen with sensitivity and off color. "This parasitic take over...it may have progressed quicker than precedented. I will admit...there is a problem here I personally have to contend with."

Sana desperately fought the urge to impulsively clutch the man's wrist. She wondered if it would feel like Seph's did while he was conscious. For she had only touched that part of his anatomy while he slept, passed out from an anxiety attack. Instead, she asked politely, "May I?"

"NO!" Edge shouted whilst stumbling backwards in recoil. After she had tricked him into eating coconuts her way, nothing was out of the question. She could already manipulate him through the crimson shard on his chest, so why give her yet another avenue of control over his repulsive Gardevoir traits?

"I'm not going to hurt you, veh Feyera!" Sana said with a rather sad tone. Her two hands reached out to the air as he rolled back and got to sitting on his knees. "I want to be able to help you help yourself."

"This...this isn't about you. This is about me," Feyera ironically pointed a thumb towards his Gardevoir heart. "Accept that."

She knew that she could not. Everything was taken from her. She had nothing left save this man who now openly detested the only valuable thing in his life. All she wanted him to do was embrace it.

There was a loud noise up ahead and Feyera instinctually looked up to see two members of Team Rocket rushing at them on the pathway. They were garbed in the usual black attire, were tall and mildly built. Both were men one with brown hair and a crooked expression on his pale face, and the other blond haired man trailed behind him with a slight limp.

"Oh boy..." he mutely said to Sana as she stepped forward, raising a hand in front of Feyera's crimson shard. "Dealing with these clowns should be a piece of cake."

"Stay close to me," Sana demanded. She knew they would run into trouble if they took the pathway.

They didn't look too tough, neither of them had Poké Balls either. But the appearance of the Rockets soon did not matter when Feyera honed in on what each of them were carrying. It was a jet black cross, with two taut wires conjoining three separate tips, forming a hollow wide triangle above and below the main stock. The black curved wings of the device were split into an X. The main flat stock intersected this fattened X straight through the center. As the man with brown hair and a gaunt face ran towards Edge and Sana, he raised the device in his hand threateningly. There was a narrow rectangular box mounted on top of the cross, and the sunlight reflected off something shiny buried inside, ready to be unleashed at a moment's notice by the incredible potential energy.

"You!" yelled the first man as he pointed the odd device in his hand at Feyera's torso. He was only slightly guarded by Sana's delicate hand covering his Gardevoir heart.

"Pant pant pant..." the other limping rocket struggled to keep up with his companion and was also closing in on Feyera. He wheezed and took his device, aiming it at Sana.

Edge put his hands up in surrender. "Hey easy does it now fellas. You don't want to make a mess. You might soil the DBC's governmentally protected ecological reservation," he sneered.
"Only one thing that's gonna be making a mess around here. And that's you, jackass," he said as he clicked the small trigger underneath the cross in his hand.

"Thwip!" out of the main stock came a metal bolt, targeted right at Feyera.

He closed his eyes and felt Sana, graze her body against his. She pushed him back and he felt something take the hit, with a distinct "whomp!". Following the noise, the absorbed impact traveled through her and then him, their bodies resonating like a tuning fork.

"What the hell!?" he heard the brown haired rocket scream in frustration.

The other rocket gasped, "*Huff* You idiot, *huff* shoot the freaking Pokemon, she's shielding him."

Peeking his eyes open, he saw Sana was confronting both Rockets as they continued to discharge their weapon's capacity.

"Thwip! Thwip! Thwip!" went the two Nihil in synchronized succession as their owners targeted the Gardevoir.

He saw Sana leap away and spin in the air as she dodged the uninterrupted assault. "Lil’ help here, veh Feyera?" Sana asked as bolts came at her gracefully dancing figure from multiple directions. "Viip, viip, viip!"

Edge knew what he had to do. He put out a hand and felt a familiar tug of power as a tiny group of the bolts curved mid-flight and bent down to the earth.

"Tick! Tick!" they clattered hitting the ground in disarray.

The first rocket paused in rapture, "Uhhh…uhhh…What the hell did he just do?!

"Don't ask questions, idiot! Unload! Hit ’em with the Nihil's barrage!" ordered the second rocket in a panic upon seeing Edge manipulate the trajectory of their last few metal arrows.

"You got it!" hollered the other rocket as sweat covered his face. He closed one of his eyes as he peered down the sights. Aiming would do very little, but it was a force of habit.

"Don't give them anywhere to run! FIRE!" Both of them did exactly that, priming their repeater bows with an ominous "TICK!" and lock. The devices clacked and made a distinct cranking noise as the crude machinery took over. Edge readied himself for whatever was to come. But it was something he could not have possibly been ready for.

Suddenly the crossbows were firing out bolts at a rate faster than Edge ever thought imaginable. It was literally blinding to see so many sharp projections whistling through the air, reflecting the sunlight and shining like a meteor shower.

Feyera had never encountered an automatic weapon before in his life. All firearms that used gunpowder had to be reloaded by a small firing lever. They could be made partially automatic through three-round burst shots similar to the première cam mechanism in the Vox-9. Even then however, their clip size remained inherently limited, ranging from three to twelve bullets at best, forcing a reload every once and a while, and consequently more accurate shots to be taken. Fully automatic weapons did not exist, save for bolt bows such as these.

They operated by using a deviously simple mechanism. Each bow had two strings; one would be drawn as the other fired. Then as the first one fired, a rotating arm would prime the other before
swinging back around. This alternating drawing and firing meant that all one had to do was place a large hopper of downward feeding split-barreled ammunition on top of the device and the "Nihil RXB" would do the rest with the click of a switch. Accuracy was a given sacrifice with all the mechanically induced recoil, but its rapid rate of fire was unmatched by any other human weapon. The crossbow was appropriately named, as it delivered nothing short of absolute chaos and nothing could be compared to it save a Pin Missile attack.

The metal spikes soared through the air, some aimed at Sana, and others aimed at Edge. But all of them were heading in their direction in an attempt to simply overwhelm with quantity. At this point, the two weapons were firing too quickly for Edge's mind to keep up with. While his vortex managed to deflect a few of the bolts, his mind just could not focus on all the incoming shrapnel.

He saw Sana try and employ a Psychic attack, noting her various twirling as she fired back a sharp energy projectile of her own that shattered a few of the bolts it encountered. But it was a battle her psychical-preying Psyshock could not win. There were too many random bolts flying about and soon she backed off in defense, spinning and deftly dodging the rain of death.

Feyera palmed the sphere of energy in his right hand and tried to retain enough concentration to at least keep the well open. This proved nearly impossible with countless shimmering stars sailing past him with a frightening "viip viip viip", and the perpetual "Thwip! Thwip! Thwip!" promising more of the metallic rain. Distraction mingled with fear, made Edge's aim was way off, he could only deflect a few of the bolts back to earth and towards the center of his miniature well of energy. He felt his body aching from not using this power for such a long time. After such dormancy, it craved to be employed, and here he was allowing it to save his life.

A stray bolt caught him in the shoulder of his bomber jacket, narrowly missing his thin frame. The way it impacted the clothing caused him to be knocked back and fall down with a wallop.

"CHRIS!" he heard Sana yell.

He was fine, the steady "Thwip! Thwip! Thwip!" of the repeating bows could still be heard above him, so he struggled to get back to his feet. As he rose up, another rouge bolt narrowly missed his center, sent off course by a mysterious purple energy that grasped the metal spike and curved it away. Edge saw Sana looking at him, over expended, her face worn and stressed.

In one hand she held a Reflect shield, resembling a teal crystal lattice kite. Its sharp imposing edges were brimming with indigo and it seemed to be enflamed with the Psychic energy originating from her heart. Multiple silver Nihil bolts had punctured the shield, but none had made it through completely. At this point, it looked like a translucent spiked shield. Edge saw another bolt impact Sana's Psychic shield and the buffer glowed a bright lavender as it absorbed more of the missile abuse. Her other arm was outstretched towards Feyera, and slightly manipulating the bolts to miss his body through acute gravitational control.

"Veh…Feyera..." she gasped as her energy began to dwindle. And still the repeating fire of the two Nihil bows persisted.

He had to do something, anything. He thought about using his Pokemon, but in a spurt of courage, he decided against it; Edge sprung to his feet and ran towards the assailants, raising his arm with his other as he did so. He felt energy in his heart pumping vigorous adrenaline that amplified with each thump of his treasured heartbeat. Feyera heard the bolts whizz past him. He didn't even try to dodge them. He saw them as dodging him.

Yet another struck him in the jacket's bulk, this time slowing him but not knocking him all the way back. His eyesight filled with the color of blood, though the trainer knew it was not his own blood.
Rather it was the aura Gardevoir would obtain shielding their eyes whilst employing paranormal powers. In other words, it was Sephiteos' blood coursing through his body. Feyera knew he was close enough when he could see what he needed to see as a Gardevoir would.

And there is was. That thick black shadow. It was as clear as the sky above. Fear.

"N—No!" The brown haired rocked screeched as his Nihil Repeater Crossbow bent upwards against his volition. Edge's mind pointed the weapon's black fanged barrel up as it continued to relentlessly fire.

"Thwip! Thwip! Thwip!"

The rocket tried desperately hard to push the crossbow back down at Feyera, but to little avail. Edge's mind was too strong. The second the rocket had shown even an ounce of fear at Edge's passionate charge, it was over for him. For the criminal's fear gave Edge more power. He could see it radiating in an inky blackness from the rocket's body, and the frightened expression of the Nihil wielder was icing on the cake. Edge's shard became doused in warmth as he vigorously bent his arm up; the rocket's body complied in unison, directing the viscous steel spitting weapon upwards at his own face.

And with a swift predictable "Thwip!", it shot a glistening bolt straight through the rocket's head, killing him instantly. The masterless bow continued to discharge ammunition in all directions as the man's body fell to earth with a lifeless "Thud!"

"GO BACK TO HELL YOU DEMON!" the blond haired rocket screamed at the top of his lungs, and continued to fire round after round in Edge's direction from his Nihil repeater crossbow. Each shot sailed through the air, splitting the daylight. Another bolt struck him near the waist, catching onto his jacket's open flap. The impact's force, tugging on his coat, spun him around and he fell to the ground. Spinning off balance, he slammed down, using his arm to somewhat break the fall. He felt his wrist buckle as he landed.

Feyera further collapsed as the psyonic energy from his heart began to wane. He considered using his Pokemon, but it was only a passing thought. Sending them out into this dogfight would be a death sentence.

Using mental strength, he tilted his head up to see Sana leaping over him, shield raised in one arm, and a long ivy-like mental tendril in the other as her rail figure briefly cut between him out the sky overhead. His eyes, following her, began to lose their red aura as her lithe body dashed ahead of where he lay. She spun her body and glided slightly off the ground in a final rush towards the rocket.

From where he lay, he heard the deafening crack of a whip followed by a the sound of a body falling.

Then there was silence, save for the steady sound of the Nihil bows, which had expended their entire ammunition cases and were now only firing phantom shots.

It was too unreal. Somehow, they survived it. Edge could hardly care how, the adrenaline in his body took over, and the fact that he was still breathing sent him into ecstatic pleasure. It was a reward of sorts for the body. A way for the body to tell the mind that it did a good job, though not unique to Gardevoir, they certainly felt this relationship much snugger than humans did. Some people believed that human beings were evolving away from such animalistic tendencies, but on the other hand, these were some of the closest species of Pokemon to human beings. Edge continued to allow his body to vigorously push the eudemonia upon him uncontested. It was short
lived for a very good reason though.

"OUCH!" Feyera yelped in soreness. "What happened to my hand?"

The young man looked down to find that oddly enough it was his right hand that was giving him a sharp pain. He was expecting the discomfort to come from the glowing Reilken Mercurius on his left wrist since that is where the changes in flesh had originally taken place. He prayed it hadn't begun to overtake him somewhere else.

"Odd…" he said at his hand. It was a little dirty from soil sticking to the perspiration there, but other than that, it was completely normal. As he played with it using his bracelet-bound hand, he noticed that once again the artifact had been giving forth a bright neon green light from various sections of its smooth ebony surface. None of that mattered. What mattered was the skin surrounding the relic's grip. The pale green had not advanced as far as he could tell. Maybe a hair or two, but nothing major. His fears, somewhat quelled, became focused on where he felt the tingle in his right palm. It was strident, and all his attention focused on the part of his hand where his wrist met his palm. The longer he looked at it, the more it shook in increasing pain.

"…uggh…, no…" he heard Sana crying from afar. Feyera snapped his head to face her direction. What he saw was too much to bear, as her whimpering grew closer to him with every gasp of air she took splitting apart her sobs.

Her once splendid figure, so often filled with vibrant life, now lay hunched over knelling on the ground next to the collapsed body of the blond haired rocket, which still held the infernal black cross.

As quickened inhalations took over, she clutched at her Gardevoir heart frantically with both her hands. Boundlessly, clear tears rolled from her sparkling ruby eyes, falling ever quicker down her face's gently sloped checks. They gracefully met the earth's captivating hold as fallen diamonds would, disappearing into the shadows of the bright day.

Alongside her crystal tears, spilled thick and dark cerise from those tender hands now stained with blood.

"…p—please…n—no…"
Still air isolated every moment; every instant, every second was a tight knot along a taut wire, dividing the world into dreadfully stable increments.

Each sigh from Sanaria's petite mouth grew in intensity. Her labored breathing was augmented by something Feyera could not understand from where he sat. The rush of adrenaline given to him via Sephiteos' horn barely lingered. Of course, it was still present; however, it was no longer crescendoing: a notable characteristic of a Gardevoir's emotion derived powers. They never remained stagnant, rather the liquid flux of emotion and energy would surge in unstoppable waves, cascading repeatedly over the mental essence, and embracing it in complete emotional ecstasy—binding body and mind closer together than a heart and its beat.

"Veh…Feyera…" whispered Sana through a series of tight gasps.

Chris Feyera leapt to his feet, surprised to find just how fast his body left the ground. He grappled on the air as his legs wobbled from the recent use of his psyonics. He stumbled, still unable to find balance in this world. The trainer felt like he had just left a very violently shaking ship and had been unable to conquer the sea legs. He fell down, with a "Plop!" as his knees hit the earth. Swearing, Feyera pushed off the ground again, desperately trying to orient his weak human body.

His balancing act was mildly aided by focusing on Sana; she was a figure of stability in an environment drenched in the colors of emotion. Dank blackness from recent fear contrasted the bight sunny day. He knew that color all too well. The way the black gaseous tar mixed with thick swampy indigo could only mean one thing: fear. But where was the fear coming from? The rockets were dead right? Was it residue from their deaths? How would that be possible? Weren't their minds shut off?

The thrill of the fight had not been able to negate the increasing agony from his right hand, about where the palm met the wrist. It was something he could not explain. It did not look any different, and the way that his skin retained its beige tone seemed to dismiss the possibility of his parasite overtaking more of his physical body. It was depressing enough to lose a part of his left forearm to the highly sensitive Gardevoir flesh. The bone chilling thought that something might be lurking deep within his epidermis frightened him, but not as much as the larger threat—the creeping commandeering emotions made over his rational mind. His passionate resistance only served to rally the sentimental take-over.

His tightly strapped boots stomped along the uneven machine trampled ground as he walked towards the wilted Gardevoir. As he approached her, his right hand felt as if it were burning—searing even. The feeling was all too familiar; it was the same heat that radiated in feverishly high pitches from his heart at times. He looked down, to see that his right hand was still just as human as ever. He also looked at his chest for good measure, but the tremendous heat from the Gardevoir horn there had been quelled ever since he had psychically bent the rocket's arm. It was a relatively simple action in hindsight; he didn't even need the cerebral dexterity to make the criminal pull the Nihil's trigger. All that needed to be done was force the rocket's upper muscles to contract, pointing the chaotic weapon at its operator. However, the action was not a mere mental force exerted by Feyera. It was a unified action. Edge had felt his own biceps, although weak, contract, swelling up,
while his lower triceps muscles relaxed along with the rocket's. In the heat of the action, there was no way for the young man to tell the difference between the two right arms. It was completely simultaneous. The only difference between them was that Edge was not holding onto a higgledy-piggledy death machine spewing out silver like a slot machine's jackpot.

Indeed, the crossbow had a mind of its own; the mechanism was in fact still firing phantom rounds. "Thwip! Thwip!" went the black weapons; dropped from the hands of their dead wielders. Lying against the ground, their strings still pulled and released, thanks to the mechanized rotating arm oblivious to empty bolt hoppers. They made the only true periodic noise, keeping track of each passing moment. It was clockwork.

As he peered at the rather disturbing spectacle, he could not help but frantically wonder. Why repeater crossbows? Why not Pokemon? Why were these rockets not carrying the usual Gauntlet M-series revolvers he was so used to facing? Were they just weapons used here in the jungle? Or was there another reason for their employment? Were they being used for stealth? For their spray of fire? He thought about how the rain of bolts had given his psyonics zero focal points. Was this the reason? Were they being used to counter him? His psyonics? His logical mind needed to know. Its attributes, gradually merging, craved answers as much as it craved emotional stability. He wondered if he could find both.

Shaking his head, Feyera took his eyes off the scene and continued to cut through the darker mist his vision had cloaked the area in. Sana sat against the body of the blond haired rocket. The black uniformed man's face was contorted, as if his brain had been frozen mid-thought. As Edge approached the cleanly killed rocket, he began to say, "Well, guess that oughta teach 'em not to f— …!"

"*gasp* …Chris…huhhh…veh Feyera…" Sana wheezed as her arms slowly lowered from her chest.

His jaw dropped and his face went numb as he looked to the left of the deceased rocket at Sana. Aghast, he could not believe what he saw.

"SANA!" Feyera roared, feeling as though one of his own Pokemon had been attacked. He bolted away from the rocket's body and ran over to her. Edge placed his arm around her shivering body. He felt her body temperature had plummeted. Her arm was clammy and the core of her body no longer spread forth a comforting warmth. Besides the sharp sense of touch, his sight provided more than enough information to the young man. He saw the damage up close. No longer was she warm and vibrant. No longer did she have an expression of positive demeanor. There was only fear.

Feyera was unable to comprehend it as a sympathetic heart pulled him under an ocean of concern. It was awful to see, and even worse to feel.

One of the metal Nihil bolts had gone straight through the edge of her palm, creating a clean hole for warm blood to slip out of periodically and voluminously. It looked like her hand was weeping along with her ruby eyes.

"*Gasp*…!*whimper*…make it stop…*sniff*" Her sobs, shattered breaths, took him by surprise, for all the while she just looked at the wound, completely stunned, unable to act. It was as if she were frozen, staring at the terrible gash. Maybe she had thought it wasn't possible to be hit. Sana had looked so confident when she flew over a collapsed Feyera: Reflect shield raised, and Psychic lash in her right hand. All of that strength was gone. Perhaps she had never even faced a vicious weapon such as the Nihil automatic crossbow.

"Dammit!" Feyera swore in transit as he sat beside her. This was awful! It was all his fault for
bringing her on this stupid roadway. He felt guilty now. Edge felt like he caused the whole thing to happen. The guilt was inescapable, its icy tendrils slipped through his mind's annexes. But altering the avenue of blame was not going to heal her.

Quickly, Edge surrounded her wounded right hand with his own, feeling the episodic pumping of blood pushing against his human skin. It felt different, the foreign feeling and pain in his right hand climaxed as he made tight contact with her injury. The rush of aching reached his mind and he arched his neck back and yelped in shock. "ARGH!" he swore and then clamped down on his lower lip. He looked at where their hands joined. For the time being, his frail hand seemed to remain normal. But the feeling of intense sensitivity was uncannily similar to when his left wrist had undergone a rapid mutation adjacent to the Mercury Relic's clutch.

"Sana..." he whispered as she continued to sob from a mixture of pain and psychological agony from being shot. He felt everything enter him through the blood pressing against his palm. The pain, the terror, the anxiety, and the Gardevoir's life. It was maddening.

"...Veh Feyera," she gasped holding onto his tattered bomber jacket desperately with her other hand.

"Yeah?" he asked, his own breaths growing arrhythmic. Feyera looked further down the path to make sure there were no more rockets coming. The two they encountered must have been a patrol or something he thought. A set of opponents that weak and Sanaria's life was in jeopardy. It was catastrophic. A wrecking ball had taken out all the confidence they once held as it conjoined to their anxiety in emotional harmonics. And Edge felt every ounce of it. He clamped down tighter on her hand saying, "Sh—"

"—Just..." Sana began to say before her rail thin frame further collapsed against his.

"Hey, stay with me!" Edge ordered, now aware that his sympathy extended directly to her. It was a powerful relay of empathetic consciousness. In a way, it was similar to how he felt when guiding his Pokemon in combat. Their pain became his pain.

She nodded softly and gave a long exhale. Her hair, wet from humidity and exertion, brushed against Edge's glossy and sweaty neck. The fine follicles would have tickled him if not for all his thoughts traveling the pathways of worry and concern.

Feyera bent his neck down and sternly said to her ear, "What do you need? I promise you everything is going to be..."

"No. No! Everything is not going to be fine, I—I'm really scared," she said shaking uncontrollably.

Edge could not even muster a response as her anxiety pushed on top of his own, wedging him deeper into a well of thought. Would they ever even stand a chance to get off this forsaken island alive? He had fought so hard, pushed himself to the extreme, and they had barely survived against a mere two grunts out of possibly hundreds in the Evercrest facility. His unbroken silence and tense expression answered her. She knew he was just as frightened.

"What—what happened?" Sana asked, clearly mortified by her deep wound. Her ruby eyes looked back and forth, from Feyera's eyes to their interlocked hands as she began to panic crying out, "Veh Feyera...! What happened!?"

He didn't tell her. "Sana, we gotta stop your bleeding," Edge insisted, knowing that she would lose consciousness at the rate she was losing the precious life liquid. Even with his hand firmly bandaging hers, he knew he could not stay forever and the scab would need to form naturally. And
still, her shivering caused him to tremble. First in his hand touching hers, and then possessively throughout his whole body.

"Veh..." she moaned, unable to say her caresser's name, only the cultural name she had given him. He felt his own fears and anxieties begin to return to him as they transitioned through her diminished stature.

Mister Feyera knew this was going nowhere but downhill. Experience with a prior feedback fall told him this. As much as he would like to have a rational for it, Edge could not explain it only sense its ominous presence on the horizon. He cursed and then began to remove his large protective jacket. Upon getting it off to his right sleeve, and realizing their bodies were connected there hand-in-hand, he vied, "Sana, we gotta break! Gotta split our hands. Just for a second!"

"Wait...!" she hollered. But he gave her no time. In a jolt, he attempted to pull his hand away from hers, but her fingers eagerly clutched at his escaping hand. Sana wailed, "No! D—Don't! Don't you leave!"

Feyera struggled with her. Soon his fingers were uncontrollably interlocking with her own as her eyes glowed in shades of scarlet. His eyes too began to gain a faint glow, obstructing vision in crimson, mirroring the Gardevoir's ocular Psychic aura. He began to panic, knowing just how simple it would be to slip into a fall when his sentiments blended with hers during the exertion of psyonics. Despite the danger, overcoming the rush of touch proved insurmountable.

Their hands were dovetailing to the point of unintended and united tussle. He drew away, but her Psychic grip kept his hand anchored in hers, mimicking her own hand motions. The stinging pain, still in his right hand, only grew as he fought to release his hand from Sana's grab. "Sana! Listen to me! I just need to take my jacket off! I'm not leaving!"

"No, no, no!" she cried, senselessly buried in fear. She looked at his beat-up piece of clothing now only covering one of Mister Feyera's sleeves. Her cherry eyes traveled along the mostly removed outerwear. Edge followed her eyes quivering uncontrollably in tears. He saw the bomber jacket was punctured in at least two different places. The bolts had torn straight through the coat and their narrow holes expanded, tearing further as he struggled to take it off. For once, he was glad the burly jacket was slightly oversized since his personal body frame was not damaged. If he had been fitting the big jacket, the bolts would have hit him at least twice in crucial areas: through the shoulder blade and in his gut right above the liver.

"Sanaria! Please...STOP! Here use my jacket's sleeve to..." Feyera insisted, hoping to bandage the wound with some artificial pressure.

"I can't...! NO!" the Gardevoir belted.

"You gotta splint the hole in your hand Sana!" Feyera shouted. "You're hurt! That's a fact!" He was no medical doctor or physician, but he knew how injuries like this went. Plus the risk of Sanaria contracting infection was much greater now that his dirty hand had been pressed into her cut. She needed something synthetic to hold the blood in. He couldn't bear the screaming pain from her body. "Use my coat and wrap it..."

"N—no! I need to heal and not be scarred forever," she said in a panic.

"W—what?" said Feyera with a look of worry on his face. The wound was pretty bad, but did Gardevoir lack the ability to heal? Judging by Sana's pristine figure devoid of scars, he thought for sure their bodies recovered.
“*Your human garments can’t help me!*” her shrill voice dug into his mind, as her clipped ear cartilage touched his smooth neckline.

“You don’t have a choice! There are no Pokemon centers for miles; did you forget?” Edge said frantically, “We’re on a desolate island!”

“H—hold it for me,” the Gardevoir insisted.

“Sana, you can’t use my hand; it’s not clean, it’ll infect you,” Feyera bluntly told her.

“N—no…” She bit her lip and then braced her free hand against her clothing’s base. Hastily she said, “Hold my skirt’s waistline!”

“Sana…?” Edge asked in confusion. He wasn’t even sure what the fabric would feel like. He had only had felt it against his clothes, and even then it was mostly mental extrapolation concerning how it felt. It was strange like that, just by looking at the garment’s delicate fibers, he could feel it against his skin. But now that she mentioned it, his mind became completely focused on the mysterious linen.

“J—just do it!” she commanded. Though she could slightly manipulate his body into doing the same thing as hers, like their joining of hands, commanding Edge had its limits. If there was no emotion to latch onto, she was helpless. And that was exactly how Feyera felt when he was told to touch her garment. Helpless.

He used his free hand to reach out and touch the fabric. Contact with his skin caused the trainer to gasp in surprise, it was finer than silk, or any other material he knew about. When his mind focused upon it, the tingling it gave his wrist as he ran his left hand against the satin fineness simply made him gawk at the ludicracy he possessed to actually listen to Sana and place his hand against her skirt’s waist.

She forced an incredibly fake laugh at his expression. Still sniffling, she took her left hand and tightly gripped the rim of her short skirt’s base. Tearing gently, she tore about a three-inch palm’s width section from the bottom of the skirt, making it even shorter than before. She was able to split the material effortlessly and perfectly straight, barely making any noise as she did so. Some blood began to drip onto the once pristine garment in numerous spherical wine colored beads.

“Hold this…please,” she said to an Edge whose face was astonished. He simply could not believe it. Based on the way Sana treated her clothing as an extension of herself, he always thought Gardevoir treasured their garments nearly as much as their hearts. But this action had revealed that at the end of the day, it was just fabric. Although it was undoubtedly a precious fabric. He held the strand of ivory linen in a quivering hand. It was so soft and so light, he felt like it would flow out of his hands like running water if he did not hold on tightly to it. Maybe it was a special type of fabric the brain had a preference for.

In any event, Feyera had never felt a material quite like this, nor had his focus ever been so tightly honed in on a seemingly inanimate object. It reminded him of the time he had played with quicksilver as a small boy in the science laboratory back at the Pokemon Academy that one time. Same exact texture and looseness. It was amazing. Holding it in his hand made him feel free and alive. The bloodstained section quickly allowed for the droplets of crimson to run off it, as they did not become absorbed by the material.

She saw him gawking at the section of her torn off garment, squinting in anticipation. Sana then pressed her free head against his right wrist, and with a soft moan, she pulled her wounded hand away from his. “Mmmm…ugh…*sniffle*” she gurgled in the fracture of their flesh.
"…Mmmm…ow…" Feyera said in tandem. The trainer shuddered as the pain in his own hand came back to replicating the sensation hers. It mirrored it in every way save for the actual wound itself. No longer was the connection physical, but the mental bond remained.

Sana quickly clutched the lash of her garment and deftly wrapped it around her hand numerous times. Edge watched. Over and around she went, at least five times, giving her a white fabric glove that resembled that of a boxer. In fact, it reminded him of what Hitmonchan wore when not wearing their signature combat gloves. This connection made him feel bizarrely lighthearted; at least he tried not to laugh about it amid all the mutual pain. Sana kept all of her focus honed in on the bloody mess running down her and Edge's forearms. Surprisingly, the linen material did not stain from the flow, nor did any of the blood run through the cloth. Edge was fascinated by it and held his mouth open in wonder.

Sana looked down at her handiwork and gasped. At the very least, she had stopped the bloodshed. Clearly exhausted, her rail thin body fell backwards into his arms, and her mint green hair brushed into his mouth unexpectedly.

"Mumph!" Feyera grunted as he moved back, spitting out a few of her long green hair strands. He arched his neck back and used his forearm to remove some of the Gardevoir's hairs that stuck thanks to the tropical humidity.

"Veh Feyera," she whispered, unaware that her balmy hair had just unexpectedly splashed straight into his gaping mouth.

"Sana." Edge's fists shook, "Listen we're gonna make them all pay."

Sana wedged the back of her head against his chest, on the trainers left side. Her smooth hair against his heart shard tingled.

He looked over at the blots littering the pathway. He imagined the pain of being pierced with one of them like Sana had over and over. "They're—they're monsters…"

"That…doesn't matter. These two…the ones who hurt us…are dead," she sighed motioning with her resting head. "Marrying …*sigh* embracing frustration at this point…it won't help, it will only blind you…us."

"I can't believe they shot you! What about your Reflect shield?!" Edge angrily said. He was more upset by the fact that he could not do anything rather than the fact that Sana had been shot. If only he hadn't been so bad at protecting her. She was fine on her own. He knew that she had stretched herself thin by protecting him in addition to herself. The Nihil's barrage was too much even for her. "Wouldn't you stop the bolt from hitting you?!"

She bent her head around slightly and looked at him. When he looked into her deep nebulous eyes, he felt as if he were scolding one of his Pokemon, telling them they didn't try hard enough, when he knew that deep down it was only his fault. He was the one to blame, but it did not stop the frustration from needing a direction to be sent in. Feyera knew he was the weak link in their tag-team. It was just like when he siphoned his Pokemon. He always took more than he gave. And while, according to what Sana said earlier, his relation with her as a fellow Gardevoir did not let him siphon from her, he still somehow managed to screw up and place her in harm's way. His psyonics were just not good enough. They weren't his. They shouldn't have been. And he told himself that is why they were weak.

She continued to stare at him without blinking, a few tearing rivers had all but dried up along her white wheat face, slightly tanned beige from all the sun.
The inadequacy began to feed into hypotheticals. If only he had made the gravity well as large as he had before back in Cerulean City. Maybe then it would have pulled all the flying metal shards away from them and into the bottomless pit of mental energy somehow imposed onto the physical world. Edge didn't care how bad that ruined him, he told himself that physically he could deal with the consequences of lethargy. What was worse than the exhaustion from employing psyonics was feeling inadequacy such as this. He was extremely angry that his fear of spiders had gotten them into this mess. Sana had warned him about the possibility of running into patrols, and he let stupid pride get in the way. It would have been better to have just gone into the forest and deal with the Ariados. Anything was better than this.

Sana studied his racing green haloed eyes. The way they shifted back and forth meant he was deep in thought. "It was a good shield. While it lasted," she said melodically whilst fingerling her skirt's new clean edge.

As moods and feelings overcame him like a typhoon, Feyera belted, "I screwed up Sana; you shouldn't have had to defend me. You didn't need to get hurt because of me! Dammit. I'm not even your trainer."

"No, you're not veh Feyera. Don't blame yourself. They're the bad people, not you," she said whilst raising her injured hand and practicing pointing. Luckily, the tendons were not hit, and she could bend each finger perfectly well. Making a fist would be difficulty though. First, she pointed at the stillled bodies of the Team Rocket members, turning her back to Feyera once more. They had each been taken out in a state of insurmountable fear. One by Edge's acute manipulation, and the other from Sana's Psychic lash. Feyera wondered what move Sana even used to end the blond rocket. He knew that somehow what he had done to the other rocket was different. It felt like the natural progression of his psyonics. First he was manipulating guards in Vermilion's harbor to let him onto the S. S. Anne by projecting emotion, second he had learned how to adequately read experience through the emotions of Celadon's Gym custodian, this was the next stage: using the emotions of others to unify physical actions. Although crude, it worked with something as specific as automatic weaponry.

It was not something he was proud about, but it did make him feel good. He wouldn't have had it any other way. Those men were evil people and deserved to die. There could have been no other way, Feyera told himself. Strangely, he was feeling guilty, but not from causing all of this. It was a different type of circumstantial guilt. Edge rationalized that the guilt was from using powers that weren't his and might wind up damaging him, playing off his defensive structure of: "not deserving what occurred to him".

Sana watched as Edge lifted his left arm around her body and brought it to his face, slightly gracing her forehead as he did so. The mutation was still there. It might have even spread a millimeter but being a good scientist Feyera couldn't tell without a proper measuring device. How would they damage him though? Would they do so by simply imparting more of Seph's features? Or was there something darker and unseen in their adulteration of the man?

"Sigh..." "Sigh..." Then the two of them sighed simultaneously, causing them to jump at each other's synchronized action. Feyera grunted and Sana huffed, trying to play it off as a coincidental oddity.

Feyera's thoughts came to a screeching halt when he noticed Sana's wounded hand pointing right at his heart. Though she was facing away from it, and could not see it, she knew exactly where it was on his chest. "Remember that...you're *cough!* different. Not like them anymore..."

"Not...anymore...?" Edge looked over at the fallen members of Team Rocket. What truly
separated him from them? His stupid Gardevoir shard? Was that it? The blasted simplicity was impossible to swallow. Yet it was so true. He knew if Operation Semblance hadn't happened, he was just as likely to have wound up in one of their shoes, ordered to kill for a paycheck. He wasn't thankful to have the Gardevoir he had killed anchored into his body—in fact it was very disturbing —, but he did not fight the relief that he hadn't been "just another lackey in Team Rocket".

Still, why him? What did he do to deserve everything? All the good, all the bad, everything in between? He didn't do anything to have this put upon him. He wondered if he would make the same choices if he were born into another life. Would he have just complied with orders like the two dead men in front of him? If anything, he was worse than them. They only followed orders, Feyera made his own rules. It was the one part of logic he never seemed to be able to follow all the way through. He could dogmatically follow any given method or recipe, but when it came to himself, he found he was typically making up his own standards. This might have begun in boarding school, but it was impossible for him to ever grow out of. Undoubtedly such a mentality played a part in his involvement with Progenitor and the Evercrest Programme as a whole.

"Sana…how do you know…?" he asked.

"You know you are different."

"It's this isn't it?" he pointed at the Gardevoir horn.

"That…has a lot to do with it, but—" Sana said groaning.

"—Listen if that's all you care about then—" Edge began.

"You didn't let me finish!" Sana squeaked after being interrupted.

"S—sorry," Edge said feeling apologetic. Here he was being rude to a Gardevoir that had just taken a bullet for him. "Go ahead."

She rotated her wrist gently. "I was trying to say that the reason why you are different isn't because you have this—" she motioned to her own, "—but because you know how it feels."

Feyera shook his head saying, "Sensitive."

She nodded, "I know…." The Gardevoir held off on telling him that he'd get used to it. She knew at times even she could not bear it. But at the same time, it was all she knew. Being consigned to emotions and their constituents is what made her who she was: a Gardevoir. If Edge had any idea of what that was like she wouldn't want to deter him from eventually embracing his own emotions and consequently her own. "Trust me when I say that I know."

"Yeah…hah!" Edge laughed nervously while scratching the back of his neck. "Look at me trying to explain how something feels to you, a Gardevoir. Ha…"

Sana tilted her head pressing it against his chest horn. "I…me?" she asked.

Feyera nodded. "Yeah. You. I don't see anyone else who capable of perceiving emotion like you, can you?"

Sana forced a lighthearted laugh. At least Feyera was not outright denying the fact that his psyonics stemmed from emotional components. She thought about pointing this out to him, but figured he had already done enough in terms of progressing by her standards. "You don't need to explain it veh Feyera. I can feel it just fine."
"Oh…okay. Well I guess that means you must be feeling better," he said.

"A…more than you realize…," was her solemn response.

"Sana?"

"Yeah? I feel better because I'm not bleeding anymore, that's what I meant to say."

"Huh? No. I wasn't asking about that. I just needed to know, how did you…?" Feyera trailed off looking over at the rocket's bodies.

"Oh that…*phew*…It was my Psychic. It manifests itself in nearly any form the mind deems appropriate, embellished by how I feel."

"Wait…hold on…what?" Edge asked in confusion.

"Psychic. It is my most powerful combat ability," she said rather matter-of-factly.

"No I get that Sana. It's just how…?"

"You channel emotions."

"No I mean how did you make it…?" Edge stammered. "…L—lethal?"

Sana pulled her skirt down as she sat against Feyera saying, "I didn't mean to kill him. Only…he shot me, with his gun."

"But you shut his mind right off. Look," Edge said directing a finger at the blond haired rocket. "I…didn't mean to."

"I'm not mad at you Sana! He was a bad man and deserved to die!"

"Bad man?" she asked childishly.

"Yeah! Don't you get it? These guys are hardened criminals."

"But Chris…you were a bad man…you just were given a chance to change…to become someone new…"

Feyera froze up because he knew she was right. He was a criminal at one point. Even worse, he committed crime not for some silly Team Rocket mission statement, but for his own personal gains.

He looked down at his chest. Working with the Rockets wasn't the only cruel thing he'd done. According to the memories awakened by Fredrick's Hypnosis Procedure, what he had done to Sephiteos here on this Island was so much worse than stealing a precious artifact from the Pokemon Sanctum two years ago. And somehow the two had been undeniably connected. The Mercury Relic, cause of all this madness now faithfully caressed his left wrist. The attributes of Sephiteos remained present in physical signs unique to Gardevoir anatomy. From his heart, to his arm, to his eyes, it was all the same type of different now.

He rose his right hand, which still stung for an unknown reason, and touched the tip of the red shard on his chest with a delicate finger. The smooth sensation flowed through him and he asked Sana, "You think because of this…?"
"Veh Feyera, you...you're—"

Edge pulled his hand away from the assimilated piece of Sana's species. "I tried. I really did. And now it has to end."

"End?" Sana asked mimicking the finality of a piano's bottom note.

"Look around Sana!" Edge said pointing. "You don't belong here and neither do I. I don't know why you and your mate came to this place, but it has done nothing but bring you harm. Why stay?"

"I—I don't want to stay...I just needed to..." she said softly.

Edge demanded, "Why did you have to stay?"

Sana pressed against his heart, "B—because!"

"Right...this thing," Feyera sighed. "Let me ask you something. If by some miracle I could remove it from my human body...err I mean...If I could remove it and give this back to you..."

"You can't!" said Sana in disbelief. She nudged her hair against it further, driving more sensations into Edge's brain.

"Sana...it can't stay here forever. I was willing to live with it as a battle scar from an Electrode. Hell, I didn't have much of a choice. But now that I have the culprit of all this—" Edge said lifting his left wrist up for her to see, "—I can undo it."

"Undo?!" she said aloud. This time her mouth was able to speak sharply and loudly. Usually it was just one or the other.

Feyera jumped a little, but Sana pressing down on him mitigated the involuntary recoil. "Yeah. Everything can be undone. That's how things work. Lavoisier's Principle. Matter cannot be created nor destroyed, only changed."

"What does that mean to you? Your emotions change right? But they are always there!"

"No Sana, this is different," Feyera said with a shrug. How could he possibly teach Sana? She was like a child grounded in her own whimsical thoughts on how the world worked. True he had to extrapolate a great deal to find a viable solution to his problem, but at least logically it made sense to him. Anything done to him, and—more importantly—his cells for that matter, had to be capable of being "undone". And he had the very piece of equipment that caused the problem in the first place in his clutches.

"How is it different?" asked Sana as her elbow nudged Edge's lower rib.

"Sana...I don't know how to explain it to you. You're too entrenched in emotion to get it."

"You aren't?"

"No I—" Feyera started to say but he could just feel Sanaria's glare though she was not looking at him. "I'm just using a different method than what you are used to seeing. We have different cultures remember?"

Sana huffed out, "Sure. We used to." At this point she wanted little more than companionship, but was unable to force something like that upon Edge unless he were to miraculously become what she assumed was buried deep down inside. Still, he had recently done her a great deed, and that
warranted further emotional investigation on her end. Not to mention he revealed the possibility of consigning to her culture through feigned scientific interest.

Edge raised a brow; her statement seemed a little off almost as if she had been calculating during the last few syllables. He asked her with a polite gesture of his hand in the air, "What's that supposed to mean now?"

She braced her bandaged hand with her other palm. "Means everything changed when Seph and I left our home," she fibbed. Though this was true, it was not what Feyera was asking about at all. However, she successfully derailed the conversation. And amid her desire for companionship—dormant for two years—that was the necessary action. Her rational was that by the time he found out it would have to be too late. Edge Feyera and Sanaria now shared more than he was aware of by only being recently inducted into the realm of her emotional manifold. If it were her duty to tell him, she would need to subvert that responsibility in favor of preserving the possibility of a reincarnated lost love. Still, she was beginning to see cracks in this outlook. Feyera had undoubtedly done something only Sephiteos would do through his—probably instinctual—Gardevoir actions, and it confused her mind greatly. Who was he and what was he becoming? As miniscule as it may have been, it gave her a ray of hope, and this tantalized her mind with tickling feathers of excitement.

"Nothing good comes from this island, Sana…first me and now these guys," Feyera said, still unaware of Sana's slim grin.

"Nothing?" she asked. "You aren't nothing."

He looked at the two empty Nihils, which had turned off automatically. Probably from being on for a set amount of time. Everything mechanical was based on clockwork. Even computers used sequential electrical signals derived from the basic binary format. Every tick to a tock. These mechanized crossbows were no different. He extended a hand and grasped at the one the blond had used. He dared not lift it, but instead simply pointed it further away from Sana and himself. In doing this, he could not help but notice that the bows were not foreign, clearly Kanto made based upon the Latin phrase on their stocks. In small-embroidered script by the "NIHIL RXB" branding, he read "ex nihilo nihil fit".

"Nothing comes from nothing," he said in a whisper.

"What does that mean?" she weakly asked his focused mind.

He took his hand off the quiet crossbow. "All it means is well—" Feyera garbed her with his jacket, "—you cannot have things pop out of the blue."

"Out of the blue? Like out of sadness?"

"No," Feyera laughed, surmising she meant seeing blue based on seeing sadness, for he had done the same in the past, "heh not emotional blue. I'm talking about when things exist suddenly where they did not before."

"Chris veh Feyera..." Sana said soothingly.

"I know it probably doesn't seem normal to you, and I can understand that since I'm going through a lot of different things that do not seem normal to me," Feyera tugged the black jacket against her clammy frame, hoping that it would warm her, "Emotions for instance."

"But you..." Sana started, but held herself off from antagonizing him and pointing out just how
deep-seated he was in emotion, especially for a human once priding himself on rationality.

Edge swiftly answered the silence, "I care. That's all. This has nothing to do with anything else."

In disbelief she wondered just how selfless he could be. What enticed her dreamy thoughts was how selfless he could become under the right circumstances. "Veh Feyera, you care?"

Edge grunted trying to make it sound less sympathetic, and more matter-of-fact. "Course I do Sana. That's just all in a day's work for a Pokemon trainer! Hey, come to think of it, you signed up for being part of my Pokemon gang, remember?" he teased.

Sana gently prodded him saying, "Well I'm sure there are plenty of things you didn't intend on signing up for either."

"Ha me?!" Edge said in feigned alarm. "My John Hancock isn't exactly on many bottom lines!"

"Your….what?" Sana asked.

Edge smiled. She might not know all the idioms, but at least she picked up fast on the ones he taught her. "My sign of approval. A signature to warrant a legally binding agreement under the constraints of a contract—"

Sana interrupted his ramblings, "Your mark?"

Edge grinned, happy to find Gardevoir had an idea of what he was describing. "Ah yes a mark."

She giggled, "Aw, you humans still do that? That's so cute!"

Feyera looked at her in alarm, "Huh? Uhh…umm, I don't understand…?"

Sana held Edge's removed coat close to her by tugging on the sleeves. "He he! You aren't making one of those silly jokes right?"

"Jokes? No," Edge said, pretty sure that Sana would have been able to tell if he was being sarcastic with her.

She balled a loose fist with her healthy hand and pretended to stamp her bent in right leg sheathe. "You really still do that?"

Feyera was very nervous now, "W—what? You don't?!"

"Why would we?" Sana asked the path ahead of them.

"How else do you have an ordered society?! No wonder you got attacked by Dark Types."

"I…that's different, veh Feyera."

"I'm failing to see how," Edge snorted. Puzzlingly, he was probably the last figure of authority when concerning rules. He rarely kept promises unless forced to, and even then, self-indulgence usually came first. Though when he signed a document, typically he meant it. If he even bothered to read it of course. Though this seemed like a natural excuse, Feyera had been particularly meticulous about learning all the regulations for being a licensed Pokemon trainer. The license was a big deal to him after all, it meant liberation from Prevoys Coffee and a way to overcome his fears. He studied all the rules as if he were a twelve-year-old who had to take the junior trainer's test in order to even think about obtaining a Pokemon.
"We place our trust in each other. Not in paperwork," Sana said with a smile. "It used to be done the way that you still do it though."

"The way we still do it…? You make it sound like there is another way. If everyone could just do what they wanted to, then you would have people like the Rockets taking advantage of everyone's naivety."

"What does a piece of parchment do? Does it make you do the right thing?"

This hit close to home for Feyera. "Hmm…Sana it…"

"Gardevoir agree based on feelings. We form bonds, and those make just trust each other."

"You cannot get along with everyone!" Edge stammered in disbelief. The idea of having to for bonds with everyone nauseated him. He never had many friends, and the few connections he had made were by his volition alone, it would be traumatizing to be forced into bonding with everyone to form bridges of trust. Then again, his whole experience was traumatizing.

Sana shook her head delicately saying, "Of course you can't. Ha ha, did you think we were some kind of hive race like the bug types?"

Feyera shivered, bugs were the last thing he wanted to think about.

"Are you cold?" Sana asked innocently.

"N—no," Edge said.

"If you are scared it's okay—"

"Not scared!" Feyera retorted, unaware of what she was going to accuse him of being scared of.

She pressed both of her legs against his. "Veh Feyera, I just want you to understand about us…you said you were interested right?"

Edge realized that Sana did not really know about his aversion to Bug type Pokemon yet. He sighed in relief. "Yeah." He nodded, and then clarified with a soft twist of his neck, "Scientifically."

"So I'll teach you!" she said excitedly.

"I don't need to be taught Sana. My observational skillset is more than adequate to dissect your entire culture," Feyera boasted.

"But you wanted to…" Sana weakly insisted, worrying that what he had said and what he had meant were now becoming different things.

"I'm a researcher. I research things and I learn that way."

"You'll learn with experience," she said pawing her heart, and using her hair to nudge his own.

"Experience…it's an odd contraption," Feyera admitted, not so keen on admitting his own phenomenological experience. Those were rooted in emotion after all.

"It's beautiful. Only you can have it; and you choose who you wanna share it with. Just like your heart."
Edge thought about all the times where he had shared his emotions with his Pokemon. Most of the
time it was unwillingly done, or done in order to satisfy a certain end such as winning an official
Pokemon League Gym Battle. Did he have a choice in the matter? Perhaps. But was he losing that
ability to choose now? He shrugged knowing that indulgence meant deteriorating his capability for
rational thought. Those emotions already shifted his moods like the wind. He was finding out the
hard way that his thoughts were contingent upon how he felt.

Sana played with their legs, tapping Feyera's leather-bound ankle as he sat in brief thought. She
continued to rub her injured hand occasionally. "I think we need to go off together," Sana said as
her desiring gaze traveled to the Mercury Relic.

"Now do you see why all this needs to end? We gotta get off this island," Edge said shaking his
head as the Gardevoir rested on his left shoulder looking out at the pathway ahead of them. He was
thin enough where her head covered the entire region of his body from Seph's shard to the edge of
his shoulder. Then again, her hair was really bulky and rounded, but it did not change the fact that
he had a narrow frame. "These guys are too dangerous. Never fought something like…like that,"
Edge said thinking about just how lucky he was not to be hit directly by the barrage. Those were
some impossible odds. "Hell, I don't even know if we should be breaking into their stronghold."

She then said with determination, "We have to...for Brucie."

"There might be another way," Edge said lacking conviction. "We should have found the yacht..."

"This is the way, veh Feyera...we just made a wrong turn and hit a bump," she insisted. "You made
a choice and I'm going to stick with it until you see it through."

"How can you be so calm at a time like this!" he shouted at her, realizing just how emotional the
entire sequence of events had been. He wanted to meet with Ein one way or another, but this recent
event had certainly dampened the arrogance he once held. He felt his moods shifting radically the
more he thought about how his pathways to remove the Gardevoir attributes anchored to his body
were becoming evermore thorny.

"Because," Sana insisted, "...because we're going to do this together. And when we do you'll...
*cough* *cough*"

Feyera was unsure of where she was going with this. Together? What was the point? It seemed
arbitrary for her to have latched onto his ideas so quickly following their falling out. Unless she
secretly wanted to romance him again, he was not sure. Then again, Sana and he had been clear
concerning that matter by somewhat talking it out. He didn't want to upset things further so he
uncritically said, "I know but..."

As her finger hovered millimeters above his crimson shard's smooth ridge, she said with an insipid
exhale, "Thank you, for taking some of the pain from me. Thanks for taking it upon yourself, that
was...wonderful...I..."

Edge looked at his hand, absolutely stupefied. He never intended to take any of the pain away
from Sana, and yet his body had once again done something without his permission. That or he had
done it subconsciously. It was confusing. It was one of those things he would have done if asked
to, seeing her hurt did force him to feel empathetic; it was strange to not even be questioned if that
was what he wanted to do. He felt the dissonance, the control versus impulse separate his mind,
cleaving it apart. Finally, Edge murmured, "Y—yeah...you would have done the same for me."

At this she laughed, "Ha...veh Feyera! I already have. You know that."
"Listen, we gotta get off this roadway. It's too dangerous to stay here," Edge motioned to the woods. "We—we'll take another way. These patrols are too tough to face head-on."

Happy to see Feyera's rational side agree with her initial plan, Sana bowed her head in quiet agreement.

"We have to stick close to the pathway though if we wanna—"

"There is another way."

"What's that Sana?" he asked her disturbingly still body.

"The doctors have a building spanning the bay. It has two entrances. Well three if you count where you came out of last time."

Feyera nervously grinned, unsure if 'you' meant him, Seph, or both of them.

She went on, oblivious to his apprehension caused by her choice of words, "Both are waterways. I dunno where this road goes, but it must be connecting to the larger harbor."

"So there are two harbors in one bay?" Edge asked, knowing his memory of the place's architecture had been wiped.

"I—I think…one of them is on the part with the land. I think that is where this road goes. And think about all these Pokemon they use," she said pointing at the roadway's various hooves and treadmarks.

"I don't think these are just Pokemon," Feyera said worriedly.

"Whatever they are, they need a big home!"

"Ha ha yeah," he chuckled at her rational. "They sure do."

"So we can try and sneak in the other way, closer to the water. The bay is shaped like a Ponyta's shoe, and the doctor building has two ways in."

"Wait hold up Sana," Edge said as she began to rise off him.

"Hmm?"

"I…" he wanted to ask her why she called the scientists of Cipher 'doctors'. Most of them weren't. Even still, how did she even know what a medical doctor was? "Why doctors?"

Sana made a sour face, "I don't know, that's what they wanted to be…you should know—"

"No I mean why are you calling them all 'doctors'? Most of them are scientists and researchers. Like me. They aren't your hospital docs," Feyera said thinking about Doctor Fuji. Though he had worked at Evercrest, he was an actual physician. It must have been a shame to lose him. No wonder the compassion of the Evercrest Programme had left with him.

She turned her slender body to face him, resting on her knees and hands. "That's what Seph told me you were when you escaped. That's the name they gave you in there, veh Feyera."

"Well…I'm not a doctor. Having a doctorate doesn't make you a doctor Sana," Edge said. He could only imagine how that identity would get tacked onto him. Probably some intern's idea of a joke. Maybe even a nickname. The possibilities were endless. It could have been something as silly as
him having surgeon-like hands. Who knows? The interesting thing was that Sephiteos was perceptive enough to pick up on little things like that amid all the torture of Progenitor. "The fellas in there aren't doctors either. They aren't helping anyone I assure you." Still in the back of his mind, Feyera wondered if they could help him.

"Okay. It doesn't matter. I think you would be a great doctor."

"Listen Sana, I'm not a physician. Doctors have medical degrees! I only had a doctorate in genetics, but even that's gone!" Edge shouted, barely able to hold back blaming Sana yet again for his numerous problems.

"Whatever," she said, "'Mister' Feyera."

"Humph," Edge grunted as he slowly lifted himself off the ground. He wobbled quite a lot, and found himself expending more energy to just mentally keep his balance. As the sunlight continued to warm his body he sighed. He was definitely going to wind up burnt.

Sana watched him from the ground, and wrapped the coat around her body.

He reached out a hand to Sana, and she clutched at it enthusiastically. She rose up to approximately his height. "There you go—" Edge started to say before being pulled down unexpectedly by her tugging as they fell down.

"Ouch!" cried Sana as she hit the ground.

"Oof. What the heck?" Feyera asked her.

She grew flushed, "Sorry. I just fell down. My body doesn't have enough strength."

"Yeah sure! You took me down with you. That's more than enough strength," Feyera lied, knowing how physically weak he was. He felt like even a child could topple him. Although Sana was not a child, she did not weigh much more than one hundred or so pounds. He weighed marginally more than that, but only because of dominant human characteristics. Still, for him to tip a scale above one thirty would be something else. Skinniness came with weakness.

"I didn't mean to hurt you," Sana admitted.

"Hey that didn't hurt, it was just unexpected," Feyera retorted. It did hurt him. The sensation of falling onto the ground being relayed to his mind multiple times made the sensation so much worse. He could even slightly feel what Sana felt when she fell down. Everything dealing with sensation was integrated seamlessly into the manifold of Feyera's unstable consciousness.

"Heh. I forgot how tough you were," Sana joked, recalling how much of a rage he had gone into when she revealed to him that he was in fact delicate.

Much to his displeasure, he could not believe her sardonic words, and instead played along with the lie, seeking consolation in humor. "Yeah better watch out since I arm wrestle Machoke in my spare time."

"Arm wrestle?" she asked him.

"Yeah, like this—" he said gripping her healthy hand and swinging it side to side.

"It's a new handshake!" She smiled.
"Not really, heh. You see who is stronger by fighting the other arm back and pushing it onto the ground."

"So like this?" she asked as her thin arm pressed against his entirely. She didn't realize that you were only supposed to connect hands, not rub arms against each other.

He nudged hers back. "Err kinda, I think you got it."

Then her eyes glowed as she said playfully, "I think I know how to win then."

"Wait don't!" Feyera cut her off as she mentally forged their arms together in a unified action to bring his to the dirt first.

"I win," she said smugly.

Feyera shook his head, "No you can't use your psyonics, that's cheating!"

She giggled and rubbed her eyes, visualizing the absurd picture: a lanky human challenging a creature of ninety percent muscle to a battle of strength without any mental provisions. "Hehe, my! My, veh Feyera, you never cease to surprise!" she remarked girlishly.

"Well yeah. I'm surprising myself all the time," Feyera admitted. Sure these 'surprises' were not the nicest, but they were usually shocking. Especially when considering the current attributes overtaking his body. What had happened to his arm all of a sudden? He needed a microscope to see what the cells there had undergone, but at the same time, he was able to simply feel the difference. This greatly puzzled the young man.

"I know. And that is a part of growing up. I went through that, I still am," she said quietly.

"Heh well at least we have that in common," Feyera said, consoled by her words but not by their implied meaning.

"Oh yes. That is important."

Feyera twisted his mouth at that judgment. "Okay. Sure."

She got to her feet and lifted off her knee with a slight wobble; quickly, she tightened her grip on Feyera's hand.

He nodded, "Okay, so let's get up together then."

The both got up carefully. They stood in the sunlight as the day shimmered off their faces in countless rays. She smiled politely at him, happy to feel his cooperation.

"That wasn't—whoa!—" he said stumbling a little, but catching himself in the nick of time by looking at up Sana's distraught face. "Heh, not so bad." He could not help but feel as though their shared weakness was being ping-ponged between the two of them. Much like Sana's injury, it traveled through them. Speaking of the injury, his right hand was now feeling a lot better ever since she had wrapped her palm in Gardevoir fabric.

"Thanks for helping me again," Sana said.

As Feyera looked over at the rockets to his right, he thought of an idea. "Sana. We can use their uniforms to sneak in to Evercrest!"

"Their vile clothes?!" she asked, clearly repulsed. It wasn't a bad idea, but the thought made her
"Yeah! Simple. They would normally see you if you were wearing what you have on now. Pastels and whites are sure to make em double-take!"

"I…they'll be distracted by my colors?"

"Come on Sanaria, I'm not saying it's a perfect plan."

"Mmm…" she pouted.

"All you have to do is put the shirt and pants on top of what you're wearing. No big deal, you are thin enough where it'll fit," Feyera said denoting her rail figure with his tracing eyes.

Edge walked over to the blond rocket and began taking off the man's outerwear, leaving him only in his undergarments.

Sana waved a hand in front of her nose, "But…but…it smells bad!"

Feyera knew it did, the sweat gave it an odor. "Sana, I'll have to wear one of these too. If you don't, then we won't be able to sneak in."

"I…" she said knowing how much she wanted to travel with him and be with him for every step of the progressive unlocking of his potential. "Fine…" Sana clutched the garments and quickly began putting them over her clothes. First, she slipped her leg guarded feet into the baggy pants. As she put the rest of the uniform on, Feyera bounded over to the other rocket's body and began to strip that one as well.

When he had finished removing the uniform from the brown haired rocket that he had killed, he sighed. The last time he had worn a Team Rocket uniform, he had been a crook. Its price was embedded in his chest, locking itself in as a perpetual reminder of the cost of evil.

He put his narrow legs through the uniform, but realized that his jeans became caught in the fabric. Seemed like he would have to take those off. He turned around and looked over at Sana. What he saw made his jaw drop.

"Something the matter?" she asked innocently.

"Sana, you're…" Feyera started to say but he could not find the words. Though the fabric was somewhat saggy, the fact that she had a short skirt on underneath it made the sight impressive.

She was coated in the ebony blackness of the uniform, and its dark accents matched her pale mint green tone. Even her Gardevoir horn seemed to naturally project out of the straight vertical line in the letter "R" emblazoned on the top's center.

"Chris veh Feyera?" she asked. "Did I do it wrong?"

"N—no. You just look so natural…how did you…?"

"I look natural in this vile piece of attire?! What the heck are you trying to say mister?!" she ordered.

"Sana, I'm not trying to say that you look bad, it is that you look good in anything, even this," Feyera said quickly covering his bases. Secretly he liked seeing Sana dressed in something darker such as this. It made her look much more like an angel of death. But he promptly dismissed this
minor fascination. "I think you pull it off really well."

"Aw you think so? I pull it off really well?" she aped.

"Yeah I would even say—" Edge started off, but her stern glare told him to stop revealing his twisted thoughts.

"Just put yours on mister."

"Um…okay," he said walking towards the woods.

"Where are you going!?" she ordered.

"Relax, I have to take my pants off and well I need privacy."

"Privacy?"

"Yes," Feyera blushed, "I don't want you to see me in my underwear."

"Your…? Oh!" she exclaimed connecting the dots at a Slugma's pace. She saw that he had already undone his belt holster.

"Yeah. Just hold up and wait for me then," Feyera said nervously rushing into the underbrush.

"Okay," he heard her say from behind.

Once a few paces under the cover of trees and bushes, he took his Alterieno leather boots off with a long sigh. Luckily, his feet were still as human as the rest of him. He sighed softly in relief. Then he removed his pants and exposed his skinny legs. They were thin, but not beyond what people would define as "having Torchic legs".

"Dammit," he cursed. Balling up his denim jeans, he threw them to the side. He then stuck a leg through the pants and proceeded to lift his other leg up as well.

Suddenly he felt something against his shoulder. He winced and turned around only to find it was a leaf.

Shrugging, he put on the pants and made an effort to tighten them securely with his original Pokemon trainer's belt holster. Feyera took off his button down shirt, revealing his core completely. It was merged with his flesh, and just as much a part of him as say a limb. The way that the Gardevoir heart snuggly melted into his body was testament to how it had emerged from within him.

"Gotta…gotta fix this," he impulsively said as he ran his fingers along the crimson shard's base.

Taking the uniform and pulling it over his head he fidgeted with it for a while, whilst walking back out towards Sana. He poked his head through and saw her in front of him.

"You don't look too bad yourself," she said mockingly.

Feyera continued to grapple with the fabric. "Well it is not working!" he shouted at the fabric which refused to take into account his Gardevoir horn.

"Hey, don't rip it!" Sana said with a faint smile.

He continued to struggle. Getting his head and arms through took little effort. Though the Mercury
Relic was a tad bulky on his wrist, the artifact's overall exterior constitution was sleek enough to slide through the fabric. "GAH!" he shouted at the shard impeding the uniform.

"Veh Feyera, get over here!" Sana ordered as if speaking to a child.

"Nuhh..." he muttered, taking the garment and tugging downwards against his exposed heart. He felt the fabric slide against it and stretch, refusing to puncture.

She began to walk over to him. He still remained transfixed in his struggle. Usually he would cut holes into material that did not have buttons going all the way down.

Sana pointed in his face, taking his eyes off the uncooperative piece of cloth.

"W—what?!" Feyera demanded. He was as upset about being unable to wear a simple shirt as any man would be. It was humiliating.

"Look at my eyes," Sana said as he followed her finger to her face.

"Sana…it doesn't fit the stupid shard is in the way!"

She then tightly clutched his shard through the material and spoke to his panicked expression, "Relax, don't call it stupid."

"It's in the way!" Feyera said.

Sana sighed. "Just...just look at mine for a moment, okay?"

Though Edge was antagonistic to the idea at first, he did look down at hers. The way it split between the fibers of the Team Rocket uniform she now wore mesmerized the young man. It was all so perfect, so seamless. Even with her relatively flat chest, the shard managed to split out of the anatomically correct location, between her breasts and out of the central "R". As he watched the piece of their shared anatomy rise and fall, he could not help but feel its burning pulse.

She continued to watch him as her body came close to his. Her eyes glistened as a smooth red aura overtook their external region. Feyera had to look through this Psychic shielding window of hers in order to see her cherry irises. In astonishment, his own vision began to become coated in scarlet as his eyes adapted a similar external aura.

"Sana, I...!" Feyera said now aware of what she had been doing. She was linking their minds.

She nudged his heart with a fingertip. "Shh just relax. You're like a little Ralts...sheesh...

"N—no!" he refused, but the sensation was too much, for even with the grunt's clothing separating her hand from his horn, he could not deny the sensitivity imposed there.

"Veh Feyera, relax!" she ordered, as one would command a child.

"I...urghhh...noooooo!" he moaned as his heart filled with heat. He desperately grasped at Sana's shoulders and brought his eyes away from her glowing heart, to look up at her shimmering ruby eyes. "Please no!" he gasped as the sensation of mental unification set in.

Sanaria sternly straightened her gaze as the surging mental wave collided, hers taking direction of his own. "Calm down."

"Don't—you'll never...!" Feyera shouted in agony as he felt his chest tighten in a mixture of fear and assurance. The paradoxical influx caused his mind to be sent off in many directions. Through
this frenzy, he felt his body shake in emotional overload.

"For goodness sake, Chris veh Feyera, it's only a—" Sana said as he instinctually fidgeted with her worn uniform's shoulders, "—donning; stop your struggling!"

"Nehh…no!" he said as he felt the heat from his heart begin to split the fabric. Every fiber of the grimy, sweat infested rocket's uniform pressed against his Gardevoir horn. He looked down to see it splitting forth out of the fabric, reminiscent of his dream memory.

As the burning heart pierced through, splitting fiber from fiber, Edge could do little but gawk at the sight. He felt as if he were experiencing this emergence of a heart shard all over again.

"Good now—" Sana said, joyously seeing the fabric tearing along the heated rim's perimeter, "A little touch."

Feyera fervently attempted to pull away, however she was too quick in applying pressure upon both sides of his Gardevoir heart shard.

Edge muttered incomprehensively as the Gardevoir pressed both her palms against his lungs, pushing the fabric against him. He took in a deep inhalation as the rush of heat lulled when she removed her hands from his ribcage. Looking down, he saw the red horn projecting out of the rocket uniform's crimson "R". It was a perfectly clean incision. No rips or tears. He was used to using scissors to make room for the scar, but now that seemed archaic.

Sana watched his amazed expression. Her voice gently resounded, "So…what do you think?"

"This?!" Feyera touched the horn. "What did you do to me?!"

"Just a part of donning. Something adults do all the time. Don't you have similar rituals?"

Feyera thought about this. Maybe tying a tie. That was the closest example he could think of. Still, it was strange to have his body give off such acute heat to cleave fabric. "No!" he argued.

"Oh…well. I should have warned you."

"Why?!" he asked the shard on his chest. "Why does it do that?!"

Sana looked at his puzzled face, "That's the way it is veh Feyera. How else did you intend on fitting clothes?"

"Cutting them apart with a pair of scissors!"

"Scizor the Pokemon?" she asked with a faint grin.

Edge rocked his head back and forth in defiance. "N—no chopping the garment down the middle. Heck even Brucie could do it for me. Or wear things similar to what I wore before. My collared shirt had an opening."

"Oh. Well these 'Team Rocket' uniforms did not grant the both of us that luxury," Sana spoke plainly.

"Haa…I…" Edge gasped at his new attire. The way it fit against his horn was undeniably more appropriate than prior attempts to make it suitable.

"This was your idea of infiltrating the building right?" she asked, fighting back laughter.
He did not like what he was being put through, but the fact remained that they both at least resembled Team Rocket members from a distance. "Yeah but I didn't expect you to do this…!" he recoiled away from her and pulled on his new uniform's contours, tucking it into his waistline.

"Veh Feyera, you helped me out, now I'm going to help you."

"Well what if I don't want help Sana!"

She looked at his chest shard, "Your body wants help. Just like mine did when I was hit by the rocket's attack."

"You—you can't explain that to me. It is completely foreign," Edge insisted, whilst deep in denial.

"You can overcome it though, that's why we need to work together as a team."

Feyera growled at her logic, but realized it was sound. "Fine. Just promise me one thing."

"What?!" Sana asked surprised. She prayed that he hadn't discovered she was withholding information from him.

"The next time you show me your fancy Gardevoir…stuff, at least warn me."

"I…I can do that for you veh Feyera. I'm sorry for startling you just now."

Edge sighed. Despite all the turmoil, he was happy to find the rocket uniform snugly fitting. He and Sana made quite a pair, and since rockets always traveled in groups of at least two outside of base, they were pretty much set.

He padded his uniform so that it lay smoothly against where the horn projected, a job Sanaria had only half completed. He said to her, "So, let's do this now…shall we?"

The Gardevoir smiled. "Yes. Let's. Follow me and take my hand," she said reaching out to him.

Feyera grasped it and they both walked into the jungle's thicket paralleling the artificial roadway.

Always keeping the clearing in sight, Feyera and Sana progressed quietly, his hand in hers as they approached a larger clearing. Two paths emerged, and Sana tugged him towards the one that was less trampled upon by machinery. If she was right, then there were at least two ways to sneak into the Evercrest facility.

As they wandered southwards, it became evident that humans were around. And quite honestly, this came as little surprise when in the distance, they could see two other members of Team Rocket. Behind them lay a much more interesting sight however.

A massive steel building, seemingly built into the land itself projected from the earth where the foliage stopped. Its gapping metal doors were barely guarded, yet maintained fortitude through the numerous cameras keeping sentry.

Feyera and Sana knelt down near a leafy plant on the edge of the forest. She braced his shoulder as they honed in on the rocket's conversation.

"Say, our shift over yet?" said the shorter rocket to his taller partner.

The taller man took a swift glance with his blue eyes down at his silver wristwatch. "No. Still a couple more minutes before shift change."
Feyera nudged Sana softly. She pressed her face against his nodding in agreement.

The shorter rocket kicked some dirt, "Ahh rats."

"Least we ain't doing anything but guard duty. Ya hear about that guy who tried to cross the Chief here?"

"Yeah, frickin' hell man, that stuff still gives me nightmares. I'd rather have been executed on the spot."

"Guess he wanted to make an example to the other scientists."

"Yeah but you gotta admit that was some f'd up shit man."

"Trust me, I once thought I'd seen it all too. Like I said before, least we are only guards. Half the time Chief pretends we don't even exist. And heck, I don't even understand half the words he says."

"Cha, guess it's an easy enough job. Stand around; take care of any Pokemon that get too close to the base. Pull the trigger, fer a nice quick pop, 'n one, two!" the shorter rocket exclaimed pointing his firearm at imaginary local Pokemon.

"Humph. I still haven't had to kill any of the blighters yet."

"That's cause you suck at shooting Will."

"Shut the hell up ya little turd."

"Easy pal, no need to get riled up just cause ya ain't a crack shot. Say what kinda nonsense is the new mandate?"

"You mean the one Chief just ordered?"

"Yeah treats us like dogs. The pay's good, but hell I can't wait for his 'new guest' to leave."

"Humph. You're right. We're not allowed to be seen until mister smarty-pants finishes his meeting with the so-called 'Ephemera'."

"Yeah what I wanna know is what kinda brain dead idiot comes all the way out to this island, sees all that's built here and not question the reason for it being here! Makes me wanna bash the little sucker's face in!"

"Well blimey, I don't know Will. Not everyone's as shrewd as us."

"Say yer new here right? Ta the organization 'n all."

"Yeah, thought I told you that last time we were on a shift together."

"Well yeah, you gotta understand I'm pretty new on the job too. Got transferred from Celadon after that incident."

"Freakin' Rockets oughta get their shit together with Cipher breathing down their necks and all. First two years ago and now that whole Kanto HQ bust."

Edge smiled, knowing he was the cause of both these problems. Sana looked over at him, ready to make a move based on his signal. He was the one who had actually done stuff like this before. She hoped that he would guide her safely; he had already shown that he was capable of protecting her
from pain, but her anxiety persisted.

He gripped her hand and pointed a finger into the air signaling "Wait."

The two rocket guards continued to banter. "Well hopefully after our privileged guest leaves we get a transfer. The heat here on Penta is awful isn't it?"

"S'ain't just the heat, it's the humidity too."

"Kinda sinks down on you."

"Yeah pressing down, getting under your skin."

"Ugh is break nearly over? I can't take it any longer."

"Pfft…still got five minutes but what the hell, let's go inside a little early and get some AC."

"Heh, now there's a rocket that's going places, Terry, ya always got the good ideas," said Will as the two of them then turned and walked past the metal door. "They oughta make ya boss er somethin'…"

As the two rockets approached the facility, its metal door opened and then they walked inside with little problem. Neither of them even faced the facility's apparent cameras. Despite all the security, the door was motion sensing.

Seeing their inky black uniforms retreat into the confines of the building, Feyera jumped up and said, "Now's our chance!"

"O—okay!" Sana stammered in a rush to stay with him.

He ran out of the thicket towards the facility's gated metal doors, Sana close behind him. Their quick pace was augmented by seeing the vertically sliding door begin to slide close, clicking as the gears began to push it back. Deftly they dashed underneath it and took a quick breath as the metal sealed behind them.

"*Pant pant* That was much easier than I thought it would be," Edge said still out of breath. He had little stamina. Sana too shared this feature; he could tell from her worm face that rushing to the partially open door had taken much out of her. She held her mouth open in awe.

As cold air entered their lungs, the two peered at the enormous facility. From where they had entered, there were a few glass panels revealing various sections of the building's deeper annexes. There was a large empty warehouse structure to their right further down, and on the left appeared to be a dimly lit corridor.

"Where'd the baddies go?" Sana asked worriedly.

Edge looked around and then heard laughter coming from a nearby room labeled "Break Room". He grinned manically, "Bumbling idiots, taking time off! Everything is going in our favor Sana!"

"Everything?" she asked.

"Yeah, we're in like Flynn," Feyera replied. "Now just to find this Ein character…" he trailed off looking in both directions.

"Do you remember any of this veh Feyera?" Sana stressfully asked.
"No. But let's follow the main passageway," he said pointing left. Then he looked down at their outfits, "We look Rockety enough."

Sana feigned a laugh. They might have had the Team Rocket uniforms on, but that did little to stop the astute observer from noticing Sana's mint green hair. And both of their Gardevoir hearts for that matter. Though the crimson shards projected out from an equally red "R", anyone—even if they weren't colorblind—could tell that there was something off about their respective chest's anatomy.

As they pranced down the empty wide corridors, tapping their feet against the metal grated floors, there was little sign of any activity whatsoever. The place seemed vacated. It worried Feyera a great deal. This was Evercrest, the forefront of Pokemon study and genetic engineering.

The place where they now found themselves was an empty shell.

Edge turned to look at Sana as they reached the end of the corridor. An intimidating door loomed ahead; its partially obscured contents a mystery. It was at least twice their height, and its stiff rodded hinges would be difficult to open if it were not already left open ajar. As he looked at her determined face, Feyera could not help but feel déjà vu. She nodded affectionately at him, vigilantly keeping an eye out for any activity.

Together, Chris and Sana both pressed against it. The door shifted fully open with a squeak and light poured out from within. They carefully walked inside, unsure of what to find.

The dark facility was perfectly illuminated in this massively tall room. It was like a large warehouse, only completely empty. The high vaulted ceilings and metal walls made Edge question what kind of a place this really was. He looked over at the end of the room and saw that there was an indoor harbor there leading to Chrono Island's bay. The roofed docks were complete with small watercrafts and other vehicles for local use.

In disbelief, he simply held onto Sanaria's hand, hoping it was all real. However, he noticed that her hand had grown rather cold.

Feyera looked up at her face to see that she was no longer looking in the direction that he was. He could only see the back of her hair. His mind frantically considered what she would be looking back at.

Then suddenly a soft click snapped the silence, echoing in the huge room. It was the unmistakable notching of a firearm. Edge's blood ran cold when he heard a familiar voice whose tone was unrecognizable.

"Put your hands where I can see them! Mister Feyera, you're under arrest!"
A tight focus on the details. Fear morphed into unparalleled perception with the beat of the heart. Once sharp breaths turned into desolate exhales as Feyera looked at their perilous situation.

Edge and Sana were surrounded. Six total. Four Pokemon and two people circling up to them from behind. And Edge knew exactly who the two people were, from not only his dreams, but also as aspects of his murky past.

Sana rocked her head to and fro as Feyera looked past her thick green hair. "VEH FEYERA?!" Sana nervously squeaked, uncertain as to what to do. They had come out of nowhere in this deceivingly vacant storage room. Feyera tightened his grip on the Gardevoir's healthy hand.

His thoughts scrambled, but he found no consoling facts. No strategy relevant to his predicament. All he could do was take in a deep inhalation, followed by a long sigh. We can't do anything, he admitted. They were outnumbered and outmatched.

It was over. They were both caught. The once hope-filled chance to escape now seemed to be a distant dream, isolated by both impassable space and impenetrable confusion. It was an ethereal separation dividing Chris Feyera and Sanaria from the world they would flee to if given the chance. That final distance could simply not be traversed. And yet the open harbor remained cruelly in sight. A bright light symbolizing escape at the end of this room was sardonically closed off by the cold click, resolutely affirming mutual dread.

It all culminated in the simple notching of a weapon, and the soft hum of its contents. A blur of machine and smoky light cut off hopefulness.

"But veh Feyera...!" Sana said in panic as her core began to expel heat, elevating in rhythm and treble. Feyera could sense the impenetrable distress as a sour taste filled his mouth. He swallowed dryly.

The world around them had been snap-frozen by the icy tone splitting forth from her smooth jawline as she stood side by side next to a tall man holding an oversized handgun. Her lips perked together tightly, the dark olive green one piece she wore closely followed her toned body complimenting her flat black shoes, and her frameless spectacles reflected light as brilliant prisms would, cutting between splintered locks of overhanging red hair.

"L—Lorelei?" Feyera belted in disbelief. "W—what ...are you doing here?!

"I should be asking you the same question, Chris." She clutched tightly on the Poké Ball in her hand saying, "You've neglected to tell me a great deal; I'm going to take you in to custody."

"Wait!" Feyera looked down at his stolen Team Rocket uniform, "I—I can explain all this."

"Oh can you?" she asked. She then looked over at Sana, who in turn winced with uncertainty. "Can you really, 'Mister Feyera'?"

"Veh Feyera...don't...no, you can't..." Sana's telepathic thoughts flew from scenario to scenario;
"Yes," he said as Sana gently pulled her shivering hand away. The cold vents above rumbled a soft hum as the air conditioner kicked on with a far off blast.

Feyera felt this uncertainty, for most of it was his own feeding into Sana's, and sent back through an intercreate tie of growing emotional dependence. Although their captors could not see it, the two of them shared a mental bond connecting their emotional disarray like a tight foundation, binding them together as cement would. And to his knowledge, such a bond was not expanding its tendrils. The way it encroached upon both of their essences made it hardly noticeable.

He tried to tell Sana to keep calm and let him talk his way out of this, but he realized in horror that his thoughts of consolation would probably be projected to Lorelei and the man at her side.

Relax, Edge said through telepathy. A lie. A hypocritical statement. It was the very opposite of every impulse his body put him through. A living and visible contrast piercing out of his sternum bone.

The tall man garbed in a white coat cut in front of Lorelei, waving his advanced firearm at Sana's chest. As he strolled before them, his lab jacket wafted behind him, much like an elegant snowy robe. His face was angular like a fox's. It showed little emotion in its taut form and angular lines. His jet-black hair mopped his narrow face, spiking in certain unkempt areas along the back of his head, and a single branch of the straight hair drooped in front of his clean-shaven face. On his thin snakelike nose, he wore a pair of glasses similar to Lorelei's. They were frameless, however their rectangular prism's starkly contrasted Lorelei's jaded crescents. He opened his nearly lipless mouth and spoke plainly, "You ought to take your own advice, Chris."

"You…you're Ein," Edge said as he put both his hands against his hips, winging his elbows outwards. He remembered meeting this man from the dream memory of the Progenitor Procedure —reawakened through Fredrick's Hypnosis. He had the same darkened eyes, the same pale skin, and the same desiccated demeanor.

"Yes." The frail scientist, now taller than Mister Feyera, still looked the same even after two long years; not aging much from his late twenties. Even if Ein had changed over the years, there was no questioning the fact that Edge had heard his very same voice from the computer terminal back in Team Rocket's Celadon Headquarters.

Lorelei cautiously watched as an emotionless Ein marched in slowing procession, still aiming his technologically advanced weapon at Sanaria. Her hushed breathing belied her fear of the mechanized particle weapon. The device Chief Ein held reminded Feyera of a pistol the Rockets used, possibly most similar to a Gauntlet—M class. It was of a similar design, being held by one hand, as a typical magnum would be. Yet its over-sized shape and glossy silver construction told Edge otherwise. Gauntlets were weapons that fired metal slugs in rounds of six from a revolving chamber, and this weapon had no such rotating clip, only a single bolted stock inserted below the grip. But perhaps the most important detail were the two fang-like metal rods splitting out of the firearm's mouth. That could mean only one thing: RAIL technology. No projectiles, just pure energy. An instant death sentence even for Edge. Psyonics could not touch a man without emotions, nor could they belittle a RAIL energy beam.

Don't fight him, he warned Sana. Feyera looked at her to see that she was indeed complying by steadily watching Ein with her cherry eyes as he circled. The man's stride began to wane as he fought a smile, bringing both his eyes to Edge's chest in amusement.

"But Chris…!" Sana said through closed lips.
"Ah so the young man does have more than a pebble for a brain after all!" Ein said with a smirk.

"W—what have you been up to since we last met?" Feyera fretted over his words.

Ein sharply answered, "I'm in charge of preserving this island's natural ecology. You've made a large mess already, and I'm afraid there needs to be intervention." He raised a hand and signaled to his Pokemon to approach.

Edge looked to his side and saw that there were four of them. A cluster of three Magnemite bunched together, their silver bodies revolving around an invisible central point as they levitated off the ground occasionally releasing bright yellow sparks. Their magnets spun in unison, while their three sharp eyes honed in on Sana and Chris. As they did so, dim red beams traced the pair's narrow forms. Next to the constellation of Pokemon working in tandem with one another, was a large Pokemon defined by its numerous edges and slants. The polygons comprising the Pokemon's body alternated between red and dodger blue as it hovered off the ground on its two bent in tetrahedron prism legs, occasionally whipping its pointed tail as if it were an overactive antenna.

"Ein," Feyera tapped his foot anxiously, "you make me laugh. You're no ecologist!"

Ein shook his head, "Why don't you tell that to the government?"

"The government?!" blasted Edge.

"Miss Lorelei Carese, I willingly gave you a complete tour of our facility here did I not?"

"Yes." Lorelei nodded, "It was clean and mentioned in the report I submitted."

"Good," Ein said with a smirk. "I can't have that –oh-so…important– detail overlooked by anyone wanting to smear my good name."

"Lorelei!" Feyera said worriedly, but she continued to glare at him with icicles in her eyes.

"Chris. What do you have to say for yourself?"

Feyera pointed at the tall scientist at her side. He hollered confusion, "What do you think you're doing in cahoots with Ein?!"

"That does not concern you, young man," Ein sternly said.

"Mister Feyera, you've eluded justice long enough," she hissed as her soft fingers gently caressed the Poké Ball in her hand.

"What?!" Edge shouted. Feyera again dramatically pointed at Ein with a stiff finger saying, "He's the guy you want! He's the one who's running his own private testing facility here on Chrono Island! They're doing terrible things here to innocent Pokemon! I've seen it."

"Psyonics…" Ein muttered under his breath. "When not curtailed properly, they deconstruct the subject's precious mental stability, Miss Carese. This causes wild and convoluted stories to emerge…*Sigh*…in addition to a heightened teenage invincibility complex."

"So they do," Lorelei agreed, recalling with distrust how she had lost her memory and forced to accompany Feyera to Chrono Island. Her expensive yacht was damaged, and she was left alone in a storm unsure of anything. If Ein and his fellow scientists had not rescued her then she would have been in serious trouble, for at the time she only carried on her person a single Pokemon. Her closest friend and partner since the days of her youth.
"Mister Feyera now sees himself as some type of god; unfortunately for him, the reality his mind has chosen to accept and the one we dwell in are vastly different," Ein smoothly said as he slicked his hair back with a bony hand.

"NO!" Edge defiantly retorted, "Lorelei, he's lying to you! Ein has been running a sick operation here on Chrono Island all along. Harming Pokemon, using them for testing! Remember how I told you about 'Evercrest' in Pallet?!

"Chris, Gideon's faithfully defending this ecological reservation from the members of Team Rocket who came here as per your orders," she said whilst shaking her head. The Elite Four member removed a small personal digital assistant from her snug fitting attire. "You're the criminal. I was told...shown...everything. Having psyonics does not warrant the...cruel things you've done."

"Cruel things?!" Edge said as he began to perspire. Everything had been turned on its head. Sana rocked her head to the side and crossed her slender legs, uttering softly, "Veh Feyera, it's going to be okay right? We're going to be okay…?"

"...I hope..." Edge projected, causing Lorelei to slightly recoil seeing his lips not move yet hearing his voice.

Lorelei tried to speak gently, but it was evident that she remained very afraid of Edge's psyonics. "Chris...You need professional help," she insisted. "I cannot believe you kidnapped me and crashed my yacht. What were you thinking...?"

"He needs to be realigned, Miss Carese. His mental stability is just not there," Ein said to Lorelei. Then he menacingly glared at Feyera's Gardevoir heart, "Humph, at least not anymore."

"I'm not some crazy!" Edge pleaded to her. "You remember meeting me in Pallet Town when I received my first Pokemon from Oak! You even read part of my dissertation..."

"—Which was shamelessly stolen from me!" Ein interjected.

"W—what?" Edge asked the coldhearted scientist.

"Do you even know what a Pro-Ionic Psy-Amp is 'Doctor' Feyera?" Ein asked beaming wildly. "From your research. You know...the research you came up on your own; the research you did not snip from me."

"I didn't snip anything...!" Edge argued. But in Ein's eyes, the young man had taken more than he accused him of: the Mercury Relic was far more valuable. It was a one of a kind artifact capable of bending the very foundation of all rationality, much like his psyonics.

Ein brushed his foot in a semicircle on the floor saying, "Care to tell us in layman's terms about how PI-PA coefficient pertains to a subject's mental variance?"

"I...I..." Feyera muttered, clearly unable to recall these rapports.

"Aw come now, you researched that didn't you? Wasn't that your project young man?" Ein said lightheartedly.

"M—my project...?" he said as he looked at Sana. The Gardevoir wore a face of distress, and her eyelids involuntarily fluttered with every motion in the room.

Ein watched as Feyera sought comfort from the Gardevoir next to him. His grin only widened,
"What's the matter Feyera?"

"N—No…you're just…"

"—I'm just exceptionally good at reading what you researched," Ein smartly responded.

"No!" Edge shouted as his fevered passion pitched. He could feel the burning heart warming his essence.

"Feeling a little expressive?" Ein said, nudging Edge further along with his crafty words. "Feeling things a little bit more heartily than usual?"

"W—why…? Why are you…?" Feyera stammered. His head drooped down to make sure that his Gardevoir heart was not on fire. Despite its tame appearance, the physiological effects were already taking place at a molecular level. Edge had no idea, he just felt it. Through this building of deep internal pressure, he continued to babble, "You can't expect…"

But Ein swiftly broke him off, "Let's try something easier: *Ahem!* referring back to page seventy-six of your dissertation: 'Concerning the Paranormal', and I quote, 'By constructing a geometric Möbius band of refined Mercurius around the deoxyribonucleic acid's double helix, one can in fact utilize rapidly alternating alpha waves to manipulate the subject's natural coding through the famed 'Island of Stability' only found in Mercurium's heavier processed isotope, causing peripheral cellular transmission."

"What…?" asked Feyera, still trying to decode what Ein was even talking about. It had something to do with genetics and possibly the Reilken Mercurius. Or at least the radioactive element Mercurium in general. He thought about the Mercury Relic. "Mercurius? Stability?"

"Ah yes, the 'Isle of Stability' keeps Mercurium from degrading itself in the typical half-life cycle many radioactive elements are prone to, allowing for lasting permanency when the isotope's nucleic shell structure is just right," Ein said.

"So you are telling me Mercurius…Mercurium is radioactive…?" Edge asked.

"Radioactive?! Feyera, have you just graduated grade school?" Ein raised his head as his glasses reflected the fluorescents. "Pah! Your infantile terms amuse me greatly."

"Answer my question!" Feyera yelled.

"Oh Mercurium is quite notorious I'm afraid," Ein smirked, "but as a living organism, 'radiation' is the least of your concerns when dealing with processed three-hundred-thirty-seven Mercurium isotopes."

"Then this…this is all…" Feyera whispered.

"Though it takes a painstakingly long method to process—so that the radiation does not outright kill the cells, nor allow the super heavy Ununseptium nucleus undergo spontaneous fission—it has been shown to be synthesized by prior generations…as you are undoubtedly aware, Mister Feyera."

Lorelei raised a brow as Ein's greedy eyes gazed upon Feyera's torso with complete fascination. "Gideon?" she asked in a hushed tone.

"—And through such a process of refinement, it can cause living matter to mesh together by cleaving membranes, breaking apart barriers and generating a localized stem cell effect—thereby
allowing for future growth to take place by any means mandated by all present genetic encoding," said Ein, ignoring Lorelei completely.

"Wait," Feyera blurted out the most emotionally charged statement since he had entered the facility and perhaps since he learned about the true nature of his predicament, "is it—can it be—revisable?"

Ein exposed his porcelain teeth asking, "Now why on earth would that even be an issue, Mister Feyera? You never mentioned such a thing in your dissertation!"

Feyera fought the strain of potential imprisonment, "Because I…"

Ein interjected with a jeer, "—That would be going backwards. Akin to us reverting back to living in caves as glorified two legged apes."

"But there needs to be a way to undo…" Edge said to Ein, as the two researchers gracefully danced about an oblivious Lorelei with their words.

"Humph! Rare as it is, naturally occurring Mercurius was key to the very first life organisms on this planet, fusing the first true living cell together from various individual components," Ein pointed at his body saying, "do we look like simple amoebas anymore? No, we have many different complex parts."

"B—but if there was a problem with the result…?" Chris stammered as Ein waved his arm.

Ein completely disregarded Feyera's angst and droned on, "How else would mitochondria have joined together with a nucleus? Beyond the first breath of life, simple single celled organisms needed to advance…they needed to grow…they needed to merge, and form a greater whole."

"Merge…?" Edge asked as he looked at Sanaria through Progenitor tainted eyes.

"Feyera you're…you have Seph's…"

"—Every instance of this has happened through a random slew of inexplicable epochs, all of which fuel life's desperate evolution. However, what happens when the furnace's flame begins to waver? What occurs when natural order stalls?"

Feyera quietly stood facing Ein and his threatening pose.

"'When change stops, life stops progressing; and consequently, it needs to be rebooted by force.' Don't you recall writing that key footnote on page forty-two of your text?'" Ein hissed.

"Huh?" Feyera quavered, "I…"

"My, oh my, such brilliance. In awe, I simply cannot comprehend your lofty intellect," mocked Ein, "come now, would you care to explain the final, most recent chapter's title: 'The Process of Geometric Gene Sequencing' to us? Surely you recall something that contemporary!"

"I…you're making things up," Feyera said dazed and confused.

"The writing is a bit choppy here and there, but it was you who wrote it no?" Ein's reflective glasses mirrored Lorelei's as he tilted his head. "It is your work right? 'Concerning the Paranormal: A Thesis on Psychic Pokemon and Genetic Quandaries' was written by you, am I right?"

Edge gasped. Lorelei studied the trainer's worried face from behind her frameless glasses. "I had
amnesia!" he retorted.

Ein lit up, "You did!? How awful! And simultaneously convenient for your brilliant scientist charade."

"Chris?" asked Lorelei. "You lied about yourself? Did you honestly think I wouldn't catch on?"

"N—no! You don't understand, it wasn't like that…Sana…I mean my psyonics robbed me of my memories!" Edge said, catching his slipup that wanted to blame Sanaria for his predicament.

"Psyonics eh?" Ein saw that Edge now lay against the brink of panic and decided to twist the knife further in saying, "Oh wait…let us consider a much more likely rational…maybe it was you who stole my dissertation! It coincides with your history as a revolting thief."

"I'm not a crook!" Edge retorted.

Ein's single strand of diverging hair wobbled with his delighted expression, "Ah ha, now that is something you like to do don't you? Heh, you have plenty of experience right? Must've been just like when you robbed the Pokemon Sanctum two years ago! You rotten criminal; how you evaded the authorities for so long is quite the impressive stunt."

Edge looked back at Lorelei, whose face was frozen in anxiety. She still held out her Pokemon's Poké Ball, unsure of whether or not confrontation would be necessary. The Elite Four member hoped Feyera would go quietly. Her lip twisted as she bit nervously on her worn-down cerise lipstick, "Justice…needs to be served Feyera."

"You can't believe him, Lorelei," Feyera said, all but defeated. "You just can't…"

"There's only one thing here I cannot believe, and that's you Mister Feyera." Lorelei straightened her posture asking, "Why?! Why did you do all of these terrible things?!"

"I didn't do any of those things!" Feyera shouted. "Ein's deceiving you!"

"Likely story," said Ein proudly. "Continue to lie Feyera; your fear simply oozes off you. You're so dreadfully afraid…not because of what you've done, but because you've been finally caught. It sickens me. Where's your conscience?!"

"Lorelei, he's…he's…" Edge stammered out in confusion. Ein was the last man to expect integrity.

"What is he Feyera?" Lorelei demanded whilst straightening her glasses. "What is he?! His story has no inconsistencies. Yours is as stable as your shaking hands!"

Feyera looked down to find that his hands were not only shaking, but his entire body also quivered uncontrollably thanks to his Gardevoir heart augmenting the fear and weaving it into a physical manifestation, making the emotions as real as a pitching fever. He hated it. It was crippling him and he knew it. Yet there was nothing to do to stop it.

"I'll tell you exactly what I am Mister Feyera," Ein said looking at Edge's face, now swollen with primal fear. "I am a guardian angel of sorts. I run a sanctuary for the precious indigenous Pokemon here. I help to protect them from filth like yourself, and what do you do?"

"N—nuhh—no…I…" Feyera could hardly take the compulsory fear from Ein's twisted rational. The way Ein exploited his emotions burned. He felt the psychic synapse of his heart shard begin to converge deeper into his mind, like a driving rail. Drilling deeper and deeper into unfathomable annexes.
"Humph!" Ein said holding his breath, "You waltz into this secure complex wearing your Team Rocket uniform, ready to prey on all the good things we do here! Awful. Pah! Simply awful. Why don't you tell us how many more rockets are on the island killing the endangered Pokemon no thanks to you?"

"I'm…I'm not…" Edge said speechlessly. Ein was beyond conniving. How had he convinced Lorelei? The rockets were right there in the Evercrest facility. Perhaps she was the reason for the mandate that Will and Terry were talking about outside the complex. He still could not think of a reason to convince Lorelei of his innocence. He was bound to emotion, and that emotion pulled him into a dark pit of uncertainty and doubt. It tugged, engrossed, and commandeered his heart as it would a Gardevoir's, leaving no room for reason. How he hated it.

Ein saw the trainer's Progenitor rimmed eyes dart about frantically in stress. "So let's 'cut to the chase' as they say: why are you here Mister Feyera? Have you come to try and steal some more from me?"

Edge shook his head, "No…I…I need your help Ein…"

Sana looked at Feyera skeptically. She raised a brow, but remained completely silent.

Ein smiled, aware the trainer's predicament all too well. "Oh do you now? 'I—I need your help Ein'," he mimicked. "Pah! After all the trouble you've caused, now you need my help Chris?"

He did. Edge looked down at his heart shard. He dared not reveal the Reilken Mercurius he wore yet, nor did he want to show Ein the altered skin patch surrounding it. But it was more than obvious that he shared the same type of anatomical emotional beacon as the one on Sana's chest.

"With what I wonder…?" Ein asked as sarcastically as possible. "Seems unlikely you would need help with anything. You're overflowing with resourcefulness! But go on, tell me, it sounds like you have something important you want to get off your chest!"

Feyera tapped the metal shard protruding from his chest and sighed.

"What could you possibly need my help with?" Ein continued to slavishly ape.

"I—I didn't always have psyonics," Feyera said in a hushed tone.

Ein's eyes snapped open wide in pleasure, as he looked back and forth from Edge to Sana and then back to Edge again. Exactly the same projecting chest shard. His apparent scheming was palatable. The scientist glanced at Lorelei with his shifty and squinting dark eyes behind thin glasses.

"Hmmm…" Oddly, the scientist decided not to address the blatant similarities between Feyera and the Gardevoir at his side. Nor did he call any attention to the replicated heart shard. He only made one association, "You would even taint your own…hurm…your own Pokemon with that filthy Team Rocket criminal attire, which borders Pokemon abuse!"

Lorelei looked at Sana, and her rage built, "What is the meaning of doing this Feyera?" She quickly glanced down at a small PDA and scrolled with a thin finger. "…Charmeleon, Gyarados, Gloom… There's no record of a Gardevoir on your trainer card."

"Chris…" Sana whispered worriedly. "You can't let them…"

"Listen, I found this Gardevoir here on Chrono Island." Feyera uncomfortably looked over at Sana, who still looked quite out of place in a Team Rocket uniform. Nevertheless, her dark appearance haunted Edge to a certain degree.
"That doesn't explain the abuse you have been giving it!" Ein shouted. "You honestly think that you can justify your dressing up of a Pokemon in criminal attire…?"

"She's not…!" Edge looked over and the incriminating evidence against him was all too clear.

"What have you done, Chris?" Lorelei asked.

"I promise that it isn't what you think…if you would just hear out my story…!" Edge fussed.

But Ein took no time in between further accusations, "Hell, you even attempt to charade as one of them—wearing an imitation Gardevoir horn upon your chest! Who are you trying to fool? Her? You think she wouldn't know the difference between one of her own and an imposter!? What other vile things have you done to that female Gardevoir Chris?"

Sana rocked her head back and forth, "No…!"

Feyera shivered at Ein's final sentence, knowing that he was in fact dangerously bordering pokephilia. He gained the courage to address the initial questioning, passionately saying, "Your guards wore the same ones Ein! How do you think I got ahold of these Team Rocket uniforms on the island?"

"Guards?" Ein asked with a devilish grin, "What guards?"

"Guards. YOUR idiot guards all too eager to take their break! The ones by the entranceway we just came through!" Edge said flustered by the innocence portrayed by Ein. He pointed back towards the door, feeling able to logically prove his innocence. "They're back there!"

"Mister Feyera…I am afraid you are terribly mistaken. That or highly delusional no thanks to being a rouge psyonic. There is only one type of guard I have on premise—" he nodded at his Porygon.

The synthetic Pokemon's eyes flashed and projected a choppy image onto the empty warehouse's steel floor panels. The image quality, although fuzzy and hazy, showed all of them beyond a doubt Chris Feyera's face as he ran towards the Everestest facility's open door. No details were lost, from his green haloed eyes to the way he carried himself in a quick dash. Sana followed him close behind in the image, but the focus remained on him. It must have been the motion sensing cameras they passed on the way in; Feyera felt like a fool for thinking his plan to bum rush the facility would actually work. Ein was ready for him in every possible way. Why didn't he rationally think his plan through? Did he even have the capability to any longer? Why was everything based on emotion?

"…I would never trust people to do what my machines do best day and night. Porygon's custom-built 'Security-Network-Triad' Software or 'SN-Tri' for short, monitors the entire facility day and night. Its eyes are as much on you right now as they are on the harbor," claimed Ein.

As the tall dark haired scientist said this, Porygon's eyes flickered twice in bursts of white and the image displayed then showed the Island's bay from the nearby berths. The soft waves lapping against the metal docks over a few hundred feet away were right here in this projected screen originating from the Porygon's radiant eyes. With another "Click!" the image changed to the various points of entry and internal corridors including the one Sana and he had just run through to get here. Eventually after scrolling through the various scenes, the image became an aerial view of them standing in a circle. Feyera's jaw dropped at the sight, he quickly looked up to see a large camera eye bearing down on all of them. He had walked right into a hornet's nest, and they were watching him every step of the way.
"…!" the trainer gasped.

"Nothing like a good security system, eh Feyera? Something that covers all the potential variables, always adapting accounting for your...heh...eh heh," Ein began to chuckle softly, as if he had thought of something incredibly clever, "Ahem!...unexpected variable change."

"We saw you enter the compound, Chris," Lorelei confessed. "You were trying to sneak in. Ein and I watched the SN-Tri."

"Good then Lorelei, you must have seen the other two Rockets then," Edge said.

"No," Lorelei sighed, "you are delusional. There was only you that the cameras detected."

"The only Rocket in my base is you, Feyera!"

"I can show you where the Rocket grunts went. I promise you, they are real! We passed them on the way to this room!" Edge said in a panic. "They're back in the Break Room!"

Lorelei kept a cool demeanor and refused to address the wild claims being made by Feyera. Why would she believe a word he said? He was psychotic. Proven to be so by Ein's carefully spun words. Sigh sighed, "I'm sorry Chris Feyera. There is no excusing your actions. I'm afraid you need to be taken into custody."

"Oh well now...I'm not so sure..." began Ein, but he quickly sealed his lips.

Lorelei paused and looked over at Ein. The lean scientist held himself off from saying anything more, pressing the side of his index finger to his sharp chin.

He heard a faint telepathic noise. "Chris? What do we do?" Sana asked. "He has no emotion to possess. There isn't anything we can do."

Feyera turned to face her. The Gardevoir's scarlet eyes showed bottomless concern, for not only herself but also Feyera. He had protected her from pain. Or at least some desirable part of him had. I'll cooperate... "Just please put the gun down," he said after mulling over his potential options.

"Not a chance," Ein said, dashing the firearm's glowing mouth from Sana to Edge and then back to Sana, keen to see which worried the trainer more.

"He's right Chris," Lorelei admitted. "We're not going to risk your escape."

Ein began to laugh, "Neh heh heh! Now isn't this an interesting turn of events for you Feyera? But I bet you're filled to the brim with...interesting things inside you."

"You'll never get away with what you're doing!" Feyera strained to say to Ein, gripping his holster.

"Get away? Ho ho ho," Ein snapped. "Who are you? You're a psycho. A nobody. Your life as a criminal running free ends today. Make one move for your Poké Balls and I swear this M—RAIL will smear particle bits of your unique cellular amalgamation all over the place!"

"I'm not a criminal! You cannot prove anything!" Edge denied wildly, as his hand moved away from the belt holster in fear.

"Chris, you take this very important young lady—a member of Kanto's Elite Four and the Judge's daughter—on a mind controlled cruise to a precarious island filled with carnivorous Pokemon, leave her for dead by running her luxurious ship aground, *huff!* then you barrage into my
research facility wearing a Team Rocket uniform expecting to somehow arrest me in some sick idea of role reversal?…Like you always loved to say: 'there's stupidity and then there's you'," Ein chuckled.

Lorelei felt like Ein may have been overstepping his boundaries, "Gideon, the Pokemon League will handle the proper actions to be taken against Mister Chris Feyera."

"Oh will they?" Ein scathingly asked. "I have reason to believe he has brought to you more trouble than you and the League can possibly handle on your own."

"I understand that," Lorelei nodded, and lowered her Poké Ball, still unwilling to release its contents, "Yet I have already sent a report in detailing his crimes, so he's set for prosecution. I want to thank you for the footage depicting his destruction of Cerulean's Golden Bridge, that will prove useful to the investigation."

"That wasn't me!" Feyera argued futilely.

As he said this, Ein clicked a small pen shaped object and the footage provided by Ein's Porygon altered. Now rather then sentry, it was clearly showing an auburn haired man with the same body type and posture causing the mayhem on the Cerulean Cape. As he watched himself helplessly tearing apart the bridge's support beams in a spurt of psyonic meltdown, his eyes began to water. He was done for.

Ein ignored Feyera's senseless denial, "Didn't forget the S. S. Anne catastrophe either now did you?"

Edge snapped his focus back and fought through the swelling tears in a last ditch effort to remain logical, "Lorelei, that was a rocket attack on a ship! How would Ein know?!"

"Feyera raises a fair point Gideon, there isn't anything tying him to that event."

Ein looked a little uneasy for a fraction of a second before saying, "I read the papers my boy, and it would seem that your name did come up as being on board the ship. What a sneaky Rocket we have on our hands here. Lorelei, you ought to at least mention his crimes at sea considering what he did to you!"

"N—no," said Lorelei as she tapped her PDA. The device's tiny screen went black before she stowed it into the tight pants she had changed into upon arrival on the island. "Of course not. That was documented as a possibility, but we'll need solid evidence to convict him."

"The evidence is there in front of you isn't it? Look at him, a struggling psyonic," Ein went on to say. "He's not able to control himself. There's no time to feel bad for him, only ways to correct him."

"Gideon," Lorelei looked Edge over, "Feyera's been marked by the IPF. That's for sure. Though I am unsure of how he was flagged without a recorded inquiry."

Ein seemed to be distracted by something. His mind gave the impression that it was elsewhere as he slowly asked, "You do carry a lot of weight as the Supreme Judge's daughter. So you will comply by sending a report to the Pokemon League authorizing his immediate capture?"

"Gideon, I already sent my report via your facility's secure channel. The docs should take one or two days to process and released to the general public, but we're going to have him under stringent watch till then."
"Wait what?" Edge said in shock. Did this make him a convict?

"Oh how delightfully marvelous," said Ein politely. "So his warrant for arrest is guaranteed? Under your unique signature?"

"Yes," Lorelei nodded, "I'll be assuming control of the litigation as an official member of the Pokemon League."

"You will…assume control?" Ein's voice pitched.

Lorelei scratched at her forehead where her deep wine red hair emerged from her scalp. She then glanced from Edge to the scientist skeptically saying, "Directly, yes, that is proper procedure. I'll escort him off this island back to the mainland with the help of those psyonic dampeners you mentioned earlier."

"Oh wonderful! I thought those would never see any practical use," Ein rolled his eyes for Edge to see.

"Lorelei, you have to believe me, this guy is a psychopath. He was the one behind Progenitor!" Edge pleaded.

"Progenitor?" asked Lorelei.

"Senseless babbles of a man gone mad, Lorelei," Ein insisted as his face stiffened defensively.

Lorelei rocked her head, "Wait I've heard that name before. Gideon, why does that word keep getting brought up? What does it have to do with Mister Feyera and this facility?"

Ein quickly changed the subject, "Miss Carese, you can assure me that the Pokemon League has received a warrant for Mister Feyera's arrest as per your approval?"

The Elite Four member began to feel as though something was amiss. She answered Ein warily, "Yes. But I don't see what that insignificant detail has to do with anything, Gideon. He's right here in our clutches."

Ein began to shift his posture, walking silently towards Lorelei. "Oh. Well I guess I should educate you my dear princess. Chris Feyera is under my direct jurisdiction as a criminal on this reservation of mine."

"What?" shouted Feyera. "The hell are you talking about?"

"Chris don't let him take you!"

"You wanted my help didn't you Mister Feyera?" Ein snidely asked, as he palmed the handle of his RAIL weapon.

"You have no jurisdiction here Gideon," Lorelei smoothly said as she palmed her hair's natural part. "Chrono Island is a part of the Federal Circuit overseen by my father."

Ein revealed his teeth. "Miss Lorelei, section eighty-four of the DBC's outline for ecological reservations reads as follows: 'should a Pokemon, native or otherwise fostered, cause any disruption—acute or chronic—to the natural balance of the ecosystem ordained by this sanction, it is deemed de facto the sole responsibility of reservation caretakers to capture such a Pokemon and insure that it is arrested in all attempts to further damage the ecological system in question as well as all other environments ordained as 'at risk' by the Pokemon's disruptive behavior by the
judgment of the ecological caretaker'. *Sigh!* *Huff!* How I just love legal loops like this precious one."

Lorelei shook her head, "Nonsense, that legal statute does not apply to him! He's going to be taken back to Kanto for further prosecution. He's not a Pokemon; Kanto Common Law applies to him!"

"Hrm..." Ein pushed his frameless glasses higher up on his narrow nose bridge, "Indecently, it was your father, Justice Robert that passed such legislation."

"I don't see the connection," Lorelei admitted. "Chris is a person like you and me."

"Ah well allow me to explain. Psyonics are typically associated with Psychic Pokemon. The correlation is always under heavy research, creating rather equipollent arguments." Ein brushed his lab coat's lapel before continuing, "However, ever since the Darkened Ages, society has neglected to officially change the status of 'psyonics', rendering the legalistic term synonymous with actual Pokemon. *Sigh...* You'd think the courts would be more careful after all the persecution!"

"It can't be, you're mistaken," said Lorelei.

"It's a relatively small detail, but those are always the ones that matter the most no? Ha! If you look at the precedent set forth, he's just as much a Pokemon as the Gardevoir he's standing next to," Ein said as his glance stabbed Edge.

Feyera's jaw dropped in disbelief. Not only were his so-called human psyonics considered on par with Pokemon, but they actually were seen as one and the same as Pokemon. Feyera did not even know whether or not Ein knew about how Sephiteos' powers had physically imparted onto him. Or did he? What nefarious plan could the mad scientist have been fostering?

"You...you're talking about subordination. He's a person Gideon," Lorelei said.

"Is he? Not in the eyes of the law your father seems to adore. Besides, you and I both know that he cannot be transported safely without the help of my psyonic dampeners, so why fight my demands?" Ein said airily.

"I oppose your demands because they are unconstitutional. Psyonics or not, convict or not, he's still got natural rights as a human being. He's not staying with you. He'll have his due process, Gideon!" Lorelei quipped.

"Why do you propose your methods are better than mine Miss Carese?"

"Because he's going to be dealt with legally and face the full extent of the law as a Kanto citizen," Lorelei said coldly. "Don't overstep your boundaries."

Ein whispered, "How positive are you in your plan achieving results?"

"Results? RESULTS?!" Lorelei said in disbelief, "I'm not concerned with results! My only concern is making sure that no one else gets hurt in all this madness."

"No one else...getting hurt?" asked Ein as his stiff lip broke into a smile sensing her compassion.

"Correct. And my way is the only way to assure that. You both need to cooperate. Feyera's coming along with me, aren't you Mister Feyera?"

Sana eagerly watched Feyera, awaiting his decision, understanding nearly everything through Feyera's emotions, which were exposed like raw flesh.
Edge nodded, still confused as to what exactly was happening. Perhaps Lorelei was attempting to help get him off the island. Maybe this was all just a ruse to usurp Ein's plans. Maybe deep down inside she knew that Ein was no good. He had to retain hope. His heart was defenselessly binding itself—himself—to hope.

"Good," Lorelei said looking over at Sana's frightened expression.

"Chris?" Sana asked nudging him.

Sana... Edge exhaled.

"Your trainer is going to be fine," she assured the Gardevoir.

Sana echoed a faint hum.

"Tsk tsk. Miss Carese, I expected you to be more cooperative. After all the hard work we did... Humph! Moving your precious yacht to our harbor and readying it for your safe and speedy departure was no picnic," blurted Ein.

"You did what?!!" Lorelei shouted, turning her entire body to face the scientist. "Where did you move my boat?"

"Oh, slip of the mind! Ke he," Ein chortled. "So many things are underfoot it's getting very, very hard to keep track!"

Lorelei cried out, "Just cut the BS, what the hell are your intentions Gideon?"

Ein smiled darkly, "Well, fine, the plan originally was to send you off on your merry way after you informed the rest of the mainland that Mister Feyera is a wanted criminal—which you did."

"What?"

"Huh!?"

"...Ah and as an added bonus, you also informed the rest of the world that I am conducting a nice little Pokemon sanctuary here on this island. How kind of you, it makes for one less headache in my master plan," Ein began to stroke his extended lab jacket's sleeve.

"I don't understand! What are you talking about?" Lorelei shouted.

"I told you he was no good!" Feyera chimed in.

Sana softly moved closer to Edge, sensing growing hostility. "Chris...we need to get out of here soon. Things are looking bad."

I know, thought Feyera.

"Tsk, allow me to finish!" Ein barked. "This was the original plan. PAH! However, there are too many—shall we say—loose ends in the initial plan, which had you going free. So now like a good scientist, I have to account for changing variables!"

"What are you trying to say Gideon? You want to hold me captive too? Hah that's a laugh!" she said seriously as her face began to lose color.

"Hold you captive? You? A member of the Kanto Elite Four? The Queen of Ice? The Supreme Judge's precious gem of a baby girl? Ha! Only if I wanted Kanto's army knocking on the door to
my experimental facility!" Ein rebuked whilst calling attention to Lorelei's status.

"Experimental facility?" Lorelei asked, not addressing the hidden threat on her life.

Feyera twitched restlessly, "He's a nut Lorelei!"

"Feyera...!"

"Shut up!" Ein shouted short and fast as he aimed his gun at Edge's torso.

Lorelei timidly grasped her Poké Ball saying, "Gideon, what are you talking about? Experimental facility? Speak quickly and tell me right now!"

Ein put his hand up into the air and spun it around saying, "Yes, you see my dear, this whole place is really just a warehouse for stocking rare imprisoned Pokemon before we cart them off to the Orre facility to be 'processed' for imposed genetic grafting. Evercrest used to be a fine little facility where good old 'Doctor' Feyera and I would experiment on various Pokemon, splicing their genes and giving them new—albeit rather short—lives."

"You did what?!" Lorelei's shout echoed throughout the massive empty room. "You were both a part of this?!"

"Yes...called ourselves angels even, as per Feyera's humorous suggestion." Ein smoothly continued, groping at his white lab wear, "Alas, like a pair of old shoes, eventually we grew out of such an archaic system of crossing Pokemon with Pokemon. Now we're on to other things going far beyond mere Pokemon Pokemon splicing; isn't that right Chris?"

Feyera looked down shamefully at his Gardevoir heart shard. He had no idea what Ein was up to now that he knew this was all possible. Had he figured everything out in this short of an amount of time? What was his plan?

"Chris?" Lorelei asked the young man who stood defensively next to Sana. "You're...you are involved in all this madness...? Is that how you...?"

"It...it's possible to cross more than Pokemon," Feyera slowly admitted. "Doctor Fuji told me that."

"—Fuji? That worthless pile of dirt?" Ein interjected.

"He was involved in Evercrest too!" Feyera retorted. "He was one of you—us."

"No, he was not like you or me for that matter. He was weak. And you fell to his level as well."

"Fell?"

"He's lying to you, you didn't fall Chris."

"Look at yourself. A shell of the brilliant man you used to be."

Feyera tried to contain all of the feelings running rampant through his system as Ein rebuked his predicament. It was awful. Edge had no one to blame save circumstance, but even that was becoming a stretch. He tried to contain all of the empty space but it began to break. In turn, it began to break him down.

"Regardless, your particular 'condition' was bound to surface once I extended my arms to find out more about your seemingly mysterious loss of the Mercury Relic two years back."
"Why would you need the Mercury Relic? You can graft without it!"

"What is he talking about Chris?" Lorelei asked.

"Oh no, no, no! Mercurius can be synthesized. We no longer require the accomplishments of prior civilizations like the one you stole from the Pokemon Sanctum as a Rocket under Cipher's command," Ein grinned. "Science has shown us the way. Although we still need large quantities of the hard-to-come-by substance…perhaps that is what I miss most about the Reilken Mercurius."

"That still does not explain…"

"Unfortunately Feyera, many of our recent tests involving processed Mercurium have failed, so I need you in the flesh to accomplish the next stage."

"Next stage?!" Edge and Lorelei asked simultaneously.

Ein shrugged, "Yes. Phase two. Adult trials. Here I was thinking we'd never make a break through with the youngsters. Pheh, we had plenty of numbers just no results."

"What?! Youngsters?!"

"Ah yes…delightfully youthful specimens. I would like to say that they felt little pain but their anatomy does tend to make it rather obvious that they suffer." Ein gave Edge a shallow nod, "Isn't that right?"

"You monster!" shouted Feyera.

"Ah so says the real monster in the room."

"I'm not a monster!" Edge said unsure as to what Ein was referring to: his dark deeds at Evercrest or his Pokemon attributes.

"Let's play a little game. I'm going to ask you some simple questions, and your mind is going to do the rest."

"I'm not going to play your sick games!" Feyera said.

"Chris, don't let him hurt you!"

"Gideon, you're under arrest!"

"Humph!" Ein laughed, "Just watch Lorelei, You wouldn't want to miss this."

Sana grasped Feyera's arm tightly as the advancing scientist danced his RAIL gun about his perspective targets. His synthetic Pokemon slowly glided beside him in a defensive orbit.

"I want to ask you something: How does it feel to know you were a part of this all along Feyera? If not for you, then none of this would have happened. All that death would have been avoided. And more importantly," Ein paused to look at Feyera's Gardevoir heart, "you would still be fully human…unadulterated by your sins. Tell me, how does it feel Feyera?!"

"No!" Feyera felt his chest clench up as Ein inadvertently triggered a wave of emotion to surge through his body. Overpowering sensations of remorse and guilt bathed him, making his body feel as though it were a conduit for negativity. His frame shuddered and he violently fell against Sana, who tried to steady him to little avail since his emotion bled out into hers, causing her to undergo a similar rush of sympathy.
"Veh Feyera!" Sana shouted as she caught him in her slender arms.

"Have I struck a chord?" Ein asked. "Do you feel a certain way now?"

"I…can't…take it," Feyera stammered. Sana continued to grasp his arm as he began to lose composure and fall to his knees. He coughed as warmth radiated from his core, flushing his face in an ill balm.

"FEEL IT!" ordered Ein.

"Gideon! Enough, what are you doing to him!?!" Lorelei screamed, "STOP!" She was beyond horrified.

But the scientist ignored her, only focusing on the hunched over man in front of him. "Feyera, you worked out so well with Mercurius. And here I was struggling to figure out what else it could have been besides isotopic Mercurium. Now as I look upon you and your…humph…'protector Pokemon', the similarities are far too numerous. Gardevoir. The link between human and Pokemon. That's only thing it could have been. That's why it happened the way that it did. That is why I'm going to continue my testing on humans and Ralts line evolutions. And it's all because you showed test subject delta-two a pinch of sympathy."

"*Gasp* *pant* What are you trying to say?" Feyera asked anxiously. "This is all so wrong, you have no idea how this feels…!"

"How it feels?"

Sana tightened her grip on Feyera's shuddering right arm. She said telepathically, "Veh Feyera…try and relax."

"Ein, what did you do to him?! I command you to stop!" Lorelei ordered.

"Command me?" The scientist looked over at her with his peripheral vision. He murmured, "Miss Carese, if I want to, I can send this man into an emotional oblivion. Imprisoning his psyches into a state of perpetual limbo. I would still your tongue so that doesn't need to happen."

Lorelei closed her eyes with indecisiveness. She watched as Sana continued to grapple with her trainer's wilted body as they both shook from imposed emotion.

"Please…no…"

"You can't do that to me," Edge argued. But Ein's manipulation had proved to him a variety of things, and its limits were not one of them.

"All this comes with the territory Feyera," Ein said nodding suggestively at Feyera's Gardevoir heart. "YOUR new territory."

"NO! ACK! *gasp* it isn't mine…!"

"Humph! Typical denial of the facts associated with a psychological splice. Especially with a creature that represents the epitome of emotion."

Edge gurgled as Sana padded his back; the rapid breaths he took in made his whole body move.

"See Feyera? You're completely in my control. I know what things will trigger emotional responses. I can send you to a very real hell should I but only say a word. That is power; and to
"Think, you used to know what it felt like to be on my side of things."

"*Huff* Arghh... ugh... *cough* Is that what you want, Ein? *Wheeze*... Power?" asked Edge.

"Puh, only mortals look for power as it is conventionally defined."

"Guhh... what?!"

"True power is not defined in equations simulating force and influence. I seek the dawn of a new epoch. My epoch. It was the same mentality that brought us both to Evercrest Chris, we saw ourselves as angels ushering in a new formula for life as we know it."

"You're insane!"

"I'm productive in my methodology. For phase two, the only thing we need now is more bodies. Just think about how efficient we can become by using you as a model Chris! You'll save so much time and maybe test subjects as well!" Ein said with glee.

"No!" said Sana.

"I'll never let you do that!" Edge defiantly belted.

"After all you've been given, you wouldn't lend a hand? Not even to possibly save the lives of countless others? My, you truly are just as selfish as me," Ein's smile narrowed.

"No, I'm nothing like you!" Edge argued as a wave of uncontrollable nausea overtook him. He held his stomach in revulsion.

"Correct yet again Mister Feyera!" Ein said happily. "What you've been given is a direct influx of psyonics, imbued with an exploitable mechanism, capable of this unquenchable might!"

The Porygon by Ein's side flashed its eyes and soon they were all looking at the footage of Feyera's gravitational field of dark swirling lavender spirals, drawing in metal and crushing it to bits on the Golden Bridge. Feyera felt as if he were back in the Team Rocket headquarters watching the same scene over again at Ein's request.

"Ein, it isn't like that, there are consequences! I need for this to be undone!" Edge bleated, "The forced influence of it... is too unstable! It... it..."

"—It's incredible that such a lovely fusion can take place between such radically different cells. And it was only possible with the help of Mercurius' marvelous catalytic grafting! But this is only the beginning!" Ein surmised, completing Feyera's sentence as he saw fit.

"NO!" Feyera had it; he pulled his Team Rocket uniform's sleeve up revealing the ebony wristlet, the Reilken Mercurius. "This is what did it!" He shouted in agony as he looked at the green skin bordering the relic.

Ein and Lorelei both gasped. Sana looked at his wrist longingly, secretly wishing that he had not shown it to anyone else.

"That...!" exclaimed Lorelei.

"Wait that...?" Ein chided.

Feyera nodded at the seemingly dormant power wrapped around his wrist. "This is it. This is what caused it."
"You're joking!" Ein exclaimed, "That's not possible! It was Mercurius!"

Feyera nodded in agreement, "Yes Mercurius. THE Reilken Mercurius."

"But how did that change your…?!” Ein gasped mid-sentence as the relic began to slightly grow a faint green line along its perimeter. "That's not possible, that is the inverse of what should have happened, how is its control allowing for augmented cellular variance?!!"

"What?" Feyera asked, confused by Ein's scientific rant.

"Hrmmm…” Ein grappled with his hand at invisible equations in midair, "The apparent subatomic rejection of host? Structural psynapse triggered by your cerebral immunological defense? Neurologically conflicting pathways binding tighter under the strain of being suppressed? He he he, this is unbelievable! Mister Feyera, you may have just made this entire miracle a lot more feasible for us to achieve!"

"What are you talking about?! It's not a miracle," Feyera shouted. "You can't call…this…a miracle!"

Sana glared disapprovingly at Edge as he disgracefully felt the horn projecting from his chest with his rigid hands.

"Oh but it is. The fact that you are still even capable of cognition is a testimony in and of itself, when you think of all the failures!" said Ein to Edge. The trainer continued to visibly struggle with the psychological rut he was enveloped within. Ein seemed fond of his condition. Ein knew how to bend him. If Ein wouldn't help him then no one would. Feyera began to go into panic. Sana looked back at Ein's weapon as he rocked it back and forth.

"Please Ein; you can't let me stay like this! I'll do anything! ANYTHING!" Feyera cried out at the top of his lungs as tears began to well in his eyes. "It's destroying me!"

Sana quickly took her eyes off Ein's gun and looked at Feyera in alarm. "HE CAN'T HELP YOU!"

Feyera shook his head at the Gardevoir as she slowly pulled away. Sana…you don't understand what this is like for me as a human being…

"I might not, I've been bound to emotion my entire life, but you still can't trust him! You're going to be okay if you just—"

Lorelei was on the brink of fear by everything coming to the surface unexpectedly. "Gideon! What's going on here?! You owe me and the rest of Kanto an explanation."

Ein turned to Lorelei saying, "Pah, you uncultured legalistic swine, I owe you nothing."

"How dare you call me…!"

"I'll call you whatever I damn well please, you're a pawn in my world now. This is your new reality!" Ein shouted at her as she spun on her heel to release her Pokemon.

"LAPRAS!" she cried out as a brilliant light filled the room. The large sea creature was easily the height of Desperado. The Pokemon's grey shell was pronged and sharpened, and its muscular aquamarine body left little to the imagination concerning the creature's strength. The Pokemon flexed its fins and neck, its thick skin bulging from tense muscles. As it reared its head back, it opened its gaping maw, spreading forth a mist of cloudy ice, and let out a deafening "Rapurasuuuuuu!"
"SANA, now!" Feyera howled as he jumped into the air.

Ein pulled the trigger to his magnum, still pointed at where Sana was once standing. The Gardevoir deftly leapt to the side, falling against Feyera as the room filled with a piercing ultraviolet light. The earsplitting sound following the beam of violet light emerging from Ein's M-RAIL caused her to holler in fear as the blast narrowly missed her, fraying some of the Team Rocket uniform she wore.

"Ahh!" Sana screamed in fear. She tightly adhered to his body with frightened arms longing for comfort.

"Chris!" Lorelei hollered, as the particle beam dissipated into flecks of fractured colorless light.

Feyera looked up, to see Sana panting and laying against him. Beyond her panic-stricken face, Edge saw Ein turn to face his new adversity. Angered by his apparent miss, the scientist snapped the gun back with a loud "Chi-click!" signaling a cell battery reload his as the cooling mechanism began to expel searing steam from the extended barrel. The oversized handgun dropped an empty container, clattering against the steel floor as Ein's gaze faced Lorelei's Pokemon.

"Lapras, Hydro Pump!" Lorelei yelled from above the two of them.

Edge could see the Lapras was still in shock from seeing Ein's M-RAIL expel enough energy to equate to a Hyper Beam. It recoiled slightly and began to arch its neck back ferociously in order to overcome fear, screeching as its curled ears perked and fierce gaze returned.

"Magneton! ZAP CANNON!" Ein cried out as his RAIL gun continued to vent wicked heat. The Pokemon trinity buzzed and spun in response.

As Lapras' neck reached the apex of its stretch and began to open its wide mouth swirling with water, a thunderous crackle was heard from Ein's Magnet Pokemon as it discharged a massive orb of pitch-black energy. The black globe, so ripe with voltage that it produced countless yellow volatile sparks running along its surface, flew through the air at Lapras.

"Lapras, evasive counter!"

The Elite Four's Pokemon spun its fins onto the ground lifting off and up into a jump. The black orb of immeasurable electrical energy narrowly missed Lapras. However, as the electric ball flew off to the side, it detonated in a flash of crepuscular lights. The field of rays shone in all directions, followed by a loud explosion that knocked Lorelei down to her knees.

Edge tried to watch, but the light from the Zap Cannon had partially blinded him. Colors slowly zoomed back into focus; he could see the tremendous column of pure blue water fly forth from Lapras' mouth. As this insatiable focused deluge flew at blinding speed towards Ein's group of Magnemite, they instinctually flew apart in three different directions as the shaft of water split through their center. Pure water poured through the empty space, punching a dent in the wall behind Magneton.

Ein called out, "THUNDER!"

All three of the Magnemite began to glow and their side magnets expelled terribly bright light, culminating in the center. The white bolts of light connected with Lapras' forceful Hydro Pump and arched along the sea beast's attack, following it straight into the mouth. Wicked blue sparks ripped into Lapras' mouth, they seared the Pokemon's flesh and quelled the Hydro Pump attack immediately. The Pokemon bent its head back in disgust and tumbled to the earth with a loud crash.
The metal floor buckled and bent under its weight.

"NO!" Lorelei screamed. Her first Pokemon and closest friend did not stand a chance against the electrical bolt conducted through a Water type attack.

Ein continued to fondle his gun, as he waited for the recharge taunting, "She's dead just like you Lorelei. You know too much. And so you see the final caveat of my plan: I need to make it appear as if Feyera killed you."

Lorelei looked at Ein's cold eyes. "You wouldn't dare!"

Ein glared at Lorelei as she stroked her fallen Pokemon' body. "You should've seen what happened to the last person who said those very same words to me. I assure you, there is hardly anything recognizable left of him. Such a shame...he had such promise, such resources...In fact, he reminded me of you Chris."

Feyera thought about Fredrick's helicopter. He began to connect the dots. Fredrick flies in on his black copter, the rocket guards talk about a man crossing Ein. It must have been Fredrick that Ein was talking about. It must have been Fredrick that the rockets were talking about as being executed for crossing Ein. Rage filled Edge heart with ever expanding heat.

Ein peered over at Edge, who possessively had Sana around his shoulder. With a quick rattle the scientist asked, "Oh but Feyera, why such animosity all of a sudden? Is it becoming too warm in here for you?"

"YOU BASTARD!" Feyera screamed at the top of his lungs as he and Sana continued to lay against him on the side. Ein's glance lashed over to where the two of them interlocked hands.

"You don't have a father, Chris. You're the one who's a bastard," Ein said with a grin. "Those are the facts."

How did Ein know that his surrogate father was Fredrick Irving? Did he make the IPF agent suffer? Did Ein force Fredrick to give away information before killing him in cold blood? Edge didn't even know what had happened, his mind simply constructed theorems to coincide with all the emotions on its own. Ein might have known about Feyera's actual father from working with him here at Evercrest, but who was to say that was the "father" Ein was referring to?

Submerged in the possessive vice of rage, Feyera got to his knees extending an open palm. He channeled all of his hatred, all of his anger; every last ounce of odium at making sure Ein would die no matter what. Edge saw his vision grow crimson, as the soft red shields of psychic energy embraced his eyeballs. He shook as the potential psychic meltdown stalled into viscous waves of anguish as he held onto Sana. The Reilken Mercurius brightly glowed green against his wrist. The light green skin there burned with increasing intensity.

"N—Not yet..." Sana whispered as she caressed his heart shard with her wounded hand. Edge gasped. He wanted to use everything, all of his powers, to crush Ein, no matter what the consequences might turn out to be. The recklessness had to be curtailed by Sana's vigorous palliative strokes.

"FINE! July! Brucie!" he called out, whipping out two of his Poké Balls. He knew Des couldn't handle the absurdly powerful electric attacks Ein's Pokemon possessed. The two young Pokemon materialized and shot their glances around the room to rapidly orient themselves to the situation.

[Whatcha need boss?] Brucie asked.
"Everything…" Edge panted. "I need your help."

Sana tried to get herself up, but found that her body was much less stable than she anticipated. She stumbled back down to the ground.

"Sana, don't worry," Edge said, "stay still."

"No…Chris…I need to help them!" she insisted.

[We got this Miss!] said Brucie with a growl, seeing his target.

[Yeah!] July said faithfully.

"Oh, you want me to kill your other Pokemon off too Feyera?!!" Ein screamed manically. "I'd be happy to do that!"

"Brucie, use Fire Fang!" Feyera ordered. "July, Mega Drain!"

Charmeleon began to rush at Magneton, but a dark wave of indigo light pelted him mid-charge. The converging rays pierced him in the chest and knocked the wind straight out of him. It was Ein's Porygon.

"Brucie!" Edge and Sana yelled simultaneously.

But it was too late. The synthetic creature launched a barrage of Psybeams to follow the initial attack, firing from its eyes. The S-NTri camera above assured it perfect accuracy, pelting him repeatedly until he put both his paws over his eyes in surrender.

As July ran over to Brucie to help him up, a direct hit from Psybeam knocked her clear away with a crippling thump, and incapacitated her immediately.

"Veh Feyera! July's really hurt."

Edge looked at where she landed to see that her flower was torn to shreds, and her root legs frantically wiggled in a last effort to find life.

"JULY return!" he shouted at his gravely wounded Gloom, extending the Poké Ball and bringing her back to its precious stasis inducing confides.

[Boss!] Brucie hollered at Feyera. Edge looked back to where he was knocked down. The Magneton joined Porygon and closed in on Edge's Charmeleon. They both floated magically on electromagnetic power, menacingly orbiting Ein's slender figure like a pair of moons, discharging bits of electricity that reflected off the scientist's mirrored glasses.

"NO!" Edge shouted as an increasing number of sparks began to eject from the Magnemite's spinning side magnets.

"Thunderbolt Magneton, Porygon, use Discharge!" Ein ordered. "Turn his Pokemon to black ashes!"

A blue bolt launched from the tips of Porygon's prism legs conjoined with the yellow ray of plasma shot out of Magneton's center. As the powers mixed, the electricity jumped and sparked, crackling and building tremendously fast. Conjoined, the jolt launched with a deafening pulse, and ripped through the room, charring the metal floorboards as its mighty volts approached the fallen Charmeleon.
"BRUCIE!" screamed Feyera as the lighting shot at his first friend's paralyzed body. "NOOOOO!

Feyera felt Sana brush against his heart and she extended her hand towards Brucie's body. A rich blonde sphere of crystal lattice surrounded Brucie. As the wicked bolt connected with the Light Screen, the wondrous wall of light refracted the focused bolt, and it split into millions of directions. Spherical light arched and curved, electricity belted about the room, burning ambiguous black patterns into the floor and walls.

Bolts jumped back and singed Ein's coat, but his Pokemon's electrical attraction absorbed most of the stray energy, serving as a crude lightning rod.

In spite of this, Ein made little exposition of pain. He dropped his glasses to the floor as sparks seared their metal arms, burning his fingers as he did so. And yet he said nothing, his cold expression was unlike anything Edge had ever witnessed. There was no emotion left in it. Something in Ein had definitely snapped, Feyera could feel the lack of any emotional heat radiating off the scientist. It was as if he were not looking at anything save for a shell. A shell that pulled all things into it and left nothing.

Sanaria collapsed from the recent strain into Feyera's arms unexpectedly. Her light body was soft and no longer tense from exertion. "Sana!?" he asked as his arms clutched her delicate physique.

"Veh Feyera...thanks," she said quietly. "Thanks for everything. You...you did good after all."

"Sana, what are you talking about?" Feyera asked her in rage. How could she be giving up this easily? After everything they had fought for it seemed impossible for her to have lost faith so quickly.

Ein raised his M-RAIL. The mechanism had recharged, deep indigo light poured out of its cold construction. "Feyera, I know how much you used to love a good verse of methodology. Here's mine: first, I'm going to erase everything you care about, I will give you nothing left to live for, yet cruelly you'll be forced to go on living, servicing me as I see fit. After I take apart everything you hold dear, I will begin to take you apart: piece by piece, bone by bone, cell by cell. I'll insure that you are conscious for all of it. I will make sure that the final fragment of your consciousness begs for death!"

"N—No!" Edge said as Sana stirred in his arms. In a burst of Psychic strength, she pushed away from him and spread both her arms out separating Feyera from Ein. Not expecting this, Edge fell to the floor with a "Thud!" as his rear hit metal. "Sana! No! What are you doing!?"

Sana communicated to him through the clearest form of telepathy, as she went on, it blossomed into vocalized sounds and human speech, "This is what I was talking about. He's not going to get through my shield."

"How adorable." Ein smiled, "Say farewell to your Gardevoir, Chris."

"Sana don't!" Edge ordered, trying to raise himself up off the ground.

But he was too late.

Ein brushed a boney finger against the RAIL's trigger, and the gun unleashed a blast of violet light.

Everything slowed down to a dreadful crawl. Edge could not see; his eyes filled with tears as the bright beam blinded him, leaving him behind in the Gardevoir's shielding shadow. The earsplitting blast followed, and then a long drawn out hiss. His eyes lost their scarlet aura, and all colors scrambled behind closed lids.
"Sana..." Edge whispered, too afraid to admit that she sacrificed herself. There was no defense against the particle beam. Not even psyonic could dampen its cruel ruin. Nothing, not even a Gardevoir, could stand up to it.

As the ringing in his ears dissipated, he opened his eyes and saw that Sana was still standing in front of him, her arms defiantly outstretched. Lorelei had leapt onto Ein and sent his shot off course. The Elite Four member wrestled with the scientist while his Pokemon watched in confusion, unable to attack Lorelei without harming their master.

Edge leapt up and ran past Sana, charging at the struggle. He raised his hand outwards and felt the tight pull of power as his the small vortex formed in his palm, eager to consume. As he ran forth, his body drew to a slow procession of steady leaps keeping him partially lagged in the air.

Ein continued to tussle with Lorelei, and was unable to get her off him. She continuously hit him, slugging his face with her enraged punches, drawing blood. As her bare knuckles broke flesh, the scientist flailed his arms in attempt to control her.

Ein saw Edge rushing at him from the corner of his eye. He grabbed Lorelei's fist and shouted, "Porygon, blind him! Flash Cannon!"

The Porgon's eyes began to glow and Feyera felt a surge of heat coming from above. He looked up in the nick of time before a ray of light came from the SN-Tri camera. Its white beam split into the floor alongside him and radiated throughout the already bright room, burning the floor with heat.

Edge slipped and began to fall, but was able to regain his balance just as vision began to return. And sight came back right in time. Another beam of light came from Porygon. This time it came from the creature's actual eyes.

Edge dodged the creature's focused blast of light, but was knocked to the ground by a swift Psybeam that followed. Once more, it was too bright to see anything, and Feyera raised a hand over his eyes. Yet another bolt of force energy pelted him in the ribcage, knocking the wind clear out of him. Dizzily, he began to panic in psychic strain.

Sana hurried over to Edge's side and tried to confront Porygon, but Magneton's timely Thundershock separated the two of them from making contact. Falling backwards, he looked up at the warehouse's ceiling to see Porygon's camera eyes aglow as it fired off bolts of Psybeam at Sana next, unimpeded by Flash Cannon's dazzling light. Amid all this chaos, she danced around their projectiles, spinning and twirling as her body gracefully maneuvered.

Ein, face bloody from Lorelei's repeated punches, ordered, "Stop their hearts! Zap Cannon!"

"NO!" Lorelei shouted, she held off from beating Ein for a brief moment in order to warn Feyera, "Chris, watch out!"

Edge looked over just in time to see Ein kick Lorelei off his wounded body.

"Lorelei!" Feyera yelled at her as she fell off Ein and onto the ground.

Ein reeled his neck, twisting it back in disgust as fresh blood oozed from his nose. "Magnetons, ZAP CANNON HER!"

In a sudden unprecedented gliding motion, Magneton's charging attack changed directions as its three calculating eyes turned and faced Lorelei. She struggled to get to her knees, by kicking off
with her toned body. However, even as she sprung off the ground it was not enough of an escape. Their focused red beams honed in upon her in under a millisecond. Together, they launched the black surge of energy straight at Lorelei's chest.

Feyera heard himself scream but was strangely absent for the entire scene, he was a mere puppet watching his body yell in horror as he saw her frightened face look upon the black orb of countless volts as it connected with her body directly. It exploded into millions of sparks as it shattered in her heart. The earsplitting crackle resonated throughout the room, deafening and stunning all.

He heard his voice echo throughout the entire chamber, but did not feel a single breath of air leave his lips. Sana was fully against his body sobbing in tears, but he could not feel anything. Everything had been lost to ambiguity.

As faint discharges from the black globe transformed from fiery blasts into tiny fireflies, they shimmered softly, gently even; flickering far away, as they sapped precious life. Lorelei's body floated off, cloudy and indistinct, as she settled on the bottom of an inky lake of unconsciousness, her pristine eyes enveloped in a permanent darkness.

"LORELEI!" Edge hollered. His true empathy broke to the surface, gasping in a long, hard breath. His head exploded in pain as he not only saw, but also felt every emotion press against him.

Coldness. Desolation. Solitude. Each steadily plucked a string of his heart, in a haunting clocklike fashion; chilling, emptying, inflecting his essence with remarkable cadence. It was surreal.

Her halted body fell limply to the ground, clutching desperately at her frozen heart. Feyera could not believe it. He didn't want to believe that this was all happening. Was she really dead? It couldn't have been real. How? He wanted to wake up from this dream—this nightmare. His nightmare.

"NO!"

"...!"

There was no more action, only feeling. It was all so wrong.

Sana fell against him and began to cry. The emotions were too much for either of them to handle alone. Feyera continued to stare at the scene in horror. All of the Pokemon save Sana watched him while his face flawlessly revealed every expression he felt. Sana held fastly onto his irregularly beating heart. Her soft hand caressed him.

He could no longer speak. Words were no longer even a possibility. They had seemingly disappeared from existence whilst pain overtook him.

She was dead and there was nothing left, like a candle at the end of its wick, he knew he could do nothing.

Nothing but cold barren emptiness remained. A serene snowy calm.

She was gone.

And he had failed.

They had all failed.

As purpose left his mind, weakness filled his heart.
Prior to this moment, he had never felt more attached to anything so daunting. The very world he lived in was rapidly slipping out beyond his grasp. And it all had become so real. Every effort he made, every reach he took; all his life, all his purpose, every bit of him ended in utter failure.

Drowning in depression, Feyera tugged upon his Gardevoir heart. It stung at first, the dull reverberations becoming increasingly more prominent as his grip tightened around the sleek material. He desperately tried to rip it out. Taking blank breaths he struggled desperately with it.

His determination triumphed over the Pokemon physicality in such a way that he no longer cared about the searing heat it produced. The awful piece of foreign anatomy could channel all of the heat of the sun, turning feelings into reality, it could scald his skin, it could show him the world in a swirl of hues, and it could drive him to insanity, but it would not stop his desperate plight to rid his body of emotion.

She was dead. He had nothing left. After all the feeling she had instilled into his life, he wanted nothing more than to be rid of emotion. He desired nothing more than to live in a world without feeling. A world without pain.

Feyera knew his weakness was that he cared. Compassion shattered his essence. The sympathy took upon a new life of its own, growing with each and every second, using his body as a conduit. Compassion enveloped his nature, tugging upon him and ripping his stability apart. A beast he could no longer tame was undermining all that he knew, all that he relied upon in his systematic approach.

And yet denying and tugging at this part of himself served to do little beside solidify that emotions were now of his essence. They were as much a part of him as mentality. He realized, with whatever logic was left in his degrading mind, that his life was as out of his hands as Lorelei’s.

Feyera screamed in pain, as the sensitive piece recoiled in his palm, pressing forth a violent surge of energy into his body that mirrored the recent wrenching.

Despite all of this discomfort, he managed to stay conscious, even as colors swirl around his vision and his eyes forcefully dilated in response to waves of unrequited emotion.

"…This is only the beginning Feyera. The beginning of your new life."

Edge looked up at Ein. He screamed at a pitch unimaginable, "ARRRGHHHHHHH! DAMN YOU!"

"Show me your power. Show me emotion, you helpless creature," Ein taunted as blood dripped from his crooked face.

Feyera didn't even feel himself question the action as his consciousness grappled onto his nearby Pokemon and directed the body. Feyera felt the metal tendrils take command of Brucie's physical body, pulling the lizard like a puppet. Using a combination of will and psyonics, Feyera launched the fire Pokemon up into the air, giving him brief levitation. Feyera spun his hand in an exaggerated motion as the crimson wall against his eyes grew thick and murky.

"L—lock on!" ordered Ein. The Magneton tried to hone in on Brucie. Its three separate eyes glowed rubicund as targeting lasers desperately searched for a focal point all three Magnemite could agree upon. The psychically tossed Pokemon soared upwards into the air. This invisible force of propulsion greatly confused the synthetic creature. The various beams split and darted all about the room, trying to follow the sporadic motion of Brucie. However, there was not enough time for even the mechanized Pokemon to come up with a proper search algorithm. Feyera's
impromptu tossing of Brucie's body had defied all their prior programming, completely debilitating them.

"STUN THEM!" Ein bellowed. Porygon's SN-Tri camera began to glow as it readied a Flash Cannon to drench the room.

"FLAMETHROWER!" Feyera echoed as Brucie did exactly that. His telepathic thoughts were mere statements of what was occurring. Blue hot flames fled from the Pokemon's mouth as Feyera twisted his wrist and spun the Pokemon so that his body faced the overhead camera. The searing heat shot straight into Porygon's overhead eye flooding the SN-Tri with enough heat to melt the glass lens. He watched through Brucie's perspective the massive overhead eye squirm, trapped in the fiery vortex. It flickered a few times as the encased machinery melted, dripping molten metal on the floor beside Magneton.

An ear-splitting mechanical cry, sounding like it had been sent numerous times through a tape delay, brought his attention back to earth. The trainer saw the actual Porygon begin to spasm uncontrollably as one of its corporeal eyes filled with fire and issued sparks before detonating, leaving a single gapping eye socket. Its various polygons began to separate and fall apart. The antenna tail wavered once or twice before completely detaching itself from the crumbling cybernetic Pokemon.

Ein swore. "Thunder!" he hollered.

Magneton then rushed forward, and split apart into three Magnemite, each releasing a bolt of Thunder. Edge tried to control Brucie, but his mind began to slip and falter. He felt as though he was looking through a long tunnel connecting his consciousness to Brucie's. He guided the fire lizard away from the bolts, but was unable to protect him from the stray electricity. As threads of Psychic energy snapped, he felt his heart produce a faint whirling noise. He looked down in horror to see it was glowing and swirling with a ruby energy that could not only be seen but felt.

As Edge started to fall down, Sana caught him in her arms and tried to support him. He tried and order Brucie, but the lizard was closed off to his psyonic commands. It was as if the Pokemon had disappeared. Frantically, he looked over and saw that Magneton was desperately attempting to dodge the Flamethrower still vigorously spewing from Brucie's maw.

"...!" Feyera jolted as he felt Sana's body against his, causing an unprecedented rush of heated sensation. He looked at her focused face and as she extended a palm and fired a Confusion attack to diminish Magneton's accuracy. The lavender rays of mental energy emerging from her palm seemed to work by slightly knocking two of the Magnemite off course. The blue bolts bent and refracted with the waves of Confusion, creating a distorted area, bending the fabric of reality.

"Veh Feyera...we need to get out of here, we can't win."

"..." Edge tried to say Sana's name but his lips would not move, his jaw was locked closed from exertion.

She prodded her glance at his frozen expression, bending her neck to move towards him. "Recall Brucie. Trust me."

Feyera nodded, unsure of what was going to happen. He looked over at his valiant Charmeleon. Even if Sana had a skewed rationality as a Gardevoir, there was nothing logic to do to help him now. He was outmatched and drained of psyonic capabilities. And perhaps seeing this was itself a form of logic. Edge took his Poké Ball out and mutely recalled the Pokemon.
"GIVEN UP ALREADY FEYERA?!" screamed Ein, bloody in the face. The man's contorted jawline, bruised and off kilter was stained dark red from his bleeding lips.

Feyera weakly raised a fist at the scientist, wanting to employ gravitational psyonics. He desperately craved to show Ein how much he hated his predicament and the cruel reality he had been cast into. He wanted Ein to suffer and to struggle for an eternity. There would be nothing better than to equalize. Nothing better than to be able to balance the pain he was given. Edge lost track of why he was even angry. It became who he was. Everything about him became structured around anger, agony, and finally vengeance. He had lost Lorelei, lost his human life. He needed a catharsis; he needed to kill no matter what the risks were. His vision narrowed and an array of scarlet blanketed his sight as he looked out at his outstretched hand in total single-mindedness.

Sana shook her head adamantly. "No..." she chided. "Use your emotion and focus it on what we want...escape."

Feyera bit his lip, still unable to say anything. As her hand graced his heart, he felt a soft tingle from far off reminding him of something his mind had been too eager to forget. He was still alive. Even in this haunting predicament, he still had the gift of life. The world around him began to slow, and his panicked thoughts extended to Sana, _How can we get away?_

She looked deep into his large green eyes, trapped within two slim rings of light. In their reflection, she could see the small harbor far away, beyond Ein and his approaching Pokemon. _Together... we're going to do this together," _she insisted as she quickly stroked his palm with both her hands. Her clothed palm stroking his hand gave him an eerie sensation that he could not describe. It was brief, but it was exciting.

_Toogether? _asked Feyera, still outstretching an arm at Ein.

But rather than respond, she pressed her entire frame against his, tightening her arms around his body and drawing close. Edge gasped as their hearts met and kissed along the edges. He threw his head back in saturated emotion overflowing from Sana into him and back to her. He felt himself changing somehow. Everything he now felt had gone through a cascade of sensation, amplifying the vigor and passion of things as simple as breathing. It was impossible, potential psionic energy greatly exceeded the amount he was used to after expending so much.

Her consciousness began to enter his and his vision began to change, taking new forms and figures into account as saturated bright colors drenched the pallet of his—now their—world. In an instance of passionate connection with Sana's mind, he saw his outstretched fist begin to turn. As it rotated palm-up, a single finger slowly extended up at Ein.

In a blinding flash of light, everything went completely haywire. His thoughts scrambled into Sana's and everything become primordial and indistinct. Colors, sounds, feelings, they were all the same. But one sense stood out as being more prominent: touch. He felt everything as Sana did; he was holding himself in a bizarre way, and also holding her back in unified consciousness. The closeness of their bond allowed for little to pass through between them. If there was even any space left separating them at this point was debatable.

It was so tremendous that he could not contain the imposed blending of essence. He tried to shout, but had no lips to do so. He vigorously squirmed, but found he was locked and cramped in every possible way. As his potential actions began to waver as far as initiative went, his eyes snapped open and shut numerous times revealing a sight as overwhelming as it was beautiful.

Sanaria was still pressed against him in a tight hug, and he was looking down at the closed space between them. Where their chests met, he saw the swirling ruby aura pulsate in utter
wholesomeness. The spectacular feeling was quelled when Sana forcefully pulled back. When she did so, everything clicked and Edge felt somewhat normal once more. He looked down and around to find that they were no longer squaring off with Ein. Oddly they were at the other end of the roofed warehouse next to the water. As it lapped against the anti-slip docks, Feyera saw a collection of watercraft lined against the boards they stood on.

Feyera gasped in disbelief. How could they have gotten away from Ein so quickly? It baffled him to no end.

Sana looked over at him and smiled gently as her cheeks involuntarily flushed, causing his to unknowingly do the very same. The after-effects of unison caused their normal functions to be totally synchronized. As Feyera tilted his head slightly in confusion, Sanaria did the very same. However, this moment of shared experience and mental-corporal bonding was short lived by the two.

For at the sides of the roofed harbor, there were two windowed rooms, each containing members of Team Rocket, now beyond question employed by Cipher's Ein. One of the taller rockets peered over at Sana and Edge and tapped his partner on the shoulder and pointed at the oddity. Feyera could only imagine what they were thinking about as the taller one pointing began to laugh impulsively from confusion. Suddenly having a Gardevoir and trainer both dressed in Rocket uniforms appear out of nowhere on the docks must have been quite the sight. The first two seemed to be relatively amused, but a third rocket in the first room wore a very worried expression.

Sana's hand brushed against the uniform she wore as Feyera made a similar nervous gesture against his own. "You think we spooked them?" he heard her say to him softly in both of their voices.

Edge just continued to stare at her, completely at a loss for words. His eyes, glossy and dilated from the experience, mirrored her hauntingly beautiful nebulous red irises in all ways save color. It was all too perfect. He had never felt anything so tying, so divine. Soon enough though, he heard a voice that pulled him down from the lofty heights they had flown to and back to earth.

"CAPTURE THEM!" screamed Ein's raspy voice from afar, as he and his Magneton began to run towards the two escapees. The distance was great from one side of the room to the other, but not great enough. Even with the injuries Ein sustained and his slight limp, he could still sprint to catch them.

Feyera looked over at Sana. "Uh oh," she said aloud, replicating exactly what he had wanted to say.

Edge laughed at the same time as her, duplicating her motions, and thoughts. The surge of endorphins from whatever they had done as a single unit was all but gone.

He opened his mouth to comment, but found that Sana spoke with him, psychically, aloud, through him, and with him, "Guess we shouldn't have given him that little sendoff gesture, huh?"

Feyera didn't know what to be more confused about, the fact that he was still speechless from their apparent Teleport, the total integration of their bodies during the Teleport, or that Sana was acting more and more like him.

As the rockets responded by swiftly exiting their guardrooms, Feyera and Sana simultaneously looked at the group of powerful personal watercrafts at their side. They both knew exactly what to do as their minds shared the last remaining fragments of snug psychic unification.
The cold chill of breaking unification gave way to increasing spurts of anxiety as soft tidewater lapped against the dock boards. Heart against heart, spirits touching, immeasurably strong, the bond, ever swiftly lashing, continued to oppose their every move with a vibrant life-force of its own.

Feyera gasped as Sanaria partially released him from her hold, causing an involuntary tremor to course throughout his frail figure, and uncomfortable nausea set in. To Feyera, it was the cruel sensation of tearing away from something once thought to have been your own; so pressed together were their hearts, minds, and bodies. It was undeniable. There was no questioning for the young man, no attributing this extraordinary event to anything besides a feeling so intense that it bended reality. Her heart shard melded tightly alongside the flat edge of his own shard in rich watery ruby gloss. They both looked down at the sight in tandem. The marvel of their connection was supernatural and amorphous. At times it seemed to be his heart shard pressed against hers on the right, but the next moment it was his on the left of their united connection. There was no telling apart their hearts, dovetailed to the point of indeterminacy.

It was all in front of him and a part of him, divinely splintering his essence with the being that stood before him caressing him in her soft hug.

Sanaria slowly lowered her arm, gliding it along the thick Team Rocket uniform he wore, as an artist's brush would grace a furrowed canvas. While she did this, the edges of their hearts finally deviated, issuing a quiet hum of resisting energy as a void filled between them. Like intimately joined magnets, Edge felt their hearts break from one to two, yet their minds remained intermingled, promoting a spontaneous and comforting interlocking of their right hands.

The amplified link from their short distance Teleport had Edge in a total rut. How was this all even possible? He wanted to act, but found that very few actions he could take coincided with his own will. It was so strange. So foreign. His volition was about as stable as the rocking moor he stood upon. Shifting thoughts brought him to the point of questioning why he was even standing against the Gardevoir in the way that he was.

Her eyes batted, rapidly concealing her own apprehension as she stared at the sliver of empty space between their heart edges. She could slip a lock of her delicate hair through the gap, but it would still feel as wide and faraway of a distance to traverse as the Giant Chasm; the millimeters became miles. This new found mutual dependency, was it permanent? She wondered how it would manifest itself in the next few moments. Would it force them both into a Feedback Fall? Prevent them from being able to leave each other's sides? Eternally bind their hearts should it happen again? Physically? Mentally? It was all as ambiguous as the earnest swirling sensations clouding their chests in rubicund warmth. No longer was the question how could such a link manifest between a human and Pokemon. It had already begun to take place.

Sanaria had no idea that it would have worked this way. How could she have? She'd never done it before, not even with Sephiteos. It was new, it was dangerous, and it was a phenomenal success. To share something like this with Edge made her heart jolt with the anticipation of interdependency. As strange as it sounded, coinciding with another to the point of limiting personal
freedom was in fact a very real fantasy she held. Not out of sadistic interpretations, nor out of masochistic thoughts; instead, this fantasizing blossomed out of a deep longing for something—someone—that could not possibly leave her. For she had always been on the receiving end of loss. The desire for unity was a derivative of the security she never had, even after meeting Seph. Sanaria had faced tremendous forfeiture—and for seemingly no reason. She knew what it was like to feel distress as dreams were painfully torn away from her. It haunted her. Her psychological states were anything but stable and yet the more time she spent with Edge, the less burdensome her dark past became.

She questioned: Was it his heart? Everything biological about it reminded her of her lost love. Yet there was a new piece added into the equation, shifting with it the hazy of variables, constructing a new entity, going beyond reasonable expectations. Even with his mind linked to hers, she felt Seph when their hearts blended. Was that final piece of Seph alone worth preserving? She was no longer as sure. There had to have been something more. As unusual as it sounded, Feyera was more than just a thrall to Seph's Gardevoir heart. Something special allowed them to overcome what they did. It couldn't have been mere coincidence either. After all, Sana took it upon faith that they would get out of Ein's way. For Teleporting was a skill that could not be employed without a very specific set of circumstances being met. Even then, the mental obstacles were as impeding as they were seemingly impossible to traverse whilst psychically conjoined—especially with someone as volatile as Feyera.

But somehow, against all odds, he had done it with her.

Their hands continued to grapple as the misty world steadily crawled past them at a Slugma's pace. To any onlooker, they must have appeared beyond panicked by the swiftness of their fondling hands. Nevertheless, in Sanaria and Feyera's own bizarrely slow world, it was a matter of minutes abridging each lenitive second.

Together, a unified thought of "How?" escaped both their minds. The synchronized thought ricocheted through their now folded over consciousness, delivering ecstatic resonation to both parties. There was no more mental division.

Feyera flinched, and Sanaria could not help but do the same. She had no idea if this was too much for him to experience at once, no idea how his limits worked.

Being a Gardevoir, Sanaria knew the restrictions behind Teleport better than anyone else did, however paradoxically being a Gardevoir allowed her to overcome the limits with faith. This channeled flux of energy was now obviously very much present on Feyera's face as he stumbled and tried to break from her embrace, not out of repulsion, but rather out of a sincere attempt to reestablish his own sense of self after the quick union.

The man wore an archetypal expression—one often worn by members of her own species when they first learned how to correctly Teleport without splintering their bodies or un-'valancing' their fine curtain-like clothes. However, for a human face to wear such a mollified countenance made Sana feel somewhat strange inside. He wasn't truly like her in that regard—was he?

Young Sanaria knew the expression, for she had not only seen it but also expressed it in the past—it was a combination of awe and overwhelmed eudemonia, coldly joined by the eutectic sense of responsibility—but Sana was stumped as to why the sight of it bothered her. Was it because she still saw him as the man he was? Was it Feyera's own thoughts seeping through her, blending into hers, seeding her mind with doubt? With an impromptu Teleport in done in such close proximity to one another, anything was possible. And yet this was the only way to at least ensure a few more minutes of precious life. Tied to emotion rather than reason, the Gardevoir simply did not consider
the many consequences. How could she? She wasn't Mister Chris Feyera. She wasn't able to take into consideration variables and "number crunch" probability. In a pitch of feverish emotion, she had been given a choice and adamantly decided that this would have been for the best.

In a pitch of concern, Sanaria looked at his brightly glowing heart, its healthy glossy exterior throbbing soft waves of rose with the Pokemon trainer's emotions. Were they only his anymore? Was it possible that some of them were Seph's? Were they her own emotions reflecting back like sunlight off the moon's solemn face? Or could he—Edge—be a synthesis which blended them all together? She couldn't tell for certain. Nothing was black and white. And a very prominent part of her did not want to be able to tell for sure, only to feel. She respired soft and short, but it seemed to take an eternity within this altered state of time they had been surrounded by.

Feyera backed out of her clutches further and she did the same. His back arched while carefully trying to avert precisely replicating Sanaria's action, but it was all for naught. The lines dividing their physical actions were as blurred as when their hearts had connected during the Teleport. Continuing to breathe in sporadic increments, the pair were tied through a physically mimicking motion of their lungs. Unfortunately, the psychic inertia was far too difficult to overcome, and he was soon staring at the chest shard between her tiny breasts once more as he stumbled backwards. While his facial lines showed little difficulty in its forced compliance in mimicking Sana, his eyes showed just how concerned he was about what the two of them were undergoing post-Teleport.

Sana wanted to laugh at their shared connection. Although crude, auspicious, and evanescent, it had worked brilliantly. And the more her mind rapidly replayed the sequence of bonding, the more she helplessly fantasized its wildly idealistic implications. After all, it was everything she would imagine. It was magical. Transformative. A milestone. Considering the number of times she had spent thinking about what it would be like to not only teach but be a part of a mutual Teleport, it was surprising that she even managed to keep her ecstatic happiness in check.

It was like showing a young Ralts or Kirila the technique, but being sublimely present for the entire undertaking. It flooded her mind with ardent thoughts. Sana wondered what it would have been like to have a child of her own, for such things were sublety ingrained into her feministic nature. As her mind went over various scenarios, her cheeks involuntarily flushed, forcing a dimmer yet uncannily similar reaction to take over Edge's pinched visage.

This was different though. The way she felt could not be purely defined as instructing since she herself was a crucial part of the integrated mental manifold. Her very emotions were made into physical power, conducting through Feyera, with Feyera, and in Feyera, as their skirted minds allowed for their bodies to move forth with unprecedented speed, resulting in a unified Teleport.

This wasn't just her showing him how to do something, this was them doing something together. She felt it. Maybe he had no idea how he had done it, but the fact remained that they were able to do it. That was enough to convince Sana that she was at least able to commune to a fragment of her past. Edge's heart connected her to Seph. It was a bridge. But his recent actions greatly confused her. He was becoming that bridge and more. Though Sanaria had repeatedly insisted that his heart shard was what gave him identity, she wasn't expecting this unprecedented embrace of identity of himself as Edge Feyera and more importantly: their mutual identity.

Neither was Chris Feyera.

As he toiled with his destabilized body, the idea of what he had just shared with Sanaria begun to possess him. Like an inundation of water, it flooded Edge's mind, infiltrating every crevice, maddeningly deepening in dynamism. He wanted nothing more than to dissect and analyze exactly what just happened. Yet there was a strange part of him that simply sought to accept. Or at least not
argue nearly as much as he had felt the need to.

How bizarre. Some part of "him" was holding his antagonism back. It was very real. Obtrusive even. Like a mental inhibitor, a dam that had never been there before curtailed his flooding thoughts. He struggled with it initially. It did not belong after all. It was the same feeling as the Gardevoir heart on his chest. Foreign. Alien. Retaining. Most of all, tightly bound to who he was. Though not as physical, its influence over his mentality continued to wildly flourish as he looked at Sanaria's eyes. Though initially scared by these strange familiars infiltrating into his mental processes, he soon rationalized a very good reason for why he accepted the Teleport for what it was: Ein.

A sharp beat of the heart. A gulp for air. Feyera's eyes snapped out of their wayward trance the moment he heard the guard door slam close in the distance with a loud "thud!". It echoed numerous times as he heard the sound relayed at least twice, growing in volume and proximity. He peered down the narrow tunnel adjacent to the small harbor and saw a few Rockets—all undoubtedly under Cipher's control—swiftly running up the docks towards the two of them. Edge tried to take his hands out of Sana's, but she refused to let go, tugging on his arms childishly.

"We can't..." she said softly, as she brought their hands close together. Their fingers mesmerizingly interlocked. "Not yet. We're..." she murmured, unwilling to finish the thought.

Although speechless, Edge could not find a reason to debunk what was happening to him. It was all too much to process, even for his pragmatism. But despite all this flux, one thing was for certain in the young trainer's mind: they needed to be safe—there could be no other way. He knew all of this would be for naught if Cipher's Ein caught them. The scientist had made it quite clear that he did not intend on helping Chris. In fact, the ex-partner seemed adamant in antagonizing the young man's growing problem. After all, it was all too easily exploitable and all too crucial to Cipher's plans.

"Sana," he said through pure telepathy. For once it felt honed and honest. Focused. True even.

Sana seemed surprised to hear him actually transmit a focused thought to her specifically rather than spewing it out for anyone to perceive. He really was able to do things that she never expected. Granted, a side of her still fought for Seph, but another part sought out this new evolving being.

"Chris? Veh Feyera?" asked the Gardevoir as she batted her heavy lidded eyes. They were so enthralled by this precious moment.

"We need to..." Edge said helplessly whilst fidgeting next to Sanaria. Her hypnotizing scarlet eyes persisted to draw his attention only to her, and to look elsewhere was a struggle. In rebuttal of these feelings of heightened enchantment, he argued, "We have to go."

"I—k—know," Sanaria stuttered. A chill overtook her and spread outwards to Edge, causing him to shake as well. She knew what they needed to do. He didn't need to tell her about the danger they were in. The problem was that it was suddenly just so difficult to do anything alone. Independence seemed to be a distant dream, a withdrawn past—lost to the sands of time. Forgotten under a cascade of mental melding occurring so very recently, but paradoxically so long ago. It flowed out from her into him, through the fissures of joint consciousness.

"No....damn it!" he distraughtly belted. He felt trapped. But his imprisonment was not one of agony. Far from it.

"But we..." she began to plead.
Feyera interrupted her, "—We don't have the time!"

Time. An odd contraption connecting one instant to the next. Weaving textiles of shared moments together, providing a bridge to the future. Right now it felt as if they had all the time in the world as they shared it—their time—together. As this time slowly ticked, melting into liquid crystal, uncertainty was but a broken moment in their bravura embrace.

"Chris veh..." she sighed, exhausted. Forging such a tight unification and focusing something as potent as a Teleport in tandem with each other's minds forced a dependency whose future consequences remained to be seen.

Again, Edge directed a slight nod to the watercraft they stood next to, more insistent and less furtively. She seemed to agree with his beacon's implication, and yet her hands continued to remain in frantic clutch of his, knitting their fingers together.

"Sanaria..." Edge said silently as his lips mouthed the word.

"Don't...I mean you can't break contact," Sanaria insisted. "You have to stay..."

"Stay?!"

"Stay close...Chris. Please. Don't try and break away otherwise..."

"What?!" Feyera shouted aloud in confusion. She tightened her grip in preparation for Edge's fully predictable recoil. Sana could read his actions as if they were her own. To a degree, they were. After Teleporting, their mentality had been streamlined to correlate; mentality correlated directly to physicality. Feyera of all people knew this. And now he was stuck. Trapped. For Sanaria, this made things more manageable, and slightly more interesting since Feyera was no longer as remote and alien to her. So long as their hearts were pressed against each other, he was in between a state of closely connected and desperately attempting to individualize himself from her and the psychic well their fraught unification had brought only moments ago.

Sanaria bit her lip in response to the flooding distraught emerging from Feyera's heart and entering hers. Though they were not touching, the close proximity was enough to make for exhausting trembles of the mind. He shivered against her frail body all the more, fighting the gravitational urge to let their hearts connect fully again. She shook sporadically with him for there was no way to impede it.

"Just...trust me. Please, you...Chris, you just don't know what we've gotten into," the Gardevoir said, trying to focus her thoughts on the danger they were in. Consequently, this fed into Chris' own feelings, and he managed to accept her words for whatever they were worth.

"Fine," Edge said softly tugging on her possessive arms, "come on then. Let's get the hell out of here together."

Smiling uncontrollably, she clutched his wrist with a wounded hand and relinquished him enough to allow for his own movements. She did not dare let go of him completely, making sure to keep one of his hands fully locked in hers.

The breaking of their already fractured hug was pain ridden but short; like the tearing off of a snug bandage. However, it did not abruptly end their mutual chain of consciousness. Rather than being fully without contact, all of their shared sensations now went through a funnel of where their bodies touched—their held hands. Sana's outstretched arm was as much a conduit between the two of them as their matching hearts.
All it took was a brief semi-physical separation and Feyera was soon feeling very much on his own. There was Sana at his side, her gentle fingers in his hand, but the recent climactic interconnectivity had made it seem like she was miles removed from him.

"You…I mean, we did it…"

"Sure," he nodded, awestruck and afraid, "huhh… somehow…"

Sana gripped his hand and played her fingers against his palm, "Somehow veh Feyera…"

"I know—" Edge began to say in a more even tone, however he was cut off by a sudden cacophony of external noise pervading the bubble he and Sana had shared exclusively until now.

It started out as a screeching noise, akin to ringing of the ears, and once the pitch dwindled, he heard Ein barking obscenities from behind them. Edge strained his neck to look back. Though limping, Ein was sprinting toward them in the distance, fighting each step with a well-timed explicative.

"He's coming for us!" Sana squeaked, holding Edge's hand tighter.

"I…see…" Edge whispered in duress. He was not patronizing the facts raised by Sana. Sight for him was rather hazy. It was as though he had just gotten out of a bath and his eyes were coated in foggy, tear-like water.

"Huh?" she asked.

"It's—" Feyera could not find the words. Emotionless and scheming, Ein was shrouded in ambiguity; he was quite literally cloaked in a miasma along with his Magneton which would occasionally escape the fog in its wide orbit.

Feyera feared his sight of emotion was slowly commandeering actual sight—or at least heavily influencing it, he could see perfectly fine, it was just different, like when he saw Haunter through Progenitor's latent amplification of temperature. He silently hoped it was due to the Gardevoir currently at his side and not the one he had run through with purified Mercurius. The likelihood of subjugating himself from either Seph or Sana seemed to vanish like tiny pools of water in the bright sunlight. Each minute evaporated more and more of his essence, chafing away past and replacing it with freshly feathered present.

Sharply turning to the water to suppress frustration, he calculated the next move. Within the internal harbor, there were various watercraft, all neatly arranged facing northwards towards the open bay. From the large mouth of the harbor hung metal chains blotting out the sunlight with their inky tendrils. The serene sea breeze blew them about.

"Stay with me," Edge ordered. Not out of command but concern. He felt pressured, internally collapsed; if he tore away much more from her something terrible would surely happen. He could not explain it, but this impending dread had been supplanted by a combination of his Gardevoir heart's natural instincts and Sana's emotional warning. He wasn't going to try and push the envelope this time. Things were already far enough out of his control. They had been for long enough. As long as he could remember.

Rather than agree physically, the Gardevoir psychically affirmed sending waves of comforting jaundice forth. It radiated warm fluffy radiance.

Taking a step on his own took a minor delay. He felt wobbly. He felt weak. Everything had suddenly sped up. That or his mind had slowed down. The only thing left connecting the two was a
tight handhold. And yet this handhold was about as significant as the synchronized beats of their respective hearts.

They ran along the narrow dock, swaying and stumbling slightly. It was difficult, but not by any means impossible. New wings of freedom gave them the strength to override shared weakness.

"There!" Edge pointed at one of the crafts near the shadowed moor's edge.

She hummed a soft, "Mmhmm," aloud and grinned.

He and Sana both leapt from the dock boards onto the nearest watercraft. It was a PWC-400-ES. Light slate blue fiberglass construction, seated up to two passengers comfortably on its charcoal nylon seat, and had a single Samson-ES engine. The "ES model" stood for "Enhanced Strength" and held in excess of two-hundred-and-forty Rapidash Power as advertised on the personal watercraft's shallow steering handlebars.

Sana moved her hand on top of Feyera's as he gripped tightly onto the steel piloting bar. She positioned herself to snugly rub her body against Edge's back. Her heart shard tingled against his backbone, tickling straight through the man's rocket uniform, essentially touching his spinal cord with its comforting delicateness.

Feyera fought a chuckle and clicked the start-up switch. Fortunately, the craft was key-less, sensing weight to initiate start-up, a convenience for villains such as Cipher and the Rockets who typically did not have to worry about their crafts being stolen. In addition, this was quite a handy safety feature, should you be thrown from the craft, the PWC would stop thanks to such a mechanism.

As the motor stridently purred to life, Sanaria jumped and clutched securely onto Feyera from behind, wrapping one arm against his chest. The craft jerked slightly, toddling in the shallow harbor. The gasoline-powered propeller whirred and then expelled water forcefully from behind in a focused Water Gun-like squirt. She squeaked and she squeezed tighter in shock.

"Sorry," Edge whispered.

"Do you know how to sail one of these things?" she asked in amazement.

"Sail? Huh? What are you talking about? I…" He looked for an instrument panel. Just a few dials and gauges. No ARMOS on one of these small fries. Everything was manual. "Um…I…" Feyera stammered.

Sana's gaze followed his confused hands. He wasn't about to ask the Gardevoir to drive though. Even if she had psychically commandeered Lorelei's body, Edge knew that action had ultimately ended up in crashing Lorelei's yacht.

"Do you?!" she squealed uncomfortably, stroking one of his hand's apprehensive white knuckles.

"Hmm…"

"Chris!"

"Um…" overwrought air breezed across the roof of Feyera's opened mouth.

"Shoot at them!" a distant raspy voice commanded. "Don't let them get away!"

Abrupt, loud footsteps combined with the turbulent shaking of the moor, gave the pursuers away.
The three members of TeamRocket that witnessed Edge and Sana materialize beyond their post were now running up the dock boards, their Nihil RXBs were drawn, based on a stray silver bolt that whizzed past Feyera's right ear with a sudden "Thwip!"

"Oh no!" Sanaria gasped.

"Dammit! Hang on, Sana—!"

Frightened, he eagerly pumped the accelerator with the turn of his wrist and noticed the Reilken Mercurius was glowing wildly. He paid less attention to this detail as the PWC kicked into full power, exploiting the Samson ES's strength and spraying the Rockets with murky port water.

"Ahhh!"

The lurching motion caused Edge and Sana to hold on tightly to the craft with their legs, saddling the PWC while it zoomed out of the smaller harbor's antechamber. Her rail thin legs—protected by her fine leg sheathes and the Team Rocket uniform — closed tightly on his own and she continued to grasp his hand and the flat area above his human heart—left of the Gardevoir shard—with her delicate fingers.

"Oof!" Edge exclaimed as the craft propelled further ever quicker. The bumpy motion of the craft caused Sanaria's Gardevoir heart to press against Edge's backbone, but oddly enough, it was not painful. One would imagine the glossy metal would hurt, especially with the chaotic lurching of the small craft. Despite the hurling and tossing of the speedy vehicle, Edge continued to retain focus on getting away from a manic Ein.

Something just felt off to the young man. Nothing was making sense anymore. Feyera could not question, only act; much to Sanaria's pleasure. Little did he know, parts of her nature were rubbing off on him; not just generic Gardevoir nature either, he already had sprinklings of that.

"We can get away…! We're going to be free!"

Feyera eagerly nodded, while his Pokemon companion brushed her legs snugly against his.

As the PWC rushed out from under the roof, the brilliant afternoon sun shown down on their faces, partially blinding them. Chalky clouds dotted the horizon, and the tarry smell of seawater filled their noses. The warmth of the sun caressed their pale faces, and filled their bodies with invigorating strength. That dark place, Evercrest, where all that death had occurred, seemed so far away now.

Counting their fortune, they headed north, desperately trying to flee Evercrest once and for all.

But first, they had to escape the bay. The very same bay Feyera had fallen into two years ago. Its haunting nature did not diminish.

Seeing the two of them leave the harbor's overhanging garage, Ein finally slowed his brisk pace. He had been unable to make it to them in time. Broken pursuit opened up to frustration.

"Dammit!" shouted Ein. The scientist, still covered in wounds and blood, fought to stand. His hunched-over posture restlessly gasped for air following his sprint. "Son of a bitch…!"

The Magneton at his side vehemently revolved its master, issuing sparks in sporadic pulses. Ein placed a gaunt hand upon his bent knee and looked menacingly at his Pokemon. In response, the three Magnemite split apart, dancing insipidly all the while. They were individually spinning,
occasionally joining together at various points in orbit. Despite all the dynamic motion, their three eyes remained fixated on the fleeing PWC as it tore through the pristine Chrono Island bay. The three Magnemite's eyes, illuminated with artificial light, flickered occasionally, unable to integrate appropriate action based upon all the turmoil. Evercrest's S-N-Tri going offline certainly wounded the Magnet Pokemon's capabilities; Ein's Pokemon programing forced them to now depend on local sight peripherals rather than communing with Porygon's cohesive system. While this slowed them down, fortunately for Ein, as a fail-safe Magnemite were autonomous synthetics and impervious to tutelage system failures.

Their revolution speed slackened along with their scientist master's heavy breathing as the frail man approached the stupefied Rockets. Ein's tight face expressed nothing but disappointment. His swollen eyes, bruised and in pain, glared at his subordinates with bottomless malice.

"Chief?" one of the Team Rocket grunts asked. The man wore a mixture of fear and uncertainty as he addressed the scientist. The man lowered his repeater bow; he had no idea what was happening. His raspy voice cracked, "They—"

The scientist stood up straight with a start; his mind racing with calculations. Ein took his L3 RAIL and pointed it at the rocket's elongated forehead shouting, "YOU IDIOTS!"

"Whoa hey now!" the rocket replied. His bright blue eyes squinted, "Don't shoot!"

The rocket flinched when Ein's tiny ink filled eyes traveled from the barrel of his glowing RAIL firearm to the gruff looking man's brow. Ein stroked the gun's handle and his eyes veered back to the bay.

"Give me one good reason why I shouldn't blast you to bits for your incompetence!" Ein hollered. "ONE DAMN GOOD REASON!"

"Chief, we can catch 'em for ya," said another rocket who wore his oversized hat on a slight angle.

At this, Ein then lowered the weapon; its humming subsided as the priming mechanism stalled along with Ein's clench. He could still use incompetent brutes like these. They would serve as a distraction. In a quick response, Ein tightly held onto his Magneton's Poké Ball as he returned the creature to stasis. He sternly ordered to the small group of grunts, "Fine then. Chase after them!"

Surprised, the first rocket seemed to relax slightly, but his eyes worriedly followed the Magnemite revolving Ein.

"Chief…?" said another one of the guards; he heavily built, yet still expressing fear. Who could blame him? Ein was as ruthless as he was scientific. Physically Ein was weak—much like Feyera —, but his advanced technology predating the Terminal War made him one of the most dangerous criminals to cross. That was saying a great deal since Team Rocket was collaborating with Cipher. However, the nature of such collaboration between the syndicates remained muddled in ambiguity.

"WHAT?!" Ein's temper began to pitch; though shallow on emotion, he was not tolerant of incompetence. Or inadequacy. Results were all that mattered to Ein; without results, you were nothing. "Do I need to spell it out for you, you senseless sack of meat?! Get on the other watercrafts and follow them before I rip your brains out from your earholes and feed the scant meal to my experiments!"

The balding rocket with a long forehead then spoke, "Wait, what about your aquatic Pokemon, Chief? It can catch them!"
Ein rubbed his temple, scheming. "No…My Lanturn will stay with me. Hmm…right…the electromagnetic currents…Humph, as will the rest of my Pokemon. Here's the plan: I'm going to rely entirely on you. Your mission is to hunt the two of those specimens down. One's a rouge psyonic and the other a Pokemon."

The rockets did not even question Ein's unusual bolstered confidence in their performance. A rocket with a hooked nose and a flushed set of cheeks answered rhetorically, "One looked like a human Pokemon."

"Hmm…they both looked human," the blond haired rocket commented.

"I thought they both looked like Pokemon," acknowledged the third rocket.

"Pah…it was a Gardevoir," Ein mumbled. "She's with a young trainer who's a psyonic…"

"Wait a Gardevoir? Ya mean like—"

"—Ohhh I've heard all about them types!" the first rocket said with a dirty smile. His straw-like brow quivered like old tinsel.

"Yeah," the second rocket licked his cracked lips, "Gardevoir make for fine business if you know what I mean…he he he—"

Ein snapped at the fidgeting rocket, "Keep your vile thoughts in your head or you'll wind up as twisted as Feyera! They're Pokemon. Slaves. Whatever you do to entertain your perverse fantasies, do on your own. Don't bring me into your perverted world!"

The second rocket swallowed, and his grubby lips trembled beneath his hooked nose, "All I was sayin' is they'd fetch a fair price…hell, I'd even sacrifice a bit of my salary just ta…ya know well…they're so humanlike and—"

"Do you want us to kill them boss?" asked a third rocket, interrupting his partner's dirty caprices.

"Yes," Ein lied forcefully. Raising a brow at them, he corrected, "But before you execute them, make sure that you cause them as much duress as possible with your Nihils, you need to overwhelm their minds with projectile spray, standard issue Gauntlets won't work."

Ein knew the rocket troopers wouldn't stand a chance, even with their rapid-fire weapons, but he needed to bide time and keep Feyera in the bay area. That was of upmost importance. Maybe by sheer probability alone, one of the Nihil bolts would wound Chris or his Gardevoir. But he didn't need luck; Ein's mercilessly calculating face had formulated a new plan already, a plan which mandated that he kept his Pokemon with him inside the Evercrest facility. As for the rockets, they were doomed. It was a simple calculation; his Pokemon gave him more utility than these expendable troopers from Team Rocket. If they were insurgents from Cipher however he may have reconsidered sending them on this suicide mission. Ein's loyalties, although minimal, were tied specifically to those which he could benefit from. Even then, such faithfulness was always on a countdown timer, always running out.

"And the Pokemon? The Gardevoir?" asked the first rocket, whose face had begun to relax, now that Ein was exhibiting seemingly less animosity.

"Can we keep her boss?" The second rocket's wrinkles began to grow from the prospect of a hunt. A hunt possibly ending in a warped reward. His eyes spoke volumes of malicious intentions. "Ya know…for pleasure…"
"Try and make that your goal; she's undoubtedly dampened after fighting before," Ein said with a tight mouth and a hiss. Whatever it was they sought didn't mean a thing as far as his calculus was concerned.

"You," he pointed at the rocket that had been fantasizing about Sanaria.

"Yeah?"

"Incapacitate her and I might even let you hold on to the creature's body when I'm done running my experiments."

"Aye boss," they said in forced unison, the rocket with black hair and a hooked nose smiling a fair deal more than the other two. His flushed cheeks grew redder with prospect. There was a motivator in his mind. An incredibly dark one, but a motivator nonetheless.

"Quit running your mouths and go!" Ein firmly shouted. "Don't let them leave the bay!"

They complied and hopped onto PWCs of their own. Powerful motors roared to life, and the troopers began to depart the smaller Evercrest harbor in a close triangular formation. Their wakes split the sea like Pidgeot traveling in their migratory V-pattern. The cool afternoon breeze blew forcefully into the harbor against them.

Ein's eyes, bloodshot and scheming, watched the scene unfold. As he stood in solidarity, he stared at the crafts while they left heading in hot pursuit into the bright daylight. His setback eyes squinted to compensate for the bright light reflected off the sunny bay water. Being far-sighted, he could see well distance wise. In fact, he could see even better than most, making out Chris' Gardevoir clutching at her trainer's back perfectly fine. It disgusted him.

The scientist forced a sigh that jerked his hunched body. The rockets he had just sent out were gaining fast on their prey. It would only be a matter of time before the pair of psychics fought back. Until then, he hoped the chase itself would keep the two occupied. They were weakened after all. And he had a bird's eye view of the chase from Evercrest to monitor them from.

"Damn…" Ein said through stretched breaths.

The most important thing to do was capture both Chris and his, now rather valuable, Gardevoir. Ein knew Feyera and his Pokemon team were at the end of their rope. Despite being in sight, Feyera and his Gardevoir would be difficult to capture. And Ein of all people knew he couldn't rely on Team Rocket operatives to finish the job for him. People like Feyera and Team Rocket subordinates were inherently weak due to fevered emotion and lack of logical intellect. In a world devoid of competent individuals, Ein knew he needed to resort to more dramatic measures. Although Gideon would be lying if he had said Chris' Teleport had not surprised him. Things like that had an astronomically low chance of occurring. Never before had a Pokemon escaped through Teleport from him, not even Delta-two. For a Pokemon to do so, it required an immense deal of focus to seamlessly bridge each individual "Psychic hop" occurring in states of elevated cognition. Never mind an individual Pokemon making the flight, Ein was dealing with a human and a Pokemon.

He turned around and paced towards a tall set of spiral stairs. Each step he took was taken in agony; his weakened body, in soreness, proceeded to climb to the facility's defensive control suite above and between the base's two harbors.

"Damn you Feyera…" he whispered breathlessly. "You're mine. You and your Gardevoir. Your Mercurium. You're all mine."
It was a short-lived reprieve for the two fleeing heart-bound runaways.

"CHRIS!" shouted Sanaria over the deafening ES motor.

"WHAT?!" Edge responded, unwilling to resort to further telepathic communication. To do so would slide further down dependency on his psyonic powers.

"Veh Feyera?!" Sana insisted, "Answer me!" She was having difficulty hearing his voice over the deafening roar of the propeller.

"What is it?" Edge said through their telepathic bond while he turned his head ninety degrees, his glance following the cliffs that surrounded the bay that Evercrest was built into. Once he had, he saw exactly what she was talking about. His heart rate quickened as more adrenalin influenced his already racing body.

Close on their trail, were three rockets riding PWCs of their own. Since they only had one operator on each, their crafts moved quicker, but Feyera and Sanaria's combined weight was not by any means debilitating. The two of them collectively probably did not weigh more than a highly muscular man or a Graveler. That was in part due to Gardevoir genetics, but Feyera was always frail—similar to Ein. Must have been from all of the rigorous work they undertook forcing them to skip meals.

Feyera swore loudly and gripped firmer onto the steering bar. The craft complied with his pressured turning and continued to accelerate.

"Feyera..." she said nodding her soft cheek on his shoulder. It was wet from the mist, but still rather warm. Warm and effeminate.

As the craft continued to gain speed, the pure water sprayed against his face, filling his nostrils with the briny scent of seawater. "Yeah?" he answered through telepathic thought.

Sanaria pressed her cartilage ear clippings upon his neck, tickling him with their firmness. "I...we might need to fight them off and...I'm scared."

The refreshing water continued to gently splash against them as they flew over the glass-like water.

"You're scared? SCARED?! I have no idea what's going on! How the hell did we get away from—"
The boat hit a small wave and gained some unexpected hang-time, "Gah, never mind!"

"Veh Feyera, I thought that..." Sana whispered with a faint smile.

He nudged her with the side of his head saying, "Sanaria, I told you already, we're going to do this together."

He felt her head shake back and forth. Their Teleport meant much more to her than to him at this point. It meant everything. But he didn't know that. How could he? "But together...?"

"Yes together," Edge said, completely unaware of potential consequences. And another splash doused his straight amber hair, now flooded with autumn colors from the direct sunlight revealing its complexity. She brushed his multi-tone bangs out of his eyes with a stroke up his forehead and along his bushy scalp.

"Thanks," he murmured in response to her kind gesture.
"Are you sure?" she asked as her gentle fingers ran through his hair as he steered the craft to the left, slowing it just enough to make a turn. "How are we going to—" the boat lurched as Edge sifted into a small gust of wind "—do this if you're..."

"Haha!" "—Together," he said laughing. The powerboat continued to skip over the crystalline water. "I told you that already."

"If this then..." she started to say. But she couldn't tell him under these conditions. There was not enough time. Maybe it was best if he didn't know. The anxiety of concealing truth ate away at the Gardevoir, ravaging her from the inside out.

Despite her rapidly assumed muteness, Feyera remained fixated on the task at hand. That was one of his skills. Concentration. The cliffs of the bay were a long way off; even when considering the brisk pace they had been traveling at, they had barely made it halfway through the bay. Edge heard shouting from behind him but he could not turn around. There were taunts perhaps. Maybe even orders. The voices were becoming louder.

"They're gaining; keep going. Faster," Sana solemnly said, whilst running her hand against his flushed cheek. Her placid strokes calmed him just enough. The sensation excited him, but he maintained focus on the approaching split through a nonstop flow of adrenaline.

Chrono Island's sound had a single entranceway, between two cliff ridges. While in this sheltered bay, they were protected from the Southern Sea's more vigorous churning. It was a narrow exit through the inlet. The bay itself was wide, and the Evercrest base ran adjacent to two-thirds of the bay's sea cliff coastline. There were two separate harbors: a small one on the base of the bay's belly, the other larger one about halfway between the harbor Feyera had come out of and the overhanging bluff bordering the bay's entrance. As Feyera faced the craft's pointed nose towards those cold precipices, he could not help but shiver at the thought of what happened to him two years ago. What happened to Seph. What ultimately happened to his life.

Feyera tried to turn his head from the approaching fjord and back at the crafts chasing them, but was greeted by a sudden loss of control of the fast PWC he was driving. He swore while trying to regain command of the temperamental watercraft.

"Chris veh Feyera!" Sanaria shrieked as he struggled.

"Yeah I got it!" he yelled. The watercraft continued to disobey and veer further off course.

"You have to keep looking forward," Sanaria insisted.

"I know!" Edge hollered in frustration.

"Chris!"

"I said I know!" Edge relayed while a soft prickle of nerves stung his backside. It stung his back, making him feel temperamental and feverish as it coursed up his spine. He was angry. But such feelings were soon subjugated and channeled down various avenues of consciousness, like blood into capillaries, as fresh feelings pervaded into his backside.

The fear from behind told him that there was something worse than mere inadequate control that he had to worry about. Her heart shard essentially injected him with her fear as she held him tightly from behind.

"No, it's not the boat! They're going to try and shoot us!"
Her fear became his own as desperation set in, looking their emotions into the vise-grip of insecurity—insecurity as mutual and shared as the marriage of sea and sky ahead of them; existing perfectly in a mirage of lucid colors.

"Jaeger *gasp*," Ein quickly belted, clearly out of breath from running up to the facility's control booth.

"Jah?" a plump scientist replied as he wheeled around in a black leather armchair. He padded his potbelly with a set of porky fingers, intertwining them above his wide checkered tie imbedded in a pocketed brown suit vest. The clothing hardly fit based upon the way the bottom buttons looked ready to burst like a Numel's hump. The chubby scientist scratched his crooked and balding head, "Your clothes Chief, zey are charred, and your face has blood all over it! What happened? S-N-Tri didn't relay any information to me here at central!"

Ein looked down to see the damages from his Pokemon battle. His lab coat was ripped and tattered. The white angelic purity was all but lost amid black smudges and energy scars. His spiny hands traversed the coat's numerous tears and massive bloodstains from his beaten face in bottomless displeasure. He raised a trembling hand to his hawk nose, which spewed out fresh blood like a river. Coughing, and spitting up his own blood, the scientist bellowed, "Fire the Phaeton missile over Penta Bay!"

"Chief?" the chubby man asked as his tiny Spoink-like eyes lit up. "Zee Phaeton?"

"Yes, you heard me," Ein squabbled.

The man rubbed his protuberant stomach, "I haven't seen it tested yet, and zee Cipher research team back in Orre insist it is not ready for practical use because of zee range restrictions—"

"You idiot! It was never designed for 'practical use' by our predecessors!" Ein hollered as more blood ran down from his honey jaw and splashed onto his lapel. "It was designed for warfare! And that is what it will be used for!"

"True…" said Jaeger softly, "our base's defensive countermeasures are starting to sound more and more like new toys, jah?"

"Don't try me," Ein sighed, "my patience is nearing its end."

Jaeger continued to speak quietly, "But zee warhead…she isn't mobile enough to go much further than Penta Base's outskirts, what if there is a problem with zee reaction? Could be risky. Ah yes, very chancy. 'Chancier than encountering a Chansey,' as they say from around these parts! Hurm—ho!"

"Bah, enough of your stupid humor! I gave you an order, seal and protect all the facility's electronics, and prepare for a complete remote backup," Ein said as his narrow figure glided gracefully past the main control schematics by the large window. He paused to look at the escaping PWC closely pursued by three others. They danced about like shooting stars in the night sky, their wakes following them like shimmering white tails.

"I zought it was funny," Jaeger nervously grinned.

Ein ignored his companion, instead muttering to himself, "…They don't stand a chance against what we have lined up. Hah ha…Military grade stopping power, enough energy to break even—"

"—B—But Chief, there are our own men out there pursuing zee anomaly!" Jaeger pointed at the
window at the water chase. "Zee troopers are gaining; they'll—"

"Does it look like I give a shit about some Rocket troopers, Jaeger?" Ein said as he grabbed hold of the pudgy scientist's coffee and chocolate checkered tie and pulled it threateningly. The plump man was lifted out of the chair slightly by Ein's enraged tug. "Those men are as expendable as our experiments!"

"Jah, but zee brute's genetic make-up isn't conducive to trials involving elevated cognitive mergers with Poke—"

"I'm telling you to launch the Phaeton missile, not write an equity report on experimentation! This is the task at hand!"

"W—wait, Ein, what is zee point of wasting our defensive trump card? Zee PWC is not seaworthy; she can only be used in zee bay; zee Southern Sea's churning would capsize her. You see?" Jaeger's breathing elevated as he pleaded, "There's no way for them to possibly escape, Chief."

"No way for them to possibly escape?! Has your grotesque adoration of food obscured your vision?!" Enraged, Ein pointed a stiff finger at the escaping duo. "Use your goddamn eyes! They're out there! They belong in here!"

Jaeger patted his stomach, "Why should we have to resort to zee Phaeton for such a small task?"

"You imported fool, this isn't a small task!"

"I'm here only because you wanted me on your post-Progenitor research team. For Project Curatus. All tests involving humans need zee help of zee good doctor, no? Ha ha, ho hurm…"

"Cut the Tauros shit, and get off your high Ponyta. You were too good a doctor and were subsequently excommunicated from your original post. I at least manage to convey the façade of an ecological benefactor. The only shining facet you have is your ruthless devotion to obtaining results," Ein said frankly.

"Now, now, you'll hurt my feelings; ol' Jaeger has a few other good traits, I assure you."

"Not that I've seen," Ein growled, "and I don't like surprises."

"I'll be sure to write you a nice, lengthy, heartfelt memorandum zee next time I inadvertently kill a test subject. It'll give you something to muse over, since you are so concerned with finding zee answers to 'why-not?'. All you need to know is zee 'why so?'. That is zee important question, Gideon—"

Ein raised a hand and cut Jaeger off with a snarl, "This isn't about scientific reconnoitering. At least not yet. We need to stop Chris. And there is only one way to accomplish that. I need to give Feyera a reason to fear. Unhinge him. Give him a slightly more heh…permanent reason to submit to me."

"I'm pretty sure if he's running away then he fears you—" Jaeger futilely argued.

"He 'runs' on emotion now, not reason!" Ein spat, "Pah! Just as predictable as any Angelus Curator. Humph! It's all for naught. We can stall his irrational little escape by doing this; he'll have no recourse once Phaeton completely strips him down and breaks the defensive shackles his mind has grown so accustomed to. Hahaha, I cannot wait to see his reaction!"

"Jah, but it may take some time before zee next shipment of SRBMs arrives! Zee replication process of the prototype weapon is painfully slow, even with zee new caches of Mercurium rolling
in from zee Rockets. Ein, is he worth putting zee whole entire base at risk?" Jaeger spat, "Is he worth making us defenseless?"

A scratch on Ein's arm pricked him. The scientist winced, buried in his thoughts. Though somewhat in pain, he went on to say nonchalantly, "The Evercrest base will be impervious to it. Phasewalk Protocol shields us."

"I know!" the fat man sternly acknowledged. "But it is zee only prototype we have here in zee west. What if zee KNRA decides to pay us a visit? Huh?! Then what?! Then we are helpless!"

Ein rubbed his bruised temple, "It's a risk we need to take. Chris is…no longer expendable."

"Expendable?!" Jaeger wobbled in his seat, "Since when was zee young delinquent anything but? I always told you he was a loose Blastoise cannon!"

"He may have robbed us of the greatest discovery of the past, and he may have set us behind two years in terms of resources with his little self-righteous stunt, but he also became the epitome of our evolutionary project succeeding Progenitor…rather unwillingly I might add…yes, most unenthusiastically…"

"They say, 'crime never pays'. Guess it was a good thing that zee boy's friend helped him live, jah?"

"Now it's time to get him back," Ein coldly said, ignoring Jaeger's tongue-in-cheek comment about crime. Jaeger and Ein were more than mere criminals, they were completely hardened against any moral code whatsoever.

"You'll get zee boy back and then you'll find out that he's not stable enough just like zee others, Ein."

"No. Feyera has something else in his possession. Something keeping it in check. Without it, who knows what wondrous power may surface? But speculation is not enough, we need to experiment."

"So it's not zee Mercurium's natural course?"

"The pilfered Reilken Mercurius is unquestionably the reason for his current condition. It's a part of him. He would not have survived this long otherwise. I'm certain of it. There had to be a direct causation."

Jaeger wiggled his feet and put an elbow on the control panel board. He stuffed his nose with a fist of knuckles as Ein went on.

"Organic cells have a way of adhering to newer streamlined formations under Mercurium's guidance. All it takes is a touch of foreign DNA to start the runaway train of molecular reactions. This would normally create a system in which synthesis can manifest at exponential rates. However, it would appear that someone has been copiously tainting my experiments with his own formula of imposed control."

"Whatever…" Jaeger grumbled, "So he has a few psyonic abilities like zee Pokemon thanks to a total waste of precious purified Mercurium…"

"Oh but it's not the Mercurium stopping him. Oh no, quite the opposite! Jaeger, you have no idea. Until you analyze his cellular structure…until you see with your own eyes what he can do; even with the inhibitor in place it's—"

"I saw zee video footage." Jaeger animated with his hands, "He destroyed zee little tiny bridge with
psyonics. Emotion based psyonics that were grafted onto him from zee missing Gardevoir Delta-two. Big deal, it wound up crippling him."

"No Jaeger," Ein grunted, "he's tapping into things going far beyond the film we have from Agent Maxwell."

"Beyond…?" Jaeger asked with concern. For Ein to speak with such gravity it must have been significant. "What do you mean Ein?"

"He's linking himself to his Pokemon," Ein said as he pawed at his flat boney chest, "One of which happens to be a Psychic type."

Jaeger made a tight fist around one of the chair's cloth arms. "And zee danger of that?"

"It—she's a Gardevoir," Ein said gravely. "And that makes it much more complicated considering Chris' predicament."

"I don't see how…" Jaeger muttered.

"I've figured it out already, it's simple enough."

"What?! Zee boy and his Gardevoir have a bond? That's cute; I've never heard a story like that before in my whole entire life!" Jaeger sneered sarcastically. "Of all the unoriginal—"

Ein fumed out of his narrow nose in disgust, "She's not strictly his Pokemon based upon their heart-bound bond, you twit!"

"What?!"

"How much Feyera knows is debatable. How much I am willing to allow him to find out is not. I know how Gardevoir work thanks to Progenitor. Poor Feyera though, he's forgotten." Ein rocked his shoulders back to relieve the aching. "He's forgotten so much of the past. He's forgotten all of his great deeds, and now only exists as a relic to his research. Our research."

"Well, then that must mean…" Jaeger trailed off in wonder. "You'll need them both."

"—Yes, it is simultaneously everything and nothing to him; his greatest asset and most exploitable weakness…but at the moment I seriously doubt he's unearthed enough relevant potential on his own."

"So he's exploitable because of what facet exactly?"

"A psyonic is universally considered to be lacking in judgment. It's common knowledge that a typical psyonic lacks the awareness of possible consequences of his acts and omissions. However —" Ein took a extended breath and peered longingly out of the booth's main window at the aquatic chase, "—this string of events is only true in human psyonics. Typically, it is debilitating, and the mind slowly folds in upon itself, as seen in Lady Sabrina's case. For Feyera, based upon what I can gather, is intellectually tearing off such restraints through a special bond he has with his Pokemon. A peculiar bond that only exists amid a certain species of Pokemon. A Gardevoir bond."

"And wh—?" Jaeger bumbled, "W—what does that have to do with anything?!"

"—I saw his heart with my own two eyes, Jaeger. When I first witnessed it on Maxwell's crude video, I did not believe it. I knew it was possible for his cells to regenerate along a new biological trajectory thanks to the dated Reilken Mercurius but the chance of such an outcome…*sigh*
astronomical…"

"And are you positive it was…zee real thing?"

"It took command of him completely. Elevated CNS, focused willpower, visible tendrils of psychic control, even the typical psychic defenses shielded his eyes to compensate for the immense internal well of mental energy."

"Shields over zee eyes?" Jaeger wiggled his porky fingers over his eyes, drawing the outline of eyeglasses.

"Essentially. It's a fascinating self-defense mechanism. You see, not only are the eyes conduits of emotion, but they are also very close to the brain. Practically embedded against it. At the climax of cognitive employment, the inner strain would be enough to crush the eyeballs if they were not 'shielded' from the difference in external and internal pressure. The translucent crimson barriers mimic pressure, stopping the exterior environment from being detrimental."

"Ah." Jaeger smiled, "You know much more about zee Feeling Species than I do."

"No thanks to Mister Feyera himself," sneered Ein, "rather ironically, I might add."

He shook his head, "Jah, well what if he was just using his knowledge to trick you? Ever consider that possibility?"

"The psychological states I imposed upon him through my crafted words genuinely touched him, completely debilitated him. Even Feyera in his intellectual prime would not be clever enough to demonstrate such candid panic as a ruse to delude me. The Feyera I knew had no…*Sigh*—" Ein drove the tips of his two fingers against his vertical forehead as he looked down at the grated floors —"sentiments until he began interacting with our Progenitor candidates like Delta-two."

"But that means—"

"*Humph!* It means he behaved exactly like one would expect a miserable Gardevoir to," Ein chastised. "Efficacious, but tragically irrational. A slave to emotion, a conduit of compassion; completely helpless yet paradoxically powerful. Unable to battle such irrationality on his own, he's perfect for controlling."

"Zee young man who used to work under your wing, he's nothing more than a tool, jah?" Jaeger said, tapping the tips of his round fingers together repetitively. "An instrument?"

Ein shook his head. "No, he's a gateway. A gateway to a more powerful set of possible life forms."

"New life forms? Like crosses between people and Pokemon?"

"Perhaps."

"Haven't zee results always failed? After all, genetics have differed too greatly in our evolutionary pathways. But then again, with Progenitor experiments as the precursor to Mercurium experiments, who knows zee boundaries of zee precious life-guiding element."

Ein stroked his chin, puttering, "…He's a human, mostly. There's no questioning that, but his exploitable components are all linked to Pokemon. Mercurium causes cells to evolve, but it is rarely discriminatory in its algorithm of integration, my dear friend. Nor is it completely stable."

"But Ein," Jaeger fumbled in his seat, "can you really hope to exert control over something so
"I already have. In more ways than he knows," Ein said short and fast. "He'll come to realize it in time."

"Oh…" Jaeger shot a shadowy look at the scientist, "…OH! …That!"

"Precisely," Ein nodded. "He's a brutally effective being which reason—and reason alone—can triumph over."

"Curbing emotion with reason…why don't you just use Pokemon though Ein? For instance, Gardevoir on their own are—"

"This isn't about Pokemon anymore. This is about improving *Sigh*…" Ein nearly fell backwards as he swung his arms into the air preaching, "—this is about improving human beings. That has all it has ever been about. We need to cut out the middleman, Jaeger!"

"Hurm…jah?"

Ein swept his arm and across like a sickle, "The age of the Pokemon Trainer is slowly dying off as our world shrinks through exploration. Soon, there will be no more room left, no way for us to exist in collaboration with Pokemon and their communities in nature!"

"Jah, well Kanto has quite a large population in comparison to where I'm from or Orre for that matter—no thanks to the Great War."

"Jaeger," Ein pointed at a picture of the globe displayed on the main terminal, "the Great War is only the beginning. Soon, people will fight over limited resources once more. Soon, they will struggle to survive. Relics predating the Terminal War are testament to this problem. It has happened before and it will happen again. That's…the nature of history. Historia est vitae magistra."

"Bah! Such conceit. Do you really believe that we're not better prepared to control this world? As far as we know, Pokemon were not even a part of zee pre-Terminal period. We have more advantages than zee collapsed world ever did!"

"Do we really? Have we outgrown the limits?" Ein shrugged, "What occurs in nature when organisms compete?"

"Natural selection," Jaeger said with a faint grin, "survival of zee fittest and Darwinian progression."

"Correct. They compete, bicker, fight, and collapse upon themselves with bloated wills to survive! Look at us! Look at nature! What if there was a way out? What if we could end the pruning cycle of life? We can. We can overcome it, Feyera is proof! Assimilation, integration, evolution, Jaeger; collaboration as opposed to competition is possible. But it must be enforced!" Ein exclaimed.

"You're talking about forcing evolution…beyond zee tests undertaken in Mahogany Town, with zee Red Gyarados," Jaeger brushed his greasy eyebrow, "most importantly, you are talking about human evolution; a process that takes millions of years!"

"Yes, if you're a naturalist," Ein dryly replied while lowering his arms, "but we know it can be sped up by splicing."

"W—We do?" Jaeger spluttered from his restrained perch.
"Of course, the ultimate question is: when we make it so people are able to directly wield the strength of Pokemon, instead of the pear-shaped weaponry of our desecrated ancestors, who will control such a marvelous contraption?"

"Us?" Jaeger asked warily. Ein slowly nodded, "Everything has a function. My function is the same as any organism's brain. To command what is powerful, to preserve my authority over its existence; my mission is very much like a young strident Mister Feyera once put it, 'to be a guardian, an overseer, a safe keeper, a guiding hand, an…angel over life itself.'"

Jaeger peered outside at the aquatic chase, "Angellic or not, you'd do well not to lose it for a second time."


"You know I don't babble in that antediluvian language, Ein," Jaeger grunted. "*Humph* so uncultured!" Ein huffed. He was always fascinated by ancient cultures and their advances, even if such advances resulted in travesties like the Terminal War. For in Ein's mind, it took a learned man to try to understand their ways along with use their innovative technology. In addition, to overcome the primitive behavior that led to such loss was paramount.

Jaeger folded his arms in silent pouting.

"'First recognize it. Then judge it. After judging, you must finally act.' This is the principle of science, Jaeger. It's our religion, it provides us with answers."

"It does?"

"Yes." Ein sighed and proceeded to glide his hand about as if it were a baton, "'Ipsa scientia potestas est.' 'Knowledge itself is power'—" his floating hand transformed into a tight fist as it reached the edge of its exaggerated sweep "—Now fire the Phaeton."

"Very well. Right, initializing zee protocol," Jaeger bumbled with the black transmitter in his palm as it slipped from his sweaty hands. Eventually he gained control of the piece and clicked the soft lever on its side. As he tapped on the microphone, he heard the testing noise echo throughout the complex's loudspeaker. He grinned at Ein and revealed his fanged teeth.

Ein refused to exhibit any response, only taking the precious seconds to calculate his next move once Phaeton was airborne. Would he be able to rely on his Pokemon at that point? Or would the fallout be too much for them to endure?

Jaeger tried to steady his watery grip on the device's glossy plastic, speaking quickly into the voice receptor, "Attention all personnel, Operation Phasewalk is in effect to protect us from the Full Stop. Prepare all our systems for zee manual override immediately. Seal all external posterns and docking bays. Ready zee launch gate."

Ein gave a cold nod of agreement.

"S-N-Tri has been offline; I can't get a visual on zee docks," Jaeger said whilst bumbling with a camera monitor. His chubby fingers prodded at the monitor's keyboard. "Black screen. Damn, she's shut down already!"

"It doesn't matter," Ein insisted with a hiss, "the Phaeton's effect will hit them so long as they are in
the bay area. They may have Teleported a short distance, but I know Gardevoir: that is a skill they only employ at the end of their rope. Even then, it is taxing enough to cripple both of their bodies. Permanently if we are unlucky."

"Zee human Teleported?" Jaeger asked in awe. "Wait what?! Chris Feyera?!"

Ein rubbed his sore cheek. "Correct. No more than fifty meters."

"FIFTY METERS?!" Jaeger shouted at the top of his lungs. One of his lower buttons looked ready to burst. "How did—"

"I told you already…" Ein pressed his lab wear's bloody lapel down flat with a stroke. He then droned on, "You won't believe it until you see it for yourself."

"How did he…what did he…you mean zee Mercurius fully bound zee cellular components enough for him to—"

Ein nodded solemnly.

"So it is still active and spreading?"

"*Sigh* Yes…the same genetically corrosive substance that runs through his veins has undoubtedly…shall we say, passed beyond his body at this point. I need to find out whether or not it is possible to induce and replicate Mercurium's effect through mutual Teleportation. That would save us the time of extraction because of the 'Transitive Property'."

"But zee new caches of the unrefined material are being unearthed by our Team Rocket subordinates as we speak…"

"Mercurium…'The Mutable Resource'. Described as 'Varitatio delectat', or 'changes that please' in the pre-Terminal period. Hardly a fitting phrase for the unrefined material, and yet our ancestors knew of its potential by giving it that name, and crafting the beautifully processed Reilken Mercurius."

"Zee rockets are not collecting anything refined," Jaeger chuckled, "but a little radiation never hurt anyone right? Ha ha."

"It will break them since they don't handle it properly. So clumsy…so pathetic. Their only concern is money. They'll do anything for the right price. Even hurl themselves off cliffs. They're only criminals even when they're at their best. Their minds will bend to its will."

"And it didn't break Feyera because of how it was processed? But then specifically how did he obtain zee traits of…?"

"I don't know…but we're going to find out." Ein shook his head, "He's not about to leave our island despite what he believes. He's done himself in by coming here. We'll test out the defensive Phaeton and capture him in the resulting aftermath."

"'Killing two Pidgey with one Rock Throw', jah? Ha ha! Is that what they say over here in Kanto?"

Ein ignored Jaeger's pitiful foreigner humor, answering with a straight face, "I will have him and his precious components."

"His components?" asked Jaeger. "You want to extract the Mercurium residue from his body? Or are you talking about zee Gardevoir traits themselves?"
"It's likely that they are one and the same in areas such as his heart. The Mercurium is now a blend of him and Delta-two rather than pure Mercurium; think of it as a mold cells follow when they regenerate."

"Ah ha!" Jaeger said in an epiphany. Mercurium binds different cellular traits together based upon the volume of the initial exposure to the element and the compatibility of the organisms in question. These small changes in physiology would be amplified through a series of localized reactions occurring to nearby areas; Mercurium was fluid enough to travel from membrane to membrane. Though how fast this whole process occurred was as much a mystery as any.

"Yes. Which will make it easier to replicate, though I don't like the idea of smearing parts of Feyera's DNA on anything if it can be helped."

"Ha, you've had enough of zee little rascal?"

"'Rascal' is not a strong enough word to describe Feyera," Ein said scowling.

"Well you can always replicate zee process through good old trial-and-error; back in med school that's all I did." Jaeger pretended he was cutting a steak with his hand motions, whispering, "First on zee cadavers, then on zee people."

"Extraction will only begin once the tests are finished." Ein said, "Markova will do a run-down of Chris Feyera's medical history to analyze a possible cellular algorithm for future experiments, which will be forwarded to you. I'll send my subordinates and rocket operatives to secure more specimens from both groups: human and Pokemon. But before I divvy up more precious Mercurium to the lucky specimens, I need to see how he responds to certain triggers in person and analyze the ramifications of Teleport."

"You would withhold experimenting just to make sure that you do it right? That doesn't sound like you at all, Chief."

Ein let out a half laugh, "I suppose I can play an odds game now that I know that the desired result is possible."

"Jah. Desirable I'm sure under the condition you survive. Ha ha!"

"It really is the same as Progenitor. The only thing that's changed since then is: now we know which species work—one of which is the human species."

"Hurrrm, a single human being. You cannot expect to clone his unique reaction without painstaking diligence."

"Ha…perhaps, keep in mind Chris and I have an…exploitable history. Should he remember it…*Sigh* He's so…impressionable."

"Oh he he he," Jaeger menacingly chuckled. "Seems like you want to take him apart too!"

Ein did not acknowledge the pudgy man's comment. "It's over for him. He's got everything playing against him, and now he's gallivanting about in our protected bay."

Jaeger nodded and his chin bulged. "And zee Ephemera?" he asked through swollen lips.

"Haahhhh…Now in 'Our Father's' loving care," Ein assured with a venomous smile.

"I see, he he he…you better pray zee KNRA doesn't show up," Jaeger giggled. "I will prep zee rest
of Phaeton's elements."

"Good. I'm going up a flight to the observation deck; you know me, I love to see an experiment in action!" Ein barked. The frail scientist quickly proceeded to run up the nearby grated stairs. He wheezed and coughed during his arduous ascent. Each step resonated with a clang that shook the chilly silence.

Jaeger continued to look out at the brightly reflective littoral bay. It was afternoon, a perfectly clear sunny day. The wind hardly blew against the tiny black wind vane propeller shaped like a Fearow outside the main window. As the foreign scientist ran his plump fingers along the illuminated code board, he began to hum softly to himself. "Hurm hurm hurm...Zee gates are sealed good and tight —" he looked at a nearby monitor showing the metal sheets closing on all the harbor entranceways, sealing the bulkheads. They closed in on the passageways, shielding the base.

A few seconds passed and the groaning eventually stopped. Jaeger could hear the dull "thump!" from directly underneath his observational satellite. It shook his whole body, and he wobbled gauchely in his wheeled chair.

His forehead began to sweat even more from the sudden agita. "Okay. Check. Zee Evercrest electrical current, hurm hurm, sifting in preparation for zee energy surge. Hardware and zee memory discs...overriding from solid state to physical core drives."

"Safeguards are a green light." He clicked a few more switches below the monitor board. "Hurm hurm... optimal ballistic range for spread. Check." Jaeger looked up at the large digital clock reading "3:19". Its bright green soon faded into black obscurity. Red lights then filled the room's interior akin to when there was an emergency procedure. Jaeger did not seem alarmed however. "Hurm hurm and zee secondary generator is providing power until the Full Stop reboot... Check."

"Zee firing coordinates, Penta bay...latitude twenty-seven due north...hurm hurm...longitude one hundred and thirty in zee east." Jaeger skillfully input the directions on a dark olive green computer terminal. It chimed in bold letters "PRIMED". Jaeger could almost hear Ein's laughter at the impending beauty. It had been too long since such a device was employed. The only thing that would be better in terms of impressiveness would be if it were stopping an invasion instead. His thoughts ran wild with the expression on anyone foolish enough to challenge them, even the military. He wiped his greasy brow saying, "Check."

A flashing screen appeared with ten blank slots for numeric code. The first three individual slots were separated by dashes. Then next part of the sequence had two blank slots between dashes and the very last part of the blank code had exactly three slots, reading: "[_]—[_]—[_]—[ _][ _]—[ _][ _][ _]

"And now for zee launching codes! Zahhh...! What was it now, Jaeger...?" he asked himself. Pawing his stomach, he contemplated. "...Hurm hurm...oh right! Zee first six Fibonacci prime numbers, haha Jaeger, you are so very smart! Let's see, two, three, five, thirteen, eighty-nine, and two-hundred-and-thirty-three! " he typed in the number sequence with a restless smirk, basking in his own cleverness for making an easy to remember password.

Stroking the final number, the computer issued a loud "click!" and "ding!" as a loud hiss came from beyond the window. Jaeger struggled to look beyond his instrumental panel to see the storage tower's cement door slide open only to find himself nearly falling out of the rolling chair.

"Drat!" he squealed as he nearly fell out of the chair. "Oof! My zpleen!" he barked at the armchair when it nudged him in the side as he reoriented his round body.
Eventually, after wiggling his shapeless body into the confines of the chair once more, he gave a long exhale. "Phew…"

The screen in front of him flashed "WARNING DETONATION IMMINANT!" in bright red flashing lights. Beyond the terminal, the bright diamonds of reflected sunlight shone off the bay's still water. Far down below, the fugitives desperately fled from the rocket operatives pursuing them on their PWCs. A soft metal mesh shield began to coil downwards, closing on the window, only partially dampening the view with its shade.

"Ah haha…!" He cracked his knuckles with a smile. "Time to enjoy zee show!"

A few flights above Jaeger, out in the warm sun, Ein stood fixated upon the spectacle about to unfold. The dazzling view of the bay was all within his transfixed surveyance. Slight breezes caused his lab coat to billow behind him like a short cape. Had it been as white as it was before, then the sunlight would undoubtedly reflect off him as much as the light from the sea. But it was not, it had been mutilated by the fight between him and his fleeing recalcitrant apprentice. Too far gone were any hopes of redemption between the two of them. It did not matter. There was no way to coerce Feyera at this point, he had been led to far adrift by emotion; the young man adamantly opposed the truth: Ein had every advantage imaginable and there was no persuading him to unfasten the Mercurius from his genetic code. In fact, every struggle Feyera made to relinquish himself from Ein's clutches—by employing his psyonics—served to clasp him tighter in the ferocity of Mercurium's mutability. Ein knew this, but he also knew more about the Reilken Mercurius than Edge could imagine. And that was the real advantage. That accompanied by the Phaeton created the perfect storm.

Ein's eagle eyes peered out from behind grey-tinted sunglasses. He wore a faint smile.

"There is a natural order to this world. And I will make it my order. To fight it would force submission, to take flight would only delay the inevitable. 'Aut viam inveniam aut faciam.' 'Either I'll find a way or make one.'"
Furious light beamed into the young Pokemon trainer's eyes. Bangs typically filled with brilliant autumn colors were now coated in damp seawater causing them to droop. Like heavy curtains, they blotted out portions of harsh sunlight in front of Feyera's visual field. His salt-crusted eyelashes quivered in the galloping turmoil. Glaring ahead, boundless miles stretched onwards and afar. The entire bay was a glass mirror surrounded by a jagged cliff frame, the edging of which had been encrusted and jeweled with Evercrest's reflective metal plating.

He had to leave Evercrest behind. Physically and mentally. There was no going back; the scientists and researchers there couldn't...wouldn't help save him from the heart shard embedded in his chest. Feyera was imprisoned with this fragment of Gardevoir anatomy, but he had been given a miraculous shot at extending his personal liberty to remove it through Sanaria's Teleport.

Peering down for a millisecond, he observed the glossy rubicund metal that pierced out from his chest, cleaving his layers of tattered clothing in two with a fine slit. Rays of golden sun danced off its broad sides, gilding the thin crescent edge with a gilt trim.

This was it. This was his chance to escape. However, the cruel turning of time's wheel pulled his lofty aspirations back to earth with a force beyond any he could remember. Much less comprehend.

A tight caress from behind startled him.

No, this was their chance to escape. Consolation, limitless in her purest form, abraded his back while the personal water craft continued to accelerate towards freedom. A freedom tasted by a tender tongue that does not forget sweetness tinged with bitterness.

A stray metal bolt narrowly missed his leg. Feyera caught a glimpse of the shimming artificial ray before it vanished into the water. The lustrous silver dash of light could mean only one thing: Nihil bolts. A second silvery projectile whizzed straight past the PWC's shallow footrest where Edge's Alterieno boot rested, touched by the exposed base of Sanaria's white leg guard.

"They're gaining! Shooting!"

Bringing his black boot up, he rubbed ankles with Sana.

"AH! Chris!" Sanaria screamed as yet another barb soon followed, with a "Thwip!" this time gracing over both their heads. The shrill sound of shredding wind whistled in his ears.

With rattling hands, the young man grappled with the steering bar. His heart rate continued to elevate, growing more substantial with every uncontrollable organic thump. Which heart was it? He couldn't tell the difference anymore. Panic set in. How fast would it take him? How long before either one of them gave out?

Sana pushed her head against his shoulder to duck, and he winced with her body's trembles. "G—get...get...us out of here...away...please."

He had to do something, anything; they were not going to get out of the spread of fire by going in a
straight line. But in this bay there were no obstacles, no cover. Just water, cliff lines, and the research laboratory as far as they eye could see.

Silently, Edge tried to stall his stolen craft enough to turn, releasing a tad on the accelerator and tilting the main bar, but it wound up violently slackening in control. The machine wobbled and shifted along in the crystal clear bay as if it were but a tiny soap bubble amid the great basin of a tub.

"Veh Feyera!" the Gardevoir shouted, holding onto both him and the craft using her slender arms and legs respectively. Her action only served to increase his tension; knowing he was not the only one at stake here seemed to tug at his proverbial heartstrings.

Panicking, Edge compensated once again, this time pulling in the opposite direction, shifting back into a higher gear. The gauges and dials below spun like maddened timepieces. Black fumes shot out of the exhaust pipe like a locomotive engine. The PWC lurched unexpectedly, and veered off to the side, nearly capsizing.

Helpless, Feyera looked to his left as the watercraft continued to roll sideways. There were a few large Staryu visible at the base of the bay's shallow depths. Their brown bodies, jeweled with glowing orbs of flaming red, lay motionless while Edge and his blazingly fast craft sped over top their quiet and undisturbed underwater home.

Sanaria tugged on his waist as the craft stalled further and reoriented itself after the quick turn. Their pleading pulls towards equilibrium narrowly prevented a full out overturn. With an aggravated putter of the propeller, the craft's underbody sunk into the sparking water once again.

"Phew…" Edge exhaled through a crooked expression. "Haaa…” he panted.

However, the pursuing members of Team Rocket were hardly impeded. They too turned their crafts, momentarily ceasing fire while they hopped over the broad crescent moon wave Feyera had generated through turning.

Knowing he was unable to see their chasers, Sana told Edge with a start, "That didn't work, keep going—!"

Another zipping noise shot beyond their heads, heralding more fired munitions. "Thwip! Thwip!"

Before Sanaria could finish her thought, Feyera gassed the accelerator to full and the PWC shot forward, spewing forth a powerful wake and geyser of water behind it. The whole piece of machinery roared as the gauge dials vigorously turned clockwise in an effort to keep up with the blistering pace they had reached. Edge's mind had never traveled as hastily as it had during the mutual Teleport, and now by comparison, his entire perceived world was moving quicker. Too much quicker. Control slipped further away with each moment, like a vague shadow of a ghost in the night.

Sana nudged her body closer to Edge in silence. Their pursuers evenly matched the incredible power of the trainer's Samson ES. Feyera heard the rumble of the other ES engines gaining as the bay water doused his face with brackish warmth. His eyes darted amid the controls looking for some kind of way to push the motor even harder. Thoughts persuaded him; if he could push himself to the limit then why not the PWC?

"Damn," Feyera swore under his breath as he tilted the control rod back to center. More of the lukewarm water splashed in his eyes and mouth. Its taste reminded him of something he could not fully remember. Why would he remember such a thing? What part of him was left to remember
such primal senses? He thought he had forgotten all about these shady waters from his past. "Damn!" he said louder.

"Are you okay?" a careworn Sana asked.

Blinking twice in response to clear out the water, his lashes quivered. "Fine! That was close!" he shouted into the wild wind. His thick amber hair blew backwards and stayed blown out thanks to the wind and water. Its greased composition was unusual. He felt adrenaline continue to pressure his, now strangely, distant body.

"They're going to start shooting again," Sana squealed. "I can't keep them from missing us forever!"

She was employing a tiny conical reflect shield. Although lackluster, the light blue hexagonal crystals interwove behind them to spread the rain of fire. Each time a bolt hit the cone, it ruptured with a "clink!" and grew ominous cracks. It had grown rather dilapidated from all the abuse and was barely even recognizable as a solid form any longer.

Edge didn't waste his time with obscenities; they weren't any good at deterring bolts after all. "…Then let's shoot something back!"

"Huh? Veh Feyera, what do you mean? —AHH!"

Edge looked back and a screeching pin missed his shoulder by a hair's breadth. "GAH!" he shouted in dismay. The craft jerked and reeled.

It was useless. He couldn't make out where the shots were coming from, but one thing was for certain, they were definitely becoming more accurate and frequent. Feyera turned back to the control rod. "Are you okay Sana?!" he asked in worry, feeling her chilled cheek brush against his own.

"Yes…I'm—I'm just so scared. I don't want to die like this."

"We're not going to die!" Edge insisted. But the thoughts of Lorelei's recent murder haunted him.

"I…" Sana began to plea, but her telepathy trailed off. "…No…"

Edge Feyera bent his head down. No one was immortal. Why did he have all this faith? Who was he kidding? This may as well be their last stand. Ein was ruthless. His lackeys even more so, judging by their disregard for preserving Feyera's life. Had he really pissed off the scientist that much? Was he worthless? Expendable? He thought for sure that the valuable Reiklen Mercurius around his wrist was worth more than he was. It had caused the merging of separate biologies after all. It was practically treated like a god by the city buried under Saffron! If that wasn't enough to preserve his life, then nothing was. Which made him worry. Maybe Ein had figured out a way to replicate the grafting process. He sounded keen on using younger specimens. How young? Children? Infants? It was all so disgusting. So vile.

"I sure hope we don't die," Edge admitted, the measures taken by Ein meant Feyera's life was no longer a viable component to his ex-researching partner's plans.

"Veh Feyera—" Sanaria thought about her acquired wound from the Nihil bolt that pierced her palm. Scaring was permanent, but death was much more so. Panic-stricken, she bent her shoulders back in a jolt, "You don't know for sure! What if they—"

"Hey, I'm already supposed to be dead!" Edge said as lightheartedly as possible under the
circumstances. It came across as short and witty, frosted with a twinge of self-animosity. "Keep that in mind! I should be at the bottom at this bay like the bastards chasing us!"

"Don't say those kinds of things!" Sanaria pleaded, "You're not that way; Ein didn't make you that way."

"*Sigh*...hha...HA!" he exhaled in a broken spasm, abridging his thoughts with uncertainty. "You're right...I did. *COUGH!*"

She pet his gasping lungs. "You're alive; I can feel you're alive!"

"Sure...alive," he said peering down at his scar-like Gardevoir heart. "Not how I envisioned being alive."

"Now's not the time!" she insisted. The dramatically tilting craft made her grasp onto him even more than before.

In a fit of internal struggle, Edge stammered, "Y—yeah...gotta make sure we stay alive—AH!"

"EEP!"

A bolt struck the rear of the craft's seat, ricocheting off and causing the entire vessel to reverberate from the impact. Psychic resonance coursed throughout his frail body, undoubtedly from the Gardevoir pressed close against his back. The shared sensation weltered and drew forth fear across both their faces since the employment of cognitive defenses was only a mere gust against a riling storm of bullets. Sana's shield may have been enough to cause already misguided projectiles to narrowly miss along their wayward trajectory; however, all it took was a perfectly lined up shot though and they were done for. Granted, this was difficult for their pursuers to do aboard PWCs, but Nihils were proficient at one thing: quantity. The law of averages alone assured them a lucky shot eventually.

Feyera cursed into the wind, "DAMMIT!"

"We're both alive!" Sana chirped, "We need to stay alive; that's all, veh Feyera!"

"I know!" Edge swallowed nervously, the turmoil of the PWC's gallop made his stomach lurch. He wished he knew how to operate it properly. The frustration ate at him from the inside out, much like whenever he was confronted with his debilitating amnesia.

"Chris...it's important that we both—" Sanaria began, but she soon realized it was not the right setting to be divulging the newer conditions concerning being heart-bound.

"What?"

Edge waited for a second or two, but she didn't answer.

"We both what?!"

"Y—you can't die. Remember that."

"Well, hell, you make it sound like I want to!"

Silence, save for the skipping of the water and rumble of the diesel motor below.

"We'll be fine!" Edge hollered, "Just fight them off with something! C'mon, like before!"
He imagined her cocky attitude from before on the island when she had boasted her battle repertoire: "A small field Confusion attack followed by surgical Psyshock sufficed just fine. A full out Psychic assault would be overkill. What's wrong? You haven't learned those moves yet?"

However, all that confidence was long gone. She was frozen and weak. Moreover, she was very afraid. And it rubbed off on him, overflowing like cold rainwater cascading down his apartment complex's eves in Pallet.

It stung. It stung like venom. And now it was a venom they shared together.

He felt Sana's ear clippings press against the back of his head, while her arms closed possessively around his torso. Their smooth pronged cartilage suggested playfulness, but nothing could be further from the reality of fact. She answered him slowly, "I—I can't..."

Gamboling over a few light waves, Feyera shouted, "What do you mean you can't?!!" He wondered if the Teleport had drained her completely. Thoughts raced through his mind. Was she as fragile and defenseless as him now? Was it his fault? Did he somehow inflict this weakness upon her? What had he done? What had they done?

She brought her right hand down from around his shoulder and against his heart shard. It felt warm, but her touch always did. "...Not alone."

"What do you want me to do?! I'm a little bit busy ya know?!?" Feyera yelled in aggravation while more bolts whizzed past their craft and splashed into the water. The metal barbs reflected the sunlight almost as much as the bright teal cove water itself, their sequential ripples reminding him of skipped stones.

"Feyera..."

"UGH!" he grunted, "Sana, I can't even see for squat!" The trainer bent his back straight and glared toward the massive facility built into the cliff on his left. Dark, lead-like fumes spewed out from behind his PWC, inflaming his nostrils with their redolence of pressured flight. "The blasted thing won't let me loosen the controls without thinking I fell off!"

Biting his lip, he waited to hear some kind of response from Sanaria. She knew he couldn't possibly couldn't fight the members of Team Rocket off. Not with psyonics nor with his Pokemon. He was too busy simply trying to make sure the PWC kept afloat at these blistering speeds. How Edge hated the craft's manual controls. It was archaic. Couldn't they have installed ARMOS on this? Seemed like everything used convenience navigation programing these days.

"Huhh..." There was a faint sigh followed by a quiver. Edge could not tell if it came from him or her since they felt the same way.

Grappling with the rubber grips on the control bar, he continued his zigzagging course to evade the raining projectiles. It was far too risky for him to look backwards because it tossed the control rod off to the side, inadvertently steering. Plus, even if he could somehow manage to face the gaining opposition, his psyonics were at an all-time low. He felt incredibly mortal. Incredibly human. Like he had felt long ago. It was all too real, all too present; life had begun to catch up with him. And this mortality tugged at his every thought, shouting questions. Would he survive? Would she? What would it matter if one of them did and the other didn't?

Pulverized by feelings feeding through Sanaria, "Sana?!" Edge demanded blindly through his salt-rimmed tears. He told himself they were from the wind. He told himself those compassionate feelings were not his own. But were they?
"Sanaria, answer me!" he echoed through thought and voice. Separating the two had become troublesome.

"Chris..." an exhausted Sanaria whispered.

"What!?"

Turing again, sharply, the light of the sun sprayed into his eyes.

"...Feyera...veh...Feyera?"

Edge violently shook his head; his curtain bangs caressed the area under his eyes with undying fondness, "What is it?! We don't have the time! SANA!"

The Gardevoir gave a half nod, her thoughts blending into actual palatable emotion, bleeding together in a river of strange liturgy, the creamy consistency blurring not only sight but nerve ends throughout the trainer's body. "We can do this together, right? That's what you said, right?"

'Can' wasn't even acceptable now, they 'needed' to. "We have to!" Feyera said as more of the bolts rained about them. "Do something! Get them off our tails!"

"Tails?" she scathingly repeated. Her breathlessness made it that much more derisive. "Haha! We have tails now?"

The young man felt Sana move from behind him. She shifted her body and seemed to turn around to face backwards. He took extra care not to shake the craft more than it already was. The Gardevoir kept one arm around Edge's neck for security. The glossy red protrusion from her back rubbed against the back of his loose rocket uniform. Her two thin legs brushed alongside his own.

"It's an expression! Our trail, get them off our trail!" Edge corrected indignantly.

"Okay," she replied in a half-hum. "Heh...tails...you're funny, Mister Feyera."

Then she clutched his at his back. Her silky hands abraded his uniform with their smooth and delicate tracing.

"W—what are you trying to do?" Edge stammered in shock. "Why are you...?"

"This isn't working, you don't have—"

"ACK!"

Another small wave launched the craft into the air momentarily. Sana squeezed the fabric tightly. He felt his muscles constrict in response to the tugging and sensation of a jumping stomach. The disorienting splash sent them both into a small panic. Sana shivered as more coastal water covered their already drenched Team Rocket uniforms.

"...! *Gasp!*"

"What?!" Edge asked her, "What don't I have!? Tell me!"

"Y—you don't have your heart going through you," Sana quickly replied, invisibly flushing at the thought of how perfect that would be. "There is something stopping it from..."
"I…what?!" Feyera questioned. "What are you talking about—?"

He felt Sana paw at his spine. She deprecatingly went on to say in a hushed tone, "Like I do, like Seph did…it's not natural; it doesn't…*sigh* it doesn't…drive through you—"

"NO!" he impulsively retorted. He realized that thankfully he didn't. It was a relatively minor detail. But he knew based on Sanaria's anatomy that Gardevoir had heart shards that penetrated their entire essence. Literally. It was their core after all. Corporeally and mentally, it drove through them. Though the latter symptom was more icksome, at least for Edge Feyera.

He only had a portion of it. The glossy thin 'heart' split out from his sternum bone about a palm's distance. How deep it burrowed into his actual body was anyone's guess. The doctors associated with his amnesia were anything but credible for telling him that it was Electrode shrapnel. Hell, they probably were told to lie to him by Rallsen. No use arguing, it was stuck for now and he had bigger things to concern himself with. However, his heart shard definitely had gained a mental foothold; he could practically feel it perpetually in his mind. Abasing his thoughts. Gone were the days where he could ignore its sensitivity to emotion. Even the idea of it being only temporary seemed to vanish in the haze of indeterminate reality.

"NOT NATURAL?!!" Feyera bellowed at her patronizing words. He was the antithesis of natural in his mind. Everything about his selfhood was derived from the insecurity of past, the unsteadiness of falsehood, and the resignation of erstwhile identity!

She continued to brush one of her hands against his straight back, rubbing his spine. These motions, though tender, sent tingles throughout his body like silver souçons of the moonlight on a cold cloudless night, chilling his essence with the embodiment of touch itself. Her hand lowered in displeasure at the conclusion of her search.

"Why?" she rhetorically asked herself.

"Because I'm a person! A human! I don't have your every bodily feature!" Feyera scolded. The last thing he wanted was to wind up with more of Sephiteos' features. It was bad enough that the Reilken Mercurius around his left wrist had begun to expose a paler skin tone. The blasted artifact from the past was as problematic as it was valueless to Ein! "I'm not—"

"But you need to be able to…"

"Thwip!"

"No!" Edge insisted, "Find another way!"

As if she could change his anatomy in any way. That was a laugh. Had that been possible, he'd be long out of this mess.

"A-another—" Sana paused before vocalizing, "—way?"

"Yeah! For Pete's sake, Sanaria!" he belted. The boat tilted just enough for both passengers to become pressed close. Water and mist stung Edge's eyes.

"O—okay, let me think of something!"

"Sana, we're running out of time!" he huffed, "I can't get us out of the channel at this rate."

"Time…" she repeated softly. Time was of the essence now that they had both come down from their emotional high point. He could feel the pressured breaks in his mind slowing cognitive
functions. Time was returning to normal, and now only adrenaline stalled the clock. The mind could only accomplish so much, now it was the body's turn.

Sana sighed quickly, "Quickly, put out your left hand."

"My…what?"

More turmoil forced the small craft into a chaotic mess. Sunlight reflected off the unstable bay water in piercing notes.

"Just do it!" she demanded.

"W—what do you plan on—" he ducked as arrows rushed past him, nailing the water in front of them with sharp impacts.

Sana urged him raising her arm in protest, "Do you want to live to see another day? Do you want to stay alive?"

"I…" bittersweet feelings started to pull at him like marionette strings. Each of their tugs prompted questions, but questions were not what the young researcher could investigate right now. There was only feeling. The feeling of every single nerve responding in pitched fever to the gratuitous adrenaline coursing through his body, augmented by his emotions. Could he really trust her? What if there was no going back? What if—?

"FEYERA! NOW! Your mind is slowing down; mine is too! I can feel it! We're gonna crash the second the rush runs out."

She was right. It was futile to argue now. The adrenaline was wearing off, floating off behind him in the gusty wind. Soon, there would be nothing left for his body to function on. Whatever she wanted to do would have to be acceptable considering the circumstances. He hoped it wouldn't involve the patch of ultra-sensitive skin surrounding the Reilken Mercurius. But somehow he knew better.

"Sanaria, don't do anything that will—" he began, but the rest of his thoughts escaped him. That would what? Make him more like her? Wasn't that damage already done? He didn't have to look very far to see that. What was he fighting? Why was he fighting? There wouldn't be anything left to be fighting for if he kept this up. His rationality blended with his emotions. Feelings shifted. Realigned. "Sigh…okay."

Feyera extended his arm out straight to the side so that it extended at a perfect ninety-degree angle from his body. The billowing bay mist salted his exposed flesh, tingling about the soft pale green makings adjacent to the grip of the Reilken Mercurius. The device's ebony contour gave forth a weak neon green glow, hardly visible from the object's straight-lined markings in the bright mid-afternoon sun.

"Okay…Keep it heading straight and don't let go of the steering rod with your other hand. Eyes ahead, not behind, don't tilt the wheel when I—"

"Wait!" Feyera raised a curious brow, "Huh? What? I know how to—"

But he was not ready for what Sanaria did next. To be fair, neither was she. This was all being done on a whim after all.

"Mmm!" She grasped his outstretched wrist tightly, clasping on the soft skin close to the Reilken Mercurius bracelet. It riled him with sensation as she pulled fast and pressure caused a myriad of
flooding neurological explosions. They blossomed in convulsions, turning the bay ahead of him into a field of bright color and emotion.

The next thing he knew, the Gardevoir had leapt gracefully from the back of the PWC. She swung her body around, kicking her rail-thin legs outwards, and swooping in front of Edge, soaring in the air like a weightless gymnast partially cloaked in jet black Team Rocket attire.

"...!" Feyera's jaw dropped at the spectacle.

Her inky clad form barely made it in front of his vision before obstructing it with all the enchantment that such a maneuver could evoke. With a delicate "thump!", she plopped down facing him on his narrow lap. Her stolen Team Rocket uniform had begun to sag and fall off her body revealing her chalky white garments underneath.

Feyera looked wide-eyed at her exposed left shoulder, now touching the right shoulder of his uniform. "Sana?" he whispered as she loosened her grip on his wrist, albeit reluctantly.

"What?" she said closer than ever. To add to the splendor, she wasn't even panting heavily after such an acrobatic motion. It was as if she did not feel the weight of the world at all.

Face to face, Sanaria smiled innocently while Edge adjusted his bottom to compensate for her change of location. Her hair, now flowing in the wind, had all but lost its balled-up form, instead gaining a slight wave to it, not much unlike Feyera's own. Salt water had a tendency to do such things. Follicles blew in the trainer's face.

"Um..." Flushing, he said rhetorically, "You could have told me you wanted to sit up front!"

"Ha," she bobbed her head responding, "you need to drive though."

Indeed, but with her dead in front of him, it was becoming difficult to see where they were going. So long as he kept the expansive Evercrest base on his left, he was heading in the correct direction, since it occupied only about two-thirds of the Ponyta-shoe shaped bay. Beyond Sanaria's milky mint green hair, he could make out the bay's inlet. Almost there.

From Feyera, a smile.

Nevertheless, it was incredibly distracting to have her in his line of sight. His eyes traveled from the inlet to the way her arrow like clumps of hair sloped perfectly below her ears, hovering just above her effeminate shoulders. Even amid all this tumult, there was still consistency in her allure.

In a trance-like state, Feyera managed to utter, "Sanaria...?"

"Hmm?" Sanaria noticed him looking at her ruby eyes. "Wha—wait! Don't look at me. You need to drive; stay in control!" she said with a tone of suppressed endearment. The words sprayed him with innocence as light and crisp as the inlet's water.

Feyera acknowledged her with a genuine smile. "Right!" he said softly. What was he thinking? He must have been losing it.

A few bumps pushed her closer against his chest. She tried to maintain composure, but the wind and churning of the PWC was certainly limiting her and causing problems.

"Arrowhead formation! Cut them off north of the main port, before the straightaway!" shouted one of their pursuers. "I'll lead; I don't give a damn about what that egghead said back at base, he's not in control here! Use your Pokemon, boys!"
"Poliwhirl, go!"

"Tentacruel! Snare them!"

Two flashes of light from behind, followed by the battle cries of Pokemon made Edge tremble. Now it was five against two.

"That one up front is as good as mine!" hollered the leader. "Keep firing you two!"

Sana placed her chin on his shoulder. "Oh no." The soft sides of her face tickled the area under his earlobe.

"What are you going to do, Sana?" he murmured to her perky hair lock beneath her ear. It reminded him of the microphone Kanto News anchors wore on television. "What's the plan?!!"

"I'm not going to do anything, but we are."

"I don't understand you!" scolded Edge with a rapid shake of his head. They were fleeing from men with the closest things to automatic weaponry and aquatic Pokemon in the water. Sana made it sound like they were on a picnic together. "Why do you need to be in front of me?"

"Thas—veh Feyera, I need to have your heart here against my own," she told him quietly. "Like it was before. A...kiss."

"HUH?!" Edge recoiled in surprise, "My heart? Don't you mean Seph's—"

He felt her flush. Her cheeks were especially warm. In fact, Sanaria's entire body was warm, and it was all right here in his possession. A very real part of him wanted to be with her, and he could not fully attribute it to just the horn on his chest alone. She lazily pushed off his shoulder, troublesomely with the PWC's lurching, but such an act was certainly not impossible. She looked longingly at his face before anxiously biting down on her lower lip with her pearly teeth.

"...Heart?"

Continuous volleys of projectiles continued to spread around the pair's position, spreading and narrowing with each heartfelt moment. Even with two of their Pokemon giving chase, the Rockets were ruthlessly firing away. Extremely dangerously since the Nihils had little prejudice in their spray of fire. More likely than not, one of their own Pokemon would be shot.

Edge shut his eyes for a brief second and shook his head angrily. "I can't believe this!"

"I meant what I said, veh Feyera; keep looking forward," she said melodically whilst forcefully pressing her body against his. "Whatever you do, don't turn you head."

"Okay." He glanced over at the Evercrest complex on his left one more time before fixating on the gap between cliffs ahead. The gateway to freedom.

"Lub-dub-lub-dub-lub-dub..." The frantic beating of his human heart was deafening. Was it from the last surge of adrenaline? The anticipation of joining hearts with Sanaria? Or something else?

Sana paused, pulling in a breath of air, like a diver before taking her plunge. The Gardevoir's heart loomed ominously close to Edge's own. Feyera could feel the static electricity jumping between the two shiny surfaces. She then began to exhale, "I—we...I know this may be hard, but don't allow my body to distract you."
"W—Wha?! No, why I'd never…" Edge said, very unaware of what Sana was talking about. He winced in apprehension. Was she seriously coming onto him at a time like this? Had she gone insane? Was the idea of the two of them interlocked in this "Gardevoir kiss" enough to drive them both into insanity? He was sure that it was, and yet there was little arguing he could muster. He simply did not understand. But he wanted to. And he wanted to understand this differently than he had ever understood anything else in his life.

And then it happened. Her heart shard touched his own, rubbing along its side profile, tingling with every sensation of vibrancy imaginable.

Blissful thoughts crescendoed, growing around his mind in relentless volleys of warm radiance. The limitless surreal overtook reality, dousing the heated flames of mind with fresh invigoration. Her heart met his in a surge of joint comfort. Whilst the initial sensation mimicked how he had felt during the Teleport, it was soon superseded by the sublime comfort that only comes from an external being, invoking comfort; the type of interaction in which one loses oneself in the other.

The craft was still charging ahead at full speed according to the capped gauges, and yet its pace had bizarrely slowed down. Stranger still, the horizon ahead of them pulled away as if someone had just tugged on the massive carpet where sky met sea.

A quick rush of vivid colors and illuminated insignias filled his visual field; they danced in ruminant patterns akin to constellations. Edge jolted as the vibrant light coated his sight, dousing it with exploding blossoms.

"SANAAAAA!"

Petals of light and luster blitzed outwards from their bodies. The external world continued to slow; the rhythmic hops of the PWC became like distant stars in the morning sunrise, fading, draining, and hazing into colorful obscurity.

"...!"

"...!"

Had they Teleported again? It felt the same way. It was difficult to judge how close the Southern Sea was now that the world was blanketed in color. And the horizon pulling backwards seemed to suggest that…well he really didn't know.

Squinting, he was able to see the water ahead of him. Able to see his hands urgently gripping on the PWC's control bars. Even able to see the smooth sloping of Sanaria's hair in the lower right quadrant of his visual field. The Evercrest base was still off to the left, but also on the right.

That was odd. Incredibly odd.

Before he could ponder how Cipher had suddenly built a whole new mirroring section to their cliff side base, another sight infiltrated his mind. Or rather, overtook it—much to the young man's surprise. What was it? How could it be? Worried thoughts attempted to comprehend the incredible. The impossible.

What he saw…how he saw…it was Sanaria's vision pervading his own.

How bizarre.

As she embraced him, her sight superimposed on top of his. He was able to see exactly what she was seeing. The three rockets pursuing them were as clear as day and at the same time he could
control the watercraft with impunity, shifting its direction with the hands in front of him, below Sanaria's backside. Splashes from the Poliwhirl's muscular strokes and the metrical contractions of a half concealed Tentacruel were in sight. He wasn't turning his neck at all. His pursuers were all in front of him. Edge had to blink a few times to be sure. As he did, he felt a flutter of Butterfree from his stomach.

It was like looking through a transparent lens on top of his own vision. Only this lens was vibrant, organic even; he could feel her very eyes against his own as he looked over his shoulder through her. The glassy images continued to blend and meld together with increasing intensity. He was sure if he blinked, she would too, and he would feel exactly what it felt like for Sanaria to blink. Trying blinking again, with this in mind, made his head spin. Feeling her eyelids against eyes he would call his own…

"Gasp!"

It was utterly phenomenal.

"Sana?! Sana?!” he asked breathlessly, time slowing slightly once more, but not enough to halt the torrent of Nihil bolts nor the chasing Pokemon. Their minds, in synchronicity, elevated their nervous systems to new heights causing time to appear to slow itself. However, there was a very big difference between being able to appear to slow time down, and to actually slow time down. What they had was illusory; their bodies would struggle to keep up with their minds unless it was a mutual Teleport.

She continued to hold herself against him and feel the pulsating rocking of the small watercraft drive their twin hearts closer together in embrace. "Um...ha...—focus on the boat; I need your heart to do this."

"But Sana, I'm—" Edge muttered telepathically. He could not find the words, literally and figuratively. Everything that was happening to him seemed too unreal, too farfetched, and too foreign. While he could see the bay's inlet ahead of him, Sanaria's sight pressed forcefully against it, and he found himself looking behind his own shoulder. Viewing himself from another point of view boggled his mind.

Edge saw her slender hand rise as if it were his own above the steering rod. It took him a moment to realize that she was pointing it behind where he was directing the PWC. Everything was terribly disoriented and wonderfully drenched in color. "Ahhh!" he called out in mental delight. "What are you doing now?!"

"Just drive!" she said firmly, with enough command in her tone to match the Pokemon Champion himself.

"Guh..." Feyera said as mild vertigo began to kick in, turning this shared world into a lofty precipice. "This is too much."

Her hand clenched into a slight fist. Glowing lavender surrounded her fingers in a foggy mist. The vapor began to swell and grow, aflutter with the same animate life flowing through the veins of Sana and Feyera.

Edge saw two bolts whiz towards him from Sanaria's perspective; they scarcely missed, scraping past his, or rather her, hair. Then they flew beyond his actual sight, going off into the distance ahead of him. It was mystifying and terrifying all the same to see the same event twice. A perfect déjá vu. Feeling his alarm, the Gardevoir drew closer against his body, folding the blanket of mutual awareness tighter around them.
"Sana! Don't! What's happening?!” he shouted as the orb of growing psychic energy spun round her outstretched hand behind him. He could feel its maddening drawing power. His focus began to wander and situate itself entirely in her perspective. Entrenching itself. Burying himself.

"...!"

All of his thoughts had begun to align themselves with her current sensations. Edge felt the smooth contour of her own body from an internal perspective, heard the hum of her heartbeat, and sensed the route of channeled power as it flowed down her slender extended arm.

"NO!" she shrieked.

Something pushed his mind away and once again, the bright vision of Chrono Island's inlet zoomed into focus for Edge. Blocks of color and light dripped and poured along the sides of their—now shaken—mutual sight. The trainer wondered what had just happened while the craft skipped over a few more small waves in slow motion. Every time he tried to retain focus on his own vision, he'd become lost in seeing what Sana was witnessing. She had fought his mind off only a moment ago, but now she began to conform slightly to their briefly shared consciousness. Though initially uncomfortable to share cognition, it was slowly becoming familiar to the both of them.

"T—ta—thas Feyera, you have to let me go after this," Sanaria whispered to him, her voice closer than it ever was before. "If our hearts don't separate...then..."

He wanted to nod, but such a physical action was useless; she could commune with his thoughts instantaneously. The craft bounced slightly, but he did not feel her shake against him this time. What would happen? He asked himself. What could happen? These thoughts became superseded by genuine concern.

"Okay," he assured worriedly. Psyonics were one thing, but whatever he was dabbling in at this moment went beyond anything a human could hope to experience. Much less contain. It was purely Gardevoirian.

She felt his thoughts go there. He was curious.

Edge thought he heard her begin to laugh, but this morphed into a strange feeling of her laughter as it bubbled up from inside of her. Externality morphed into internality. Its rhythmic jolts sparked his core like electricity from inside and preceded outwards, overflowing as a goblet would from a heavy-handed pour. It became impossible to tell where one mind ended and the other began in the flux.

"Keep your emotions focused on one thing."

"What?"

"I thought you of all 'people' would never...!" she exclaimed, emphasizing the word 'people' contemptuously, almost as if it were a foreign term to her. "I thought I'd never be saying this to you during a kiss."

Feyera fought a blush, but it was too much of their flush at this point to conceal it. Mixing sensations that were neither his nor hers but theirs had him deeply troubled. More so, he didn't even know what Sanaria expected him to do. Here she was slighting whatever humanity he had left.

Submerged in tar-like frustration, "I'm trying my hardest to..." Feyera began to say.
"It's simple," she said whilst wagging a finger, "protect me. Protect us. That's it. We're 'protectors protecting each other'. Don't worry about how, I'll handle that. But you need to be here for me... with me."

Confusion gradually seeped into courage as a river feeds into a bay. He didn't even have to ask the Gardevoir. Edge felt like his body knew what to do instinctually. For it was no longer just him doing anything on his own. Images intermingled until there was little differentiating what he saw and what she saw. He was flying at the rockets as quickly as he was fleeing them.

It was awe inspiring. Like magic, he began to pervade her sight, bearing witness to the very things lying ahead of her, but behind him. He saw her hand in front of him, its three fingers all too familiar, but he questioned whether it was hers or his own. Senses pointed one way, and reason another.

"Sana?" he asked the Gardevoir's hand as if it could answer.

Sanaria's hand twisted, she spun out a vicious discus of spinning indigo energy, whirling about the fine tips of her fingers, like a vortex of boundless fount. The nebulous shockwave twirled, mesmerizingly blossoming into a wide sphere of dark energy. Its revolutions quickened, and the sensation of being on a PWC became but a dream as his own mind touched her hand in joint assentation.

"SA—NARIA ?!"

The moment her fingers felt as if they were his own, the second he could no longer peer at where they were heading, her hand opened wide releasing the sphere. As it left her hand, Feyera felt as though it was just as much his creation as it was hers. His vision returned, though it was still superseded by her own thanks to their union of hearts. Edge saw it zoom in front of him towards the rockets he was paradoxically fleeing.

It billowed and contracted, as a breathing entity would. Feyera felt his eyes, or rather Sana's eyes, illuminate the second the energy wave made contact with the teal bay water. For their Psychic creation exploded outwards, growing countless expanding arms of violet, thick in murky texture, iridescent colors, and peerless vigor. It skipped along the water like a flat stone, shredding through the diamond-incrusted waves with complete freedom. The kaleidoscopic sphere's spiral arms chopped against the water, creating waves of unstable psionic energy. Its pitch-black center tugged against the pristinely clear water, forming a chaotic whirlpool, biting and clawing its way through.

The Pokemon swimming after them didn't stand a chance. The Poliwhirl pulled a brawny arm out of the water to confront the maelstrom. A loud crackle and ear splitting howl followed; shrouding the Rocket's Pokemon in ink, but leaving very little to the imagination. Tentacruel swiftly dove underwater, but could not defeat the draw of the vortex. A surge of viny charcoal colored tentacles flew into the air with a second crackling scrunch. Sprays of ooze mixing with the bay water did nothing to conceal the mess.

And the shockwave pressed onwards. Feyera could not hear the profuse obscenities over the deafening roar of suction. Two of the rockets veered off course to evade the approaching psychic monstrosity. But there was no escape for the rocket leading the chase immediately behind the Pokemon. His unfortunate watercraft dove straight at the focused well of energy. Menacingly, the energy's efflorescence only continued in response to his fright, drawing upon fear to further its growth, pulling in emotion in order to pull in the physical.

Edge could see it. Indirectly. Not indirectly as in through Sana's eyes, but rather he could feel the dread, the jet-black fright that the man gave off. It was thick enough to cut, strong enough to feel.
Perhaps in his last moments he tried to evade the swelling death. Maybe he even had the nerve to fire another round with his Nihil Repeater. It was all in vain. Nothing he did mattered. His fate was sealed. Twisted thoughts, thoughts of perverse acquisition pervading through the villain's mind fertilized deeper animosity from the energy well itself, feeding it. It was sensation made whole. Feeling made into reality. Reality that could—or rather begged to—consume.

The base of the pursuing rocket's PWC was cleaved in two by one of the energy disc's wide arms, effortlessly splitting it into jagged halves. Cataclysmically, remnants of the craft crumbled and buckled, its operator howled in pain while his body was pulled in towards the incredible suction. Everything became deformed through the orb's centrifugal influence.

Fiberglass bent with flesh. The sphere of dark energy continued to drive through the aquatic machine with unstable ambition, crushing it into unrecognizable fragments and shards. Focused gravity ripped the chasing vehicle to shreds nearly instantly. The groan of twisting and collapsing metal could be heard even over the loud PWC motor.

"ARRRGGGGHHHHHHH!" Unfiltered shouts of horror exited the lead rocket's mouth as his craft and his body were crushed into one another by the insatiable pull of Sanaria and Feyera's creation. He only managed to muster a few howls of agony before being molecularly torn in two as the spiraling energy ran through him. Without hindrance, the psychic well of intense gravity seared further along the wake of the—now crushed—PWC, with blitzing indifference.

The other two rockets, aghast with fear, pulled their watercrafts into wider evasive patterns. They managed to avoid the well of energy by retreating to the sides of its devastating path. However, even their ebbing away became hindered by the abysmal draw—the draining of gravity itself. Their crafts stalled numerous times and they had to direct them in complete separate directions just to insure escape.

Feyera became lost in the daze of drunken miasma that came with unleashing such a power. For it was not his own, but hers. Theirs. But theirs witnessed through her. It was all really confusing. Was she even still there? He could not tell for sure. He was becoming lost, possessed. The scent of destruction, the unadulterated feeling of another's fear, the Gardevoir against him, inside him, it was becoming too much. Edge wanted to roll his eyes back, to collapse out of this heightened sense of awareness, but cruelly his vision was locked into place. It was shared with Sanaria after all. He was as much her as he was him. The bleeding unification permeated each nerve with undying…

"FEYERA!" she cried out loud. A loud crackle brought his attention away from swirling orb, now far off, and back to the two overlapping images. It was suddenly painful. Burning. His eyes felt like they did at the end of one of his psyonic meltdowns.

"NO!"

"AHHHHHH!"

With a prompt tug, Sanaria pulled away from Feyera. The moment their hearts split, two things happened nearly simultaneously. First, the spiraling ball of energy began to dissipate. Its spiral galaxy arms folded outwards and bent into the water while its center dissolved into a hazy levitating ink. There was a loud "CLAP!" accompanying the fading psyonic well. Sharp pain barracked Edge's mind. Sana pushed him back slightly with both her hands on his shoulders. Their hearts ceased to brush against each other, and his vision snapped back to normal.

"...!"

Well, partially normal.
He was now looking only at the cliffs of Chrono Island's bay. They were drenched in colors foreign to them. He told himself it must have been a Feedback Fall. In front of him, Sanaria held her head down and took in multiple quick breaths. "Huff…haa…"

"Sana, are you okay?!" he asked her, surprised by how fast he could respond to feelings of concern.

She didn't respond and weakly collapsed against his frame. The PWC slowed as he caught her.

"Sana!" shouted Feyera. "SANA!"

The collar of Feyera's charcoal grey shirt underneath his Team Rocket uniform pressed against his neck when her cheek rested there. She nudged him with her minty green hair. It sensitively rubbed his exposed neckline, comforting him with its unintended tickles. The topmost point of her ear's cartilage rubbed in his ear, making soft squishy noises.

Then she cooed softly, speaking aloud. "We…*cough* we did it, Chris veh… *gasp* *cough*"

"Yeah…" Feyera breathlessly answered. The boat was nearing the main channel and gaining speed. Each bump made him anticipate their escape even more. Their pursuers were no longer shooting. They'd be lucky just to be breathing.

"I told you…and you trusted me."

Edge tried to make light of what had just happened, "Together, huh?"

She remained silent and pressed her face along his neckline, where his shirt collars usually sat.

"How do you like that?" he said rhetorically, "Sure as hell took care of those assholes." The young man was positive she 'liked' what had just happened. He felt it through her while the whole thing was happening. The more he thought about it, the more he realized that during the kiss, everything was a quick glimpse into what she felt. Such tight connection to another had never been felt before. Those contemplations alone seduced him with their far-reaching interpretations.

Her wheezing turned into short breaths. Although incredibly weakened, the Gardevoir's clasp remained as firm as ever.

Despite the loud motor, the silence from Sanaria was eating Edge up from the inside out. "Huh?" he said, fishing for some kind of a response, anything really. "Sanaria…?"

She pushed her soft face again against his wet uniform's shoulder. He felt her wiggle her legs behind his own as she continued to look back. "...There's great bright light...like when Volbeat dance in the night sky when they mate...like...like...the noisy colors."

Perplexed enough to try to scratch his head, but realizing he could not, Edge asked, "Noisy colors?"

"Haa...they're rare, veh Feyera. They only come out once a year over the Petalburg skyline...What are they called?"

Sanaria must have been delirious. Come to think of it, Edge was on the brink of delirium too. The fever from linking minds would set in any moment now. Desperately, he tried to fight it off until they made it past the bay's mouth, past the place that invisibly haunted him for the past two years. If only they could just get a little bit further maybe, just maybe she would come to her senses. They needed to leave the place where so many negative emotions had resided.
That had to be it! Maybe she was talking about the surge of colors Gardevoir often witnessed after invoking their emotion-driven powers. He was under their spell too judging by the burgundy and rose tinted cliff lines bordering the bay. And to think, he once thought Progenitor was the culprit! In his defense, they were both characteristics of Sephiteos.

"Are they pretty colors, Sana?"

"Hmm…no, not yet."

"Oh." That was strange. He could see all kinds of colors right now. Why wouldn't it be the same for her?

"Remember, the pretty colors come out when there is a great big noise, veh Feyera."

"Hmm…What are you talking about?"

"The loud stars in the sky. I don't know how the humans make them, but they are beautiful."

"Heh. Fireworks?" he said on tenterhooks. How did she even know what fireworks were? Sanaria did mention Petalburg's skyline.

"F—Fireworks?" Sanaria whimpered aloud.

Edge wiped her head delicately with a nod of his chin. Her hair was so soft. So thick and luscious. He wanted to bury his face in it and inhale the floral sweetness.

"That feels so…nice," she murmured.

Edge asked, "What does?" He backed off, and did his best to not sound afraid or awkward.

"Your…ambitions," said Sana as she snuggled close, her temple pressing on his jawline.

"What are you talking about?" Could she really tell what was going on in his mind right now?

She didn't answer Edge. She didn't feel the need to. Words could only convey a fraction of actions, and actions could only convey a fraction of emotion.

Her forehead was especially warm. Probably a fever. Had to be. On the other hand, did Gardevoir even get sick like humans did? Like experience hallucinations and whatnot? Who knew?

"Stay with me, Sanaria; we're almost free."

He thought he felt her lips pucker sweetly against his neck. Her muscles relaxed and she shivered for some reason. She took a deep inhalation, and hummed. Edge did not seem to mind that she showed him a hint of affection. They had just been through an awful lot. Linking minds so frequently was bound to mess with their emotions. Maybe she mistakenly thought he was Seph again. For a moment there, he might have even thought he was Seph. He sure felt like it.

"Mmm…yeah the colors," she said as one of her hands danced about in the back of his shaggy auburn hair. Stroking his deeply buried scalp playfully, she went on to say, "But there's only one and it is going up and up…so high up…"

"Wait what?" Edge asked. He tried to turn his neck to see, but the watercraft lurched as he did so, nearly throwing them both off. He swore, disgruntled to say the least that he was forced to stay facing forward. For whatever reason he found it difficult to not believe the Gardevoir. Her voice seemed so serene, so sincere.
"Aw..." Sana used this as an opportunity to caress him tightly. "It's okay. Don't worry. The loud colors aren't out yet."

"Sanaria, are you serious? Is there really a 'firework' behind us?" Edge asked in a frenzy.

She tilted her head up, going out of her way to affectionately press against his ear with a partially open mouth as she did so. "It's up high above us now; I wish you could see it. It's so bright and pretty... *sigh*... I just want to watch it together with you, Chris... I mean veh Feyera."

Not nearly as perturbed about her slip-up in naming as he was with the prospect of a 'firework' soaring above them, Edge twisted slightly on the PWC's bar to slow it down. The toddle of the motor still rumbled, they were nearly out of the bay by now. This was too important to miss. What was going on behind them?

"Where is the...?" Triggering the engine's auto-kill, Feyera stopped the PWC by lifting both his hands completely off the steering bar. He whipped his face around to face Evercrest.

However, he stopped. He had to.

What he saw before him appealed beyond compare. Robbing his attention were two scarlet cherry eyes, each bejeweled with pools of dilating ebony met his curious glance. They moved closer, closing thorough distance as Sanaria pushed her ecstatic face towards him.

His eyes circled her every feature longingly.

Edge forgot about the idea of a 'firework'. In fact, he forgot about everything. He lost the sense of feeling in his legs and felt dreamily lightheaded. Delirious even. The motor beneath them puttered to a complete stop, adding to the hypnotic trance. She was right against his body, studying every detail of his face. She smiled endearingly at his confused expression. It was quite obvious that she was looking for something to happen between them. He felt it too. Time seemed to pause with each tiny heartbeat superseding the last with increased attraction. Feeling. Emotion. It bled together.

In a fit of pitched emotion, Edge put both his hands around Sana's head, touching her minty green hair, damp with bay water, running past her now tender sensitive ear clippings.

She clasped his shirt's collar from behind and stroked his neck.

"Sanaria...!" he ardently whispered, feeling a rush of attraction.

Sanaria tugged tighter against his back and pushed her entire frame against his with a soft purr through broken lips as her heavy eyelids sagged, concealing her scarlet eyes just enough between the twin black forests of eyelashes.

Without delay of thought, he brought her frantically quivering lips near his own. His heart beat frantically. Her breaths soon caught up to his own quick ones. What was there to do? What wasn't there to do? Questions rallied his mind; the swift eudemonia of potential romance overtook his sensation of control. He felt like he was flying. He felt like he was losing control. Of his body. Of his mind.

Before any real sparks could fly, a brilliant flash of blinding light illuminated their entire world with its blanketing whiteness from above.

Feyera snapped his gaze up to face it, just as Sanaria's small mouth touched his. Awkwardly, they continued the half-kiss, her mind trying to infiltrate his own and amplify desire like before in his dreams under the guise of Lorelei. But now it was physical. No. Not just physical; that hadn't
worked and ended in a Feedback Fall. This was genuine.

The dousing light meant he could not see anything. Only imagine. Feel the soft pecks and reciprocate. The bright flash dissipated in what felt like hours, but was only milliseconds.

Following the painful light overhead—reminiscent of the Reikken Mercurius hidden in the underground sanctum—came a distant rumble. The entire bay shook with the ensuing dismal sound wave. The small quake melded into the water, into the watercraft, and into the two closely bound fugitives by rocking their cores with its far-off explosion.

With sight returning, his eyes remained locked on the blue sparkling stars between his saturated amber bangs. They were so pretty. So high above him, and perfectly framed underneath by Sanaria's hair interweaving with his own. It was like being under a massive umbrella made out of the stars themselves in broad daylight. The rusty cover gradually proliferated into senseless smog above them in the harsh afternoon sun. Every moment shaped the luminous clouds into new forms, mutating their appearance over and over.

Under this constellation of electrical stars, the two of them wondered not only what they were even doing, but also what was above them. Yet this curiosity began to flee when Sanaria yanked on the hair covering Edge's ear to make him look back down at her.

Those bright ruby eyes sparkled with anticipation. Their nebulous irises reflected the bright navy blue falling stars from above. She batted her eyes and Feyera initially resisted, but she was already up against him and on his lap wrapping around him unconditionally with her slender legs and arms.

He could have sworn she whispered a faint phrase amid her peaceful humming.

With a nervous cough, he backed away slightly. He knew he had told himself over and over no matter how this made him feel it was wrong. A taboo. Punishable by law. Flat out wrong.

Those were stupid reasons. Legality? He had robbed the Pokemon Sanctum as a member of Team Rocket. Morally blameworthy? He'd been assisting Cipher's researchers with the grisly Progenitor Procedure. Edge Feyera had no reason to take a stand on the high ground.

No, he had to go deeper into his mind. He had to see where his heart met with his mind, a concept previously thought impossible by the dogmatic researcher.

Her eyes continued to sparkle and reflect the stars. Radiating crystals as beautiful as when the sunset kissed the silhouette of the mountaintops northwest of Pallet Town.

What heart though? His human heart? Nonsense. This all had to be derived from something else. Something foreign. These emotions were not his own. How could something like this even real? It didn't make sense. It didn't have to.

Once again he was playing in her hair with his hands. Caressing the back of her neck with his forearms. Squeezing his arms possessively around her slender torso.

What was the reason for all of this? Why this fatal attraction to a Pokemon? Had this all really come out of a dream she had penetrated so long ago? Feyera's questions were overcome by the moment. There was no more why; it simply was.

Closing his eyes and moving forward, he nudged her upper lip with his own. He longed to split them apart. They were so enticing; warm to the touch and slightly wet. A mixture of scentless pheromones and aromatically pleasing floral notes stoked a fire within his nose. The preromantic pleasure and surge of endorphins urged him closer to her. However, the second he broke his lips
apart in order to kiss her fully, a jolt reverberated throughout the small motionless craft they both sat upon.

"Huh?"

"Hhmm?"

Edge's eyes opened to see a very confused looking Sana. She was redder than he had ever seen her before; her checks completely flushed pink rose petals.

Chaos followed, a loud buzzing noise came from behind her back. Quickly, Edge looked past her slenderly sloped shoulder and saw that his stolen PWC's instrument panel had gone completely dark. A few sparks jumped from the metal bars to the speedometer dials. The motor had completely stopped; the bay water gently pushed the PWC to and fro.

"ARRRGHHHHHHHHH!" a loud scream from behind him filled the sound void.

Edge and Sana both peered over to see both of the rockets had completely lost control off their still in-motion PWCs. One of them had partially caught on fire. The scarlet flames brushed against the gas engine, creeping along side in the wind. With a flash and bang the machine exploded with a deafening blast.

Feyera and Sana squinted at the violence and smoldering ash.

"Eeep!" she went and he felt her hold tighter onto him along with the flinch.

The other craft veered way off course. Rolling onto its side, it sent its operator flying into the water with a scream and a splash.

"Oh my gosh!"

"What the hell…?" Feyera whispered, looking up. Miles above him, the willow tree of deep sapphire star-like lights drifted down from what looked like a dimming second sun. The beads slowly floated downwards; falling, drooping, tiny specks of twinkling moonshine. At the center of the wilting blue diamonds, where all of their comet-like tails originated, was a bright star, now fading into obscurity in the broad daylight. Twinkling. Sparkling. Dancing. It was an incredible sight to behold.

"Is this…are we…?" Sanaria asked his worried face.

He knew exactly what she feared. She wondered if they were dead. He did too. It didn't make sense. Afterlives weren't supposed to happen.

However, as for the two kisses the two of them shared… It all made sense. It all was supposed to happen.
Damp clammy hands, quivering violently in the broad daylight, softly stroked the closest thing to comfort. Under a hurling cloud of artificial light, they caressed the only thing with stability. The sky itself was soaked to the skin in strange colors. Threads of navy, torn from a celestial tapestry, wilted over the horizon, surrounded Chrono Island's bay. Reflecting sunlight and aquamarine alike, the strands of light seemed to have hundreds of sapphires dancing along their lengths.

Beautiful and terrifying all the same, he could not think of any place he'd rather be. But why? He knew not what was happening to them. But he did know they had experienced all of this together. With a muffled breath, he peered up.

She followed suit, tilting her neck and rubbing her hair against the side of his face.

As gorgeous as the aurora was, it did not compare to the joining of hearts. The "kiss" shared was substantial enough to disrupt any flow of rational thought. Ample enough to break into him, extensive enough to generate fissures of uncertainty. Not about the past. Not about what he had done to himself. No. These feelings—lukewarm as the bay's teal wave crests—were ridiculous. Unreasonable! Outrageous! They were so focused, so centered, so honed on one thing—one being. Never before, save during research, had blinders swayed his vision. Every instance of his single-mindedness promised answers. This…connection with — to — Sanaria, only beckoned questions. It prompted thoughts going far beyond himself.

And here was the worst part: he enjoyed that. Part of him hungered for the diffidence he had just tasted.

Vehemently shaking his head in disgust, Feyera clasped onto the steering bar of the small watercraft. It was cold; first touch alone was enough to numb his hand.

Try as he might to forget by gazing up at the starry heavens, his residing sentiments expressed a single, sublime truth; a truth existing for the entirety of their kiss. In that moment, he was solely concerned with a future. Not his future, but a future with the Gardevoir at his side.

Lurching, he removed his hand from the now sweaty steering bar and ran it up to paw his lush hairline. An involuntary reaction for the young man during times of stress.

Fingers lightly breezing through warm hair calmed him. He closed his eyes. The motion was soothing, even if it only lasted for a second. Unable to feel the organic comb against his head, he focused entirely on the stream of sensation running through his fingers; taking deep breaths all the while.

A soft purr interrupted his coping. With a gasp, he paused and opened his strained eyes.

To his surprise, it was not his hair that he had been stroking at all.

Sanaria looked at him with scarlet cherry eyes housing volumes of concern. He completely halted petting of the back of her head.
What was happening to him? *Think, Feyera, think!* he ordered to himself over and over. Nothing inside made sense. Nothing outside made sense.

He soon reached a favorable conclusion: if they really were dead, and were somehow still together in this afterlife, then whatever happened next between them wouldn't matter. There would be nothing left to prove, nothing more to hide. No danger. No persecution. No fear. His mind raced with the creation of fantasies, it played with possibility, and it entertained imagination.

"Mmm..." Sanaria cooed at his side. It was an incomprehensible mummer, but charged with sentiment nonetheless.

What was she thinking? More importantly, what was she feeling?

Feyera bent his head against her shoulder, where her neck met the garments. It felt real. His body told him that she was real. The warmth of her skin, the aroma in her hair, even the aura of glowing allure all saturated his senses.

It couldn't be a dream. But these thoughts of denial continued to perforate. Like blossoming spring flowers, attraction was unexplainable, yet striking. Unreasonable, but desirable. Something was happening and he could not explain it. He wanted it to be real and not real all at the same time. The bright lights trickled down gently, yet his focus was on her. Whilst staring into her eyes, he felt a slight jolt from his trainer's holster at his waist. Half expecting it to be an untimely biological response to his recent kiss, Feyera looked down to see that the three Poké Balls clasped against his leather belt were shaking uncontrollably.

Timidly, he reached down to Brucie's Poké Ball. Its shiny red and white metal was dazzling in the sunlight. However, the moment his tiny fingertip touched it, a rouge spark sprung from the interior of the sphere arcing out in all directions at once!

The tiny sparks and crackles bit at his nails.

"Ouch!" he said waving his whole hand in anger.

Sana tried to avoid laughing at this cute reaction. She wanted this moment to be perfect more than anything else in the world, and Edge's atypical clumsiness was making it all too easy to become enthralled with him.

"Te he," she snickered endearingly. "Thas—err…veh Feyera, *sigh* what are you doing?"

"I…!" Edge grunted, but she had already taken that brief second to hug him again, this time leaning against him entirely in his arms.

"Oh!" Edge blurted, feeling wondrously warm contact with Sana once again. Heated ecstasy coursed through his veins. There was no way he was dead. Feyera brought his full attention back to Sanaria while the soft waves of the bay gently rocked the PWC.

It was so lovely. He opened his mouth to break the silence, "Say, Sana if this is real then what about what we said before about us not—"

She cut him off by hugging him tighter and nodding her head against his cheek with a faint, "Shh… wait. I mean, no, all I wanted was to—"

Before she could reveal any intentions, the Poké Ball split open to both of their surprise, releasing a bolt of light. Edge only had a moment's notice to catch a reconstituted Brucie in his arms right before the Charmeleon materialized over the bay water. Such a fall would be deadly for the Fire
"Huh!? Brucie!" shouted Edge, who had acted on instinct.

The lizard, bruised from the battle with Ein, let out a weak cough, simultaneously spitting out tiny embers from his nostrils.

Then he realized the danger. "Ah! Oh no! What happened?!"

[Ugh?] the fire Pokemon blurted. His ruddy leather hide quivered in the sea breeze.

"Chris, oh no, you're going to spoil the mood!" Sana whined in a teasing voice. Was he really that insecure? Maybe humans were different from Gardevoir. After all, the things she shared exclusively with Sephiteos went far beyond what Edge and her just had, save the Mutual Teleport. She shook her head; according to Feyera's dreams there wasn't that much difference between the two—maybe a bit more emphasis on kissing and the physical however.

"Haa..." she sighed; she concluded it must have been him being awkward. Why wasn't he in touch with how he felt? Why was he burying it? Didn't he know that she wanted to forgive him? Didn't he know that she wanted to be with him? He was her second chance. Her torso ignited with a surge of desire, originating from her heart and spreading like warm water throughout her body.

[What are you doing boss?] the Charmeleon asked his Pokemon trainer. Eagerly, Brucie peered around from the security of the young man's outstretched arms. With a stretch of the neck, the lizard looked over at Sanaria.

The Gardevoir mustered a nervous chuckle, exposing a grin out to her canine teeth. "Ehh...he... um...hi Brucie!"

The three of them bundled close together on the tiny watercraft. It was small, but had room enough for two to sit comfortably, making it obviously out of place for Sana to be sitting on Edge's lap.

"Uh...Now hold on; I didn't release you, buddy!" Edge said. He was just about as nervous concerning the way his Poké Ball spontaneously released its contents as he was about Brucie catching Sanaria and him in a rather compromising position of affection. Maybe Sanaria had inadvertently touched the release button with her thighs. The mere thought of her tightly wrapped thighs being so close to his waist made the trainer flush uncontrollably. His palms sweated and he resituated his seating, unnerved to no end.

Raising a brow, Sanaria took great interest in his apprehension. Animate magnetism was clear as day; her emotion reading abilities didn't even need to be employed to sense his desire for her. Yet it was his suppression of such facts that perked her interest. Was he turning this into some type of game for her to play now? Like a game of Meowth and Pikachu? _That would be fun_, she thought. In fact, she could make it fun. Biting on her lower lip, she forced a serious expression. "Feyera...?"

"Erm..." Feyera quietly muttered to himself, still in shock by everything that had taken place and especially his current predicament. Desperately, he tried to think of anything besides the Gardevoir on his lap. He couldn't. The more he tried, the worse he felt.

[Say what happened to the bad guy in the white coat? And why and you and Miss Sanaria...wait —] Brucie quickly looked at the environment, and seeing that they were all on a small watercraft in the middle of the bay became panicked [—why would you take me out in a place like this boss!? I hate the water!]

There was a soft mist of blackish tan emanating from the Pokemon's body. Fear actualized. Feyera
felt terrible.
"I…um…Brucie, I didn't mean for you to see the two of us—wait, I mean I didn't mean to take you out of stasis!"

[Say what!??]

Just then, his other two belt-bound Poké Balls quivered as sparks flew along their surfaces.

"Wait what are you doing—?"

"Oh no!" he barked as they too split open revealing the silhouette of a Gyarados and a Gloom. "Gah!"

"You're going to really have a party now?!" Sanaria hissed. "Of all the rotten times you could pick, Mister Feyera!"

"I didn’t—no!" Edge belted, "NO!" The last thing he wanted was his whole Pokemon team seeing him and Sana like this!

With a mighty splash, Desperado dove into the water. She had emerged next to the, now stationary, PWC holding the rest of the team. July was still very weak from the confrontation with Ein, and Sana stroked her bruised flower bulb lovingly as the little plant stood on the seat behind Edge.

[Hi!] said the Gloom. [Hehe! That tickles, Sana!]

"Ta ha."

"July? Des?" asked a wide-eyed Edge.

[Well I'll be, Ed—gie! Now, what in tarnation is goin' on here?] the Gyarados bellowed as warm bay water dripped from her curly barbells.

"Des, we ran into some serious trouble back there," Edge said motioning with his head back towards the Evercrest base bordering most of the bay cliffs. He even pointed dramatically. Anything to take the focus off the scandal.

Desperado eyed the group of them and rocked her head. Sana was seated facing Feyera atop his lap; she patted July from over the trainer's shoulder, while Edge himself held Sana between his outstretched arms that were holding Brucie's light body. [Ya know if ya ran in-tah any bit o' trouble you always've good ol' Despie to call on, sugar.]

"Des…*huff*," Feyera panted as Sana pressed closer against him, "I couldn't—I mean, erm…there was nothing you could've possibly done!"

[Aww now that's just poppycock!] she said flailing her tail fins in an exaggerated motion. [Maybe there was nothing YOU coulda done, Edgie, but Despie sure as heck could've given' out a good ol' lickin'.]

[The man in there was too strong, Des,] whispered July. [Too…powerful…]

Brucie grumbled, [None of us stood a chance.]

Sana raised a hand up to Feyera's auburn hair. She hesitated before retreating the hovering hand back to her own, twirling a strand of it around her finger. "Des…" she said.
[Y'all talkin' nonsense, I ain't afraid. Ain't no one gonna make me cower and squat on my spurs!]

Staring at Sana's messed hair, Feyera slowly answered his Gyarados, "No. Nothing more could've been done. We barely escaped with our lives."

[What?!] the Gyrados answered in shock, [Oi! Remember ol' Haunter, Edgie? He sure as shooting wasn't all that tough when we gave him a lil' taste o' vengeance! 'On the house', raamem'ber, pal? A cold dish o' that on behalf o' Lumpy!]

Haunter. Jill. His nemesis and his fallen companion. It wasn't just a tragic emotional loss; losing a Pokemon was like losing a part of himself. Edge still had burgundy marks on his left elbow from the Shadow Claw attack. *Scars from the past*, he told himself, refusing to look down at them. It felt like it was so long ago. Like a different lifetime. The more he thought about it, the more he needed to see it. Was it all even real? What was real anymore?

Sana noticed Feyera staring raptly at his arm. Mildly perplexed, she opened her mouth slightly at the sight. "What is it?" she asked.

"I…gasp…!"

Edge couldn't quite describe it. He placed Brucie on the stationary steering bar with a tap in order to get a better look at what was troubling him. "Um…it's…it's just…"

The Reilken Mercurius had all but lost its interior glow. The lines of neon green were strangely absent. Instead, it was as black as the midnight sky.

How it looked wasn't nearly as important of how it felt though.

On the inside, where it covered a portion of his left wrist, the bracer prickled and tingled, like needles all throughout.

He put his other palm on the piece of ancient technology. To his surprise, the device moved. Again he jostled it, and discovered it was coming loose. It was partially attached to the underside of his forearm, and the freshly exposed skin burned with dull heat. To be fair, his skin there had adopted a soft hue of green mirroring Sana's, and everything about that was bizarre: from the alien nature to the heightened sensations. The trainer studied it for a few moments before Sana gave him a pat on the back.

"What is it…?" asked the Gardevoir once again, this time with more urgency.

However, Edge did not know how to explain it; there was a persistent ringing deep in his inner ear and he felt slightly dizzy. The young man attributed to everything going haywire for a few moments since he had never used psyonics in perfect synergy before. All things considered, he was lucky to be alive. In fact, he felt ecstatic just to be breathing on his own.

"Feyera?"

His eyes traveled up and he took in a deep breath. "Haaa…umm…" The fresh smell of the distant jungle foliage was palatable; it tickled his tongue with sensation.

Sanaria continued to watch him with growing concern. "Umm…?"

Edge tried to evade her gaze. He was still trying to process everything that had happened before… well before that. Of all the dumb luck! All their pursuers had been eliminated and Evercrest's firework-like missile had missed them completely. Even though they were idly sitting on the PWC,
to Edge Feyera, it felt like they were walking on water. While he begged to attribute this optimistic perspective to his own emerging abilities, it became impossible to deny the fact that Sanaria was intimately connected to such strident achievements.

One of her fingers danced about his Team Rocket uniform's backside. In fixation, she refused to blink. Those eyes followed his for the few seconds that had recently passed in silence.

[Boss?] asked Brucie.

"I'm—" he smiled "—just a little queasy right now. It's…like everything is so close to me. The smells in the air, the rocking of the boat. I feel really nauseous actually."

Sanaria's resulting expression was a mixture of worry and flippancy, but Feyera could not tell which. She put her hands up to her heart, clasping them snugly together, and opened her mouth as if she had something to say in response. "...—" Only air.

[Yeah; well, imagine how 'I' feel!] Brucie aped from behind Sana, [I absolutely HATE the water! Not too much can hurt me, but that stuff sure can!]

Rather than hang his head in despair, Edge quietly nodded.

The Charmeleon, who had wrapped his flame-tipped tail around the steering bar, went on to say, [I thought you knew that from the last time we went sailing!]

"Oh so veh Feyera took you sailing too?" Sanaria asked with a faux jealous grin.

Edge peered warily at Sanaria. "Uhh…I wouldn't call it that exactly…"

With a shrug, she smiled wider. She knew what she had just had with him was different from anything else. It was typically the type of thing only humans shared, but through infiltrating Edge's dreams, she'd learned quite a bit. And she could always count on him to lead after she initiated. It was inertia. All it took was a push. Must have been a human trait. She liked it, not because of its exploitability, but because of all the latent feelings it revealed in Feyera.

Brucie gave a weak nod and his face turned pale, [It's awful…the motion…the lapping of the waves…ugh…no fun. Do not want—…"

"Why don't you make Brucie levitate or something, Sana?" Edge joked. "Ya know, float him in the air or—"

She chuckled, releasing Feyera a little more, yet finding nowhere else to retreat to. In her mind, it didn't matter since it was no longer a purely physical connection. What had happened…well had happened amid heaps of emotional interplay. It reminded her of the dream she shared with Edge, under the guise of Lorelei. More importantly, it reminded her of what it felt like to be a part of his desires. For Feyera it was another story; his nervousness was practically palatable. And yet none of Edge's Pokemon companions addressed the massive Donphan in the room. For the longest time, survival had been the priority. Judging the ominous silence from Evercrest, it still was.

She poked his shoulder blade fondly, saying with a hint of passive charm, "Does it look like I'm one to do whatever you'll me to do, oh my dear…*sigh*…and wise Pokemon trainer?"

"Huh…?" Edge swallowed, "P—Pokemon trainer?"

"Peh! For starters! Heh…" said Sana rolling her eyes.
"I'm your trainer…?" the young man asked in confusion, forgetting his prior lies. Just moments ago, he could have sworn she was as human as anyone he'd ever met. Her lips felt human. The only thing inhuman was the union of heart shards, and even that was becoming somewhat normal to Feyera.

[Hrrmm…but ain't that only the tip of the Snorunt's cap,] Des jeered silently.

[Did you forget that she's your Pokemon?] July chimed in, [Obviously she is! C'mon, Feyera; you're like ALWAYS telling us that!]

July, being oblivious of the pair's relation, had grown accustomed to not reading in between the lines, taking whatever Edge said as fact. And who could blame her? Feyera was a man who liked to pretend to be in command even when he knew he wasn't. Oftentimes he came across as unnecessarily arrogant. With his heart shard's latent emotional manipulation, this arrogance could be transformed into projected self-assurance, almost contagiously so. Brucie and Des on the other hand, were not so naïve.

[Oh yes indeed,] the Gyarados smirked, [seems like ol' Edgie always has a sweet little explanation—all buttered up wif facts, jus' like a warm Sunday biscuit!]

Between Feyera's other Pokemon, Des was the only one with enough guts to confront her Pokemon trainer; she'd slice past the emotional hurdles he'd create using her honest, albeit blunt, judgment.

"Umm…I…" Edge stammered, wiggling nervously with Sana still atop his lap. "I—I'll explain this…"

"What else would you be, veh Feyera? I'm completely subservient your will," Sana mocked. Her shrill psychic voice continued to overflow with mordancy, "I know, why don't you ask me to jump so I can respond 'how high?' Tee hee!"

[He he!] July chuckled, [Wow! Miss Sanaria sure enthusiastic to be your Pokemon, Mister Feyera! But I think it would be dangerous to jump from where we are right now—]

Desperado rolled her large eyes at the Gloom's innocence.

Sana's tone continued to lighten with her overt sarcasm. "Ohh, I'd leap high enough to spin around the world, anything for you!"

[Err…] Brucie muttered, he had little on his mind save for his seasickness, [please no flying, no flying!]

Sana lambently dragged her hand down Edge's arm and peered over at a perplexed July before turning her neck and saying gently, "Don't worry, Brucie. I'm not going to make you levitate or anything, that would be mean; besides, I'm completely drained after THAT—"

Edge froze up. His cheeks flushed scarlet. He watched Sanaria unveil a half smile, softly exposing her tiny white teeth from the side of her grin closest to him. There was no comfort in her emphasis of 'that'.

She looked over at Feyera endearingly before cogently parting her lips. "...I—*sigh* I think your 'Pokemon trainer' is just trying to be funny, Brucie."

Something wasn't right and the Charmeleon knew it. The way she said that sounded off. Brucie sputtered his words as he held onto his gut, [Y—you're his Pokemon too r—right…? R—right Sana?]
"Of course I am, Brucie," the Gardevoir responded. Her glistening ruby eyes pierced Edge with zero animosity, but rather a dark, secretive, and nonverbal glare of mutual understanding. "Why would you ever think otherwise?"

[Ho' nelly...] Desperado snickered from the side, [I'll take point! I can think of a few reasons...]

"Gah! STOW IT, DES!" Edge yelled with a jolt that rocked the tiny vessel.

Frightened by the sudden outburst Sana clasped securely onto his shoulder in response, involuntarily running her other hand to meet his.

The Gyarados scoffed unobtrusively. If anything, she found the situation humorous, and even though the secretiveness was over the top, she liked the way she could comically manipulate her trainer.

Feyera took Des' lack of words for what they were, and felt himself tugged by the emotions supplanted by his recent interaction. Did he do the right thing? Denial became difficult on the mental front, let alone physical.

[Hmm...*gurgle*] Brucie forced a nod out of content to hear that the Gardevoir and his trainer were at least pretending to get along. However, it was an effort beginning to become stretched thin by Sanaria's tone and Feyera's jitters.

Edge looked up at the sky. Not more than a few minutes had passed since the bright light momentarily illuminated the world. He'd never seen anything like that before. It was so strange and mystifying. Just like what had happened between him and the Gardevoir at his side.

Perfect. That was his alibi. If his Pokemon ever found out, he would blame their kiss on that...that thing up there now fading. He would say that he was scared and mistook Sana for someone else. It was easy. But could he really lie to himself like that? And more importantly, could he afford to lie to her like that?

[Say,] July chimed in from behind, dancing on the taut nylon seat with her root-like feet, [why are you two frolicking around together here in the bay anyway?]

"Umm...!" Edge's glance shot down to make sure his hand wasn't subconsciously dancing with Sanaria's and thankfully it wasn't—at least not any more. "Phew." July must have meant playing, and not the actual act of dancing hands together. Although Feyera could not determine for sure which accusation was worse. "We weren't doing any frolicking...I don't know what you're talkin' about, July."

Des let out a labored cough. Feyera could have sworn she had thought something under her breath, but he was unable to read it properly. It sure sounded a lot like "tauros shit". Seems like a few of Feyera's expressions were rubbing off on his Pokemon. Though a strained emotional bond with Desperado made understanding her thoughts difficult.

"I mean that's something Gardevoir do when they are making friends—" Edge's palms began to sweat frantically, "—that's all."

Sana noted the young man's apprehension. She didn't even need to be a creature of empathy to see something that obvious. He was so crude at concealing emotion; every part of Feyera's body was a beacon of projection, running rampant with all its involuntary functions, ranging from the pheromones to the eyes. Are all humans like this? she wondered. Or is he just new at it all? But it didn't matter. Edge was different. He was like her in so many ways, but different in even more.
"Don't be so antsy, veh Feyera," she said coolly, "there's no reason to be getting all worked up!"

"Ahh..." Edge felt his shoulders relax. Yet there was a deep sense of shame riling his mind. Could he even call it ignominy any longer? What pride did he even have left? Here he was making out with a Pokemon. Maybe it was merely disbelief. The latter appeared much more reasonable, all things considered.

[Making friends, eh?] said Des. The Gyarados then bemoaned an exaggerated sigh, unwilling to call any more attention to the now painfully obvious connection between the two. Her barbells quavered in the balmy bay air. The sparking stars above had all disappeared and only the bright sunlight remained. Magically, it was as if nothing had even happened.

"I'm serious; she'll even tell you that!" Edge eagerly tilted his head towards the Gardevoir beside him. "R—right Sana?"

"Yeah."

"Yeah so there you go," Feyera muttered through a puckered mouth, "IN—TER—ACTION! Nothing scandalous; totally natural, can't blame me for—"

"GAROH!" bellowed the Gyarados. [Ahem! Well then, ol' Despie would sure take kindly to knowin' why you two little 'interacting Gardevoir' are gallivanting around the bay! Care ta fill in some o' the gaps, Edgie?]

"What are you talking about—?" Feyera exclaimed, quickly realizing the little word trap he had fallen into. His face grew beet red. How could he be foolish enough to let her pull one over on him like that? Admitting to being part of her species...had it been before the kiss and Feyera would have surely had a fit!

Sanaria giggled, "Well, frolicking is something only Gardevoir do."

[Really? So that means you're...]

"Nonsense. It's like shaking hands, July!"

[Oh?]

Eagerly he attempted to mimic a handshake with Sanaria in order show the Gloom. It was tricky to do on board the PWC, and even more tricky to do considering she was resting on his lap.

Sanaria clenched up, her back arched a little in response to Feyera's sudden approach to clasp her hand. "Um wait!" she squealed.

But it was too late. The moment his hand touched hers a surge of pleasurable sensations doused his perceptions coating the world in tints of rose. His breathing elevated and his cheeks swelled in scarlet hues.

"Haa...haa..." he puttered, realizing that even touching her skin at this point was enough to send him into a frenzy of charged sentiments. "Nuh' nuf...*gasp!*" Touch giving way to psychosomatic ecstasy had never been that bad before, except maybe on the area close to the Reilken Mercurius.

"Haa! S—stop," she exclaimed with a quickly blushing face, "augh...silly, y—you're making me feel..."
Hastily, he released her hand.

She held her rapidly elevating chest in response, causing her breaths to return to normal.

Edge followed suit, holding his heart shard. "S—see?" he panted in half-defeat. What had just happened? He only touched her hand's skin and that was even more pleasurable than when their hearts touched. But hadn't they frolicked before? What was going on?

[Gee Edge, that was amazing,] July chimed in, ripe with innocence, [you have to teach me how to do your special handshake!]

Des raised a curious eye at the small device around Edge's wrist while the trainer nervously clutched at it. […Yeah 'amazing'…] the Gyarados echoed.

"We're only working together because we need to…" Feyera lied. Nevertheless, it wasn't too much of a lie. The needed to, but he had left out the part that he enjoyed needing to.

"Oh we 'need' to?" Sana asked cutely. "That sounds really passionate."

Ignoring her, Edge fiddled with the control panel below Brucie. He was careful not to rev up the motor, but from the looks of it, it wasn't going anywhere. The dials were no longer illuminated, the control settings were frozen in "STANDBY", and the fuel gauge read "EMPTY". Feyera groaned, furrowing his brow.

A couple of seconds silently passed.

[Aw come clean already!] Des growled, [Any day now, Edgie…Come clean, wouldya?]

"What?!" Feyera shouted at his Gyarados. "Come clean? What the hell do you want me to tell you, you big fish?! Sanaria is my Pokemon and I'm her trainer, there's nothing more to it! Now we need to get the hell out of here. And YOU are gonna fulfill that need!"

[Oi now, that's no way to be talkin' to me,] the sea serpent snarled. [I ain't some shed tool, buddy.]

"I'll talk to you any way I see fit!" Edge tossed his arms into the air, his anger reaching a boiling point. He couldn't take it. The stress, the anxiety, feeling everything around him. It was maddening, and he couldn't even escape. He had the weight of the world on his shoulders, and his Pokemon were clueless. They were more concerned with his escapades with Sana.

[Oh no you won't!]

"You're my Pokemon!"

Sanaria's legs quivered and she put her arms on Feyera's shoulders. "Calm down, both of you!"

Des rocked her head back and forth while her massive tail splashed about in the water. [Pah, this lil' shrimp ain't got a bit o' respect for me…GARIO!]

Pressing his lips together, Edge forcefully exhaled out his nose. "You're—"

To cut him off she roared, [After all this time, after all we've been through together.]

"Well, maybe if you just kept your barbells out of my business then we wouldn't be arguing!" Feyera quipped back. "Ever think of that?"

[S'cuse me, sheriff; I didn't know you were in charge of whether I can care 'bout you.]
"It isn't that hard to follow the rules!"

Coldly, Des taunted, [What rules?] Steam expelled from her nostrils. It was a side of Des Edge hadn't seen before.

Feyera curbed his tone slightly in response, "M—my rules."

[Your rules?!] Fighting the urge to lash back at her, Feyera quietly asserted his demand. "Respect them," he said. [Respect?!] she said expelling hot steam.

"Des..." Sana tried to interject, but it was too late.

[RESPECT?! How on earth am I off-an-gonna respect a lying lil boy?! A lil boy who's too knee deep in denial to admit he's got a part of Sana sticking out from his gut like a 'pooned Wailmer!]

That stung. Rage took over. "What the hell was that?!!" Edge hollered at his Pokemon, "Do you have any idea what this freakin' thing feels like...?!!"

[You're crazy if ya think you're foolin' anyone round these parts, junior.]

"Enough!" Sana squeaked with fright, "Stop it!" Des wouldn't dare hurt Edge, but then again, Feyera had no idea what his powers over emotions could do at this point. Sana had to do something to intervene. The charged emotions were already flooding off Edge, disorienting her sight with their chaotic murk. Crimson from anger being the strongest.

"You don't understand anything!" shouted Edge, his vision ripe with inflammation. "You can't! It's not like you're incompetent, you're just incapable! You—"

[Ha! Ha ha!] she continued to taunt. It was evident from her diminished lackadaisical tone that Feyera's "instanced" animosity was chipping away at her self-control. [I'll bet you wish that was the case! You wish I didn't understand you, don'tcha? Well this girl's smarter than ya think, pal. Since day one, I knew somethin' was off about you. And that there was before I even got to know you.]

"Shut your mouth this instant!" Edge ordered, his fists shaking. "You know nothing! You hear me?! Nothing!"

[No.] She rocked her head. [Your bled out visible feelings tell me everything; n' ain't any other bootstrapper I know who can do that. We're Pokemon. You're a person. When ya think about it, we shouln'd even be talkin' right now.]

"That's not me, that's this! Psyonics! Gardevoir heart shards!" –Edge pointed down— "You don't know me! You never knew me! I—this thing is all you know!"

[No.] Des rocked her head, in a dismissive manner. [I figured the two of ya' had more than the similarities that meet the eye and I wanted ta help ya out of your little Vulpix den. Ya know, Edgie, the one you've been digging all this time. Thought you'd grow up with a lil help.]

"I—awauk!" Feyera froze before he could further affront his Pokemon, for Sana had suddenly—and aggressively—grasped his heart shard with her hand, "—guh...ACK! *cough!*"

It was tremendously cold all of a sudden. The young man felt his airways restricted as if he were
suddenly pulled underwater. Emotion—that precious life force he'd grown accustomed to—was being drained, redirected, and pulled away from him. Like oxygen sapped from a flame, the void it left was chaffing away his vitality somehow. It was unbelievable, he'd never felt so dependent on his state of mind before.

Sanaria let out a labored gasp of her own, "Please veh Feyera... just calm down..."

"Sana," Feyera whined, now short of breath, "take your hand off there... It—this... it's awful! Please s—stop!"

[Humph!] Des grumbled watching the two struggle like caged Furret's on the PWC.

"Get off!"

Sanaria commanded, "Just stay still!"

"W—what are you doing to me...?" Edge asked in confusion. His ebony pupils constricted in fear, revealing more of his emerald irises in the process. Even the golden rims of Progenitor vanished as his eyes glassed in a forest green.

"It's for your own good!" Sana insisted, knowing she'd done this to him before when he went to extremes. It was the only way she knew how to control a member of her species; you had to go for the heart itself. He was fine last time, so why would it be any different now? All she was doing was drawing his sensations into her own. The cycle initially left a certain emptiness, but like all things: expansion followed contraction; just as in breathing—something Gardevoir and humans shared.

"Nugh! No! Get off me!" Edge complained, "You're hurting me!"

"You can't be blasting everyone with your emotions!"

"Says who?! W—wait I'm not blasting anyone!" Feyera continued to grapple with Sana. Finding physical strength was now more difficult than he ever remembered it being before. He couldn't even keep his eyes focused on one thing. Colors and images were spinning out of control. He felt airy and wispy. Trying to look down where the infernal biological short-circuit lay in his chest, he began to think he was becoming ethereal.

[You two are going to knock me clear off the boat if you keep that up!] Brucie hollered, [You're making it tip! No more!]

In a last ditch effort, Edge brought his hands towards Sana and tried to pry the Gardevoir off him. As soon as he touched her heart shard, a floodgate of their feelings barraged his mind. His eyes began to roll back. The world spun. Color and light was everywhere.

[STOP!] shouted a distant Brucie.

"Gah...!" Feyera snapped back from the emotional high. He stared at Brucie's worried light blue eyes.

[Boss...?]

"Huff...ha!" The empathy held out for his fellow companion began to give him a sense of grounding. This was paradoxical since he was on water, but Feyera was dealing with sensations not fact. Noting the concern of his Pokemon made the trainer's eyes gravitate towards his heart shard.

[Hmm?] July asked. She—nor any of the other Pokemon—could not see the influx of color being
exchanged between Edge and Sana, not to mention the emotions those colors conveyed. To them, it appeared as if the two were playfully wrestling. To a degree they were—in Gardevoir terms. [Are the two of you done playing around? We should get going.]

"Err fine," he said turning his grip over Sana's hands into a soft petting motion, "we'll...I'll stop, Brucie." The stroking eased the nerves, and Edge was soon greeted with a shockwave from Sana's end of the emotional tightrope the two traversed. It caused his head to spin even though the choking had ceased. His head spun like during the Feedback Fall, except now the danger had passed. In fact, the expansionary phase of emotion delivered from Sana overwhelmed Feyera to the point where he could not imagine redirecting anything back to her without opening a feedback loop. What had changed though? Why was it all so different?

"B—better?" the Gardevoir asked him. His reaction surprised her, she didn't think the "giving and receiving" would be so influential on him.

Panting and sweating, Edge tightened his hold on the PWC. "Huff...ha." He had to distract his mind from these uncontrollable sentiments somehow. But everywhere the trainer turned there was Sana. In front of him, in his mind, in his emotions. She was inescapable. "Yeah," he replied weakly, "sorry. I'm sorry. Brucie, Des, I'm sorry."

[Don'tcha make it a habit.]

[Thanks boss,] Brucie looked out at the water, [you know, I love seeing you and all, but you think we can talk somewhere else that isn't a big old ocean?]

July pointed beyond the two cliff faces in the distance, [This is only the bay, Brucie! The sea is that way! Over there past the tall cliffs.]

[I don't care. Whatever you want to call it, July, I want off it!]

Beads of sweat doused Feyera's forehead. "Oh! Yeah, sorry, it must have been Sana who accidently released you..."

"Hey!" The Gardevoir promptly objected to Edge's blame, "If memory serves me correctly, MISTER veh Feyera, you were the one who—"

"NO!" Edge shouted, afraid she would tell his Pokemon about their recent exploits, "Don't!"

She lowered her gaze to look at his heart and then gave him a gentle closed mouth smile, before relinquishing it from her grasp. Sana hummed softly under her breath.

[Y'all are actin' like a bunch of lil' guppies. Reminds me of back when I lived in the wee lil' water pen of that saddling-riddin' merchant! Humph...riling and complaining, bickering and fighting, lying and machiavellian'. S'all startin' to get on dear ol' Despie's nerves!]

[Can we please just figure this out...Say! What happened over there?] July asked pointing at the smoldering remains of the other PWCs.

"Ah!" Edge said with delight. The topic had been changed! About time! And now all they had to do was address the issues at hand. Yet the trainer was still drawing blanks. "I don't know, Sana fought them off. Come to think of it, she did a pretty nice job!"

"You helped me out though," she said endearingly, "didn't you?" It made Edge feel uncomfortable that she was practically addressing his heart at this point. Sanaria was strange like that and he didn't know whether it was a characteristic of her species or a random quirk.
Edge rubbed his moist hair back nervously. Eventually he managed to admit, "Err...yeah, I was driving...I think."

"You did a great job you know?" Sanaria insisted. "'Driving'...heh heh."

Placidly, the trainer replied, "Speak for yourself, Sana."

She squinted her lids a tad saying, "Aww give your precious heart some credit. It—you did great."

For the longest time, Feyera wanted nothing more than to deny its existence, but that was well out of the question. Instead, he replied dryly, "Seph's...Ahem!—Seph's heart. I had no other choice."

Sanaria's eyes glistened at hearing this. Feyera's focus remained on her rather than peering down at his chest, somewhat to the Gardevoir's displeasure since all she wanted was an excuse to stare at it. Touching would be out of the question without risking a Feedback Fall.

"I knew you could do it...and you did," she addressed his golden-rimmed eyes, "I'd congratulate you on your abilities as a Gardevoir, but I'm sure you wouldn't be interested in hearing that!"

Edge's Pokemon watched him with wide-eyes.

"I didn't...no..." Edge bumbled whilst playing with his sleeves "—That wasn't right...what I did wasn't normal, *huff* wasn't right—"

"Feyera, Feyera..." Sana shook her head, "You haven't been 'right' since unearthing your—Seph's —Psychic powers...you don't see 'people' like Ein unleashing emotion wells!"

"He doesn't need to!" rebuked the trainer, feeling a knot grow in his throat. Ein had weapons. Ein had RAIL firearms. Ein had...whatever that horrific blast of light was. Emotions didn't touch him, he wasn't fazed by an Elite Four's Pokemon, plus he had more resources than Feyera could imagine. It was dizzying. The poignant notion of once being on par with such a man during the days at Evercrest was troublesome. Sure, the differences were there, but did such differences only exist due to the blasted shard on his chest? Did inhumanity alone fracture Feyera?

Sanaria sighed. She could do little else. Edge had a taste of what they could accomplish together, and now it was up to him to acknowledge it. Trepidation would be the trainer's biggest obstacle; she could feel it.

[Can you please let me go back inside the Poké Ball, Boss?!] Brucie said as compellingly as possible for a lizard about to toss his cookies.

"Ah! Sorry, pal; got distracted! Here, hold on for one second," Feyera reached for the trusty device. When he unhooked it from the holster, he noticed it was not issuing any red glow. "Alright, return!"

Nothing happened. He just held the Poké Ball out at his first Pokemon. The red and white painted sphere did not even utter a hum at his vocal command.

"Hmmm...?"

Des raised a confused brow. So did her trainer.

"Um, Ahem! Brucie return!" Feyera repeated, checking to make sure it was the right Poké Ball; sure enough it was from the telltale Roman Numeral "I" etched into the design. Edge rarely even checked the numbers anymore; his Smith and Salven's brand holster organized the team on a
rotating "C plate" mounted on the left side of the waist. Each member had a unique slot. Brucie was first, and at the top of the "C". Then came Des and July. The rest of the slots were empty and thus the curved plate retracted to make itself smaller and less noticeable. It wasn't always this way though. Feyera recalled the feeling when it had a fourth Poké Ball. For a while, the holster seemed to be off balance, never riding quite right on his leather belt, but that was more out of grief than poor craftsmanship.

Sana shuddered next to Feyera as a light breeze picked up and blew through her hair.

"Err…return?" Edge said again, this time actually clicking the button with an exaggerated motion. Usually Poké Balls were automatic in regards to inducing stasis upon previously captured Pokemon. It was a relatively new innovation made by Silph during the phasing out of their older models. The newer builds would replicate the Pokemon's gnome sequences and quickly compress it through a series of complicated technological algorithms, essentially "folding" DNA into particle chambers and stacking the life data into carbon nanotubes. Complicated stuff to be sure, but nevertheless fascinating. Regardless, most Pokemon trainers didn't know the first thing about particle accelerators or genetics.

"C'mon," Edge grunted, "Work, you damn piece of crap!"

Sanaria addressed his frustration with a feeble "Hmn?"

The entire scene was eerily silent. No birds could be heard, no noise from the Samson ES engine, only the steady lapping of wave crests against the cyan fiberglass base of the PWC.

"What the…?" Feyera shook the Poké Ball up and down like a rattle. It made some noise inside, signaling something was loose.

[Wha'sa matter, Edgie?]

"Just a sec, Des!" He then tried to pry it open with his fingernails, and it issued a dull hiss as its hemispheres separated like a Shellder. "GAH! NUH! OPEN!" he belted, throwing his hand back in recoil.

Sanaria hugged him fearing he was hurt, "What's wrong?! Chris, are you okay?"

"Ugh…yeah…I'm alright." Grumbling, he acknowledged with a disappointed frown, "It's completely fried."

[Fried?] [What?] asked July and Brucie simultaneously.

"Huh?" The Gardevoir tilted her head and repeated, "…Fried?"

"Yeah—" the trainer said tapping on the internal circuit board with a curious finger, "—toasted the way Brucie likes his stew."

[Haha, that's the only way to eat your stew and not get sick, Mister!] laughed July.

Edge raised a brow, well aware this was the truth; his cooking ability was abysmal.

"What happened…?" he asked the broken piece of machinery. While not expecting it to answer, he longed for a hint, a reason, anything. From what he could see, it was definitely structural damage. Maybe overheating. The internal silicon board was completely blackened like charcoal. The hinges on the device did not even resist his tugs to pry it open. Deeper inside, there was a faint scent of smoke that rose out of it. "Looks like it burned from the inside out."
"Is it permanent?" Sana asked curiously touching his outstretched hand. Intimidated, she kept her fingers away from the human device as if it had fangs or something.

"The damage...yeah...I have no idea how these things even work." Edge toyed around with the external switch.

"Was," he corrected. Feyera felt the need to defend his credentials—even if he couldn't remember them, "There's a big difference between understanding Pokemon, and understanding technology, July!"

"O—okay, I think I get it. You learn about Pokemon but not where to put them!"

Edge furrowed his brow and scratched his temple. She hit the nail on the head for once. "Kinda, yeah," he replied. "But who knows, maybe I knew all about it at one point."

Sanaria grinned. For some reason, she could not help but find his angst to learn about everything humorous. Maybe it was he actually believed he could. Of course, she wouldn't want to inflict actual despair on Feyera, but a reality check for the ex-researcher was frequently in order. "Tee heh...aww, Doctor veh Feyera, you know far too much!"

"What was that?!"

"Nothing, go back to fixing the Poké Ball, Doc," Sana said making a silly face.

"Peh...'Doctor'. That's the thing...hmm," Edge hummed whilst holding the item out over the sun reflected water, "I can't...fix it if I don't understand it."

Brucie weakly raised a paw and asked, [Did you break it? Like last time?]

"I don't think I did—" However, he froze upon looking over at July. Hadn't this all happened before north of Cerulean City? When his psyonic powers took over to protect himself from Agent Engelhart's Gauntlet revolver by opening a rift through dense emotion, his Poké Balls—at least one of the empty ones had been damaged. That was why it took two to capture July. He was not sure why this was all coming back to him, but he knew it had to be significant. Nevertheless, this déjà vu did not explain the whole sparkling cloud and bright light. Edge ran his fingers over his forehead pensively. Maybe Ein had messed up somehow. Perhaps Fredrick really did save the day after all. Edge was almost positive the helicopter that followed him onto the island belonged to Fredrick.

Judging by the amount of time since the bright light, not more than twenty minutes had passed. He convinced himself that he could not worry about trifles. *I'm alive, right?* Whatever that thing was, if it had hit him, he'd be dead for sure; by it soaring way up into the sky before detonating, nothing negative had happened. Edge seriously doubted it was a firework, in all likelihood it was some type of prototype missile from the Great War. A weapon gone wrong judging by the high altitude it reached before detonating.

"This is all too freakin' bizarre," the trainer admitted.

"So it was...fried!" Sanaria said aloud with a giggle, "But why? What do you think happened to the Poké Ball?"
"Grr…I don't know why. I might have busted it, just like before. When I was on Cerulean Cape. When I was still growing accustomed to…all this…"

"Humans sure like to make things that break," Sanaria said with a half-grin.

Edge retorted, "Well, not all humans have dangerous psyonics, Sana!"

The Gardevoir arched her neck back and sighed. She wondered if he'd ever learn to just call them Gardevoir powers or psychic powers rather than the clunky word 'psyonics'. She laughed at the thought of it. It really did sound awkward. Silly even. But then again there was some charm behind it when Feyera backed it up with his I-know-best attitude. Mostly because such an arrogant attitude was easily dismantled.

"Whatever you want to call them, but we all know what they really are…!"

"*Sigh*" Edge wasn't up for going round and round again.

"They're extra special," she said to his surprise.

That they were. As awful as their drawbacks were, Feyera could think of no other way other than to naturally be gifted with psyonics. As far as he knew he wasn't born with any gifts. He'd stolen them. Curiously, Sana's carefully chosen words managed to bolster his ego rather than bring it down.

Edge said with a cough, "Ahem, well they like to break things. Let's see how much damage was done to July and Des' Poké Balls…"

He reached down towards his waist and unclipped the two Poké Balls from his Smith and Salven's brand holster.

"—Aie! Crud!"

"Let me guess, *huff* you…fried those too?"

[Edgie-boy!] Des shook her tail and made a few splashes in the water. [Ya old ga'loot! What kinda action did I miss out on?!]

"Don't worry about it, Des!" Frustrated, he stomped his Alterieno on the fiberglass footrest and gently tugged a strand of his auburn hair. In a trance of thought, he twirled it about his finger. Calculating. Rationalizing.

"Typical..." Sanaria said to Edge's manic expression.

The trainer repeatedly shook the capsule devices in vain. "N—no! How did I!? I don't believe this…! Dammit! Another consequence?!"

At this, Sana fell silent and dropped her head slightly. Her empathy extended deep inside the annexes of his mind ever since their hearts connected. It was hard for him; he wasn't making that part up. She recognized how foreign it must have felt to lose so much and not know what was going to go next. The uncertainty was enough to drive a person mad with paranoia. She knew she had to at least help him overcome the adjustments. All the same, Sanaria wasn't obligated to do any of this.

[Hey, Mister Chris, if you keep breaking our Poké Balls, does that mean you don't want to have us around anymore?] July asked worriedly.
"I…of course not, July!" Feyera promptly released the strand of hair. "I love you guys; I never want you to leave me!"

[You sure as shootin' don't act like it sometimes!] Des venomously interjected.

Recoiling back into Sanaria's arms Edge belted, "Desperado!"

[Yeah?] said the Pokemon with a sourpuss expression, [Something you wanna say, lil' fella?] She bent her neck back in a taunt, raising herself further out of the water, showing off her height. The Pokemon was easily twice as tall from head to tail, and more muscular than he'd ever be.

Edge fidgeted with his hair and imagined playing with Sanaria's like he had all too recently. It was a tantalizing thought, but he had to make things right. He had to get them off this island. And to do that, he needed all his Pokemon to trust him. Exhaling Edge said, "Look girl, I'm sorry."

The trainer felt Sanaria squeeze his shoulder. He hoped that was a sign of approval from her.

[Peh! Sorry for what?] the Gyarados haughtily asked.

Edge tucked his tongue between gritted teeth. "I—I'm sorry for being such a bad trainer."

There was a moment of complete silence.

[Ain't make no difference if you're a bad trainer or not, Edgie.]

"Huh?"

[You heard me, hun. Don't matter who you are. You can be rodeo star or cleaning up the manure, but your attitude is the most important, see.]

"Attitude? My attitude…?"

[Right.] The huge sea snake gave him a solemn nod. [Your pa ever teach ya something like that?]

Feyera shook his head at the mention of family. His father couldn't deal with raising him after the passing of his mother. Weakness ran through Edge's veins like a poison.

Des' large lips puckered shut, concealing her fangs.

Sana beckoned with a twist of her arm, "You gotta remember you're that way now, veh Feyera… your feelings can carry over onto others, bleed into them. Force them to feel like you do if you aren't careful…"

It was true. The trainer let out a sigh, "I—I know. You told me that already! Instan—"

"Instancing," Sana finished for him aloud.

"I didn't mean to…I…" Edge wailed.

[Yeah, cause when you're on top of you game, I am too, hun.]

Protesting the crazy thought Edge rebuked, "I can't always be optimistic and cheerful…!"

[Right you are,] Des let out a grumble from deep in her throat, [that's why I'm here to help you when the going gets tough.]
Rubbing her shiny cheek with a green palm, Sana insisted, "Let her finish."

[When you're upset don't take it out on me, that's all. I can handle a little abuse; peh, the battle scars show it...but not from my pals.]

"I—I'll try Des, but I don't know if..."

[You can do it. I've seen it.]

Feyera smiled.

[Jus' tell me one thing: why didn't you let me help you out? Was it cause ya didn't trust me?]"Des, Ein had Electric Pokemon! They were too powerful; we barely survived! For god's sake, Lorelei is dead!"

[Lorelei?] Everyone became quiet.

[Well, someone wanna tell me who this Lorelei is?] Feyera had almost forgot after kissing Sana. There was nothing he could have done, he told himself over and over, but guilt persisted to eat him from the inside out.

"Lorelei...was a good friend of your trainer, Des. She and he had a...special connection."

While Feyera was about to deny that his connection to Lorelei was anything substantial, he could not help but realize the truth in Sana's words. True Lorelei hadn't been romantically interested in him. But it was that sincere hope that had lead him to find out about his past. Sure, it was Sana charading about as her in his dreams, but could he blame the Gardevoir for trying to contact him through one of the more powerful feelings? He could honestly say that was the first time he felt something so emotional. It wasn't love, but it was something.

"She scarified herself," Edge wispily said. Who was he to her? Some no-name trainer with a researching partnership with Cipher's Ein. An active participant in the Sanctum Robbery. As unimportant he was, she was equally important. She was a member of Kanto's Elite Four. Her father was one of Kanto's magistrates. She was a somebody; she even owned a yacht and was under the belief that Feyera stole control of it from her. Edge had brought her to her doom. With her dying words, she warned him about Magneton's Zap Cannon. He felt tears in his eyes while he looked down at the Gardevoir's chest rise and fall next to his.

[I'm sorry boss.] Brucie said.

"She's...she's dead." 

[My condolences, I...I didn't know, Edge.]

Sanaria petted his shoulder.

"Why did you get involved with her life?!" he yelled at Sana.

"I...I'm sorry, I..."
"Why did it have to be her? Couldn't you have just mind-controlled someone else?"

"She was the only one you had feelings for. She was in your dreams, you liked her."

"And now she's dead because I 'liked her'! Couldn't you have just told me to come to this Godforsaken island?!"

"If I did that, then you wouldn't have come here. There wouldn't have been any emotional motivator."

"Emotional motivator?! I wanted to get this thing—your mate's heart—out of my body! Isn't that emotional enough for you?! Isn't it emotional enough for me to tell you how I don't want to be trapped like this forever?!"

"That isn't a pure motivator though, just a means to an end, not an end in itself."

Feyera bit his tongue. Her words were true. He didn't like them, but they were true. Had he been able to remove the Gardevoir heart shard he wouldn't even know what to do with himself. Collect more badges? Research Pokemon? Go back to serving cups of coffee at Prevoy's? Everything revolved around the heart shard. Be it through employing psyonic powers or trying to remove it, it had become his essence.

[Adversity is like a strung gust o' the wind, darling. It's the type of wind that tears us from everything but the things that cannot be torn, so that we can see ourselves as we really are.]

"Des...that's..." Edge began. He was fighting back sentimental feelings at this point. His eyes continued to grow misty from the peaks of emotion he found himself situated upon.

[Nothin' but words of my former owner,] she said with a large wink, [but I sure hope you can understand 'em 'n shoot at the same time.]

"Shoot?" Sana asked with a gasp.

Feyera replicated her surprise. "What do you mean, 'shoot'?"

The Gyarados nodded, [Yeah, because where we're going, you'll be needing to shoot.]

"Huh? I don't understand..." Edge said, looking up at the Phaeton's afterglow. The sky had returned completely normal, save a faint glossy rim circling low in the horizon.

[They've got guns bigger than ours, Despie!] Brucie chimed in.

Did they really? Edge thought. He and Sanaria were able to create a much more powerful vortex together. Not even Ein could stand up to that kind of power. Knowing that filled him with excitement and worry all at the same time. True, Ein had a ray of particle light that could punch a hole through metal, but it was still a firearm. What Edge and Sana had was so much more... organic. It was sublimely worth fighting for.

[I'll take a wager 'n say ol' Ein hasn't counted on crossin' paths with me, hun,] said the Gyarados.

Feyera danced a hand on his kneecap. "Brucie, it doesn't matter how hot a fire burns, with enough water you can quell any firestorm. You just gotta know the weakness. And you gotta keep fighting."

Brucie glanced at his flame-tipped tail worriedly, [I think the white-coats have a lot more than a
There was truth to the Chameleon's words, but emotions powered Edge with hope. Positive feedback from linking with Sanaria made the whole world brighter, more vibrant. He'd gained a set of reigns over all the validity. And such reigns were not based off reason. Quite the opposite. Edge couldn't—wouldn't protest.

"Yeah," he slowly replied, "but none of it has stopped us yet."

"See, veh Feyera?" Sana replied joyously. "We can do this!"
Ein gradually rocked his handheld shortwave radio in front of him. In fluid motion, he swayed it back and forth over the bay, its forked antenna's tip glistening in the sunlight like an enchanted truncheon. Blank, ambiguous static persisted regardless.

"..."

It had worked. Through his ashen-tinted lenses, Ein glared at the immaculate coastal bay. Another adversary conquered. Another shortcoming turned exploitable.

His boney hand clenched tightly on the metal railing above the main control booth. A gentle breeze blew through his messy dark chocolate hair. High above him, the cloud of smoking blue dust continued to wilt, its long arms extending from the source of the explosion. Like a web of willow branches, it drooped across the sky, mixing with the bright sunlight.

It was the sunlight. It was the sun. So poetic were the parallels, Ein could only fathom the possibilities.

"Phaeton..." Ein exhaled, "simply marvelous...sigh...to think...it all developed out of human weakness... Frailty. How far we've come..."

The first clicks of electric noise sounded from down below. From his vantage point, Ein looked down towards the glass control booth, as the grated metal slits lifted up like frightened hair. Between the narrow gaps, he saw his assistant vigorously shuffling circuit boards around as if they were a deck of oversized playing cards. Even with protection, the core drives needed to be inserted into the protected spinning hard disk drives in order for the system to undergo a memory reboot. While the mainframe operating system had higher processing power in a solid state drive, hard disks allowed for data retention when remotely forced off—or 'Full-stopped'—, since data was made physical rather than purely electrical. Anything electrical was a vulnerability. Metal-plates could be demagnetized much easier than integrated circuitry made of silicone.

A faint click gave way to rapid crackling from his sleeves as Ein flipped his radio switch. "Status report?" he whispered into the handheld.

Nothing. Not even an ounce of static. Destroyed. Jaeger was stories below him, bumbling with engineering, completely unaware of Ein's attempted radio transmission. The device had worked only a moment before the light. Ein grinned, realizing Phaeton's permanence made his mind race with excitement. Extending his sore arm over the railing edge, he tossed the small radio with a smirk. Silently, it fell like a stone into bay; down the cliff it tumbled, too far to issue an audible splash.

Earnestly, Ein pressed his palms together, noticing his skin was becoming damp from the humidity. Phaeton countered Feyera quite nicely in the short-run. Ein had much bigger plans however; stalling an escape was the simplest of his series of planned maneuvers. And yet without this crucial crippling device, little else in his master plan would work. It wasn't just about stopping Feyera; no, quite paradoxically it was about restarting something—something that had been impeded. There was an undeniable charm to how it all fit together so well. Pieces coming together
to form a whole, parts congregating together to generate order; this was the stellar beauty which brought him to science in the first place. The constellation of cause and effect daubed his mind with their flurry spider webs, a lovely tapestry of axioms and consequences. Ein had made his move; all he had to do was wait for Feyera to realize checkmate. And though Feyera may not choose not to acknowledge it, fighting it off in passionate denial, there was little else Ein was committed to bringing out. Everything was going according to plan. There were no loose ends. No externalities. No resistances.

Like a frail leaf frozen on a frosted pond, Ein's target had been frozen at the mouth of the wide bay. The Phaeton had prevented Feyera's escape by localizing a complete Full-stop—the death sentence to any circuit dependent technology left unshielded. It was a type of assault well known to Ein. If not for prior exposure, Phaeton would only have been found in the heavens above.

What was Phaeton? An invisible pruning of technology, a systematic willowing of domination's agents, a means of turning the very things humans relied upon against them. Phaeton was a weapon; powerful, swift, and operational. Similar to RAIL-class weapon designs and without any doubt as potent as the portable ion launchers, its dynamism came from the tiniest particles imaginable. While RAIL guns were proficient at decimating local targets by overwhelming atomic structures with focused beams of accelerated ions, Phaeton's chain reaction of so-called 'forced ion creation' unleashed a wide-reaching and disruptive magnetic field. The design was not to 'create' a turbulent magnetic field per se, but rather to 'open one up' high in the atmosphere. By breaking earth's natural solar radiation barrier, Phaeton triggered the equivalent to a solar storm. The same type of storm eastern lands like Orre were prone to experiencing.

Ein lifted his stern-faced head up. He wore protective lenses to shield his eyes from the predictable harsh light, but at this distance it was hardly necessary. Fallout wouldn't reach him, as far as he knew it was harmless. The detonation occurred miles above Evercrest, and resulting ionic energy—mostly visible light—would be pulled into outer space as soon as the rift in earth's magnetic field opened. Judging by the color of the receding blue streams, this suction had happened instantaneously. A SRBM could not travel much distance, belligerents of the Great War hadn't developed ballistic missiles capable of carrying shells long range. Flying Pokemon were much more useful for carpet-bombing and air raids anyway. Ballistic missiles were chiefly employed to perform destructive tasks not suitable for Pokemon: typically attacks on militia outposts rather than civilian infrastructure. During the war, Kanto's military strikes with projected suicide rates higher than fifty percent were deemed unsuitable for organic transportation, and thus used artillery for high-risk forays. The KRA had enough technological resources from Silph Co. to push that figure down to ten percent by the war's closing, saving themselves valuable troops and morale in the process. Once Kanto's navy established a foothold north of Gateon Port, continuous barrages of SRBMs carrying Electrode-Weezing payloads were launched. Distilled Muk mire was added to the slew of contents to create voracious flames of napalm. Casting water on the fires produced clouds of toxic smoke far deadlier than the sheer heat. Though this artillery could be intercepted—and was by many a brave Pokemon—, its prevalence from Silph Co.' mass-production led to Orre's inevitable surrender.

Compared to its incendiary, bio-hazardous precursors, Phaeton lacked high raw output. At surface level, it barely trumped a large group of exploding Electrode in terms of kinetic energy. However, it was semi-kinetic energy that caused ion formation in the upper layers of the atmosphere. This rapid excitement of electrons caused stratospheric burnout.

"A convulsion of ions high in the atmosphere," Ein thought aloud to himself, still in awe. "The sun wherever it's needed...The ability to filter Pokemon from Poké Balls, freeze ARMOS, break communication, cripple transportation, erase computer memory. It's the power to control the development of our world!"
And it was all in his hands. Not even all Pokémon were safe from the pulse, which is why Ein keenly decided to keep his Electric Pokémon with Jaeger under the Evercrest base's makeshift magnetic shields. The scientist's thoughts ran rampant with thoughts. He was invincible with this prototype. A base equipped like Evercrest could short-circuit and halt organized military strikes, nevermind fire an offensive strike on Kanto's mainland; all with a relatively simple semi-kinetic pulse. And no one save a few scientists from Orre knew of how to impede Phaeton's culling. Why? For decades, the high desert regions of Orre had been in the shadow of the sun's frequent outbursts. Believed to be caused by a mixture of diminished atmospheric immunity and strong magnetism of the ferrous soil, microelectronics would frequently fail during high winds accompanied by bright aurora-like lights in the sky. The rare but impeding phenomenon was dubbed a solar storm. Although Pokémon could predict magnetic disturbances, Orre had fewer numbers in the wild capable of foretelling when and where the storms would hit. Plus, the storms would often arise from something as uneventful as a sandstorm.

Years ago, Ein's mentor founded the Solaris Project, a protective venture to help rebuild Orre by stopping harmful full-stops. Amid his work with Cipher, Ein successfully perfected it, judging by the sound of restarting turbine generators shielded beneath him and the silence of the discarded radio. Phaeton mimicked the natural occurrence of cosmic vulnerability on demand. The Great War saw nothing like the Phaeton. Nothing like the power of the sun itself. To Ein, it would seem war would no longer cover the world in darkness, but embrace it in capacious light.

With a grunt, the Cipher scientist grappled with his stained lab jacket; his boney hands tapering down the wide lapels beneath his collar, scraping some dried blood off in the process. The west was at its end, and so was the crude cautionary role of science. On a macro scale, it was evolution punishing the slothful. Kanto would crumble under the very world they built. The rest of the world would follow, adhering to a new order. An order of progress, adaptation, and advance. An order where organic percussion thumped to the time of one heartbeat.

From advanced Poké Balls to basic sparkplugs, no electrical devices were immune without magnetic shielding. Evercrest's exterior had been recently upgraded with the latest 'Solarity Shields', thinly pressed sheets of lead alloys capable of blocking—or rather deflecting—even the most brutal of solar storms from the increasingly volatile sunbursts. The construction was common practice on Cipher's buildings in Orre and Ein, being the project's mantle-bearer, insisted on coating Evercrest in the polarization-immune substance.

The man's posture, stiff as a board, began to relax as one by one, Feyera's Pokémon were released from their Poké Balls in the distance. Ein knew time was running out before all of his circuitry failed from overheating. And there was one device in particular Ein was interested in seeing fail.

Before it came to fruition, a bright red light burst out from near Feyera's paralyzed watercraft, morphing into a massive creature easily twice his height.

"…!" Ein gasped. It was something Ein had not taken into account. He had lost track of his facts amid the struggle.

It was a Gyarados.

"Damn…!" hissed Ein, "Lorelei mentioned a Gyarados…"

How could he have been that careless? Ein should have known Feyera would conceal that member of his Pokémon team in a matter of defense from his grossly powerful Electric Type Pokémon. The trainer had little choice, especially after seeing the brutal execution of Lorelei's Lapras.

Feyera's Pokémon team hardly appeared to be debilitated by the magnetic blast of the Phaeton. The
Rocket troopers, even though only a small taskforce, were eliminated by a combination of psyonics and Phaeton's electrical overload. *But why not Feyera's craft?* wondered Ein. What had the young man done to save himself from the fuel eruptions? How did he foresee the danger? Did he know about the Phaeton? No, it couldn't be; that information was constantly under lock and key.

Truth be told, Ein did not expect the fuel to be ignited by the rouge electrical sparks. How could he? PWCs were never tested to withstand Phaeton, much less the solar storms Phaeton was based upon. The watercrafts weren't ever anticipated to be exposed to solar storms in the desert region of Orre after all. But why hadn't Feyera's ignited? How did the young man know to kill the PWC's engine or suffer the fate of his pursuers? Were his psynic powers really that strong?

Ein pressed on his temple, adjusting his protective glasses with a ring finger. Questions were driving him mad. Was it the Gardevoir at his side? Was it the both of them working together in tandem? He feared the latter; for as much as he had studied Pokemon, immaterial bonds of companionship were unquestionably the least understood. It had to be the Mercurium. It had to be the Gardevoir whose cells were metabolized; the cells incorporated into his ex-assistant's existence. Delta-two.

"The high powered microwaves! The electron overloads have enough sudden volatility to destroy the entire spectrum of semiconductors. And you knew to stop the motor?! How did you know Feyera?" he asked fiddling with his hands. "Even with an inhibitor present…my word…what a vibrant will to survive inside you…! The heart piece…it's…adapted."

Helplessly, Ein watched as the trainer's Gyarados arched its neck back and roared in the distance. For the first time, he second-guessed his plan, finding holes like these unable to be ignored.

"I must have it!" Ein yelled, imagining the crimson heart in his hands. The scientist released his white-knuckled grip from the railing and turned around to descend back into the base and prepare orders. He slipped past the metal framed door, sliding it open with a firm hand. As soon as he entered the base, he unclipped a small headset from the wall, clamping the bulky—yet protected—electronic device into position. Coughing from the base's air, he placed the microphone next to his cold lips.

"Jaeger!" he called out to the control booth through the speaker phone.

"Jah jah. *bzzz* how was zee weather up there?"

"Phaeton was a success, it disabled the vulnerable circuit technology…Hopefully, all of it." Worry once again crossed his face. Thankfully, these inklings of panic were invisible to Jaeger.

"*Cough!*" The heavy voice came through the headphones along with a slew of crackling. "Jah. I can confirm a visual chief; Fey—a's Pokemon were all released involuntarily."

"It's a good sign. But I was expecting him to be frozen on the PWC for us to collect at our leisure."

"No." Deprecatingly, Jaeger affirmed, "It would appear that isn't zee case. A careless miscalculation has given him wings to flee on."

"..." Ein fell silent. Miscalculation also nearly killed his target rather than freeze him. He could not take the responsibility. "Variables…they change. Until we eliminate human emotion, Jaeger… they'll always change."

"We need to have an action plan for Feyera."

"He'll undoubtedly use this short-lived lull to run away on his Gyarados."
"—Surf away—"Jaeger corrected.

"—Not that he'll get very far on that runt of a specimen! Looks like it would barely be able to tow Feyera," Ein said ignoring Jaeger's condemning tone. "We'll position a barricade on the northern part of the island to cut him off."

"Our troops are already stationed there, west of zee Lost Cave. Good thing we were excavating for Mercurium there yesterday."

"Right. The so called 'Cave of No Return' was due for an earthquake excavation on our behalf."

"However."

"However…?"

"We'll be unable to send orders until zee storm quells."

Ein graced his hand on the corridor's metal wall, triggering a sequence of lights to brighten the dim passageway. As light illuminated his path, he darkly said, "At the very least we turned off that infernal piece of equipment delaying dear Feyera's progress."

"I can't— *crackle*—can't get a clear read on that though, chief. I can't read his hemodynamics from this distance."

The prospect of further unhinging his prey was not only a liability but an anomaly. A gamble yes, but one he had to take. For the sake of seeing Mercurium's full potential. If a human could manage to control a Gardevoir's heat shard then the rest was simple. Replicable even. The future would be within his grasp.

"Peh…useless…" muttered the admin. "Give me a status report on the Evercrest Base!"

"S.S. bulkheads blocked solar wind interference, but we're only recovering at forty-two percent expected efficiency. Generators are crawling slower than a Slugma on a hot summer—"

"—Sap the Pokemon, Jaeger. Use their energy to power the base back up!"

"Ah! Right away! Using your Electric Pokemon, we can optimize za recovery speed. Your Pokemon—Magneton in particular—are projected to boost us up to…hrrm sixty-two percent effective recovery."

"Not just my Pokemon. Drain our specimens in Gamma as well."

"They won't last as long as your Pokemon."

"It doesn't matter. They were useless anyway. Inject them with high doses of CYP, family four-fifty, that will maximize their output. Anything to get us back online ASAP. We have to send that transmission!"

"Roger. Hurm hurm…Add in zee energy from experiments…let's see, accounting for a few casualties here n' there, we're still looking at a measly seventy-four percent…"

"Cut unessential energy expenditures and give me a time frame before we can broadcast our signal!" Ein barked into the headset.

"Erm…" there was heavy muffled breathing from the other end of the transmitter. "Ten to twenty-five minutes…sir. Propagation keeps shifting on our dishes."
"Dammit! If Feyera gets away for good it's your head—!"

"—Sir? Um…Sir!"

"What?" a quick pacing Ein asked. Hearing worry in Jaeger's voice, he came to a halt in the middle of the hallway. Rather awkwardly, he shouted to no one, "WHAT?!"

"*Crackle* He—erm…Feyera's not leaving zee bay!"

Dumbfounded, Ein's stance remained frozen in the center of the hall. A chill shook his chest. Had he been outwitted somehow? What was happening? He held a hand over his eyes. They had become inflamed with sharp pain. "What…!?!" he breathlessly spoke into the padded microphone.

"It's—*crackle!*" The transmission cut out into tormenting interference.

He tapped the headset pieces over his ears. "Jaeger! Jaeger!" Ein said to the hiss of static noise cupping his brain; its monotone reverberations growing louder by the second. Suddenly perturbed, his eyes shifted back and forth, dancing in their sockets like window-veiled shadows in the night. "Tell me what's going on!"

Meanwhile in the bay, Feyera tightened his grasp around Sanaria. The motor mutely responded to his throttle. Try as he might, nothing happened. Even the steering bar was stuck.

"Dammit…Looks like I broke this thing along with the Poké Balls."

"We," Sana corrected him, tugging on his shoulder playfully. She rocked back from where she was sitting on his lap.

"We…" he repeated whilst aimlessly fumbling with the PWC.

"…We make quite the pair, wouldn't you say?"

Flushing, Feyera nodded his head. "D—destructive as ever."

"Is blowing things apart the only thing you care about—?"

"Well you wouldn't—!"

[Hey!] Waving her tiny arms from her post on the seat behind them, July chuckled, [I'm sure glad you two aren't fighting anymore!]

Des let out a haughty laugh, knowing more than July was aware of, [Hah! HA! Not a twinge of animosity 'tween tha two of ya.]

Edge twirled his wrist nervously. Sanaria made a similar twitch with her neck, tilting it ever so slightly towards the young man. Furtive perhaps, but it did not go unnoticed.

"Yeah. None of that. Haven't the time," he said in short bursts. "Have to figure out how to start this POS up."

[POS?] asked July.

"Wasn't it called a PWC?" Sana asked. She furrowed her brow, partially concealed beneath her green bangs, in confusion. "That's what you called it before. Why a new name for when it's stationary?"
"Hah yeah, but—" Edge jerked the accelerator with both his hands to little avail, "—PWC stands for 'personal water-fairing craft'. Ya know, the thing that we weren't stuck on a few minutes ago! Grr…ugh! POS on the other hand, stands for 'piece of sh—"

Brucie quickly interrupted Feyera, [—Whoa wait! Boss, I don't want to be stuck out here out in the bay!]

"Gah!" Edge stomped his rear on the seat and kicked the fiberglass footholds. "Looks like we can't get a freakin' break here!"

[And I can't even be recalled.]

"I'm sorry Brucie; I'm tryin, I'm tryin!"

[If we're stuck here then that means…] July murmured.

From a few feet away, Des shook her head. [Best ta keep calm.]

Feyera looked over at the Evercrest facility following the perimeter of the bay along the cliff sides. It was ominously quiet. Sealed closed with panels of bright stainless steel. Then again, why would the scientists inside need windows? That would be a huge waste of energy on the tropical island.

"We can't be stuck here, veh Feyera." Sana shuddered against him. "If that man—Ein—were to capture us now…"

"—There's no way in hell I'm going to let that happen to you!" Edge shouted, feeling incredibly driven. Maybe even a little overly protective, like he would for one of his Pokemon but then some. Seeing Sanaria in a sense of distraught had amplified these sentiments significantly, especially after what they had just experienced together. Was it responsibility? The prospect of companionship? Whatever it was, he felt a duty to protect her. It was more personal than what he felt between Brucie, Des, or July. And who could blame him? He hadn't kissed any of them!

With large scarlet eyes, she stared at him, dumbstruck.

Melodramatically, he corrected, "To us I mean."

Des shot him a small wink. [Glad you care 'bout us too, darlin']

"Of course! I'll get us out of this. I have to! My reputation's on the line, right Despie?"

[Sure sure.] Des lambently nodded, [Edgiest character out there n' all…]

[Too edgy for me.]

"Sigh…" Sanaria rocked her head, "Look at you; it's almost like you have a plan! So far all I've seen you do is fidget with the washtu—boat!"

"Oh please! Of course I have a plan, Sana!" Feyera lied. However, his continuing struggles with the PWC brought little success.

"What is it then?" she whispered, nudging him affectionately, using her uninjured hand to claw at his shirt's collar. "I want to know!"

"I err…well see—" Edge punched the dial with a fist in a last ditch effort, causing Sana to jump up in surprise and hug her arms around him. "Damn…" he whispered to a sore hand.
"What are you doing? Trying to break it more?!” she scolded.

"—Heh. Guess that only works in the movies," the trainer mordantly growled.

"Hmm? Movies? But we're not moving."

[Huh?]

"Nevermind…*sigh* it was a bad joke. I should just close my mouth and…"

[—Ah ha! Always talkin’ nineteen ta the dozen, that’s our Edgie.]

"You are a bit of a chatterbox."

"Can you please, just try and let me fix this? Or we're not getting anywhere."

[We're not going to be able to get away are we?] July asked.

Brucie brought his paws up to his chest. [Oh no! We're not really trapped for good?]

Sanaria tried to remain positive, but such thoughts were infuriatingly flippant. "Try to…I don't know. Washtubs don't have all these colorful buttons and spinny Spinda things…"

"What is with you and washtubs?" Edge asked.

"Oh you wouldn't understand."

"Try me."

"Fine, when I was younger I went on little adventures in the shallow waters of Mother Sea with Seph in a washtub we called our boat."

"Are you serious?" Edge asked with a smirk. "That's ridiculous!"

"What is?" Sanaria asked with concern.

"I didn't know you…Gardevoir were pioneers," the trainer said furrowing his brow at the machinery on the steering bar. Like that would change anything.

"Pioneers?" Sanaria said aloud, mimicking Edge with her high-pitched voice.

[Aye! Only the roughest, toughest, meanest, rootin', tootin' explorers on this side of paradise, darlin']

Sana looked blankly at Des' wide grin.

[You fit right in with us, hun.] the Gyarados went on to say. [I knew you were an adventurer at heart just like the rest of us the moment I laid eyes on you!]

Sana looked down at her heart shard. "At heart?" she echoed.

[Eeyup!] the Gyarados said with a faint gallop in her tone. [Jus' like me 'n the rest of the gang, sugar. Eh he, especially Edgie!]

"Hmm," Sana hummed softly to herself.

"Des…” Feyera grumbled, "is there anything besides battling and banter you're good at?"
The soft water continued to gently rock the craft.

"What do I do..." Edge muttered. "What do we do? We're running out of time, I'm sure they've got more troopers eager to capture us. And the sea is so close...!"

[Look here n' listen.] Des' tone changed from jolly to serious. [I can carry you 'n one of the small fries at best. I'm just not big enough ta support the whole crew now that ya up and busted our Poké Balls.]

"What good will that do though?" The thought of leaving Sanaria behind was mortifying. He suppressed an involuntarily reaction to hug her. "We can't leave anyone behind!"

[Boss...] whispered Brucie. [I'm not afraid anymore. If you want to go on without me, I understand. I've been with you the longest; count me the luckiest.]

"I...No! I can't let you leave my side Brucie."

[It's okay,] he said through a closed smile revealing two of his fangs. The Pokemon's light blue eyes no longer looked ill. [Chris...you've been good to me.]

[Me too!] July chimed in. [I'm so happy to have met you, Mister Feyera!]

"There has to be another way. I won't abandon you—anyone out here!"

[I know, but it's too important of a mission.] The Charmeleon raised a nail and pointed at Sana. [You need to go on with your—...Pokemon.]

"Brucie!" Edge hollered, too distraught to differentiate between Sana as his Pokemon and what she really was. "You don't understand; if I leave you here you'll die!"

"Then leave me here."

"SANA!?"

"...I won't die. I—there's something worth fighting for in my life; something that will keep me alive."

"Absolutely not!"

She squinted her cherry eyes in admonishment. "Don't be so selfish."

"You don't understand," Edge exclaimed shaking her, "When Ein's troops come out looking for me, they'll kill you! Hell, they might have more bombs. Fredrick can't save our hides forever!"

She closed her eyes. Bringing her head next to his, she softly hummed into his ear, "You have to let go. Veh Feyera...please try to understand. Everything in life is a cycle; you've got to let it come to you...when it does, you'll know what to do."

"That's it!" Edge shouted, causing the Gardevoir to jump with surprise once again. She hugged him rather than fall from the shock.

"Veh Feyera?"

"Sana! You just gave me a brilliant idea!"
She reddened in his partial-embrace. "I did?"

Feyera looked at her, and then turned his eyes in order to hone in upon the structure buried in the cliff face. They were close enough to see the Southern Sea from within the bay. Cipher's Evercrest facility traversed the entire cliff face, from the harbor they had exited from, to the natural gateway to the Southern Sea. The massive metal structure must have been as large as some of the small towers in Saffron City. Of course, it was lying on its side, built into the cliff that ran along the bay's perimeter. However, there was something odd about the part of the building that ran up against main cliff right before the aquatic bottleneck.

A door. An absolutely massive door. It was easily the size of most airship hangers. Feyera pointed at the grey garage contrasting with the orange cliff's face.

"That."

"That?" [Huh?] [That?]

"Yes. That's how we'll get out of here for good."

[Ave ya gone an' lost your marbles?]

[You can't go back!]

Sana touched his forehead with the back of her palm and asked, "Are you losing it, Mister?! Was the kis—erm shared sight too much?"

[Ya jus' off 'n told me about how ya almost died in there, proclaimed how not even I could getcha out of that jam, and now ya wanna to go BACK?!] Desperado shouted.

[You're crazy!]

"Feyera, your heart must be overheating your mind."

[There's no way!]

"No. Just think about it. We're not going to be able to get away on this PWC anyway. It has no power left. Even if it did, I don't know how we'd traverse the rough Southern Sea."

[Yeah, she's a bit rough,] Des conceded, [at least when I went for a lil dip on the northern end of the island.]

"And Des can't take all of us on her back. I can't store Brucie and July in their Poké Balls either to conserve space..."

[Right, so your plan is to stay here?! Go back to the guys that killed your friend Lorelei and tried to kill us?]

"Not stay there, think about what Sana said. It's all one big cycle."

[Huh?]

[Afraid I'm not seeing it, chum.]

"It made sense to me in the moment." Edge sighed, "Basically, we stole this PWC from Cipher, and now we're going to steal a yacht."
"[A YACHT?!!] all three of his Pokemon exclaimed in unison.

"…You mean Lorelei's?" Sanaria said; her mind on the same track as his.

"Yeah, that prick Ein mentioned that he took the boat that we came here on," Edge quickly responded. All the pieces were coming together like one big puzzle. "Lorelei believed she was being rescued. Ein had to maintain his ruse, right up until the bitter end. Cipher must've transported her boat from the crash site to their main harbor for repairs. That's why you couldn't find it before, Des."

July nodded, [It's starting to make sense. I think…]

Feyera tried to curtail his excitement as he spoke, "There wasn't enough room to keep the yacht in the harbor we came from. Oh no, that place was much too small. They needed a larger harbor, a harbor right next to the bay's exit makes sense. And revoke my trainer's license if that huge metal door isn't housing a harbor!"

Sanaria seamlessly continued his thoughts, "So they must've put it in there. That's the only logical conclusion."

"Precisely," Edge said with a bright smile. He wasn't sure if she had actually read his mind, feelings, or what. Regardless, there was something keeping them on a similar wavelength of perception. In either case, he loved hearing her say "logical conclusion". Who knows, maybe he'd be able to actually teach the Gardevoir what that meant to a researcher like himself. Little did Feyera know, his marriage to emotion would make that more difficult than he thought.

[That sounds Zubat-droppings-crazy, sugar!] Des said. [Pardon my obtrusiveness.]

[Ain't it?] Brucie revealed his sharp teeth. [Think it's crazy enough to work though?]

"Hah...well you've both been around me long enough."

[Sure have, darlin'. Crazy is your middle name.]

July snickered, [Heh...heh...I thought it was 'veh'.]

"Mmm," Edge pondered for a moment. Sana did like to call him that a lot. Specifically 'Chris veh Feyera'. He wondered its meaning, but soon became distracted by the specks of motion from his peripherals. Looking, he saw that there was some movement and commotion back at the smaller harbor he had just escaped from. Nothing overly alarming, they were far away. Edge figured it was either another strike force of PWCs or Pokemon. As long as no more fireworks were being launched in their direction, he assumed they were relatively safe. He had to act fast though.

"They think we're gonna bolt. If they've got things like that missile weapon, we're not getting anywhere. But why did it miss us?" Feyera asked. "The black helicopter, the IPF, Fredrick must've sabotaged it."

[You really think that?]

"Yeah, what else would be stopping them from unloading all their armaments on us? They have a professional infiltrator on their hands," Edge said with a smile, thinking back to the days under Celadon City's Luxaira casino.

[How?!]
Edge looked over at Sanaria's crimson eyes before saying, "I—well, I don't really know how for sure. But what matters is we have a chance to nab that yacht from right under their noses!"

"Veh Feyera...What we did back there...it won't happen again."

"...!" he gasped. It had not been more than an hour since that magical moment, but it felt like a lifetime ago. Must've had something to do with quicker brain activity.

Seeing his reaction, she flushed. "I just thought you needed to know; you can't rely on it."

What did you two do?] July asked as Sana pawed her flowery bulb. Feyera squinted his eyes shut for a moment, "Err...we...what exactly did we do...?"

Sana smiled lightly. "We...Teleported. Together."

[Huh? Y'all serious?] [What's that?] asked Brucie.

[...Tele...Teleport...Teleporty?]

"Think about it like moving really fast, July. Too fast for anyone to see." The Gardevoir stretched her arm over the water. Feyera and the other Pokemon looked at it and its pristine reflection in the bay. "With enough...to—um...emotion, you can make space kiss for you *sigh* if only for a moment."

"Kiss?!" exclaimed Edge. Accountability was bending him over himself at this point. Did she have to use words like that? He didn't even dare look at Des.

"Yeah...tehee, it has the same meaning—" she replied. She bent her forearm so that her delicate hand touched her smooth exposed shoulder from beneath the clothing. "—It would take a Caterpie too long to crawl down my whole arm, but when you make my hand and shoulder kiss, it can get there right away."

[Oh!]

"Faster than light travel is absolutely fascinating, but can we please not talk about Caterpie crawling around on people's arms," Feyera grumbled. Despite an irrational fear of insects, at least it was better than her talking about kissing. In particular, their kissing.

Sana sniggered.

Wow, you can do that boss?]

"Err...I'm no magician."

"He's right; he's too grown up to do it on his own."

[Hurmph!] Happily, Des rung in, [The surprises don't ever stop with you Edgie!]

"I don't...no, I know I couldn't have...Physics don't allow—"

[Psyonics?] questioned Brucie.

"Even still, you'd need something hundreds of times earth's mass to manipulate and bend space like
that." He sighed, "Something like the size of Jupiter. It couldn't have possibly been me." Feyera looked down menacingly at his heart shard.

"That's because it was us!" proclaimed Sanaria, quite fond of being able to group Edge as a part of what they had done together.

Edge snapped his gaze up, just in time to catch the Gardevoir wistfully eyeing his chest.

She bit her lower lip, a little embarrassed that he had caught her staring again, but more taken aback by the fact that she couldn't help herself from ogling it at every moment.

Enveloped in infatuation, or perhaps simply the idea of infatuation, Feyera found it difficult to chastise the Gardevoir. If she was obsessed with him, that was one thing, but obsession with the heart shard itself was whole other. After their little exploit and merging of hearts, the division between the two had all disappeared for a few brief moments. He knew he enjoyed it. In fact, he allowed for the intimacy to occur. What were the costs though? Edge groaned at the thought of this sadistic pleasure, "Maybe. But that doesn't make it any less nuts."

Sana clenched two tiny fists and rocked them up and down eagerly while insisting, "Aw come-on; veh Feyera, you know you did it with me. You felt it!"

It was obvious he did. He wouldn't be able to deny that. Part of the aftereffect was ecstatic pleasure. The type of pleasure making him feel like he could accomplish anything. Following their little lip pecking, even that buoyancy was amplified ten-fold. Like winning the Kanto Lottery or something. It was something extraordinary, yet he had no idea what to do with it next. Filled with a bizarre inability to disavow his compounding sensations, Edge rocked his head back and forth. Not a word could be said about it. There was too much awe. Too many outlandish implications. Not enough concrete facts. There would never be enough facts, never enough words to fully explain the feeling.

For several seconds, Sana watched him ponder. Sitting completely still, she opened her mouth as if to say something but held off, resorting to telepathy instead, "Even we have our limits, te he."

"That's great, but those are your limits; not mine. I'm only grafted-in for the time being. Teleporting is the type of thing you do; that's like your Gardevoir livelihood or something."

She wagged a finger. "Veh Feyera, I don't think you understand how a Teleport works at all!"

[I dunno much about Psychic Pokemon, but ol' hearsay tells me they can only Teleport when they are really tiny!] Sana grinned, "Exactly, Des. Only children can do it at will!"

[Heh, I know a bit more than I lay on! Guess it pays ta listen!] she chuckled, [Used to always eavesdrop on my ex-master. Boy, that 'ol chum had a score ta settle with an Abra who kept getting' away!]

"Don't call that sleazebag merchant your master, Des," ordered Feyera, "that man was nothing but a scamming crook!" Though to be fair, had Edge never been conned, he'd be out of a very important member of his crew. But hey, that old magazine he had gotten with the deal was a total con.

[Oooh!] teased the Gyarados, [Lookie here. Seems like someone's awfe'lly jealous he didn't get ta me first!]

Edge felt his face blush. At least she was teasing him about his friendliness towards her—a
Gyarados, rather than the much more realistic—and obvious—affection present towards Sanaria.

Right on cue, Sana gave him a poke with her elbow. He wasn't sure if it was intentional because she quickly moved her body, perhaps adjusting out of a fidgety urge.

Then wind began to pick up. The craft was beginning to drift with the afternoon tide—the same tide that pushed him ashore two years back. "I don't know what's holding Ein up, but it wouldn't be smart to wait and see. There will be time to explain all of this later right?"

Sana's face lit up in delight, "I can tell you all about it whenever! But..."

"—Right, because we gotta get moving" Edge said looking up at the sky. It had grown significantly less pure blue over the past few minutes, almost like a dim grey, like the kind of sky you'd find on a March afternoon after a morning of rain. "There must be a storm on its way."

With concern, Brucie howled in anguish, "Oh no, not a storm!"

"A storm's coming? I don't see any rainclouds," July said through a squinty set of eyes.

"You can feel it right?" Edge asked his maritime Pokemon, thinking she would know best. "Like something's coming."

[Nah, darlin',] Des reluctantly answered, [must just be a change in the wind yer feelin'.]

"Feyera...you should get going."

"Hmm...Okay. Des, we got a yacht to steal."

[Wha' about all that stuff about Ein being too powerful?]

"This isn't just about doing what's easy." Feeling his gut clench up, he stammered, "I'm—I'm going to be honest with you guys."

[Really?] Des jeered sarcastically, for Feyera wasn't one to be disclosing about anything besides his emotional state. And even those he tried to conceal.

"Yes. I have something to say."

[Go on.]

[Yeah, tell us.]

"Well the truth is, we...we're running out of time."

[Huh?]"Hmm?" Sanaria eyed him peculiarly, she half expected him to try and back out of his Gardevoir traits once more with an excuse like: "If I don't undo this soon, bad things will happen to me." An apparent fear of Feyera's she had heard far too often.

"Brucie...is sick. I allowed him to battle when I wasn't at my best, when I thought I could run the show on my own, and he paid the price."

[Boss?]"Hmmm?” groused Des.
"Just…let me finish *huh…*" Edge took a quick breath, "Guess there's no stopping now. Look, Koga's Toxic is attacking his body."

Sana gently nodded, finding it touching to see Edge being honest about the circumstances. If not about himself, then at least for his best friend.

Brucie clutched his torso.

Edge tried to look away but couldn’t help. "*Sniff*—And the Toxic poisoning is going to continue to make him sicker…unless…"

[Unless what?!] demanded the lumbering Gyarados, now looming ominously over the PWC.

His tone firmed. "—Unless we get to Lorelei's yacht—" Feyera pointed to the section of the Evercrest Facility that was clearly an entranceway "—The medicine is in my bag there. Even if Cipher managed to confiscate my things, we can still take the yacht to civilization and get more of the antidote."

The whole group remained quiet as Edge continued to collect his thoughts hastily.

"They won't expect a second infiltration. Their missile missed us, our pursuers are all dead, the PWC is busted, we can't get out into the Southern Sea, and—" Feyera padded his knee with a determined fist, "...guys, this is our last chance. That's why we gotta do it."

[Okay; take a hop on my back, Edgie, ol' Despie will do the rest.]

Feyera smiled weakly. Des had saved his life before in Vermilion's bay. It was only appropriate for the two of them to travel on Chrono Island's bay.

[Wait, can we come too? Des said she could carry us!]

[I'll reckon I can carry only one and a half,] said the Gyarados, bending her neck down to surface level. [Sorry…]

"No, it's too dangerous for you Brucie!" Feyera quickly said. He didn't want to leave Sana with the smaller half of the team. Plus while on the water, his flame-tipped tail was a huge liability; especially on anything that wasn't stationary. "Stay with July and Sana until I get back. They might need your help."

Sana lifted herself gracefully off his lap. "Take him. I'll manage fine, veh Feyera. You haven't seen anything yet."

"No," he said clutching her wounded hand, "I'm not taking that risk."

"You have to hurry," she protested. "Go now before they come!"

Standing up next to her, he put his arms on her shoulders. "Sanaria, I'll be back; I promise."

"…!" She wore a face of shock. He had suddenly gained such determination, such charisma. Sana wondered if he knew that. Looking deep into his green eyes and projecting her feelings, she hummed, "I know. Be careful."

"I…I will." He wanted to kiss her. He wanted to so badly. The way she held such composure at a time like this was more attractive than imaginable. If only she were a human. If only she hadn't been a Pokemon. Tragically, he could not muster the courage. He could not bring himself to do
anything in front of his Pokemon. It was a private matter, something he wanted kept secretive and buried.

Even more heartbreaking was the fact that she felt his resistance. The way he sodomized his desires, suppressed his urges. It pained her greatly that he could not be honest and truthful. Nevertheless, she remained strong, gently stroking his heart with a purr, "I'll be with you regardless. Right here."

Edge could do little but nod his head. Could she really follow me through this thing on my chest? He opted not to ask. "Take care of Brucie and July until we get back," he said swallowing a dry gasp.

She avoided his eyes as he sat frozen like a statue. How could he do this to her? After all they had shared together just now, he could not even hug her? What if something bad happened while they were separated? Rather than anger, she felt disappointment. Frustration that he could not acknowledge his feelings.

Sensing her eschewal, Edge lifted his leg over the seat and grappled onto his Gyarados without another word. Once partially secured on her upper back, he whispered into her ear. "Thanks Des." "We'll be back!"

He felt the warmth of his Gyarados' scaly body and the quick exaggerated breaths from her anticipation. She leaned her head back ever so slightly to respond, [Daw, don't thank me till we get there in one piece, sugar.]

"Right, let's do this!"

[Ride 'em cowboy!]

Feyera took one final look back at Sanaria and July before the splash following Des' tail obscured them from his sight.

Static persisted, cleaving each transmission between the Cipher scientists. One of which was deeply frustrated by the anomalies occurring all around him. Although weakened, Ein's trembling fist grew tighter still. His heart pounded in anticipation. He held his breath as if underwater, waiting for oxygen in the details. Finally, there was a recognizable set of sounds. Jaeger's voice.

"It would appear Feyera's…not leaving zee bay…sir."

"I heard you the first time! I'm in the dark here, Jaeger! What the hell is he doing?! Give me a visual!"

"Telecom feed is shut down to conserve energy for za reboot. Umm…I err…do you want me to describe it to you?"

"No, I want you to go fetch yourself a goddamn snack—" Ein pounded his clenched fist into an open palm. "—OF COURSE I want you to describe it to me, you oversized sack of phospholipids!"

"He's…*Zzzzz* he's on his Gyarados. Riding zee beast. *bzzz* is—approaching Alpha Sector."

"Alpha Sector?!!"

"Affirmative. At twenty knots per clip, they'll be at zee main harbor's gate in two minutes."
"What…? Why…?" Ein stammered into the microphone. His thoughts were racing with potential reasons for why Feyera to reattempt a base infiltration. A change of heart? Perhaps the emotion of vengefulness—no, loathing—took over him? Maybe he had lost control. But this soon? It seemed completely irrational to Ein. He was sure there was a reason…there had to be a logical explanation. There just had to be.

Jaeger broke the hum of interference with a quivering voice, "I wonder if could it be that he really thinks he's a Pokemon. Considering he's feeding off emotion enough to Teleport, he might have suppressed human rationality."

"He was taken over by the heart before; right in front of me. Although I am unable to understand how since it could be neural or exocardiactic. The heart caused a surge of chemicals to douse his system. Whether it was his brain's mesocortical pathway or the heart's receptors."

"Head or heart. I wonder if that is how it works for him? You'know, sides of zee brain, halves offsetting each other. Like zee balancing scales, jah?"

"Cease your conjectures!" Ein barked. "Hearts don't 'think'; however, this one has a pull on the chemicals that generate emotion and that 'pull' is exactly what we'll need. This is the key. Mercurium consumes, and Feyera's heart shard feeds on emotion—brain signals—to consume. In tandem with one another, the process is sustainable, even exploitable since he's been employing those Gardevoir powers."

"It did look like he enjoyed it. In zee footage."

"Yes…mind over matter. It's fortunate that the painful derma-toxicosis is being covered up by biological ecstasy. Evolution at work."

"Toxicosis?"

"Curator Toxicalia, specifically. At the epidermal level."

"Isn't toxicosis is zee over presence of an organism's cells in a splice?"

"Yes and no. Toxicalia is one organism's physical properties taking-over another's. His heart is a prime example of this since his body is undeniably human. Thus it's local toxicosis."

"Zee heart…that makes sense, that's a Gardevoir's life essence. But why on his wrist? Why there, Ein?"

"Initially it stumped me as well. But now I see it as a self-defense reaction. It's a biological response to fending something like a virus off. It's rapid adaptation at work; the very same as a Pokemon's rapid evolution."

"But what does it mean?"

"Gardevoir cells must be more adept at channeling emotional energy under…artificial strain."

"You keep insisting emotion is tangible. Are you feeling okay?"

"I'm fine. And you're correct, it's not tangible per se. But its effects are. It's chemicals are."

"Hmm…Seventy-six percent. *sigh* Would it make a good power source?"

"I hardly intend to make him into a living battery, Jaeger." Ein's light steps passed a large metal
door leading into the main laboratory. He paused for a moment to look inside at the dark room. Seeing nothing of interest, he pressed on through the catacombs. "—After all, a furnace is only as useful as your wood supply. Judging from Maxwell's footage, psychological energy would be consumed far too quickly which is why we need to think outside the box."

"Then…?"

"It's principle, Jaeger. What does a Gardevoir do best? …Connect to others; feed off others. We let the subatomic merging process of Mercurium bonding continue. If Feyera doesn't cooperate, we'll exacerbate the process. Replicate it with another specimen if we have to; we have the means to now…"

Silence came from Jaeger's end.

"…By supplementing a Gardevoir's empathy powers with a voracious element like Mercurium, you'll have the perfect emotional drainer." Ein paused, gathering his dark thoughts. "We'll be able to create Shadow Pokemon at twenty times the current rate. I ran the projected results ten times already. And that's just the beginning…"

Jaeger answered with auxiliary information, "Power restoration is nearing eighty-five percent."

"Good. We'll find out if Phaeton put him 'back on track' by looking at the hemodynamics. In the meanwhile, we need to secure Alpha Sector immediately, Jaeger. He's going to try and get in again. The blasted fool."

"Zee gate's sealed though." Jaeger snapped his pudgy fingers. "Good n' tight."

"You imbecile! That flimsy partition won't keep him out, much less a Gyarados! It's only designed to deflect waves of solar radiation, not 'Harbingers of the Sea'!"

"*Crackle* What should we do?"

"We need to greet him there. Together. You have your little machine right?"

"Yes. *zzz* Understood, chief. I'll prepare a secure route through zee base. Meet me in zee Omega Foyer, level seven."

"Roger that," Ein murmured pressing his spare set of glasses closer to his eyes. "Send our reserves into the bay! Give them no quarter! If I can't get a cell sample—"

"—But *bzzz* chief!" replied Jaeger through a broken transmission. "Our reserves are thin! *Hsss!* —most of zee hired *crackle!* men are combing zee northern mining site."

"Then release Pokemon unable to provide power to the facility! Engage their Predatory Programing," Ein shouted into the receiver.

"Right." Jaeger grumbled, "What should I type in for zee target's composition?"

"Gardevoir. Angelus Curator. They'll know what to do."

"Affirmative." A few pouncing clicks on a keyboard echoed in the background before Ein heard "Drawing from battery power…and…cages opening."

Silence followed by a dull hum from deep within the bowls of Evercrest. An eerily collection of abysmal howls echoed far below. They didn't even sound like Pokemon any longer. The awful
thuds and shrieks were enough to make neck hairs stand on their ends. Ein fought the human
instinct to shudder by picking up his pace.

"They're loose. Zee Shadow Pokemon."

"Good," Ein said tightly grasping the RAIL pistol at his side. "Take caution on your way down…
still haven't worked out all the kinks."

"I'm reading a faint resonance of Mercurium in Alpha Sector!"

"Already?"

"Our dials are spinning out of control. Point zero four PPMs and rising!"

"Did we have a leak?"

"No…that's impossible. A leak would have rendered backup circuitry like our headsets useless."

"Not if it was isolated. And Alpha Sector is isolated. We need to get there right away."

"Sir. I have to ask: in Alpha Sector *bzz* is it zee Shadow Diamond?"

Ein halted mid-stride. A faint smile crossed his lips. "Yes…yes of course, it's the Obsidian," he
whispered. "But how does he know…?"

"Is it too late to—*Brrzzzzz!*" Incomprehensible static came from the other end of the transmitter.
While physical energy conduits and wires were shielded, little could be done to protect wireless
communications from electromagnetic interference.

He descended further down into a steep stairwell, passing a shielded window. He took a moment to
peer out it, making out the blue sea snake charging towards the side of the bay's mouth. However,
with all the foam spraying about, he couldn't be sure if Feyera was riding the Pokemon.

"So you want to invade Alpha Sector, Feyera?" Ein asked walking deeper into the labyrinth of
Evercrest. The metal beams, cold glistening steel, shone under the faint fluorescents. "I can assure
you, you won't like what you'll find there. Although I'm curious, Mister Feyera…I pegged you too
young to remember. Heh heh…not that you remember much."

Sweeping a gaunt finger over the Evercrest transportation platform's control, he took a deep breath
as the panel illuminated. How nice it was to have command when Phaeton stripped everything
else. How nice it was to be in control. Soon Feyera's Mercurium would also be within his control.
All that and more.

Pausing, Ein pressed his head and hand against the screen. "You've demonstrated a brilliant
spectacle of willpower; but all for naught, Mister Feyera."

There was a whirling noise from down the corridor. The distant noise of energy and power littered
with screeches of blood-lust brought a smile to his face.

"All for naught."
Bright sunlight glistened off the jeweled eyes of Feyera and his Gyarados alike. As a unified force, they rushed towards Evercrest's larger harbor. Harrowing determination drove their hearts. Amid all this resolve, Feyera's heart had been the most bountiful in perseverance. Like a shrill note, it vested in him a sense of insistence and unyielding faith. This was it.

Des lightly skipped over some of the shallow waves, waving her body upwards and downwards like a sail. Completely driven, she continued to accelerate, chopping through the sea as if she were in hot pursuit of prey. It was causing Feyera losing his grip on her. He continually released her with each arc she made, only to catch her seconds later as she hoisted back up. Tossing and turning, the devoted sense of responsibility was the only thing keeping his body firm enough to hold onto her.

[C'mon tad, hang on tightly! Don't let go!]

"Des!" Edge shouted from atop his Gyarados' back. He fell from his perch and clenched the Pokemon's rapidly contracting muscles. The beast wavered a slight bit, nearly tossing her rider. "Ah!—Slow down! I'm slipping off!"

[Can't do that sugar! We'll never make it in time.]

"I feel like I'm going to fall though!"

[I'd say you've been putting on some weight!] she joked.

[Hey boss!] shouted a familiar voice from right behind him. [This should be nothing for you after the last ship we were on together!]

"BRUCIE?!" Feyera exclaimed as Des flew out of the water, earning a few moments of airborne weightlessness and flipping his stomach.

Little did he realize, but the fire Pokemon had leapt onto his trainer's back the moment before they had taken off. [Yeah!] shouted the Charmeleon. [Who else did you expect to be clawing at your back?]

Feyera fought a smile at the thought of Sana doing just that earlier on. But he quickly dismissed the thought. "How did you…?!" Feyera asked, turning his head to see the Pokemon clutching onto the loose black fabric with his sharp nails. The Team Rocket uniform's top was all torn up; he considered taking it off at the next opportune moment. Whenever that presented itself.

[Sana helped me! Tossed me right in time, and I flew!]

"I didn't mean how!" he said, mildly impressed by the employment of her powers.

[Then why did you even ask?]

"Because…what about all this water?" Feyera exclaimed, pausing as Des splashed into the sea with her underbelly. "Your tail might get wet! Des, slow down!"
"We gotta turn around! This isn't safe for you!" Seeing the spray spraying up from each dramatic motion made him almost as frightened as Brucie should have been! Then he thought of the other thing on his mind, or rather other person on his mind. Edge growled, "You should have stayed with Sana to protect her!"

But to turn around would waste precious time, and that put July and Sana in further danger than they were in already. Realizing defeat, "No!" he huffed "You can't be serious buddy! What were you thinking…?"

[What's that?! I can't hear you over the sound of all that impendin' triumph, Edgie!] joked the Gyarados. [Y'all know those racketeers ain't got a clue o' what's comin' their way!]

[Yeah! We're gonna bring the muscle! Together.]

Feyera bit his lip coming to terms with just how brave his first Pokemon had grown up to be. It was pointless to argue, they were over halfway to their destination already. "All right! Hold on tight and whatever you do don't let go!"

[Yep!] The side of his flame-tipped tail tapped Feyera's waist twice. A quick acknowledgement he understood.

These thoughts were interrupted rather suddenly. [Whoa now!] Des slowed up with a sharp ninety degree turn. The stop was so abrupt, she even lapped in her own wake. There was no more bay to traverse, ahead of them was the metal portcullis guarding the massive harbor's archway. [Heh, okay chum we're here, now what?]

It was imposing, but not impervious. The wall ahead of them completely dammed the harbor's mouth. Its stainless reflection sparkled with the bay's greenness. Like dark emeralds, the flat panels were boxed into rectangles of metal I beams. The was no going under it with Brucie either. "Okay. This's got nothing on us!" he said remembering what Sana had said about staying positive.

[Don't worry Despie, you're always our team's 'Ace in the Hole']

"Haha, sure you're not!" Feyera said, grabbing Brucie with a free arm. "Ease up and relax, I'll think of something."

"Yeah!" Feyera said petting her rough scales. "And Brucie, I don't know what gave you the courage to come out here with us, but thanks pal."
"I thought it was the right thing to do, especially after the things you said! I felt you meant it, you weren't trying manipulate us.

"Manipulate…?" The tendency to manipulate emotion rang in his mind. It was a reminder of how attached he'd become to this bizarre influence over psychological states. Like an addiction, it had slowly infiltrated his day-to-day experiences with the world around him, so smoothly he hardly noticed it.

[Heh. Sure did ring true to yer tune, Edgie,] Des agreed.

"Stop already, you're gonna make me get all misty eyed! We gotta stay on task. We've got a mission and I'm going to need you both for it to work."

[That looks like it's made of solid steel!]

"Steel is malleable when you heat it up."

[Malleable or not; heat alone won't puncha hole up'n through it!]

"Judging by the ridges—" he pointed at the bars "—it's reinforced with alloyed beams, those're the wall's skeleton."

[Huh?]

[Meaning…?]

"We only need bend the frame a bit to rip open a hole, once the metal's hot and flexible!"

[Okay!] the Pokemon responded with respective growls and roars.

Raising his left hand toward the center of two beams closest the trainer exclaimed, "Brucie use Flamethrower on the metal right above the water! Up from where water's lapping and in-between those rails!" His ebony brace wobbled with the motion.

The fire lizard gave a cough before spitting out a few embers that drifted off the side of a now stationary Des. [Okay, boss, you got it, ha ha! *Huff!*]

"Faaarrrrrooooom!" A searing jet of flames shot out from the small Pokemon's maw. The incredible heat pushed Feyera's hair back and made Des recoil. But the lizard's aim was true. It covered the grey metal in a cloak of scarlet. In a matter of moments, the metal bars close to the water had grown heated, a sodden gold red.

"That's it! That's it!" Edge said excitedly, holding his Pokemon's belly.

Sealing his lips, Brucie asked [Now what?] Black smoke fumed out of his flared nostrils.

Feyera stretched his hand out, and the Reilken Mercurius felt as if it had grown loose. Edge paid it no head and answered his companion with a tight half smile, "Time for a welding job!"

[Welding? What's that, Mister Feyera?]

"Wait and see," Feyera said, clambering up towards the top of Des' head. She tossed slightly as he anchored his legs on the sides of her long neck. Everything was riding on this. If he could only shift the malleable bars a little bit…

[Oi, Edgie what are you doing?]
"Gah!" he rallied himself. In a fit of shaking, Edge straightened his knees, partially standing against Desperado, digging his feet between her scales. With a huff and tug, he grappled with his right hand onto the Gyarados' pronged azure crest to support his frail figure. Brucie still hung on his back, like an oversized knapsack.

[How do ya like the view from up there?] she joked.

"Des, try to stay still. I'm going to bend the metal."

Off on the distant bobbing platform, Sanaria and July watched; their eyes aglow with hope, held open by tension.

"You can do it," Sana whispered, clutching her heart shard in Feyera's absence. She knew he could, he had recently gained an influx of positive emotion, and the bright jaundice aura surrounding him was brighter than the sun above. "Do it for all of us... do it for me..." she said breathlessly. She wanted his heart as her own. It would be so nice to have her life back. Sick from lonesomeness, she imagined how nothing could be better. Emptily, she imagined. How could she tell him?

Looking over the trident sculpting the back of Des' head, Feyera glared at the burning orange section of metal. Then down at his heart shard. It burned with a different power. It was now his mind's duty to link the two. There was no room left for frustration, only action. Pale colors around him became brighter with the shift into heated orange vigilance.

With a snap up of the wrist, a familiar sensation drenched his senses as he focused on the perseverance, hoping to make such optimism physical. Hoping to project and feed. In tooth grinding pain, small bits of black and violet energy proceeded to gather around his palm, joining and merging into slick bubbles and blooms. He could not describe it; it felt awful and pleasurable all at the same time. It was as if determination in his mind had flowed into the points of his trembling fingers. Like feathers, these feelings tickled his fingertips. Arcs of bending energy shot outwards; orbs of this lubricated material fused together, their rondures stitching tightly together in satiny threads dripping with murky ink. There, right before his eyes, they fell into themselves repeatedly, birthing larger globes.

But it had escalated too quickly. The deep indigo well of suction swelled and went beyond his control with a bright ray. It was too late to stop the reaction now. He'd messed up. Seeing the trembling well of emotion frightened him as much as its power tantalized him. He longed for Sanaria to be behind him. However he couldn't feel her comfort any longer. His hand wrapped around Des's crest had lost sensation. The only thing left was himself, but even that rapidly became lost amid projected sensation.

"Veh Feyera!"

"Wha—?" That voice. Nearing a climax, the world around him became colored in burgundy. He knew what it was; it was his body involuntary protecting itself from itself. There was nothing more he could do; everything was snatched from his control. His mind was being viciously dragged away from reality.

"Fu—AHHH!" he tried to cry out, but the hurricanes' wind swallowed his words. Tempest upon tempest of projected thought in front of his palm wanted nothing more than to consume. Nothing was stopping him from letting it either. Why should he try to impede it? It was his life-force. Perhaps he could leave his body once and for all through this well of emotion.

The whole scene had begun to become oddly detached. Edge felt like he was not even alive any longer. The reason why he was here didn't matter, only the feeling. Like him, it had a will of its
own. A simple, objective goal to drench the world in saturated emotion. A will so real and vibrant, he could touch it with his own. Where did the two of them meet? Where did the two of them stop meeting? Could it have been that tiny space between an outstretched palm and a swirling convolution of dust?

"…!" His breaths had stopped long ago. Realizing this, fear quickly overtook him, its presence darkening color hues to shadows of black. "…!" In panic, Edge's body went into a set of spasms. Through burning eyes, his vision became cloudy, liquid rubies poured into his peripherals closing in on his center of sight like rivers of blood.

Feeling his convulsions Des bellowed from below him, [Edgie?! Y'alright?]

He couldn't answer her. He couldn't even see her. Touch was vanishing as well; his limbs felt as waiflike as phantoms. All his senses were being drawn into the maelstrom.

"Feyera no! Let it go!" he heard amid the delirium. But it couldn't be Sanaria, she was back on the PWC!

[Boss!]

A soft breath of warmth brushed his back. A beautifully warm sensation entered his heart to replace the cold shivers of breathlessness. He wondered what it was. Sanaria? It felt as comforting as her touch; as comforting as her heart pressed against his.

"ARGH!" Edge hollered as consciousness fired back into his head. He was hunched over on his Gyarados' head crest, trying to get the vicious field to leave his outstretched grasp.

The turbulent energy spiraled out of his possession, savagely riling through the air with whistling fury. Growing, swirling arms of energy blistered out towards the harbor's gate, their velvety spiral arms like dust of lavender. Though not nearly as potent as what Sanaria and he had created before, it still managed to slice through the air at an impressive speed and force.

He greedily took in air with a "Gasp!" the moment the fabrication collided into orangey metal grates.

With a crackle and groan, the metal twisted. Buckling outward towards the sphere's heart like melted wax. The fat flame-heated rails bent outwards, opening the fortress like harbor as if it were a Closter. Every second was agonizingly slow. With a blink of his eyes and a snap, the well fell in upon itself and vanished in a cloud of ethereal smoke.

"…!" he wheezed, unable to vocalize even a single syllable. It had hurt. It had hurt more than ever before. The willpower needed to control breathing was difficult to hold onto. Breaths slipped out irregularly. Flames in the heart tingled his stomach. In erratic throbbing, pressured tubes of blood reached their tendrils down into his body's deepest crevices, their steady thumping a cacophonous rhythm foreign to him, yet paradoxically completely buried within himself.

"…?" he breathlessly asked his cold outstretched hand before his stance crumpled like a house of cards atop his Pokemon.

[Nice work, Edgie-boy!] Des said in awe, completely unaware of how much her trainer had over exerted himself. [Now hang on; I'm gonna go for it!]

"Don't…" he tried to say, but he had suddenly lost the ability to communicate with his Pokemon. He was in the dark. Able to hear them, but unable to respond. He made a tight fist and pulled on Des' crest to get her attention.
Oi, saddle up.

[No!] Brucie squealed in protest. He pointed a paw past Feyera's knee, in line with Des' sight. [I made that metal too hot! You'll never get us through without being cooked alive!]

Feyera's eyes drooped, along with his posture. He collapsed against the back of Des' head with a light "thump!" Saved again by grace.

[Boss!]

[Are you okay?]

Edge nodded, his face pressing on something cool. Squinting open his eyes, he discovered it was the scaly hide of his Gyarados. "Mmm…nugh?" he groaned, lifting off the Pokemon with a very weak arm. Peering down at his heart and could have sworn he saw Sanaria's hand there. A double take revealed that it was his human hands possessively gripping the metal. Maybe his mind had gotten confused.

[Hey, come'on sleepyhead!] Des said shaking softly. [Ya did your thangy a'gain. Time to move!]

Edge's voice waivered, "Huh…?" He was barely able to provide an audible response. How were his Pokemon acting so normal after his violent display of psyonics? Why weren't they perturbed that he'd almost let it loose? Did they even know how close he'd come to losing control?

[Don't panic now, but looks like we've got company coming from the other harbor!]

Sure enough, there were PWCs emerging from the smaller harbor where Feyera and Sana had originally escaped from. They swarmed out, like beady black insects in the distance. Pokemon were likely in tow as well.

"More? More of those things…?" puttered Feyera. "*Wheeze*…We need to hurry…*cough* or Sana and July will be in trouble!"

Of course, the trainer did not even question why they were even working PWCs in the first place. He hadn't been able to put the pieces together yet. Phaeton was just as much a mystery to him as it was to the rest of the world. Reasonably enough, he blamed himself for the electronic interference, and his guardian angel of a friend—Fredrick Irving—for stopping Cipher's missile.

[But what can we do…?]

"Nothing." Lethargy made his mind grind to a halt. "We're…*huff* just sitting ducks now until the gate cools."

[Boss!] Unexpectedly, the Charmeleon hurdled over Edge's shoulder and in front of him, using Des' back for support. [What did you tell me before about fire?]

"Huh…Brucie?" Edge raised a brow.

[Back before we hopped a ride on Des' back!]

"I don't…?" With a loose sleeve, he wiped a sweaty portion of his hair from his eyes. Everything had been jumbled up inside his head. What was his Pokemon talking about?

[It doesn't matter how hot a fire burns, with enough water you can quell any firestorm. You just gotta know the weakness. And you gotta keep fighting.]

'It doesn't matter how hot a fire burns, with enough water you can quell any firestorm. You just gotta know the weakness. And you gotta keep fighting.']
Suddenly it made sense. "—And with water…got it!" Edge said triumphantly. Clutching his first Pokemon in his arms, the young man cleared his throat, lowering his Alterieno boot heel into one of the fissures between Des' scales. It was so rigid and chaliced that he doubted she could even feel the makeshift fastening onto her body. "Give it an Aqua Tail attack, Des!"

[Here's goes!] With a resounding roar, the Pokemon raised her back tail. This shifted the weight a lot, shaking Feyera and Brucie since there was hardly that much space for them to share to begin with. But he held fast, holding his breath and clenching every muscle in his body as the creature below him snapped her entire lower body like a whip.

"Pwwwsshthhhh!" It only took a split second for the cascade of water to envelope Des' tail fins as they sliced into the pristine bay water. Clouds of frothy bubbles heralded the ensuing wave of water. In a devastating crackle, the ensuing wave affronted the harbor gate with enough force to turn a ship. The aquatic barrage splashed against the metal sheet and hot steam quickly concealed the gap with a hiss.

"Alright! Great job, Des, take us through!"

[We can't even see!] protested Brucie.

To be honest, it wasn't even something Edge had considered. Everything was becoming so wrapped up in his present emotions. Reality felt like a distant form of prose, a long forgotten mystery novel. He had difficulty making the differentiation between feeling and fact.

"I…It's a risk we need to take, we have to get Lorelei's boat back! That's our only chance."

[Are you sure—?] "I've never been surer—" he gave Brucie a small wink "—this is going to get us out of here. This is going to get you better, friend." Buckling close to the scaly hides of his Gyarados as she reeled her head back he insisted, "It has to!"

A gracefully tall woman, with snowy blonde hair balled behind her petite face, pensively addressed the situation to her companions with a glare. Hollowly, her voice broke the steady rhythm of blips from her blank computer screen. ". . . He's gone dark."

The nearby men in the dim room peered over at her. Her thin jawline was a sharp chiseled diamond, her eyes an icy blue, and her lips red as a wild rose.

One of the higher-ranking men rushed over to her, his tie flapping from his black business suit as he sprinted. Hovering next to her, his height barely equal to hers he asked, "Off the map completely?"

"Mmhmm." She nodded, pawing her chin with a petite finger. "Exactly as I expected."

"Huh?" The young man scratched the base of his neck, brushing his dark brown hair stubs. "What the hell is he doing out there in the islands? That place is a DBC ecological conservation!"

"I don't know." She crossed her hands, intertwining her sallow fingers into a tiny nest. "Not yet."

"Celestia, do you want us to intervene?"

Her knuckles chilled with excitement. ". . ." Hatred of the obscure gave her all the motivation she needed.
"—With your command," a nearby man chimed in, "we'll have SENI troops outfitted for deployment in under an hour."

"No," she hushed. "Give him his space. The less he thinks we know the better."

The man at her side rebuked her with a scoff, "A disappearing act is hardly something to be ignored!"

"That's an order." Her piercing glare did not waiver in the slightest. It was seductive, entrancing. It was the type of stare that took command with imperturbable indifference, sapping any dissenting thoughts out from the air itself. "We're not going to risk discovery that we're onto him."

Shot down by her cold leer, he apathetically tucked his tie back behind his jacket's buttons. Feeling aloof, his mind knotted as he answered in detached English, "Affirmative. Commander Celestia."

Her azure eyes sparkled like Sableye crystals in a forlorn cave.

"Gah!" Edge belted, water splashing down from his soaked light brown hair. "Cough! Ah! Ack!"

[Everyone okay?] Edge looked down. He made sure Brucie's tail was kept alit during their plunge through the hole by protecting him with his body. "We made it!"

No doubt they had, but the ensuing sight was anything but promising. The harbor was filled with hallow grey light from overhead fluorescents. Countless beams, suspended like tree branches, danced, twinkling with harsh light over the murky harbor water. The harbor itself had been filled with ships, a myriad of all sizes, about thirty all together spread throughout the sheltered docks.

Though there was a high ceiling, at least twenty stories high, one vessel in the harbor gave the domed roof the appearance of being somewhat restrictive or a size too small. The ship, if it could even be called that, was massive. Incased bow to stern in cold dark plated steel, its tall bladed radar tower nearly scraped the cement ceiling. Its gun projections were too many to count.

Larger than any cruise liner Feyera had ever seen, its shadow was large enough to cast the nearby boats into perpetual night. Like kneeling worshipers, these dwarfed ships bobbled in the twilight, invisibly anchored to faded moors of briny lumber.

Two sharp projections, adorned the black boat's bow giving it the appearance of an angered person's brow. From the craft's nose, the metal spines shot out in two directions, forming a cast-iron 'V'; its tips easily over twenty stories above sea level. There were a few letters written on the side of the massive ship's shiny visage, however their meaning had been obscured by the vessel's sheer size.

"That's…that's…" said Edge breathlessly.

[*Gasp!*]

"I can't believe it…! That thing…it's…" he said fumbling for a name for it. What could one even call that thing? A battleship? A war cruiser?

[…Enormous!]

[Bless my tangled bootstraps! That there's not like anything I've ev'ah seen before!]
"Why would Cipher need such a massive war machine?" There was only one reason for stockpiling a warship, machinery like that rarely saw use during times of peace. "They can't be seriously trying to—"

A loud crackle from above startled Edge and his companions. "Ah! Doctor Feyera, I see you've taken a liking to Cipher's war cruiser. Bet you never thought you'd see one of those outside of a museum. *Cough! Hack!* …Stand down immediately, and I might release your Pokemon instead of cooking them into feed!"

That voice in the loudspeaker was unmistakable. Feyera held on tighter to Des' crest. "EIN!" he shouted.

"Hmmhmm." There was a faint chuckle. "It's nice to see you again too! Although I hardly expected you to come back into my possession after using such—*sigh*—expensive energy to get away. Such a terrible waste, wouldn't you say? So highly irrational of you!"

Feyera knew Ein was trying to trigger a reaction. Unfortunately, he found it difficult to counter the riling urges. Directing his fevered rage into disgust, he said, "I'm going to make sure you never get away with this!"

"What are you going to do? Call the policemen on me? Proclaim the DBC's wildlife sanctuary is headed by criminals? What will you say? Who will even believe you, Doctor Feyera?"

"I—"

"—No one will believe you. No one! You're just a shade to the world around you. A world you can't even remember!"

"…"

"You're alone. A nobody who's forgotten his past. You're afraid, Doctor Feyera, you don't need to project that to me. Frightened now that you're a wanted man, a cold-blooded killer, a rouge psionic."

Ein was right, and it was getting to him. He couldn't even muster a response, let alone think of an actual solution.

"If you have a sensible bone left in your body, you'll know that you're done; backed into a corner just like—"

"No!" He motioned to his Gyarados to pick up her pace as they rounded a wooden post. "I'm not gonna to let you go on with your maddening work."

"FEYERA! You're a product of such maddening work! Never forget that!"

"You're wrong again, Ein; I did this to myself!" Christian said peering down at his torso.

"Humph! And you know it will stay that way…worsen, unless you cooperate with me. Work with me Feyera; I'll help you stand the pain. You already have their species' naivety; you're worse than an ingénue! What's next? Where will it end if you don't make the right choice while you're still able to make a choice?"

Feyera had it. "I wouldn't dare trust you! You only have one goal, you twisted fuck!"

"Twisted?" Ein asked with a smile present in his tone. "That's a subjective term. Oh Doctor Feyera,
"you've grown so incredibly personal over the past two years!"

"Take the subjectivity and shove it up your ass! It's personal now, you murderer!"

"Peh…All your anger and rage can't touch me! I'm the gatekeeper. Your gatekeeper. I deal in facts, not emotion. You're a husk, a parasite on a fool's errand, whimsical as the crazed mutation that's overtaken you."

"I will; I'm coming for you!" Edge egged on, the inflammation of his heart now beginning to sting. "Mark my words; you won't get away with this! You're done! Everything you stand for! DONE!"

"You may be a loose cannon, but ironically, you're exactly where I need you to be!" Ein paused, resuming in a darkened tone, with a baseboard's volume, "Your body's biologically processed Mercurium is of importance to me, and now you're expected to share it…whether you want to…or not."

He did not like the sound of that. Not one bit. "—Mercurium?" asked Feyera, thinking about the Reilken Mercurius binding his arm. Juggling Brucie in his arm, he wiggled the Pokemon Sanctum's treasure with a grimace. Surprisingly, it had grown unfastened. He played with it, realizing it had become loose enough to remove from his wrist. "Umph!" Quickly he did so, gingerly dragging its sodden grip off. There was little stopping him. With it being inauspiciously clamped onto his wrist like a collar for the past few days, he was glad to be able to rid himself of it. Ancient relic or not, it had been agitating his skin; the lightweight metal had been causing his arm to grow pale over the past few days. The prospect of feeling glorious sensation against his skin was undeniable. However, as he pulled it past the larger portion of his palm, it suddenly stopped and he felt a sharp pinch, almost as if a bug had bitten him! The pain was almost sharp enough to make him toss Brucie.

"Yeowch!" he said, muffling his shriek in his shoulder. After the shock subsided, he padded the previously covered part of his arm. Strangely, the Reilken Mercurius was dangling from his wrist like a Banette, strings causing it to spin and dance in midair. There was only one problem. Those strings were attached to him! Like a thin pair of umbilical cords, two wire thin projections from the bangle's interior were buried right into his arm! In a mixture of agony and shock, he pawed the once hidden area. His wrist had a ring of softer paleness; a band of grey tattooed on his arm, as if it had been put to sleep by the grip of whatever was on his arm. The Reilken Mercurius began to wobble and wiggle the two cords running into his arm. "Ngh…ugh…*gasp!* Holy shit…"

[Um, boss? What's a'matter?]

Feyera didn't hear Brucie. He couldn't. A warming, filling sensation had started to flow through his whole body. It was strange, like being hugged from the inside, bringing warmth out to the world. So potent was the sensation, even the trembling vibrations of the hooks anchored in his arm became pleasurable motions he could draw ecstasy from. Warm shivers and euphoric urges blurred his sight into a pearly cream. The whole harbor had become immaculately bright and cheerful. "Ahh…ahh…huff…!" he panted in soft breaths.

"Psshhh!" Hearing a dry hiss dragged his attention back to the brace quick enough to see steam being expelled from the hoop's interior. Next, a small glass tube popped out of an internal chamber of the ebony metal, tugging him into reality again. "Ugh…*groan* …oh?" Feyera fingered the revealed vial's base, pulling it out from the Reilken Mercurius. He gasped. It was filled halfway with a bright, translucent, green liquid. On the side, a coded label with tiny blocked font read, "Serenithium T-10". Barcodes and cryptic scientific terms clouded its meaning.

Impossible! he thought. Reilken Mercurius—what he thought was the ancient relic from the
Pokemon Sanctum was not ancient at all. Uncertainty was arising from its every orifice.

Pulling again, he stopped at the knuckles; the tube like blood hooks were dug into his arm! Why had it even attached itself to him in the first place? What was going on? Whatever it was, it wasn't what he had thought. His disgusted expression winced as the wires tugged on his arm's skin, riling heightened sensation there. So sensitive was the feeling, he became unable to stop, groaning as the wrenching gave way to blood. Nauseated, he clutched his Pokemon's scales tightly and braced his gut with his partially freed hand. Why did I even put the damn thing on in the first place? "Urgh… what the—! URAGHK!"

* [AYE! Watch where you're spittin' ya seasick landlubber.]

"Cough! Ack!"

[Des, he looks really ill! —Boss, are you all right? What happened?]

He shook his hand. Dizzying anger took over. "Shit…*huff*" Lurching and swearing under his breath, he weakly asked the massive spinning room, "S—st—STOP!"

Edge's Pokemon couldn't do anything to help their trainer; his uncontrollable moans continued gained intensity, feeling riling every last one of his nerves.

"Feyera…" A few seconds passed before Ein acknowledged Edge with taciturn, "You're not going to be able to fight off what I have in store for you should you remain uncooperative. I'll assure you of that. Resistance is pointless."

"Gah!" Tearing the rest of the device off, its tubed wires snapped near the base. Thick substance poured out. Another firmer tug brought the grip off his hand. "T—this is no ancient relic…*cough*…" Edge said softly. He lurched again from the Gyarados' back.

[You gonna be alright dear?] she asked, now more concerned. Feyera didn't get seasick; Feyera wasn't one to moan.

"Urgh…ahh…"

[I think he's gonna be sick again!] exclaimed Brucie.

[Don'tcha spill any o' that belly gunk on me!]

"N—no…I need to bandage this," said the trainer. "AH!" Using his sleeve and pressure from his other hand, he quelled the initial spout of blood drops. Subsequently, the heightened sensations he was recently feeling in bouts of ecstasy ground to a halt. "Urgh. What the hell…? What the hell did Reilken Mercurius do? *Gasp!* FREDRICK! What was he doing to me?"

[What happened?]

"This…thing." Edge coughed, putting the wired device in front of his Pokemon to see. "Guh…it wasn't just wrapped around my wrist. It frickin' bit me! It was injecting me with something—" he said clutching the half-empty vial of 'T-Serenithium -10'. He'd never heard of the compound before. It could have been anything, but intuition led him to believe it wasn't very good. And it certainly wasn't the ancient Reilken Mercurius from the Pokemon Sanctum. He bit his lip, fighting the gut-wrenching feeling of being duped. It had all been a lie.

[What?] asked the Pokemon confusedly. Edge had ordered him to stand back upon putting on the so-called-gift from Fredrick. It was looking less like a gift at all with each heated second.
"I…urgh! I don't know. Ah! Dammit! I have some serious questions for 'Fredrick' he said snarling the man's name. He was angry; he'd been misled, tricked, deceived, fed a lie. It had to have been the case! What was Fredrick trying to do with modern tech wrapped around my arm? Control me?

Or worse? I trusted him so much... "Damn…maybe he was using me after all…"

He'd have to figure it out later. Now wasn't the time; the point of the matter was the device was no longer intravenously feeding him that serum. Solemn thoughts persisted however: It could be anything he was injecting me with…I trusted him. And he lied to me.

Pocketing the increasingly bizarre piece of technology, Feyera motioned to Des to move towards the docked side of the black vessel. She silently complied, going to the craft's right. Brucie remained deathly quiet as well; Feyera nervously patted his Chameleon's leathery hide with his convalescing hand. His arm was still in pain, but the sensitivity was slowly fading away along with the elevated throbbing upon removing it. Frustrated, he continued to scan the area for any sign of Ein or his men. He felt a small draft pick up in the otherwise still port. It was coming from the docks.

Des did not feel the breath of air. [What is it now?]

Someone…something else is in the harbor. "Where are you?!" Edge hollered, "Show yourself! EIN!"

Eerie silence. Then a faint bone chilling "click". "Me? I'll be joining you in no time, Feyera. Show a little patience why don't you?" Ein's voice answered over loudspeaker, grumbling at his assistant, "These inter-base elevators are dreadfully slow, especially on back-up generators."

Feyera said quietly to his Pokemon, "He's not here yet."

They nodded. [Mmm.]

Worriedly glancing at the dark corridors where dock ramps led to, his spine trembled. Was he going crazy? No, he couldn't be, that premonition felt real. "That means there's—"

"—I'm sure you'll find yourself some company, Mister Feyera," Ein said, interrupting Feyera's apprehensive thoughts. "Oh, you didn't think I would let you peruse around, did you?"

"Huh?" Feyera asked the loudspeaker. And then it dawned on him: Ein had a counter plan.

"Pathetic, your wit's been dulled by passion. Take a good look around, Doctor Feyera. Don't get too comfortable though. You don't remember our 'housed horrors' do you? I'll wager Delta-Two is the only one of our specimens you can remember; it's a part of your genes now, after all. But cheer up, young doctor! You may've surprised me, but I've some surprises for you yet!" There was a soft laugh. The transmission eerily cut off with a snap. Only a Beedrill's blur of buzzing remained in the cold, damp air.

A loud "GWROARH!" echoed from afar, its resonance rattled the nearby iron chains in bloodcurdling jingles. Quickly, he whipped his head to the left, in the direction where he had heard the eerie noise come from. "Is some—thing there?" he whispered.

Nothing was there. Just a dark corridor in-between docks leading further down into the base, its stairwell a blackish pitch into hell.

[Huh?] asked his Pokemon.

Feyera turned back to face his Pokemon, giving them a shrug. "Nothing." What had he dragged
them into? *We're here on a mission,* Edge adamantly thought. *Gonna do it; no matter what.* But the thoughts persisted. Did he imagine that noise? Was he going crazy? Maybe Sana was right about the heart shard overheating his mind. He had no idea how fevers worked for Gardevoir. He had no idea how anything worked anymore. He'd been tossed into obscurity, just like Ein had said.

[Whole place is quiet now that Ein finally shut his yapper!]

Worriedly, Feyera swallowed hard. "I—hope it stays like that."

Dwarfed by the steel juggernaut above them, they pressed forward in folly uncertainty. As the group toddled through the stagnant harbor alongside the Cipher dreadnought, the shadow of the vessel overtook them. Edge looked up and pointed at the sides of the warship. Like sharpened timber, its guns and cannons pointed outwards, a forest of metal and might alongside its face.

[My word!]

"Look at all those weapons..." he whispered. "We have to warn someone...! Shit. The whole world is in danger!" It was nerve racking; not only was it enormous, but it was armed to the teeth. The only consolation was that it did not appear to be in operation. All of its lights were out; its deck canons had all wilted. You would need an entire crew to operate a ship of this magnitude. You might even need a second crew to oversee the first crew. But the eerie thing was that the entire harbor was empty. No workers, no Cipher, no Team Rocket. Just him and this enormous ship. It was ominous. Not a sound could be heard, save for the irregular squealing of a nearby air vent's fan.

"...! Is that a massive RAIL gun on top?" Feyera pointed to the striking cannon atop the ship's main battery. Its wide round barrel had splits along the cylinder before the encased recoil absorbers. "Holy mackerel...that thing looks like it could overtake the entire southern seaboard! How is this all possible?!"

[Huh?]

"It's just...Cipher. They're just scientists collaborating with Team Rocket. Aren't they?"

[And?]

"*Sigh* I guess you'd think these guys would be gathering a whole army together with ships like these. And armies outside the KNRA are about as common as unicorns," Edge said, resorting to humor in order to offset his anxiety. Having a standing army was outlawed following the Great War; supposedly, peace existed when there was only one group holding the guns.

[An army?]

"It...doesn't make any sense!" Rationality failed him. He couldn't come up with a single reason behind what Cipher was doing! Sapped of logic, he twisted his hands into a knot, subconsciously applying pressure on his wrist. Frustrated, he had forgotten entirely about the 'Reilken Mercurius'.

[What do you mean?]

"Think about it. What's the point of using ships from the Great War era when you don't even have an army to command? Where would they find the manpower?" Edge stroked his chin to dry water off, "Huh...*sigh* Where's the connection? What's the link? Goddamn, why can't I figure it out?!"

[Beats me.]
"I'm sure glad she's sleepin' now. Would be a shame if that monster woke up. Betcha she'd be one hell of a grumpy mule to contend with."

"True. Count our blessings. Let's just find and board the yacht before Ein gets here! He must be at the other end of the complex."

They eventually rounded the cruiser; it took a noteworthy amount of time to accomplish. The inky blackness of the hull reflected from underneath the surface of the water, bleeding into the harbor's water like slick oil. Slowly they passed under the hull's penumbra.

"I have a real bad feeling about this." However, he couldn't explain why. Perhaps too many thoughts were going through his head. First the flash of light, then Fredrick's claimed "recovered artifact" turning out to have clamps and wires running through it. Serenithium. What did it all mean? Had he been injected with drugs this whole time? Why would Fredrick want to do that?

Silently, he hoped that he worst wouldn't happen. He couldn't imagine confronting him. Cowardice took hold of his thoughts.

[Hey dear,] Des whispered, catching wind of his tepidness, [you're gonna make sure it's all okay in the end.]

[Yeah, cheer up boss, at least nothing's moving.]

[We're alone, c'mon this is gonna work, Cipher wasn't ex'pectin' company!]

Feyera didn't feel that way, and his thoughts were elsewhere. "The second I get my radio back, I'm getting into contact with Fredrick…"

[Yeah…?]

Feyera nodded as they passed the warship, eager to regain his possessions. Suddenly out of the dark shadows, a bright white ship appeared. "Hey! That's her boat right there! The Prima!" he said reading the cyan colored name.

Indeed, a large yacht lay ahead of them, pure and snowy, but dwarfed against the cruiser. Its bow was badly damaged, but patched in multiple places. The nose of the ship had been sharpened into a point. Or perhaps that was just the exposed skeleton of the ship.

Des' grin widened. [That's exactly what I'd reckon a fancy, schmancy yacht would look like!]

"Okay, we'll get aboard and figure out how to start it up before Ein gets here! Get us close to the docks."

With a quick leap, Edge lunged onto the dock boards. He helped his Charmeleon climb down from his back.

[Thank ya for ridin' the 'Des-press Express'. Here's to the next time I gotta save your hinny!]

But Feyera was feeling too detached to listen to Des' rambling. His eyes stared emptily at the area where the bracelet had previously him. It was so sallow it reminded him of Sana in a way.

[Boss?] Brucie asked, as he regained his footing on the chipped wooden boards covered with velvety anti-slip material.

Feyera replied in a daze, "Huh?"
[Don't we need to hurry?]

"Oh!" Realizing his trance, he jumped. "Sorry!"

[C'mon, what's gotten into you, boss? Let's move! Miss Sana and July are waiting for us to return with the bigger boat!]

"Right! Okay Des, stay at the front of the yacht and we'll toss you a line to help you get up…"

But the sea serpent wasted no time. [I got this on my own, busted!] She leapt from the water with a loud splash and landed on the bow of the vessel, wetting the dock boards with a mighty splash. The entire vessel shook.

"Haha!" Edge laughed. "Looks like you got it taken care of already, Des!"

She poked her head out over the bow. [Always do!]

Edge smiled, "Okay Brucie, I'll race you to the boat's gangway!"

[You're on!] Now that they were back on land, his tail was no longer in as much danger.

But Feyera managed to keep up with his swift partner, breaking a sweaty pace in the process. "Let's *pant* get on through the deck ramp and then figure out how to hotwire the y—oh…!"

He froze. The sheer surprise stopped him from swearing aloud.

A shadowed figure stood in front of them, blocking off the florescent lights from behind him as he approached the metal ramp. His broad shoulders and exaggeratedly tall collar cut out his stiff outline. A glistening golden badge adorned his right breast, reflecting aquarium-like light from the aquamarine water below the gangway. Imbedded on the brooch's face was an emboldened five-pointed cross, trapped within a gilded, diamond-shaped border. Two lines met at right angles, forming a lowercase "t" and the fifth line intersected at forty-five degrees between the top right-side points. Feyera knew symbol. It was the IPF.

Next to his shield-like badge, a gossamer tie, sinuous with a spiraling navy design, puffed out from his ebony vest. Ebulliently unraveling, it blew up against his chiseled face when he reached the landing. With a dark gloved-covered hand, he tucked it back into his vest with a growl. "Always hated these uniforms," he desultorily grumbled. White light from behind him revealed a shining silver metal beam that ran on his back parallel to the shoulders, splitting into razor-edged aileron fangs on one end.

With a firm first step onto the gangway, he proceeded to walk in a stiff path towards Feyera. His split coattail followed him in symmetric bounces. The mounted RAIL gun on his back clinked with each stride. However, it did not loosen its position; it did not shift. No, it was worn with an over-the-shoulder leather strap and supported by a back-mounted metal support. It retained his shadowy form—a shadow of a crucifix. Eventually his rigid advance placed him only a few paces in front of Edge.

Feyera's eyes widened in surprise. But there was little acknowledgement on the other man's behalf save for a modest grin, barely recognizable in the shadowy murk cast on his visage from behind.

With a cough, he adjusted his posture, towering even higher on the dry dock boards. His chatoyant eyes, despite being shielded under a dark veil, were piercing.

Feyera opened his mouth, unsure of what to say, he wasn't expecting this confrontation to happen
so soon. What would he say? What would he do? The young man's thoughts scrambled as he stood idly facing Fredrick.

For better or for worse, there was no need for Edge to utter a syllable since the man's newly materialized lips formed swift words, their meaning frosted in ambiguity.

"Ahem! Well, if it isn't Mister Christian F. West. It's about time you showed up again to save the day."
"Nobody has called me that in years. I'm Mister Feyera," said the young man in a mixture of suspicious inquiry and shaky hesitation. Unbeknownst to him, his emerald eyes flickered with a reddish glow emanating from the cast-iron veins of frenzied orange embedded so intimately in his irises. Fleeting psyonic impulses twitched his every nerve. "Fredrick…how can you be here?" he wondered.

"You don't seem too sure!" fired back the other man from the edge of the dock. "*Ahem* Then again, you've always projected an 'air' of confusion. Especially in regards to your past, 'Edge'."

"…!" His eyes violently tingled, shaking with treacherous aspiration; a desperate yearning for truth – conflicted with an equal craving for closure of some sort. Something. Anything. Raising his pale forearm to rub against his low nose bridge, Feyera hollowly asked, "The past…? What the hell do you mean by that?"

"Tell me something. Are you going to deny your past?" asked the towering man. He whimsically stroked a few of his short dark brown hairs into place beneath a wide-brimmed hat; its suede rim concealed most of his face. "Or are you already too far beyond answering that inquiry?"

"M–my past…?" Straining to see facial details, Feyera squinted. Nevertheless, the light from behind the man's broad shoulders was much too harsh, cloaking him in a frozen eclipse of shadow.

"Too invested in pleasures gained from your powers?" prodded the cloaked agent.

Feeling dizzy and lost, Feyera's boyish voice cracked. "N–no. I can't remember the past. Fredrick, I have amnesia, remember?"

But the shunting trainer was cut off by a blunt response from the solemn police agent. "Your past–" Fredrick pointed an accusing finger at him "–is it still a dream to you?"

"A dream…? What?"

"…Is it all a wicked dream you can't seem to wake up from…?"

"What do you mean by that?" he asked anxiously.

"Dreams take subconscious will to experience. Experience takes conscious will to master. Is it not true that we are dead and only seem to live, fallen deeply into misfortune, fancying that a dream is life? …Or are we alive and is life dead?" Had his imposing, militaristic posture not been enough of a cue to Feyera, the analogies to dreams were certainly distinctive to the International Police Officer's prior conversations with him. And yet it made no difference, for far too much had taken place in too short a span of time.

"Fredrick, cut the nonsense! Is that you?!" he asked in earnest; stepping lightly forward.

"Ah–ah!" Fredrick raised a stern hand, and Feyera's advance paused without a second of hesitation. "Relax," he ordered.
"...!" It was as if a nerve had been pricked, something invisible seemed to hold Feyera back. "Humph."

Almost nonchalantly, Fredrick shook his head in a quick, "No. I'm afraid I'm not who you think I am, Mister Feyera."

"What? What are you saying?" Feyera shouted in disbelief. "Wait! But you're him! You're Fredrick! You have to be!"

"Oh?" shot the agent scornfully. "What makes you so sure?"

"Erm! I– err… Your badge! Your voice! Even your posture, Fredrick!"

"Says the man with amnesia. Tell me: does that constitute anything more than vaguely-linked conjectures, doctor?"

"*Gasp!*" The trainer peered at the ground, however the brightly illuminated weapon on Fredrick's back beckoned frantically at his attention; spurting Feyera into a state of involuntary shock. He held his head as psyonic aches overtook him. "*GAAH!*" he wallowed in inexplicable agony.

"Hmph. Curious. Seems as though the positive reinforcement worked," said the police agent peering at Feyera's arm. "What are you sensing?" Fredrick asked coldly. "TELL ME!"

"The RAIL gun!" Feyera answered in a hurry. Though the device was eclipsed by Fredrick's expansive shoulder frame, there was no denying the dreadful warmth of the weapon. "I… I… can feel its power radiating…!" he answered in heaves. "It's everywhere… I… I…"

"Hmm? A RAIL gun, huh?" A faint grimace crossed the agent's face. "Like the one I have here?" he asked while tauntingly tapping the ammunition carton resting above his waist with a gloved hand. "Is that what you sense with your psyonics?"

"…Yes!" exclaimed Feyera as the searing pain began to dissipate as suddenly as it had arrived. Fredrick hid a smile. "The very rifle the two of us retrieved from the Rocket Headquarters!"

Feyera's heart seared with warmth. He clutched the metal shard as delicately as he could before the heated sensation came forth. "*Gasp!* Fredrick… there's something wrong with that weapon…! I thought you said it was evidence… Why do you still have it?"

"Hmm…" He raised his broad shoulders in a labored exhale; the ion rifle rattling, its composite cylindrically arranged steel vents clipping noisily against the back of a solid brass wreath adorning the agent's tall, military collar. "…Must've slipped my mind. You of all people should be able to understand the massive draw of power."

"…! Fredrick… don't you remember?" said Feyera fighting a debilitating chill running up his already stiffened spine. His pale eyes darted to Fredrick's concealed hands. "Did you forget our mission?"

"No, Mister Feyera. The assumptions you've made since we first met are bordering on dangerous naivety. 'Fredrick Irving' is the name of a man who has passed on," he spoke while raising an accusing finger, "not unlike yourself, Christian. *Sigh* Fredrick's… a dead man."

"DEAD?" shouted Feyera. "NO!"
"Afraid so." Fredrick shook his head haphazardly. "Like your friend Fredrick, you propagated your death. Mister Feyera…I don't know why I held on for so long. Deep down, I hoped for a different outcome."

"–Stop! That isn't possible!" Feyera said with a start. "Dead? Me? Fredrick, how on earth can I be dead?! Did you really believe the bogus reports of what took place in Pewter City? I promise, that was only to keep the League away from my psyonics!"

"Who do you think bought Brock off?!" snarled Fredrick. "Think about it. Brock's low man on the Pokemon League's totem pole; light years away from recognition by the Pokemon League."

"No!"

"You see, Mister Feyera, I helped to fabricate a lie. I gave your fugitive powers the structure they so desperately needed. But, in the end, I went too far… and I'm afraid it will cost me my life… as well as yours."

"–What are you saying? Fredrick! You're alive! You're not dead! You can't really be –"

"dead…?! Is that even possible? AHH! What are you saying?!"

"–Your alarm… The telepathically projected uncertainty. Is it cognitive dissonance? Frantic disbelief? …Or, maybe, has that scar burrowed that intimately into your mind? Can you no longer display your signature cynicism?"

"Yeah–no!" yelled a confused Feyera. "My alarm is–" "–warranted… *cough cough!* all things considered!" The world around him grew redder as his heart pounded.

"Oh?" pressured Fredrick. "Is it now?"

"YES!" shouted Feyera, breaking out of the telepathic trance he had been sent into. "Who the hell says stuff like that to another person?!"

"Another… person…?" repeated Fredrick hollowly. "Are you even a person anymore?"

Anxiously, Feyera folded his arms across his chest. "I… I thought we were friends."

"Then your definition of friendship requires an adjustment. You take my orders!"

Feyera gasped, paralyzed in alarm, not without an inexplicable ache of irony in the recognition that he had been duped. He'd been fed a lie. However, what remained much worse than the spuriousness itself was the fact that he was blissfully unaware of it this entire time! Thrusting his hands in Fredrick's direction, he screamed manically, "WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY TO ME?!"

"Ah… ha. Come now, Mister Feyera, there's hardly been any harm done. What's good for the Zangoose is good for the gander, right?"

"You tricked me…!" he whispered; blood broiling from within his core. "Why?!"

"What I did was not unlike what a certain scientist I had the pleasure of meeting in Celadon did," added the agent for good measure. "You're nothing but a Pokemon tricked into believing that you're human."

"Oh yeah? And who the hell does that make you?"

"*Ahem* Heavens, Mister Feyera! There is a strict set of confidential codes I adhere to. I could tell
you who I am, but that might only make our situation worse. I know about your psyonics. I know the inherent flaws of them being tied to emotion. You could say that, in a way, I'm your trainer."

"No… no…!" he whispered emptily. A dull rattle in the background made both men quickly survey the seemingly abandoned harbor. Seeing nothing obviously capable of causing the noise, Feyera quickly asked, "How do you know anything more than what I told you about myself?"

"You seem to have forgotten that I'm highly trained in gathering all sorts of information."

"—And DECEPTION as well…?!" Feyera retorted. His thoughts raced to the mysterious Reilken Mercurius. "Are you highly trained in that as well…?! Huh?! Tell me!"

"I do my research," replied the stoic agent. "You're – you used to be a prodigy at one point?"

"What's it to you?" Feyera venomously spat. "You're a manipulative heap of Tauros shit!"

"Don't jump so hastily to passion-filled conclusions. Doing so only discredits a prestigious researcher," countered Fredrick. "Your good name is all that's left of the animal within."

"I'm not looking for credit, you hoax!" shouted Feyera. "I'm looking for someone to trust!"

"Hmm…" In response to Feyera's sharpened anger, the uniformed agent wore a grim expression. "My word… You've become quite needy without my guiding arm, haven't you?"

"–I'm not needy!" denied Feyera.

Fredrick shook his head in a toying manner. "I thought I'd never see the day. Maybe there's hope for you yet."

"I only want to understand! What's happening…? Why is it this way…?"

"Didn't you once say something along the lines of: 'if you don't understand something, take the first step towards knowledge and—'"

"NO!" belted the young Pokemon trainer. "No more games!" "I want answers, Fredrick!"

"Answers huh? You sure you're up for that?"

"Yes," he said quietly at first. "AND I WANT THEM NOW!"

"Fine. I owe it to you. Did you think I took your word for it when I found you, half-dead, in Celadon's underground? Did you believe I wrote you off as a simple trainer by the name of 'Feyera'? What a happy coincidence that would be. Yes… that would certainly be in line with your – parasitic – heart's objective, wouldn't it?"

"OBJECTIVE?!" "You promised to help me! I gave you my trust!" Feyera said stomping. "I told you my story back in Celadon! I trusted you! I thought you knew… *gasp* I thought you didn't care about who I was, I thought you only wanted to help me! And then that device… 'The Reilken Mercurius'… the deceit … the filthy lies you fed me…! Why did I trust you?!"

"Did you hope that I too would acknowledge your feeble lies, crafted to cover up the truth behind your psyonics?" asked Fredrick glaring derisively at Feyera's chest. "Hrmph! As if you could run away into a delusion-filled dream of your own lies."

"Lies?" Feyera felt put on the defensive. "The psyonics —" he looked down at his heart "— my psyonics came from out of nowhere! That's all I knew. This shard… it's…"
"–No." interrupted Fredrick, seemingly reading the young man's frantic mind. "You know that isn't true, Mister Feyera. Deep down… inside yourself… you know that isn't the truth. And so do I. … Celesta taught me everything I needed to know about you."

"Celesta…?" Feyera asked emptily. "I don't know any Celesta."

A rare leak of emotion became apparent as Fredrick frowned. "Maybe you'd remember her when she was still Deirdre. Does that name ring any bells to you?"

For some reason hearing her name made him feel inexplicitly tense. Nervous even. "N–no," he shuddered. "I only have my Pokemon. Quickly, Feyera turned to look at his Pokemon. "Brucie…? Des…?" he called out telepathically to the Pokemon.

Nevertheless, before his Gardevoirian transmission received any type of telepathic response, Fredrick began to walk cautiously forward. "I have to applaud your efforts to suppress the truth from your host body," said the towering police agent. "It was quite an ingenious defense mechanism. You fabricated a wonderful world for yourself to live in; one in which you were the victim. One in which you did no wrong. As luck would have it, one in which you could do no more harm to yourself!"

"Then that means… Of course… You knew about Evercrest all along?" he said coldly.

"Knew about it?! Ha! We're here right now, aren't we?" replied the enigmatic agent with a scoff. "And both of us are an integral part of it." Memories of a faded past seemed to flash before Fredrick's walnut brown eyes. Shrugging, he went on to say, "–You were once a researcher here. A bit of prodigy – like I said before. Born a West; you became a prestigious academic doctor of science. Published too… always had an interest in Psychic Type Pokemon. And an unhealthy obsession with the science behind telepathy."

"I–" Feyera felt inexplicably warm inside. Heart aglow in bright crimson, he tried to maintain eye-contact with Fredrick in spite of the growing uncomfortableness of his situation. Guarding his chest he quipped, "It's nothing!"

"Humph. I honestly wouldn't expect anything less from you." Fredrick looked away, staring high up into the harbor's rafters. "Happiness is something we all strive for. You had a noble endeavor: to link minds to generate reoccurring euphoric conditions triggered by psyonics…" This simple act alone seemed to lift an immense weight off Feyera's shoulders. "…However, there was a dark side to the young doctorate's academic illumination, wasn't there?"

He gasped. "…!" As soon as the invisible burden had seemingly disappeared, it returned with teeth. "…I know far more than I wish I knew. Evercrest…this place… was your home. …Twice."

"Huff!" Feyera answered airily. "Twice, huh?"

"Yes," Fredrick replied, the austerely in his voice growing with each passing moment. "And, unfortunately, it was Deirdre's once as well…"

"Humph!" Feyera nervously asked, "Where'd you get an idea like that?"

"The question of 'Where?' doesn't have the same gravity as the question of 'Who?'. And now, it's the latter which matters to a man in my position. Hmm. You, Mister Feyera – endowed with the psyonics from an unwilling experiment – you go by the arrogant title of 'Edge'. But what's the truth, 'Doctor Feyera'? …Who are you? Who have you become? Do you know who 'Edge' really is?"
"I have an idea," replied Feyera with a slight frown. "I've embraced it as my identity; I don't have my memories to fall back on." However, his brief reminiscing of the Semblance mission left him rather perturbed. More than usual too. "Fredrick?"

"Hmm?" Fredrick turned his head to the side. "What's that…?"

"Fredrick, how did you find out my psyonics weren't natural and why did you go along with it? You could have told me. All this time – …What was the purpose of not telling me?"

"—Hah!" Fredrick raised both his gloved hands high up into the air, displaying his impressive arm span. "Some things are better left unspoken amongst children."

"I'm not a child! Answer the question!" barked Feyera. "I want to know how! I want to know why! What does this all mean?"

"I suppose I owe it to whatever is left of you – before you disappear." The police agent nodded, whilst briefly pawing the golden wreath adorning his officer collar. Loosening a silver neck chain from below his collar, the sharp-nosed agent exposed two army plated identification tags; though Feyera was not close enough to read their stamped print. "– As you've already so expressively urged – the only question that's left is: why. Why Mister Feyera? Why did you do it? What was your intent?"

"Uhhgh?!" Feyera grunted. "That's a silly question."

"Yes. Troublesome, isn't it? Why? That's what I need to know," Fredrick said with familiar trance-like resolve. "That's the last piece of the puzzle. That's the most important piece. It's all I have left. If there is any way to tell me before it's too late … it would finally put this old man's heart at peace."

"Why…?" Feyera asked hoarsely. "I don't know! Amnesia and all that! Pah!"

"—Mister Feyera, do you know why you are who you are right now? Has your curious wonder brought you to contemplate the reason behind why things are this way for you? …Or has an unanticipated variable come between you and your work somewhere along the way?"

Immediately Feyera thought about Sanaria. Her eyes, her heart, the brief ecstasy the two of them shared over and over. Despite the undeniable warmth filling his chest, Feyera roguishly answered, "Uh… I'm not sure what you mean by that, Fredrick. I'm doing my part for Pokemon."

"Interesting," said the scrutinizing officer, "and how does that feel? To be 'doing your part'?"

"It feels… like it's something I need to do," Feyera alleged. Yet the sarcasm he expressed was not without subtle sincerity. "I want to be able to communicate with my Pokemon. …I want to do what I can with this psynonic gift while I have it."

"Hmm. Not sure if you're going to return the psyonics to their rightful owner?"

"Of course!" Feyera scoffed. However, a nagging thought pestered his mind, echoing in haunting vibrations "I am their rightful owner."

"Really?" pressured Fredrick. "Then it is only a matter of time before they completely take over."

Shrugging nonchalantly, Feyera bluffed, "I've just gotten more used to life with psyonics, that's all."
"Have you?"

"Correct." Feyera anxiously stroked his drying auburn hair back and out of his eyes. "She's made it easier for me...somehow," Edge thought.

"Does that rationale justify what you've done?"

"Humph. I don't see the big deal. It's no skin of your hide to let me live!" Feyera was surprised to see Fredrick wince his right eye, almost as if he had been struck. "My involvement with Evercrest is in the past. You and I – we have bigger fish to fry for Kanto's sake."

"Perhaps," said Fredrick as he pressed upon his crooked nose bridge. "But there soon may no longer be a 'you' left."

Feyera quickly looked down at his Gardevoir crystal. Indeed it was swollen with blinding light, its edges heated enough for him to feel! The black shirt he wore had begun to cinder upon contact with the mysterious red crystal. "...!" he gasped, but dared not touch the mysterious crescent.

"You told me back in Celadon that your mind could not contain the influx of rouge emotion. And now, I can see it billowing out from your bonded heart in radiant waves of passion. Hah, call me a poet!"

"*Nehh! Urgh!*" The strain to suppress the psyonic rage welling from within was becoming more difficult to contain with each passing insult.

"—I also told you it was likely to be significantly more permanent if you ran out of time. Has the weight of that changed your perspective? Or are you merely here out of coincidence so that you might be cured of your crimes...?"

Feyera insisted, "My objective is the same. I need to fix this! I'm going to fix what happened two years ago! You duped me with the fake Reilken Mercurius, but believe me; I will find the real relic! And when I do...things will go back to normal!"

"*Sigh* You sure are just as motivated as I remember," Fredrick whispered "...It hurts to see that... you've taken that from him too..."

"Mmhm. I–I have to be." Feyera made a tight fist. Pounding into the air he exclaimed, "One way or another, I'm going to make amends, and I'll be damned if you try to stop me!"

"Amends? How can you say something like that?" Disapprovingly, Fredrick waved both his hand and his head back and forth. "You don't even have a grasp on your own identity! You don't even understand the weight of the psychological mess you've gotten yourself into! You're dragging innocents into the whirlwind of consciousness! That's why it has to stop. That's why I'm here."

"—LISTEN! You have a point: I'm in a labyrinth. That's right. I don't know how to correct my former decisions, or how to truly render them at peace with my present actions! I've never known. I've never learned. But I can try, Fredrick! *Huff...* A man can try!"

"How so?" asked a clearly intrigued Fredrick.

"Don't you see? I'm a nobody! I have nothing left! My father, *sigh* gone along with any ties I held to the West estate! ...I was broke by the age of eighteen! Had it not been for scholarships, I may well never have made it to my graduation, let alone get involved in doctorate work!"

"But you didn't—" Fredrick was going to say "have to" however, Feyera cut him off midsentence.
with an irate shout.

"–ARGH! You know what?! You're right! I didn't remain an academic doctor at all! I lost it! I lost it, Fredrick! You hear me?! *gasp* –My doctorate, my dissertation, my entire research on Psychic Pokemon, all of my recent memories … stolen… taken… two years ago." Nevertheless, Feyera couldn't bring himself to confess to Fredrick that the acclaimed 'Doctor Feyera' himself had been the one at fault for losing his identity. "*It– it's all gone…*sigh* I'm not anybody. Not anymore. …Don't you get it? Everything I've worked for is gone! All that's left is me, Mister Feyera." He looked down at his chest. "Edge…is the psyonic scars cast upon me through unconstrained research during my academic years. That's all you need to know."

Fredrick bowed his head. "I'm sure that's the case…" Feyera couldn't tell whether or not Fredrick was being sarcastic. Amid all the raw sensation caving in on young Feyera like a torrent of flooding water, it became nearly impossible to tell. But then the agent offered a comforting "You know something? You've grown up a lot."

"Bah! Now it's your turn," Feyera threatened.

"Hurrm? My turn? I told you already…I'm not alive. Not anymore."

"Fredrick," pausing for but a moment, the young trainer asked warily, "do you know something I don't about psyonics overtaking people?"

"Ah… Despite all your cynicism, Mister Feyera, you still have a sincere heart, don't you?"
Fredrick smiled at Feyera's predictable pout. "You know… sometimes I wonder if that's always been the case. Sometimes I wonder if you got that from your–"

"–Fredrick, cut the damn chitchat already!" Feyera insisted. "Tell me what I want to know!"

"What would be the point of that?" groaned the agent. "It's no good telling you that your inconsistent opinions are all true. The best I can do say is that at least some of your opinions are correct. Forgive me for saying this but: I don't think you've been paying very much attention to all of the details."

"Gah!" In angered disbelief, Feyera asked. "So… you're saying that I'm wrong…!?" "Never mind the 'not-paying-attention' part!" "About how much?!"

"Oh please–" Fredrick pressed against his forehead's temple "–don't act all surprised."

"I'm not acting! Fredrick, this is how I feel! The Reilken Mercurius…the relic that did this to me… was a lie? Dammit!" Feyera swore loudly with a stomp of his high boot. "I don't even know what's real anymore!"

"This shouldn't be news to you: the anguish you feel is more real than anything else, isn't it?"

"I–it is?" Feyera felt alarmingly confused. "Can he be right?"

"Yes, as real as any moment of pleasure, is every moment of pain. The trick is to balance the two. Too much pleasure dilutes the pain allowing you to feel true delight. And too much pain will lead you to despair."

Almost as if he had just snapped out of a sweet dream. It was incredible how crisp and clear the dark harbor had become. Mouth slightly ajar in steeple-like wonder Feyera could barely keep himself standing upright as his vision seemed to overtake him with one bright pulse after another.
To reply to his stupefied silence, the officer twisted his unshaven neck in a stretch. "You haven't lost your mind, have you?" he asked. "...Not yet...? Is it possible...?"

"No! I'm serious; Fredrick, what's your side? Fess up!" Feyera ordered. "Start with the fake artifact you hooked on my wrist! The so-called 'Reilken Mercurius'!"

Fredrick grumbled whilst looking quizzically at Feyera's exposed left arm, where the 'Reilken Mercurius' had been securely stationed until not too long ago. "...You really haven't lost your mind in its absence from your body?"

"No! Of course not! I'm still trying to get back my memories! Fredrick, I trusted you! I trusted your Hypnosis procedure! I trusted that the artifact attached to my wrist was the Reilken Mercurius stolen from the Pokemon Sanctum! And most importantly, I trusted that you believed me when I told you that I could save myself from being overrun by psyonics!"

However instead of lecturing to Feyera with something along the lines of: "Perhaps you shouldn't have been so trusting!" Fredrick replied with a bizarrely straight "I'm sorry."

".../" Feyera could barely process the agent's out-of-place apology. A warm, cushiony sensation nearly forced him to tone down his anger. Gasping from the strange loss of control, he managed to say surprisingly calmly, "...I know it wasn't real. I'll accept that. But I need to know: what did you do to me? Why the armlet? Why the lies...? Why...?" Feyera's waning voice seemed to wispily fill the larges masts of pre-industrial ships as they passed over the distant horizon; the scientist sharing the very same fear of the sailing ship's crew: the fear of being unable to return.

"'Why?' indeed," Fredrick said concealing a pout. "Now you're beginning to see the importance of that...primordial question. 'Why?' is synonymous with purpose, and purpose is synonymous with life itself. Which is why--"

"-Purpose?" Feyera hastily shook his head. "No, this deception of yours goes well beyond any purpose I've been made aware of!"

At this, the police agent smiled. "Your conclusion that I'm the one pulling the strings is a natural response I presume. Considering the circumstances, I can hardly blame you. I suppose if you can't understand something, then it's best to be afraid."

"I'm not afraid!" shouted Feyera. "You just manipulated me like some kind of beast!"

"And what do beasts run off of? ...Fear--" Fredrick held his breath, a tired smile warming his face "--That's really embedded in your nature now for good, isn't it? All you know how to do is attempt to cope with it. Running away isn't coping. The sooner you learn that for yourself the better off you'll be--"

"Wrong! You cured me of senseless fear! You taught me I didn't have to be afraid! That psyonics could be used to help others!"

Fredrick replied rather hollowly, "Did I really...?"

"Yes," insisted Feyera. "You may have not been the trustworthy police agent I've ever met, but you taught me one thing: that I couldn't allow fear to diminish my strength! 'Psyonics are all in the state of one's mind' you said. 'The only hurdle of the mind is fear.'"

Fredrick shook his head. "That emotion is quite hard to shake though isn't it...? Especially when someone else is involved. That's when fear becomes reality. The fear of losing someone special to you...that's true fear. Everything else is...nothing more than a phantom of the mind...a
resurrected ghost of the past ushered into the present…"

"...Whoa, hey now, save the philosophical mumbo-jumbo for your damnable sunlit office!" said Feyera anxiously raising his hands in disapproval.

"Hm hm," laughed Fredrick lightheartedly. "You're right, Mister Feyera. You know, for a prodigy, you've got a pretty good sense of humor. I thought you scholarly types were all dorky recluses."

"WHAT? ...Dorky recluses?!” Trying to make up for the cluelessness concerning why Fredrick would make a sweeping, over-generalized claim like that, Feyera rebuked by saying, "Listen, I don't have time for your petty stereotyping while the entire world's on the brink!" Feyera pointed at Cipher's enormous warship. "NO ONE DOES!"

"On the brink…?" Fredrick tilted his head to look in the direction of the massive war cruiser. However, he hardly seemed to express any derivative of surprise or anxiety. "On the brink of what exactly, Master West?"

"I..." However, Feyera become so accustomed to Fredrick calling him 'Mister Feyera' that he had to pause for a second to say, "um – please don't call me that." Worse still, Feyera didn't have the slightest idea why Cipher had a vessel outfitted for Armageddon.

"Heh," Fredrick nodded warily. "If you insist. But that was who you were."

"I don't completely remember my past life as a scholar!" Frustrated by Fredrick's twisting of his words, Feyera shot back, "Look, you don't need a PhD to know that whatever Cipher's got planned can't be good! Don't you see the size of that battleship? Look at that RAIL cannon! Pokemon can't defend a shore city from that! Kanto will fall if they're caught off guard!"

With profound indifference, he raised his head to stare at the monstrosity – its massive steam turbines aglow from the faintly reflective harbor water. "Personally, I believe in the combined strength of humans and Pokemon can overcome anything," Fredrick said darkly. "Don't you feel the same way in your heart?"

Feyera couldn't tell if Fredrick was being sarcastic; scrambling for the truth, nothing made sense! "...Fredrick, please, no more games. I'm not your enemy here! You have to inform the KNRA! Kanto's in deep shit if that Great War cruiser makes it out of this island's bay!"

"The army?" Fredrick smirked. "Hah! I don't believe that's necessary, young man."

"What?!" Feyera began to advance with a scowl. "What exactly are you suggesting!? We'd need an entire team to overtake a warship that size!"

"Interestingly enough, Pokemon are exactly the answer to our current dilemma. In particular, your Pokemon, Mister Feyera. The one you're always with. The one you depend on to use your psionics!"

"Pah! Pokemon? Let me be clear: there is no Pokemon left. I may have stolen from a Pokemon, but it is a separate entity entirely within my control," Feyera said with as much confidence as the young man could muster.

"Sure..." Fredrick replied with a role of his eyes.

"Fredrick, I don't know what big-game-hunting tactics you're playing at. But I'm going to stick with my original plan since it actually makes some degree of sense! If you want to get out of here alive, I suggest you start appeasing my rationality."
Ah–ah.” An outstretched hand slowed Feyera's progress. Beneath the sleeves of Fredrick's overcoat Feyera could see serrated jet-black markings running up his arms. "Now, now; just because I said you were funny in times of pressure doesn't mean that your humor will get us anywhere fast."

"ARGH! I'm not joking around!" Feyera yelled fretfully, whilst pointing his nose arrogantly up into the air. "Stop acting like a know-it-all!"

"Says the haughty honors student who's lost his memory," sneered the tall agent in a half laugh.

"Humph! You don't know anything!" Feyera replied, his brows tingling.

"No need to mislay your emotional stability either. You don't want to do harm to your particular brew of psyonics before you even tap into them."

Indeed, Feyera had been caught in a frenzy of confusion, anger, and distraught. Worst of all, he could not help but allow it to overtake him. "Emotional stability!?” repeated the overwhelmed young man. "What are you talking about?! This isn't about me! This isn't about psyonics! This isn't about feelings! This is about saving Kanto from Cipher! How can you be so calm?!!"

"And to that, I'd answer: how can you be so disarranged, so radically – emotional – in a time that requires utmost levelheadedness?"

"I… I can't remain levelheaded when I can't even trust the man next to me will do what's right. I can't trust you! The…emotions… *cough* *urhack!* what I'm feeling… it isn't allowing me to!" He thrust his arms out aggressively in Fredrick's direction, feeling marvelously competent in his trigger-happy resort to psyonics. "ARGH! I can't! I won't!"

"Take hold of your temper!" Fredrick's stern voice captured Feyera's attention before it was too late. "Don't you remember from last time?"

"Remember what?" he wondered.

"Remember… All it took was a single police agent to take down the entirety of Team Rocket's Kanto Headquarters." The agent tilted his hand as he spoke, reveling the shining RAIL barrel strapped horizontally across his back. "Though, to be fair, I had a little help from a brave psyonic back then as well." Fredrick opened his hand in a seemingly benign gesture. "…Mister Feyera, I–I"

Fredrick seemed to be getting a little choked up "I hope we can still work together. …As a team without shackles."

"…!" Biting his lip, using the sharp pain to help ignore the overwhelming, driving urge to help protect Fredrick, Feyera replied, "Fredrick… I don't know what the hell's gotten into you. But I'm not about to go along with your plan until I get my answers from you! That's priority if you want my trust on this undertaking!"

"Answers?" sighed Fredrick, "Pray tell: what do you really want to know from me?" Before Feyera could say anything, Fredrick added, "But first ask yourself if you feel the answer will be comfortable. Acceptable even. Mister Feyera, first ask yourself if your capricious heart can endure the potential emotional strain."

"I know what it is I want to know!" "Fredrick," Feyera raised his left arm, pointing at the mark left behind by the armlet; the area of skin had all but lost its color, numbed from either the grip of the device or something much more sinister. "Tell me about the Reilken Mercurius!" ordered Feyera. "Tell me what you injected into me! Why did you tell me it was an ancient device! Why did you
"Hmm…" Fredrick's quiet gaze traveled to Feyera's arm. His brow furrowed at the sight. "Was it completely destroyed?" he asked with an air of suppressed concern.

"Destroyed?!" Feyera manically repeated, showing Fredrick the damaged piece of machinery. "What about the fact that you were sticking me with something?! A serum! A drug! A virus for all I know…! Eh! What was it?!"

"I–I had no choice," Fredrick stumbled over his words. "I'm…sorry.

"You're sorry?! SORRY?! Sorry doesn't cut it, jerk! What was it? What did it do? Where is the real Reilken Mercurius!? *Gasp!*" A bitter shiver ran up Feyera's spine. "Where is the real relic responsible for what took place two years ago?! Tell me! Tell me right NOW!"

"Mister Feyera, calm down!" ordered Fredrick. "This isn't the time for antics!"

"NO! You have no goddamn right to demean me!" Feyera hollered. "I can't trust you! You betrayed me! You betrayed my trust! Tell me right now, you fucking piece of shit: What's stopping me from killing you where you stand!?"

Instead of reaching for his ion rifle in response to Feyera's mounting angst, the illusive agent smoothly replied, "Okay, maybe I have betrayed what your heart calls 'trust'. But, I promise, I only wanted to protect you from yourself."

"By sticking me? Yeah, that sure makes a lot of sense…!" Feyera said crossing his frail arms.

"Let me ask you something: are you able to feel faith? Faith in me?"

"Faith…?" a puzzled Feyera asked. His palms tingled with warmth. Doused in sweat, his arms shivered violently, all his energy holding the beaconing psyonic urges to retreat back into deeper within his mind. Behind a foggy aura of feverish red, the hot-iron doused irises honed in on Fredrick's expression, his face, his muscles, everything about the annunciation as it took place in highly discernible, orchestrated precision right in front of Feyera's enraptured eyes!

"Do you have faith in your heart?" Fredrick lowered his gaze. He peered past the orb of light in Feyera's hands, past that glowing illusion made by the mind and directly into the young man's emerald eyes. "Faith is a sense of trust – transcending the rational, seeing the invisible, believing in the unbelievable, all the while receiving the impossible—"

"—I don't need your silly faith. How could you ask me to take all this on faith? That's nonsense!" Feyera yelled back in dismay. "Quit insulting me!"

"It's one simple request: take a leap of faith," urged the officer, "if anything, then do it in light of the present circumstances. Do it for Deirdre… Please…"

"Faith…?" The word only held a fraction of a meaning to Feyera. "NO!" "I can't… Not after what you've done. Not after all the deceit. Not after you betrayed me…!"

"You know what? Fine. *Ahem!* Do a quick cost-benefit analysis if mere 'faith' doesn't suffice for you." Fredrick lazily rolled his left arm in a wide arch. "Be a good scientist, why don't you?"

"A good scientist…? Is that what I'm supposed to be? …Is that who I'm supposed to be now?"

"Heh. Just look around at where we are, doc! Then why not tell me that us fighting each other is
the rational decision to make!"

"He's right...!" thought the young man. "Gah! Dammit!" Feyera shouted whilst dropping his defensive arms. "Damn your sensible logic...!" he grumbled under his breath.

"Hah! All right! Haha!" Fredrick let out a hearty laugh and rubbed his gruff shadow of stubble. "Glad to see the young researcher hasn't changed too much on his journeys! Were you always a sap for some probability one–oh–one?"

"Bah! You're not off the hook yet!" In his mind, Feyera knew Fredrick was right; the thorough explanation he wanted wouldn't be feasible right now. "I'll have my answers from you!"

"Hey, relax sonny; I don't exactly have anywhere to run away to." But Edge could tell Fredrick was struggling with something inside as he said, "And believe me: I want to leave almost as much as you do. ...This place gives me the creeps."

"All right then." Feyera tried to encourage the glowering agent by saying, "Say, you know what?"

"Hmm?" Fredrick raised a curious brow. "What?"

"You might be worth keeping around after all." "...At least for my sake..."

"Hah!" Fredrick gave a carefree shrug. "Ohh, now I see how it is. What percent do you reckon keeping me alive contributes to your likelihood of getting outta here in one piece?"

"Mm. That depends." Feyera gave the officer a friendly nod. "Fredrick, we need to work together. I care too much to fight you. I care too much about – " "Sanaria..." – I'm going to need your help to escape. This whole place is crawling with Cipher's agents!"

"Undeniably. You do care; I can sense that more than ever before," Fredrick nodded in agreement, emphasizing, "but from where you stand now, Cipher's all around you."

"Hmm. Then we need a plan to reduce their numbers so we can make a clear break for it!" No longer feeling as defensive, Feyera jumped straight into strategizing, quickly surveyed the quiet shipyard asking, "Did you clear this harbor of troops?"

"Of course. Hah! It didn't take too much effort, considering Cipher's off-shore facilities employ mostly mercenary grunts from the Rockets. *Sigh...* Tsk tsk... the poor, hopeless amateurs," he said half-jokingly.

"Wait a sec, how'd you know--"

However before Feyera could finish his thought, Fredrick quickly asked, "–Tell me: do you have Pokemon on you, or are you going to try and use your little mind tricks in the event of conflict?"

"I...uh...I have half my team," Feyera answered truthfully, "I spent all my psyonic energy just to break into this harbor!"

Fredrick smiled. "...Did you now? Heh. So you were only threatening me before when you said you'd kill me? How conniving!"

"I barely managed to squeeze through thanks to Des—my Gyarados," he said "and my trusty Charmeleon as well!" but Sana, the Gardevoir who seemed to grant him strength to defy all odds was not. "I can't let Fredrick think I'm completely defenseless...even without my psyonics. They're not gone or anything, I'm just afraid if I fall into them again something terrible will happen! Last
"Impressive, so that racket coming from the main bulkhead was you…" Then the officer looked skywards at the lofty steel-plated ceiling and asked, "Cipher's admin…does he know you're here, Mister Feyera?"

"Yes. He does--" though how Fredrick knew Ein was a 'he' went unquestioned by Feyera, who spoke somewhat frantically, "– listen to me very carefully: the admin here – Ein – he's a bloody murderer! Ein killed Lorelei outright with his Pokemon! And he's coming for me next. I don't know what he wants but it has to do with my psyonics. He was talking about a project called 'Angelus'…" Fredrick remained quiet, seemingly locked into a fixated contemplation; Feyera remembered that the officer was prone to retreating into steady rumination. Feyera took this as a queue to continue talking, "We don't have much time! Cipher's conscripted Team Rocket mercenaries are outside in the bay as we speak."

Alarmingly, that got Fredrick's attention almost immediately. "You said the Rockets are in the bay right now?" he asked curiously.

"Yes," Feyera verified, "They're coming from the interior harbor we escaped from." "Sana…" he thought with an unprecedented wanderlust. "I need to get back to her before it's too late…!"
"Fredrick, I have to go protect my Pokemon! I can't let anything bad happen!"

"Hmm. Curious… there's a lot of love you have for your Pokemon, isn't there?" The agent smiled, giving Feyera a sharp sneer. "Love… Quite a delicate specimen, isn't she?"

"Huh?!" replied a surprised Feyera. "W–what do you mean by that?"

"Your Pokemon," Fredrick clarified, allowing his leering smile to loosen.

"Right, my Pokemon…I can love them, can't I? I'm a licensed Pokemon trainer!

"Sure you can." Anticipating Feyera to retort in predictable denial, Fredrick pointed to the sea creature coiled around the bow of the nearby yacht. "For instance that Gyarados there. She's rather small for her species, wouldn't you say?"

"Size doesn't matter," Feyera dismissed the condescending remark. "Does he know about siphoning…? Does he know about Sana…?" The young man couldn't help but feel as though there was more to what Fredrick had said to him. Quickly he concluded, "– But time does matter!"

"Never mind then." Fredrick turned away from Feyera to face Cipher's warship. Then he chastised Feyera saying, "I simply thought you'd account for such risky fragility in your plan, that's all."

"I didn't exactly have time to draft it out," said Feyera. "It was a last minute decision to split up and barge in here. I didn't think we'd find a freaking war cruiser docked in Evercrest's main harbor!"

"And yet here it is before us…" muttered Fredrick. "Terrifying, wouldn't you say? Say, do you think anyone would even believe us if we told them about this?"

"They'd believe you," grunted Feyera. He was beginning to get annoyed by Fredrick's time-wasting comments. "Either way, my Gyarados will get cooked by Ein's Electric Pokemon. He's got a defensive array run by a Magneton and a Porygon. Calls it S–N–Tri. It's security on steroids!"

"…And you were able to get past it…?" Fredrick whispered in concealed wonder. "…How…?"

"Well, I wouldn't do it again I that's what you're asking me!" Feyera answered Fredrick's perplexed
expression with a gesticulation of arrogance. "Anyway, Sana – I mean… my Pokemon and I were able to briefly disable it. Together, we managed to escape with a mutual Teleport."

"I see," simpered Fredrick. "A mutual Teleport, huh?"

Feyera realized how nonsensical he had sounded and wilted his head saying, "Err…yeah. Something like that…I think… Ya'know, I bumped my head. I guess so I don't remember what really happened. Somehow, we got away." He quickly caught his breath thinking, "Ah…but it felt so real. Was it real?"

"Sigh…okay, okay." Fredrick rolled his eyes at Feyera's apparent internal distress. "I'd hate to put a Pokemon in danger; especially one you've grown somewhat fond of."

"Fond of…?" That seemed to be more than a queue that Fredrick knew more than he pretended to. "What are you trying to imply?"

"Oh," shrugged Fredrick, "I only tend to imply very little in my words." Answering Feyera's ensuing grumble Fredrick cheerfully jabbed, "Saves a great deal of time, doesn't it?"

"Right…" Feyera said hoarsely. "Time's of the essence!" Once more, the Pokemon trainer went to contemplating a course of action. "We'll need to act fast! It won't be long though before Ein and his Cipher cronies show up here! I don't even know the base's layout!"

"Well, you did haphazardly barge into their fortress," rebuked the agent. "You sure you don't remember anything about getting out of here? Would've pegged you as an expert by now."

"Will you cut it out? I'm trying to think us out of this mess!" snapped Feyera.

"Humph…" Fredrick walked towards one of the control booths along the dock. "Not the shrewdest decision, but nonetheless an impressively passion-filled one. How unlike you, doc."

"Will you please quit badgering me like a goddam parent!?" yelled a defensive Feyera. "I had no other choice; the PWC's motor crapped out on me!" Feyera took a step towards Fredrick, albeit with hesitant caution. "C'mon, we gotta move. We don't have time to fight, only time for flight. Team Rocket is going to overrun my Pokemon waiting for me outside if I don't hurry back!"

"And there it is. Just as I thought." The police agent closed his eyes, placing his hand on one of the dials. "There's something you want to get back to, isn't there? …Someone special."

"What?" Feyera flushed whilst saying, "I want to save my Pokemon, Fredrick! Who knows what they'll do! You know as well as I that Team Rocket is nothing but a gang of heartless bastards!"

"Heartless bastards? Interesting choice of descriptive vocabulary, Mister Feyera." Apathetically, Fredrick turned, exiting the open-windowed control booth seemingly to rhetorically ask the war cruiser, "Those eloquent words make one wonder: will those heartless bastards ever learn?"

"Fredrick's contemplating. Thinking. What about?" Feyera wanted to know; however, concerning his mental curiosity, the psyonic had learned his lesson when the last time he had attempted to read Fredrick's mind ended in disaster. "Who are you talking about? Ein? Cipher? Or Team Rocket?"


Feyera wondered, "Why doesn't Fredrick address them as 'Team Rocket' but always as 'The Rockets'? ...Must be from the old school, I guess. On dated Kanto Police television shows, the cops
always referred to the syndicate as 'The Rockets'. Frederick was supposedly an operative in the police force before the development of the IPF. So that makes some sense... But Frederick wasn't at Mount Moon was he...? He must have sapped that info from Archer's computer." "Cough*

Fredrick's continued silence prompted Feyera to say, "You want an answer? They don't learn, Fredrick, they're crooks. *Sigh* Crooks don't learn."

"They don't?" replied the troubled agent. "Are you sure? Do you really mean that?"

"Of course I do—…!" Feyera felt guilty, but the lies were necessary for his protection. "I mean whatever! It shouldn't matter! Now that I've found you, we can get off this godforsaken island together and get help!" Feyera worriedly looked over at the nearby ships lapping gently with the dark harbor water.

"Godforsaken, huh?" Fredrick couldn't help but raise a brow at Feyera's description of Chrono Island. "That's what this place's become to you, hasn't it?"

"Yes." Feyera agreed surprisingly. Despite his atheistic tendencies, Feyera could think of no other descriptive adjective to describe what the island that birthed Progenitor felt like. Clearly upset, he crossed his arms. "Mark my words; you'll explain everything to me once we're safe. And I'm not letting you out of my sight until you do!"

"Oh–ho." Lazily, Fredrick stroked his partially concealed jawline. It was defined, carved into a broad base. With a carefree tilt of his chin he asked, "How do you propose that, Mister Feyera?"

"Well…" Feyera clenched a fist anxiously. "Didn't you arrive here on helicopter?"

Fredrick took a step back. "N–no!" His surprise seemed more than evident to Edge. "Are you telling me there's a copter here?" he asked worriedly.

"Huh?" the researcher scratched his head in confusion "I thought I saw…"

"–Are you seeing things?" Fredrick asked. "Do you have a fever?"

Instinctually, Feyera felt his forehead. It was warm, but not overly so. In fact, most of the discomforting heat presided in his chest. "Never mind. I jumped to a conclusion." Every sentence was becoming an elegant dance. "I may have seen a black helicopter, but that doesn't necessarily mean it was Fredrick's copter." However, all the evidence truly brought him to that conclusion. "...Was that irrational?" he asked himself, questioning what he had seen before. "...Was that coincidence?"

"So, you're positive that you saw a helicopter? Where?"

"Yeah, I saw a helicopter." "...and it looked a lot like yours." "It was about an hour's walk from this base!"

Somewhat reassuringly, Fredrick answered Feyera's thoughts with a quick, "My copter is several leagues away, Mister Feyera. I landed back in the jungle, before infiltrating this base from the southern gate. I'll be honest, I had no idea this facility expanded around the entire bay. Seems like a lot of it was added on recently…"

"Probably because of that," Feyera pointed to the warship.

"Hmm… that's odd." Fredrick tapped on the nearby computer terminal, which had recently restarted from hibernation and displayed an intricate map of the base.
"What is?" Feyera asked curiously.

Fredrick pointed to the large glowing section of the base representing the harbor they were in. "Everything is quiet but it looks like an elevator is coming our way." Feyera looked at the screen to see a flashing yellow light traveling along a long tunnel comprising Everest's chained together facilities shown in a digital module.

"Shit! That's Ein! Fredrick, we need to override the power core while it's in transit! That should buy us some time!"

"Let's see then." Fredrick eagerly typed on the terminal's metal keyboard. "Oh, it appears I cannot disable the power supply!"

"Gah! Why not?!"

"Because it's using power separate from the base's back-up core. Look at these power levels, the entire grid is hibernating or something." Fredrick pointed to a series of narrow cobalt bars representing the electricity. "But… it appears the elevator's electrical generator has somehow gone mobile."


"Hmm… I can't hack it," Fredrick said worriedly. "Unless you can come up with a better idea, I think we're both going to be facing strong opposition very soon."

"Dammit! I can't fight Ein without Sana by my side!" "Fredrick, we need to bail!" said Feyera.

"Bail?" queried Fredrick. "Come again?"

"Hmhm." Quickly, Feyera resorted back to his original plan. "Yes, it's a longshot: we'll hijack Lorelei's yacht –" he pointed to the Prima – then ram our way out of the harbor and out into the open bay. We'll pick up my Pokemon before Team Rocket troopers overrun them, then head into the Southern Sea and radio in an airstrike!"

"Sounds simple enough," Fredrick concluded, though Edge could tell he was trying hard not to smile at the researcher's abstract proposal. "We'll simply 'call in an airstrike' on the premise of zero evidence of Cipher's criminal activity here. *Sigh*...It's a novel idea Mister Feyera, but don't you want the glory of taking down this massive hunk of war?" Fredrick pointed to the quiet behemoth lapping gently in the dark water. "I'm sure the two of us could sink it in no time if we work together."

"Uhh." Feyera felt torn. The ship silently spanned the entire length of the main steel dock, completely inert and defenseless. "I need to get back to Sana; I promised her I'd rescue her and July…"

Fredrick pointed at the jagged bow of the ship. "Your psyonics and my RAIL gun should prove more than a match for that ship's hull. We can sink it together. I have two ion rounds that can be augmented by your psionic whirlpool."

Feyera frowned at this suggestion. "I already told you, I can't use my psyonics on a whim! There aren't any 'rounds' just utter chaos!"

"What are you saying?" asked Fredrick in alarm. "Are you afraid?" he pressured.

"N–no. It…just feels too risky." Secretly, Feyera worried that his psyonics would overtake him for
good. Permanently. "The psyonic sensation – before at the harbor's gate – it was almost completely beyond my control. I don't want to become a tool to anybody. I can't even properly use my psyonics as my own tool!" "*Sigh…*

"Now's the time to act, Mister Feyera!" Fredrick said forcefully. "Cipher's already expended the brunt of their forces. If we can just take the Tauros by the horns, and sink their dreadnaught here and now…!"

"I– …" Feyera fought the temptation to employ his psyonics by resorting to doubt. "How do you know for sure? There's no telling what Cipher might do next! It's too dangerous to stay and fight, we need backup." However, for Feyera 'backup' implied a fair deal of miscellany: from rescuing Sanaria to informing the army about Cipher's warship.

"BACKUP?!" Fredrick scoffed. "The two of us don't need backup. This ship's defenseless! A sitting Ducklett!"

"And so is Sana…!" Feyera said in a blend of telepathy and speech.

"Just who is Sana?" Fredrick asked in subdued curiosity.

"Err… Sana… She's someone who protected me, and who I owe protection." Feyera answered somewhat awkwardly.

"Sounds sweet, kid; you two engaged yet?"

"Gah! She's not like a girlfriend!" Feyera scoffed, raising his nose high into the air. "Don't worry about it; it's definitely not something a charlatan like you would ever understand!"

"Mmm. I don't intend to pry… She's in your heart, isn't she?" Fredrick's playful grimace transformed into a more serious expression. "Heartstrings aside, Mister Feyera, now's the time to act!"

The thought of seeing Sanaria surrounded by forces her and July could not be saved from made Feyera worry. It made him worry a lot. "Can you be sure, Fredrick?" he asked. "Do we really need to do this?" "What if Team Rocket–!?"

"–What's gotten into you?" interrupted the agent. "You're wasting time by worrying! You can still get back in time to save the Pokemon! You can do both with your power."

"I–I can…?" asked a disbelieving, and ready to collapse Feyera. "I can't believe that…I feel as though I'm at my end… why am I so tired?"

"That's the point! Psyonics are a power that comes forth from your heart, from your desire to do what must be done, even when the desire drives you to fearful ecstasy."

"The ecstasy is real. …But what of my fear of losing it…?"

"Losing it? You mean: losing you fear of losing control? …I thought you wanted to be rid of it! Haunter's no more right? I thought you were freed of your fears, the lack of control — your limitations."

"Maybe you're right…" "Maybe psyonic power is that way…" "but I cannot allow desire to take me to the point of stupidity!" Try as he might to rationalize a solution, Feyera's insistent thoughts continuously wandered back to the Gardevoir he had left behind. "Sana…she needs me to get back to her…" "I can't stay here Fredrick." "I need to go back before anything bad happens to her." "It's
"I thought you said the world was 'on the brink'," Fredrick said cunningly. "you'd choose to take flight back to your Pokemon rather than stay and fight to save the world from destruction? What's come over you? A Pokemon is replaceable, the world is not."

"It's not what you think," said an unexpectedly vulnerable Feyera. "I ... need her... she can't be replaceable. That feeling when our hearts touched... can't be replaceable."

"Mister Feyera..." pressured the officer with an intimidating stance "you're becoming delusional."

"Enough! I've made my choice!" Feyera said firmly. "There's only enough time to make an escape. Besides, we need more firepower to sink a battleship! We need the KNRA! Cipher has operational missiles. Hell, Evercrest is practically an undercover military base of its own!"

"I'm aware." Fredrick nodded because the two men were in the shadow of a warship after all. "I'm very aware of the danger this place poses to you. In fact, that's exactly why I came here."

"Huh?" "...So you're the one who stopped it?" Feyera asked sharply as he walked closer to the police agent, running his fingertips along the ship's gently bobbing hull.

"Huh?" Fredrick appeared to be definitely caught off-guard. "Stopped what?" he asked.

"You're the one who saved us?" Feyera said so quickly, it felt practically automatic. He couldn't even think fast enough to catch his thoughts as they echoed, "You saved...us?" With a frightening involuntarily tilt of his head, Feyera felt control over his body slipping further and further away, down a waterfall of perceptible sensation. The ship, the harbor, the man in front of him, they were all so vivid. So clearly defined. So saturated in an inky river of color from the afternoon sunlight penetrating overhead.

"Us? Who's 'us'?"

"Me," clarified the researcher, unsure of whether his initial choice of pronoun reflected a torn sense of self, or himself and Sanaria. "And my Pokemon." Feyera held his head in distraught. "Your interference with Cipher's ballistic was what saved us."

"I saved you?" Fredrick replied in a mildly confused tone. "How?"

"Yeah..." But then he thought, "Wait...something isn't right."

"Mister Feyera, we don't have time; take me through what happened," commanded Fredrick. "Step by step."

Carefully, Feyera recalled the events, at first inadvertently reciting Sana's perspective. "There was a firework... ahem... a missile of some sort that Ein fired during the escape from the other harbor. I don't know how, but I was able to see it chasing behind me. But it went off course, high up into the air--" he pointed up towards the lofty steel ceiling "--then there was a huge explosion above the two of us; I'm sure it would've incinerated us if it wasn't set off its trajectory! You sent it off course, right?"

Fredrick paused; silently he squeezed on his nose-bridge, closing his eyes in deep thought. "You know, I appreciate your heartfelt gratitude. I really do. However, I can't stand to see you living in this ignorance any longer--" and, to Feyera's great surprise, Fredrick asked an overwhelmingly mind-boggling question "--take a second to think: why would Gideon ever want to destroy you?"
"What?! I don't know why—" Feyera paused. His blood suddenly ran cold. Soft needles began to prick and tingle all over his body. Air became sparse and wintery. His hands began to shake. "G–Gideon?" Feyera repeated, unsure if he had heard Fredrick properly the first time. "Gideon…? Forgive me, but you just called Ein 'Gideon'. Fredrick, h–how do you know his real name?"

"Heh." There was a faint nod and a certain sense of satisfaction discernible from the Fredrick's expression. For a brief moment, the azure glow of Fredrick's pride drew alarmingly parallel to the aura perceived by Feyera's eyes. "Don't worry about that part of it. Remember, your little Gardevoir heart isn't able to endure profuse emotional shock."

"…!" Feyera snapped; he could no longer play this game with the so-called police agent. "Fredrick! …Who the fuck are you?!

"Creak! Hiss!" A loud mechanical groan came from afar, and the whole harbor shook. The gate had begun to open, the thin line of sunlight piercing through the slender gap widened, illuminating the harbor in bright light. The rays of sunshine glistened like tiny stars in a sea of yellow haze, suspended dazzling prisms revealing the darkened face of the police agent. "Sss…" white fog from the eves of the vaulted arch glowed with the bay's light.

"You knew!" Edge blurted. "You knew all this time!"

"Of course I knew," Fredrick muttered, acknowledging the young man's telepathic outcry with a serious expression. "Fate, it would seem, has kept you alive. Against all odds too, based on your peculiar allergy to Serenithium."

"What is Serenithium?" Feyera asked, quickly pawing the patch of mint green skin near his left wrist. "What was in that vial?! You need to tell me!"

"Serenithium was a dream. A compound used to reduce the power of psyonic powers before they overtook their hosts. But now, I'm afraid that the dreamer has woken."

"A dream…?" Feyera repeated, calling to mind the various dreams he experienced in the past. "What do you mean by a dream? Am I…?"

Almost mutely, Fredrick concluded, "Like Deirdre, you are a dream with consequences. The only difference is you may not become a nightmare like she did…" his voice echoed hollowly. Suddenly, there was a loud crash of metal overhead as a piston set off a disruptive clatter of noise, followed by a slow, ominous rasping of machinery. Hissing and steaming, the facility's gears began to groan, coming to life. Small vent-like doors close to the floor opened around the main dock with fiery hisses. "Go! Get out of here!" urged the officer. "You need to get back to her before it's too late! Before the heart's wicked desires overrun you entirely! Before you lose your mind to the Pokemon's will like MY Deirdre!"

"…!" Feyera could feel his pulse rising, the shimmering crystal of Gardevoir anatomy warmed his chest with a reticent energy. "What?!” He felt the warmth of other bodies radiating dull vibrations of heart upon his chest. "Wait…I'm not using psyonics, what's happening to me!?" However, Fredrick did not elaborate, instead turning to face at where a pale beam of reddish light from Feyera's chest pointed. Near one of the steaming vents the pale light reflected on a rising cloud of smoke. Feyera quickly put both his hands in front of his chest, momentarily covering the light the crystal emitted. "FREDRICK?!" Feyera shouted, wrestling with his ambition to maintain a hold on the radiating crystal. "What's going on?! Who's Deirdre!?"

But Fredrick's gaze had honed in upon where the radiant aura had pointed. From the steaming vent came a harsh "hiss!" and a groan as two ebony clad Pokemon, each on their hind legs as if trying to
stand, fell to the earth on all fours. Their each of their pairs of eyes were blotches of melted blood upon cold orbs. Simmering and reflecting in the dazzling colorful sunlight from overhead, their shadows resembled mink downs, jet black in color as the field of energy suddenly became disoriented.

"Shadow aura!" yelled Fredrick. Defensively, he reached for his RAIL gun and initiated the charging switch, sweeping low to the ground to steady his police magnum on a wooden crate. "Click! Bang! …Tick! Click! Bang!" went the sound of a deafening magnum, firing two relatively swift rounds. Feyera only had time to see the gushing of fluids spraying out from the direction of the smoking vent. The noise of the feral Pokemon had ceased, but more echoes and howls resounded from deeper within the base. "We don't have time…I can't confront all the Shadow Pokemon on my own! Looks like it's your plan after all, sonny; here, take the keys to Lorelei's yacht. It's time for you to leave this place behind for good!"

"How the hell do you have the keys to Lorelei's yacht?!" "You can't be serious!" protested the young man.

"– Mister Feyera, you still have a lot to learn, and even more to remember," the man said as he drew forth the massive RAIL rifle from his back. It was as shiny and silvery as Feyera had remembered it. "Thanks for being honest with me. I'll give you a clear escape if you follow my instructions to the T —"With a sharp smile he said, "You know, after all this, I'd hate for Cipher to have to put you down or something." Fredrick reached into his overcoat's pocket and tossed a boney set of keys to Feyera.

"Put me down?!!" Feyera asked, catching the flung keys in a fluid motion. Even the hard notches of the keys felt incredibly discernible in his palm. "Ah–haa! There's so much to sense!" he thought manically. Everything around him felt heightened. He wasn't even outdoors and the whole harbor was filled with dynamic texture and speckled light, rivaling the brightest of days. "Urgh…! Why…?"

"Mister Feyera, believe me when I tell you that you can't trust anyone!" said a stern Fredrick.

"Apparently!" said the researcher with an angry sneer. "Starting with you!"

"Don't even trust yourself," ordered Fredrick, seemingly unperturbed by Feyera's admonishment. "Feelings won't always lead you to do what's right. Only trust in the things with true staying power!"

"Then–" Feyera looked down at the searing heart embedded in his chest "staying power?"

Fredrick nodded. "You'll be able to figure those things out in time. That I have faith in."

"What do I do?" he asked rather helplessly.

"I can't believe I'm saying this but: you'll need to save the Mercurium from decaying. …There's only one other man I know who has researched Mercurium's enough to do so… If there's still an ounce of trouble in this world –" Fredrick said concealing an angry scowl "– then he'll be in Union Cave, at the largest known source of Mercurium! Set course to Azalea Town, on the southern tip of the Johto Peninsula. Look for a man, my age, by the name of Kurt Gabriel! You may have a chance to catch him if he's not hiding."

"Whoa, wait, Kurt?" Memories that he had been unable to recollect seemed able to kick in "Kurt! Professor Oak had mentioned his name in one of his articles!"
"You know him?" Fredrick said rather unpleasantly.

"Uh… yeah." "Whoa!" "He's a rustic Pokéball craftsman." "How did I just remember that!" he wondered. "I haven't read an article by Professor Oak since my research days…!"

"Doesn't matter what he goes by. Find him!"

"Err… in Azalea Town? All the way out there in the boonies? Humph! I may be a traveling Pokemon trainer, but I'm not some boondocks ambassador!" Immodestly, Feyera looked up snobbishly crossing his arms; however, the crystal on his chest seared his forearms with harsh ferocity. "Ouch!"

"Mister Feyera, this is very important: you need to tell Kurt if he wants to make amends – like you have – then he needs to help you."

"What?"

"Tell Kurt that he must continue his research; he must be able to find a way to repair your damaged Pokéballs! If there's a way to do that, then maybe the Mercurium's effect can be reversed engineered–"

"–What?! Hold up a sec, Fredrick! I can just buy a new pack of the gizmos, it's no big deal." Sure, Pokéballs were convenient contraptions. Most laypeople didn't even understand how they worked (and why would they? Pokéball technology was leagues ahead of that processed by Silph), but they were easily replaceable, especially since they would degrade over time and needed to be replaced semi-annually. This profitable marketing ploy also pleased many conservationists since the degrading mechanism conveniently released the Pokemon from permanent confinement should the Pokéball become lost or abandoned. Still, the relationship between the Pokéballs, Kurt, Mercurium, and the Reilken Mercurius itself remained a mystery to Feyera.

"Yes. It's a very big deal. Keep your wits about you, head down low, and above all else, find a way to do what you need to do without 'Edge' overtaking who you really are."

"Who I really am?" A chill ran up Feyera's spine. The young man wanted this to all be a bad dream. "Do what I need to do…?"

Silently, Fredrick readied his side holster, facing the direction of the growing noise.

"Frederick…!" "Fredrick…!" Feyera said trying to get his attention. "–Edge doesn't have power over me! I am Edge!"

"Humph… That's what I mean. And I'm afraid it isn't your choice anymore." Fredrick hoisted the large RAIL rifle over his right shoulder. It was as imposing in the light as Feyera had remembered that day in Celadon; streamlined silver splitting menacing into two fanged teeth and an extended barrel plated with several venting pieces of metal fanning out. "I need you to trust me, no matter what happens next."

"YOU'RE WRONG!" Feyera shook his head. "I can't do that."

"If you won't…" frowning, Fredrick didn't push anymore, "then, at least, can you make a promise to do something I wasn't strong enough to do?"

Feyera scratched his head. "What?"

"Promise me you won't forget those closest to you. Please, no matter what, promise not to make a
lifelong mistake; you have a responsibility now that your hearts are tied –"

"Ding!" went the elevator gate behind them.

"– together." Fredrick had barely uttered that last word before he and Feyera swiftly turned around to face the resounding noise.

Meanwhile, outside the Evercrest base…

"July, I'm worried."

[What is it, Miss Sanaria?]

"I need to follow your trainer." She looked toward the harbor. "He's not safe."

The Gloom looked around quizzically. They were still trapped in the middle of the bay on open waters surrounded by the inlet's massive cliffs! She asked the Gardevoir seated atop a water-riding Cipher escape vehicle which had frozen, [How exactly can we do that? It's not like we have any way of getting to them.]

Sanaria looked over at the distant harbor where Edge had gone to along with his Charmeleon and Gyarados. She and July were marooned on a defunct PWC until they were rescued…or worse. The Gardevoir spotted a cluster of other watercrafts rushing in their direction from the other harbor. "July…" she said softly "Let's not yet count out all our options."

[You wanna fight those guys!? You're not a Pokemon trainer!]

"Hmm…Maybe you're right. I'm not the same as veh Feyera. I don't know how to commission orders in the same way he does." She gave the other Pokemon a whimsical smile. "But we have enough in common. He's taught me enough to manage."

[Oh yeah riiiight, like your commitment to doing downright stupid things!]

"July!” Sanaria exclaimed at the Gloom's uncharacteristic rudeness, but Sana held off upon seeing a faint grin from under Gloom's curled leaves; indicating that she was joking.

[Kidding. I was just trying to see what it was like not to be so nice. Opposite of what Des says, I think it's super underrated!] the Gloom crossed her stubby arms. [Let's figure out a way to help, I'll do everything I can!]

"Mmm!" Sana smiled. "That's just like you, July. Hah! You're always so nice. You always put others first. …I like that. I hope I can teach veh Feyera to be like that."

[Aw, don't worry! Yeah the doc's a little screwed up in the head sometimes, but I'm sure you and him will make great friends!]

"Um…really…?" she flushed a rosy pink on both her snow-powdered cheeks. "F–friends? Me and veh Feyera?"

[Yeah! Why not?]

Sanaria shook her head and looked hopefully in the direction the trainer headed off in. Seemingly straight into the face of the mammoth cliffs bordering the bay. "July, I need to tell you something: I think that ship's already sailed…" she said softly clutching her shimmering crimson heart.
[Why are you sayin' that with a smile on your face?! Why wouldn't you want to be friends?]

"Don't worry about it," Sana said. She partially closed her large eyes in contemplation. "We're close in a different way."

[I don't get it! Oh, and speaking of ships sailing, what are those…?] July pointed at the watercrafts approaching.

Sanaria looked in the direction of the encroaching speed crafts. "Those…aren't friends either," she said rather artfully.

"Hiss…" A glass door reinforced with metal mesh opened revealing a platform. Standing there was a battered Ein, garbed in angelic white and a short plump man in a snug fitting suit of earthy colors. "HA! Looks like your flight's been delayed, Doctor Feyera!" Ein shouted. "And permanently too! Surround him!"

"Shit!" gasped Feyera as Fredrick whirled around, billowing the length of his suede military garment as he did so. Despite the buttoned uniform's rigidity, its cloak-like posterior swung like a cape, splitting in two straight down the middle.

"FREEZE RIGHT THERE, FEYERA!" shouted the police agent in an unprecedented sternness.

"Fredrick?!" Feyera looked over to see the unfriendly sight of Fredrick's RAIL rifle aiming at him. Ein, emerging swiftly from the elevator, aimed a similar RAIL weapon at Feyera. "What's going on?" he wondered, now being the target of both a rifle and a pistol; Fredrick's ion weapon hissed louder, but then again the rifle had begun charging sooner. "Is Fredrick playing the same game as Lorelei by trying to feign my arrest? Ein isn't gonna fall for that ruse a second time!"

"Arms in the air!" ordered Fredrick. "Call off your Pokemon!" Stupefied, Feyera looked for a trace of a queue in the agent's words. Devoid of any hints, Fredrick demanded, "RIGHT NOW!" and, somewhat reluctantly, Feyera complied.

"Brucie, Des, stand down!" Unbeknownst to Feyera, his Pokemon had both grown alarmingly silent over the telepathic bond once shared. He dismissed this telepathical quietness as a consequence of the ineffable range of feelings brought on by confronting the man called Fredrick. That very same officer was now aiming an ion class weapon at him.

"Reunions like these bring out the best in us all, don't they? Reminds me of back underneath Celadon's Rocket base! Hah!" The frail scientist exited the elevator gracefully and his comrade followed suit clumsily. With poise contradicting his assistant, Ein flicked the single strand of black hair out of his eyes and exclaimed, "Quite the surprise, eh doc? First dear Timothy Rallsen, and now your most recently embraced father figure. Where will the little bastard's search end?"

That stung. A lot. Feyera reacted with a threatening stance. "Who are you calling a bastard?! You're nothing but a motherfucking prick!"

"Pah!" Ein twitched, but remained otherwise composed. It seemed as though he had numbers on his side to counter anything Feyera would throw at him.

"—Gideon," interjected Fredrick, "you haven't changed one bit." He had breezily moved all the way over to the edge of the dock next to the starboard deck, giving him a clearer line of sight towards the elevator gate.

Coolly Ein said, "You're one to talk. …He's as much yours as he is mine. Tell him to step down."
"He's not yours, Gideon. Not anymore."

"You can't..." whispered a distrustful Feyera. "Fredrick, you know him? How...?"

"If he's not mine, then is he yours?" Ein asked Fredrick with a sneer. Fredrick remained quiet, barely able to keep his shaky focus on the elevator doors. "—Incidentally, that would actually make good Doctor Feyera a bastard with two fathers, wouldn't it?"

"..." Save for a faint growl, Fredrick remained mute.

"What is he talking about?" asked Feyera.

"Ah, yes; you'd like that, wouldn't you?" Ein smirked, glancing quickly over at Feyera and then back to Fredrick. "I'd wager you won over this one's heart in no time. Correct?"

"...It wasn't hard," replied Fredrick with a firm glower. Then his stern glare faded, exposing a whimsical grin. "Humph." Lightheartedly, he concluded, "In fact, I couldn't believe how easy it was. ...How natural it felt. It was almost as easy as getting a Gardevoir to trust its trainer."

"...!" Feyera helplessly looked over at Fredrick, feeling every bit of the police agent's venomous words. "No...!"

"Ha!" Ein laughed. "You must be well-versed in your technique then, old friend."

"OLD FRIEND!?" exclaimed Feyera. "Fredrick! What's he talking about!?"

However, Fredrick refused to answer Feyera, and instead pointed his RAIL's barrel at Ein. "Don't you dare call me that! I'm nothing to you!"

The admin didn't even break a sweat at Fredrick's quick change in temperament. Nor did he flinch now that Fredrick's charging weapon was focused on him. "Oh...? Did that strike a nerve?" pressured Ein, who kept his RAIL's focus on Feyera. "You're just chock full of those nowadays, aren't you?"

Jaeger butted in from behind Ein saying, "You won't be playing daddy any longer." Jaeger aimed his wide-mouthed weapon at Fredrick. The chubby man's weapon, a scattershot of some type, almost laughably matched its owner's physique. And so this triage of standing off left Feyera as the only man without a defense, save the ever-precarious psyonics.

"What'll it be then?" asked Ein, squaring off from opposite ends of the harbor's wide platform. "If you make one move for your Pokemon, it'll all be over; fire that rifle of yours, and I'll neutralize it with my own RAIL gun."

"And then there's me," Jaeger said with a click of his gun. The pudgy scientist also unfastened a nylon rope of strung-together Pokéballs wrapped loosely around his vest. He pulled the silver whip behind his back, where it lay dangling, ready to release all of them at once with a single snap. "I assure you, zee odds are in Cipher's favor!"

"So--" Ein adjusted his sharpened spectacles "—what'll it be, old friend? You, or your second failure of a child?!

Awestruck by the comment, Feyera's blank expression stared at the growing mystery. "...Gideon," Fredrick muttered as the ominous humming noise from the RAIL rifle continued to rise in pitch. "I told you already where my loyalties rest. ...Not with the likes of you, nor with him."
Jaeger twitched, but Ein raised a palm to stop his assistant from casting down the whip of Pokéballs. Instead, almost casually, Ein released his Magneton from stasis. "Now, now. I should've figured as much… This was to be expected, but not from the likes of you. I thought our arrangement would have pleased your deeply troubled heart, Aldaine."

"I knew you couldn't save her…" spoke Fredrick solemnly. "After everything you promised, you couldn't save my daughter…and yet…I wanted to believe. I wanted to believe that you could reverse it."

"What the hell??" Feyera couldn't help but exclaim in awestruck astonishment. "Fredrick, what's Ein talking about??" Nevertheless, both the men ignored him.

Ein's assistant bumbled with his wrist-mounted digital assistant, muttering, "Feyera's Mercurium levels have stabilized, Gideon." From across the room he pointed the device's sensor in Feyera's direction then reading the screen said, "Variance level is at thirty percent and falling logarithmically."

"Excellent," replied Cipher's chief research admin. "Just a little more time before the crystal's nature possesses his mind entirely."

"…! SAY WHAT?!!" shouted Feyera as worry clouded his consciousness.

"Oh, you didn't tell him?" Ein said with a shrug towards Fredrick.

"Gideon!" Fredrick addressed Ein with an angst-driven tone, "tell me: how did you do it? How did you manage to disable the Serenithium I.V. on Feyera's wrist from a distance?"

"Peh, you're as inquisitive as ever. I suppose – considering you're still alive – I'll reward you with an explanation." Ein glared at the Magneton whirling alongside him.

"Now hold on one minute….!" Feyera blurted, frantically trying to trace what was unfolding before him.

"Magneton, display module Solaris, build three-nine," Ein ordered. "Quickly!" Immediately, the three Magnemite split apart with one of the artificial Pokemon rising above the other two in a wide arc. "Doctor Feyera, I know you're not exactly the type who remembers things, but in Orre's High Desert there were these disastrous ion storms," Ein said as wicked light from his Magneton menacingly reflected off his eyeglasses.

Feyera did his best not to flinch or show apprehension. Too bad it was written all over his face. "What?" Feyera asked raising a brow. "Orre?" "I haven't been there since I visited my aunt years before the accident." "I don't even remember what it was like…"

Fredrick chimed in, "Natural disasters in Orre? Hmm… Is that why the Pokemon ecosystem was damaged beyond repair?"

"Correct. Frequent, uncontrollable ion storms that seemingly came out of nowhere destroyed any chance of Orre housing an ecosystem favorable to Pokemon like the rest of the world," said a remarkably composed Ein, "Humph… Only the most tenacious could survive in the inhospitable desert for a variety of reasons—" Meanwhile, two Magnemite spun chasing each other in an elliptical orbit underneath the one that had risen above them. "—That was all well before we lived in a modern, globalized world however. Although… it's not like a vanguard from Kanto would care."

"And…? What? You had to move out west to Kanto? Is that what you're trying to tell us?" Feyera
asked, recalling when Rallsen mentioned that Cipher was originally based in the Orre region. "Orre wasn't enough of a shithole, so you had to expand your horizons and create problems here in Kanto?"

"Stow it, Feyera," ordered Fredrick. "Gideon, continue."

"Looks like your little pet needs a little more of zee discipline," Jaeger said tauntingly to Fredrick. Feyera shuddered violently as heard that. "Pet?!
"I'm not his pet!"

"Oh–oh–ha! Right; not anymore, your collar is missing!" chuckled Jaeger. "Looks like you've lost your Pokemon's leash after all those promises not to, Aldaine!"

"...! The Reilken Mercurius... a collar?" Feyera shot an angry glare at Fredrick. "No...! How could you...?"

"Oh? Oh my! You didn't ever tell him?" Ein quickly asked Fredrick, who shook his head to say "no". "Hah. How incredibly... polite of you. Then again, masters don't owe their Pokemon any explanation. Why waste your breath on a creature unable to comprehend the weight of his power?"

Fredrick winced. Feyera screamed out, "WHAT IS GOING ON?!"

"...Or perhaps there's something – personal – behind the lack of transparency towards your pet?" Ein taunted. "...At the very least, you could have given him a sense of his intended purpose. You could have made him feel ready for this proud moment..."

"That's not going to happen!" Fredrick said with an alarming volume of conviction. "I will not allow it."

"Don't you see?! It already has!" piped Jaeger. "No thanks to Phaeton! ...Aldaine, your time with Cipher's property is up! Like your daughter, soon he will belong to our collective."

"WHAT!?" exclaimed Feyera.

Fredrick seemed to be fazed, his eyes darting at Ein, and then at the spire of metal atop the dreadnaught. Collecting his thoughts, the agent answered a roughish grimace, "You know, you probably created a lot more trouble than I could have prevented, Evice. This is no longer your collective."

Jaeger appeared to be taken aback by the name, a long lost alias of Cipher's master impersonator. "Bastard...!" Jaeger exclaimed in perfect, unaccented English. "Such terrible disrespect! How dare you spoil my ruse!"

"Heh. You can drop the act, Evice." said a composed Ein to his partner, "Neither of them will live to tell a soul about who you really are."

"Humph!" The short Cipher agent crossed his arms. "...And here I was getting so good at playing that character!"

"Looks like it's time to find a new alias then," Fredrick said to Evice doggedly, "maybe you should run for mayor or something, I'm sure a small town could use another 'Es Cade'."

"—WHAT?!!" Amid all these revelations "Uh– Fredrick?!" exclaimed Feyera, his heart pounding frantically out of control. "Ahhh!" Sensation in his nerves volleyed in resonating waves of increasing frequency! Thoughts scrambled, head trembled. "EIN...!" he hollered in dismay.
"What's happening…?! What did you do?" "What's happening to me"!" Fredrick nodded in Feyera's direction. Like a glimmering light at the end of a tunnel, Fredrick's signals seemed to become ever more distant. "ARGGGHHHHH!" cried Feyera. Strangely however, the group seemed to be ignoring him despite the racket. "Haaahh! Haaaaaah!" he gasped for air, it seemed only sweet oxygen could possibly calm his rollercoaster-like pulse.

"Evice – make no mistake – if you fail to play you cards right –" Fredrick said with a twisted expression "–much more than Feyera will be lost."

"Pah! Your well-kept psyonic going to lose it," insisted Evice. "It doesn't matter anymore what you say! Without Serenithium, the Mercurium in his body is moments away from breaking down. The resulting chain reaction will leave nothing behind but the shell of a human guided by the spirit of vengeance itself! HAH! I can't wait to see the look on your face when his eyes become as soulless as your sweet baby Aldaine's!"

"You'll regret those words, worm," Fredrick said, striking daggers in his tone.

"Quiet! All of you!" ordered Ein. "I have something to show you."

Evice turned to face the lean admin. "Ein? …Do you have something to say?"

"As a matter of fact, I do. People are able to engineer almost anything given time and money. But the most important resource is motivation," Ein said with a snap of his finger. One of the two Magnemite closed its round eye, and paused its cycling. Feyera held his breath in anticipation, the palms of his hands grew cold and wet. "That's our power. Humans are strategizers. Producers. People see a problem and use our heads to repair it. Not unlike Feyera's treasured Gardevoir species."

"*Cough! Ack! Hack!* …Try another time to agitate me, Ein! *wheeze* I'm all fed up for the day!" growled Feyera. "Your taunts mean nothing! I've mastered Edge!"

"Pitiful denial. I know how much you adore them; and now you can spend the rest of your days with one," Ein said with icy laughter, looking menacingly at Feyera's shivering arms. "You won't soon forget to avoid crossing me. Soon, you will only take orders from Cipher, just as your predecessor has. Soon, you will be sealing the hearts of Pokemon and creating an army of Shadow Pokemon!"

"You're wrong." Scowling, Feyera stubbornly replied to his opponent, "I'm not a part of your plan anymore!"

"IDIOT! Don't you get it? Hmhmmh!" Evice chuckled. "All thanks to you, little bookworm, it's already happened! And it'll happen again right before our eyes!"

"Gideon," said a glowering Fredrick. "Continue with the explanation. Now."

"Hmm… feeling rather impatient are we? Don't worry, you'll see your little girl soon enough." Ein said with a devilish smirk. "In any regard, following the rediscovery of archaic industry, something strange became apparent to people living in Orre. Occasionally regions of Orre lost power, seemingly without reason. Lights would go out, circuits would overheat, computers would lose data, machinery would grind to a halt. Of course, this was only recognized by the Pokemon before the integrated circuit was unearthed by humanity. In fact, this invisible phenomenon was what caused many of them to migrate since Pokemon using electrical signals to function would briefly cease functioning. Think about it: to be without electricity would be debilitating to us, but deadly to them. Especially since electricity is life energy itself. This upset the balance of Orre's ecosystem,
and slowly wild Pokemon left the region, never to return—" Feyera continued to watch the ominously floating group of Magnemite. "—Tragic that creatures so powerful could be so delicate, no? But look who it is I'm talking to."

"Get on with it!" Feyera demanded.

"Funny, you only used to get this hotheaded when it came to meeting your deadlines. Now I can't steal a glimpse of you without being stunned by your frivolous emotions. I hate seeing how fieldwork has gone so terribly awry."

"The science project is over, Ein! I'm done with you and your distorted ambitions! What you did was wrong...! Project Progenitor..." Haunting memories of blood-crusted needles above his eyes sent shivers down his spine "should not have happened...! You never deserved my research, this....!" He touched the Gardevoir crystal, shouting out in ecstasy, "THIS...!" "HAAH! AH! Argh...! This....! *Gasp*! ...Isn't what was planned...! It has to stop! I can't live like this...!"

"It's only just begun." Ein pawed his chin with an index finger. "Let me ask you something, Feyera: where's your sense of adventure? Where's that ever-important, oh-so-irresistible spark of curiosity when it comes to learning something about this strange world?"

Fredrick spoke up before Feyera could retort by saying, "Gideon, continue with the explanation. How does this all tie into Orre?"

"Ah yes... By the time people began using integrated circuitry, Orre's wild Pokemon were all but gone. Worse still, Silph's global monopoly had cut the desert region off from the Pokemon-free technology. Then the Great War happened; Orre revolted against Kanto. In the war's wake, technology had spread rapidly into Orre as an unprecedented consequence. Kanto's special ops and insurgents alike had brought enough of the new Pokéball technology and brought into the very region they were seeking to quash; effectively they accomplished exactly what they were trying to avoid."

Feyera scratched his head. "So this all goes back to the Great War?" asked the trainer.

"Doesn't everything?" said Evice. "We're nothing but the byproducts of cataclysm."

"My associate is correct," said Ein. "After the Great War, rather than forming an embargo over Orre, Kanto sought to regulate the nation's economy by making it a part of Silph's worldwide enterprise. However, there was a problem. Actually, more of an intentional blight cast upon Orre. The imported Pokéball technology was designed to be faulty. After a few weeks of functioning, it would fail; Serenithium would leak out. And with valuable residue, went control through use of Pokéballs. Tension between Kanto and Orre grew all over again. People in Orre believed that Silph had sabotaged the exported technology as a means to retaliate after the war. Rebels found it an easy enough cause to fight for. Many people feared another Great War."

"But, that never happened... why?" asked Feyera, with enough curiosity to irrigate out the rivers of perpetually ecstatic sensation.

"Because of science. The abrupt, widespread failure of Kanto's 'Pokemon Independent Tech' became more predictable. How, you ask? Simple. I studied the phenomena. Rather than standing by idly in shelters, I investigated; rather than turning to the hills to retreat, I calculated. I took each occurrence and dissected its every attribute. Then I researched. Tirelessly. Ceaselessly. I looked into the past... unearthed it. And what did I find? Orre's upper atmosphere had been ravished thousands of centuries ago. The desert storms occasionally disabling the new technology from Kanto were nothing more than the sun's solar wind penetrating through our sky's canopy, causing
impulsive, yet curable destruction."

"You did all that?" asked a nearly speechless Feyera. "Why?"

"To better our understanding of the world, Feyera. A noble cause, just like Progenitor. Producing improvements to Pokemon and people alike…"

"–Lies!" Feyera spat at the mention of Progenitor. "Admit it, you didn't want to correct anything, you only wanted to control it!"

"Humph. So what if I did?" Ein's gaze darkened. "…You tell that to the people of Orre who were left without Pokemon or power after the Great War! …You tell that to the Orre rebels on the verge a second world war because they believed Kanto was retaliating in a time of presumed peace!"

Feyera clenched his jaw shut. Orre was practically another world to him. A very foreign one. A world tainted by the past. Adulterated by international politics, bureaucracy, and war. Stranger still, Ein had for once shown a hint of emotion when it came to Orre's history.

"…I fixed the problem, Doctor Feyera," Ein gave an exaggerated slash of his arm "–My research stopped the second Great War from happening."

"I don't believe you! Fredrick –" Feyera pointed towards the police agent opposite him "– he doesn't believe you either! EIN! You're nothing but a liar!"

Evice shook his head. "Ignorance won't save you from the truth. You simply don't remember how pragmatic empiricism gets results."

"Correct. You've lost that, Feyera. Now, you're too empty to appreciate the scale of my brilliance. Yes, and this is the fruit of my labor," Ein pointed at his split up Magneton. The Magnemite on top whirled its twin magnets aside, generating pulses of yellow sparks. They jumped and sprung around the small synthetic Pokemon. With an unprecedented zap, the lead Magnemite electrocuted both of the other Magnemite below it. Feyera put his hands up defensively. "Hah!" Ein sniggered from behind his charcoal tinted glasses as electrical light bounced off their reflection. "Watch the show!"

Upon impact, the Magnemite with an eye open suddenly sealed closed like a camera shutter. In doing so, one of its magnet arms shot off and collided with the other Magnemite with a loud "cling!" The dormant Magnemite opened its eye immediately as the electrical onslaught dissipated. It had resisted the shock completely and was notified by the other one when to reanimate itself!

"And there you have it. Foolproof. A system that completely bypasses electrical interference caused by solar radiation or other so-called 'ion exciters'—" Ein's eyes glistened "—by integrating two separate platform generators that alternate whenever a current overloads the primary system. Should one be overloaded, the other is automatically triggered via 'REFLUX Programing' or Reinitiated Electrical Flux—the digital concept of a biological kneejerk. And as you can see… No temporary loss of power while the generator shifts. No breaks in the circuit. A perfect defense to any natural electrical interference."

"Wait…that really happens in nature?" Feyera was finding it all difficult to believe. He knew Ein was brilliant. But Ein's brilliance was masked by rancor. Still, a part of Feyera could not help but be subtly charmed by the delightful prospect of science engineering nature. Correcting it. Refining it. Swooping in whenever nature went wrong. Fixing whatever nature did wrong. "And you can fix it…? With science…?"
"Correct. Amplify the magnetic field given off by Magneton, and 'Sun Shielding' does the rest! Though I have to admit, the SS tech's implications go far beyond deterring things merely natural."

Fredrick spoke up, "Okay, then what are you saying?"

"Yeah… What does this mean?" Feyera asked, unable to see the connection.

"Fools. It means that the power of the sun is once again in the hands of mankind. As you've undoubtedly witnessed first-hand, Doctor Feyera."

"Wait…” Edge's thoughts stirred. "The firework! The one that exploded into stars of light and color. “That was made out of the sun?"

"No! Not the sun. The sun's projected particles. Charged particles called ions. What you saw was light energy from space passing through the planet's magnetic cover. An artificial aurora. A localized ion storm triggered by a burst of radioactive Mercurium!" Ein explained. "…we've opened a new gateway to evolution!" he whispered excitedly.

"I…” He didn't know what to say, much less produce vocal intonations corresponding with what he felt. Language had begun to fail him. Yet not even this could be fully explored, as Feyera was bathed in a comforting sea of neurological bliss, the feelingly stunting his curiosity, slowing his breathing, and causing the young trainer to lose sight of his concerns amid the sea of newly-awakened fields of perception.

"You're familiar with it, yes?" Evice asked with a stern grin. "With the Mercurium?"

"Undoubtedly," Fredrick answered bluntly as if for Feyera. "It was the first pre-Terminal War technology able to control Pokemon. Subsequently, the material was used in the construction of Pokéballs by refining it into Serenithium. My only question is: where did you get such an abundance of the liquid metal in order to create a warhead made of it?"

"Oh, where else? Underground. In Kanto's long-forgotten mines," Ein said proudly. "Team Rocket makes for great ore excavators. …If half of them go mad, nothing is missed!"

Evice bobbed his head up and down in agreement. "Radioactive materials are rather volatile if they are not properly purified. Amorphous technology like Mercurium is doubly hazardous since you have ancient technology coupled with trace nuclear radiation from the Terminal War."

"So, the Rockets don't know that the unearthed Mercurium is radioactive?" asked Fredrick.

"Does it matter?" Evice asked cheekily. "They're expendable."

"I'm sure some of them figure it out," supposed Ein, "but I'm also sure it's far too late by then."

"You son of a bitch! You've been poisoning people this whole time!" Feyera wanted to say, but strangely enough, he could not bring himself to say it aloud. Something invisible had gripped around his neck in a tight vice. "I guess…if those people were working for Team Rocket, then it was their fault in the first place!" Still, this rationale seemed to be littered with holes; perhaps the most obvious being a red crystal jutting out from the Team Rocket uniform Feyera wore.

"Who's going to miss a few criminals anyway?" taunted Ein. He pointed his RAIL weapon at Fredrick. "Not you or me; that's for sure."

"You are a criminal!" Feyera desperately tried to bellow. Unfortunately, his projected telepathic thoughts were only able to capture a brief glance from Evice.
"And you're not?" pressured Evice in reply.

Ein answered Fredrick's absent expression, "Now, I bet you're wondering: 'why waste a perfectly good Mercurium-filled missile?' Not to mention a 'Phaeton Missile' packed tight with radioactive Mercurium could send the entire KNRA back to the Stone Age! After all, Union Cave is all dried up!"

"It–it is…?" said Fredrick "Then that means…Kurt…!"

"Kurt? No, after he returned to holistic Pokéball creation, there wasn't much use left for the old man…" Ein raised two illuminated prisms closer to his menacing eyes with a stroke along his tall nose. "Let's face it, your real question is: why would I test-fire it on this pipsqueak of a man first?"

"Ein must have lost it. For him to resort to such measures…he must be insane!" Loudly, Feyera began coughing; forcefully, he cleared his throat feeling able to raspy speak. "Well, looks like you wasted it, Ein! *Hack!* I'm still here! Your missile's a failure! You couldn't even kill me with all the power of the sun at your disposal!"

"Variance level at five percent," said Evice to Ein. "Kinetics are stable enough for brief organic exposure."

"Precisely, doctor," said Ein darkly from behind two sharply-edged, mirrored lenses "but who said I was trying to kill you? What if I was only trying to make you stronger?"

"Gasp…!" "Fredrick said that too! How~" Feyera looked over at Fredrick, who had lowered his RAIL weapon to the ground. "No! Fredrick, what are you doing?!"

Ein smiled at Fredrick, who had crossed his arms disapprovingly. "Thank you for biding the necessary time for Mister Feyera's variance levels to lower to an acceptable range. Ha! Your filibustering techniques are second to none as always. Excellent work, Aldaine."

"Oh no!" shouted Feyera, suddenly realizing what double treachery had taken place. "Fredrick and Ein weren't only old associates, they're working together! Fredrick had been stalling…! He tricked me again…!" "NO! You double-crossing traitor! What are you doing?" he hollered, choking helplessly on annunciation as his neck burned with fire. "ARGH!" gagging incomprehensibly, Feyera fell to his knees. The perceived impact rocketed throughout his body; every fiber reverberated within him to the point of nausea. "Ugh…" Swelling clouds of a misty morning were beginning to congregate over his eyes. Sight became dimmer and more saturated in the most intense colors imaginable.

"–It's going to take some adjusting to all the new things in store for you," Ein said lightheartedly. "But it'll all be worth it in the end."

"What'll be worth it…? I–I'll die…! I'll lose…*GASP!* I'll lose everything! You can't let this crystal overtake me!"

"No. You won't lose a thing. You'll have your wish, Doctor Feyera. You – your work – won't be forgotten. Don't you see? Your fantasy has become your reality. All the fear of your father forgetting about you, all the hope that you had to become important enough to win your father's recognition back was for naught. You are important. You are recognized. Why, I'm sure your catalytic role be well documented in every affordable textbook of the new golden age of humanity!"

"No…" Feyera looked away from the Cipher Admin, down at his heart borne with light between
"...But here's the real irony of your work: any father – *humph!* indeed, any semblance of a man to portray your lost father – would deny you, and deny who you've become!"

"NO!" Feyera stared blankly at Fredrick; he was the closest thing to a father he had met on his journey, and although not a very good one, at least there was always hope. Hope for acceptance, hope for adoptive fatherhood. However, the soft beige color had drained from his face. "FREDRICK!"

"I had too, Mister Feyera," said the supposed police agent. Pausing, he bowed his head. "...Cipher... is an organization entrusted with providing protective light to our fragile world."

"No! NO! I won't believe it! It isn't true!" howled Feyera.

Fredrick looked Feyera dead in the eyes with piercing cold bronze. "This is the way it has to be," he said.

"NOOOOOOOO! Dammit!" Tears from his glowering eyes etched against Feyera's cheeks. The riveting sensation of tears molded his trapped face into a sorrowful expression. "Fredrick, *sniff* how could you double-cross me?! How could you possibly be working for Cipher?!!"

"He's not," Ein said crookedly. "Don't give him your ignorant praise, Feyera!"

"It doesn't add up!" No longer did Feyera feel as though Fredrick was employing subterfuge. His cheeks were on fire! The creeping doubt that Fredrick was more than who he claimed to be shook Feyera's core. "Fredrick!" He pointed at the police agent. "How can you be allowing this to happen?! You've betrayed me!" The young man's torn expression said everything he was feeling; the agony gradually captivating Feyera's fractured consciousness.

"...Please understand," Fredrick said quietly. "Don't forget what I said: it needs to be this way. This is my wish. I–I... don't want to hurt you, Christian."

"HURT ME?!" Fighting back the tears, Feyera hollered, "Don't you dare call me that! Who the fuck are you to call me that?!!"

"...!" Fredrick stepped back.

"Fuck you!" Feyera shouted. "You have no place in my life...! You've killed me, you fucking traitor!"

"Oh don't look so upset," Ein said almost jokingly. "Today is the first day of the rest of your life!"

Feyera grasped at his chest, feeling lost and empty as frozen inhalations, mixed with a myriad of inexplicable sensations stung his lungs like cadenced artic waves, their chill growing with each heartbeat. "...!"

"–But before you completely fade away, I want to see you methodically put the pieces together. I wonder: will you even be able to figure it out in time? I'll be here all day," said Ein, "but unfortunately I can't say the same for you."

"It can't be...you planned all of this?" Feyera said hoarsely. "N–n–no...not with the Mercurium...! And the Serenithium I.V.?!"

"You never were one to give credit where credit was due. You were otherwise brilliant. Hmm...
too brilliant… Incidentally, there was no other way to get rid of you. I had to do this to you –“ Ein pointed at Fredrick ”– the man you foolishly accepted into your life was nothing more than a means to control you. And control you he did, for a while. I can see why letting you go is so difficult for him, you're very special after all. Not only to Kanto's white knight, but to the rest of the world. You're the first psyonic actually able to control other Pokemon."

"…!" Dumbfounded, the surprise rocked Feyera's world. "That's impossible! You're saying Fredrick's not…” "…a traitor?

"This isn't about him," Ein said. "This is about you, Doctor Feyera. This is about what you ultimately wanted Angelus to provide for humanity: control."

"No," he murmured, "this was never what I wanted."

"Too bad! You've added a new dimension to humanity's dominance; forging a new chain in the hierarchy. Halflings like yourself are able to follow issue orders better than any Pokemon Trainer could dream of! Pokemon will do almost anything for one of their own; and armed with psyonics, you don't need to seal their hearts to command their actions!" Evice grinned. "As for Shadow Pokemon themselves: the artificial sealing of their hearts has never been more practical with a Gardevoir we have complete dominion over!"

"No! I'm not your tool! I won't listen to you…!" Yet the young man's frail voice had lost any depth it once held.

"Don't play coy." Ein kept going, "You did everything I asked you to. You made sure to listen to your heart, not your head. You did everything you felt was right, like a good Gardevoir I might add."

"NO!" Edge wheezed. But even his weak breaths felt immaculate as the cool humid air stroked his chest from within. "Every lovely gasp of air means another heartbeat. I want to feel that rhythmic pulse again. I want to feel it spread throughout my body!" "Ahh…! Ah–ack!" screamed Feyera in groans of mixed sensation escalating ever higher. "E–Ein…!"

"You came back to me – your master – didn't you?" Ein continued to lay into Feyera's profound panic—which, judging by the distorted puffs of hazy twilight colors surrounding the young man—had already grown into something distinctively tangible. "Just look at you. You're falling apart without someone to guide your feral tendencies. But it's okay. They'll be no more angst, no more deciding. Now you'll only listen to me."

"Gasp! Gasp!" "I–I can't breathe!" The shock and all it invited was too much for Edge to take. Fantastic colors of sandstone bleached by time splashed all around him. With each stroke of sound from Feyera's exhales came a surging sense of limitless flight, pumping his spirit ever higher. Into lofty clouds not yet experienced. "Stop it…! Stop it now…!" he thought, but his body begged for more of the dazzling color from above. Trapped in a surprisingly heartening purgatory of sensation and warmth, Feyera laid his trembling hand against the silky mist of a nearby cloud of sparkling garnet, their warm particles of light danced around his fingertips, trickling every sensation imaginable along his neurons, running all along his back in diametric pulses entrapping his whole body. The ecstasy, laying deeper into his mind, made him lose sight of the colorful spectacle in front of him. All but lost in this terrifyingly blissful experience. Feyera felt as though he could never leave. Felt as if he could never want to leave! Content to be trapped in this hellish pyre of flooding sensation, embraced by the warm arms of trance-inducing delights. "…Ahh…!"

"Gideon, don't do this to him!" said a distorted voice. Distressingly, the sound of the voice was coming from all directions.
All the more disturbing, Feyera could not even budge a muscle to peer around this strange dream
sequence. Involuntarily, Feyera lowered his arms, to unveil his sight. "Huh?" There wasn't
anything to see however. Feyera didn't know if he had gone blind or if this was death.

The mysterious voice continued to dissuade Ein, "You can't do this! You won't! I won't allow it!
This has to end! …And I'll be the one to end it!"

"That...that...voice..." Feyera wondered. It sounded like someone he knew from long ago. "Is
that...?" Gradually, the world's colors began to reemerge, albeit in hues of radically new shades.
Feyera saw the hazy outline of two men advancing slowly towards one another. A sunset of orange
light separated the two figures. However from within the tapestry of beauty's center came two
crimson eyes. Their strange light glowed in distinct patterns Feyera recognized from when he
resorted to using psyonics. These two eyes, simmering with the iron scars of the Progenitor virus
seemed to rush at him; shrouding his vision in a thin mist of their turbulent waterfalls. At first he
was scared. But then he became terrified. The influx of dreamlike saturation spreading throughout
the room in lucid waves blurred everything together.

"He'll forget all over again," went Ein, "and not even you had the heart to protect your son from his
fate. …How awfully tragic."

"...!" Out from the abysmal founts of rushing colored rapids came a shout of intolerant fury
"Noooo!"

"July, we only have one chance!" shouted Sana as the swarm of Team Rocket grunts surrounded
the idle PWC with a Gardevoir holding on to a Gloom in her hands. "I can only Trace my enemy's
power once; we have to make it count!"

[Okie dokie,] July said shaking her leaves, ready to follow Sanaria's instructions in the same way
that she would follow her trainer's. [We'll give these knuckleheads a good whooping!]

"Mmm!" Sana's nose itched and she felt like she was going to sneeze from the Gloom's shaking
leaves tickling her neckline. "Not yet..."

"Go Venomoth!" yelled one of the nearest mercenaries as he flung a Pokéball in their direction.
"Psybeam!"

Sana raised her slender arm high into the air to deflect the moth's kinetic wave before it could
strike July. With a timely Lightscreen of crystal lattice, the azure beam of energy bent and split
apart, splashing outwards in all other directions like a stream of water striking a stubborn dam.

"Go Wheezing!" called out one of the Team Rocket mercenaries. "Use Sludge Bomb!"

"NOW!" exclaimed Sana, as power began to surge along her lanky arms and into her shining heart.
The culminating energy expelled out from the rear of her heart crystal, separating into two distinct
beams of diamond-like purity. The beams expanded, quickly crystallizing to form a set of
otherworldly wings of translucent quartz. Effortlessly lifted into the air July, lurched in Sana's
trembling arms as the psychic energy continued to surge out from her heart and manifest in the
material world in a bizarre scene of beauty. [Okay!] July said, spewing a cloud of deep purple
Poison powder into the air from her floral bud. [Hi-yah!]

"Sss!" The cloud billowed and swirled around the two defenseless Pokemon, cloaking them both in
a dark shadow. Weezing's exhaled Sludge Bomb flew through the air, exploding with a loud "Ka–
Bang!" in the dusty cloud. "Pshhhh!"
"Where'd they go?" wondered one of the grunts as the makeshift smokescreen from the poisonous mixture began to dissipate.

"Up there!" shouted another grunt. He eagerly aimed his Nihil repeater skyward.

"T—that's impossible...!" exclaimed another one of the mercenaries. "It can't be flying!"

"FIRE!" called out the other grunt. "Shoot the creature down!"

"Thwip!" "Zzzzzrrr! Crackle!"

A fury of bolts and beams alike were launched all at once at the unbelievable spectacle levitating above the cloud of poisonous dust.

"Stand down!" ordered a mysterious voice in Feyera's head. It was masculine, but other than the gender, she could tell little about it through the fog of triggered ecstatic surges engulfing him with every heartbeat.

"It's too late! Don't you see?! I planned this all along! I knew the exertion of Feyera's psyonics at a critical density of Mercurium would cause a chain reaction. The atmosphere was full of it when he barged into the base. But what does it mean?"

"WARNING...WARNING..." echoed a computer's effeminate voice in the background. "Power surge imminent."

The pudgy man next to Ein quickly snapped open his PDA and said with a start, "Looks like Phaeton triggered Ion Storm is going to disburse a relapse at any moment!"

"It's too soon, Evice!" Ein barked. "The skies should be clear. We're not obsoleteing on a risky trajectory in the solar wind! Something's wrong!"

"Dammit! The external sensors are telling me otherwise! Variant Atmospheric Magnetism is rising exponentially, and the weather vane has gone offline," Evice said looking down at his handheld computer, "the base's shields aren't going to hold up if we don't shift the generators once again to compensate for the Phaeton's repercussion."

"Get to it!" ordered Ein. "We don't have time for a second blackout!"

"I'll have to do it remotely from the terminal on the platform generator—"

Those words sparked a familiar memory. "Gideon," said the voice. Suddenly, Feyera was able to see. That protective voice came from a tall man, dressed in suede military attire. Gruffly, the police agent drew his secondary firearm, a sleek steel magnum, pointing both weapons at Evice saying quietly, "seems like your plan has too many loose ends."

"CLICK! BANG!" An earsplitting sequence of howling gunfire resonated throughout the harbor. The echoes did not shake Feyera, who had been only capable of observing in the most passive of ways; trapped behind an ever-growing wall of colorful sensation, pouring in from all directions around him in such massive waves of increasing intensity, it caused him to lose contact with his limbs.

"ARGH!" Evice's scattershot fell to the ground, the magnum's bullet had gone straight through his arm. With a gutless whimper, he collapsed to the ground with a heavy "thump!" holding the open wound with his other hand by dropping the Pokéball sash; the whip-mounted Pokemon tumbled away from Evice's possession, rolling on the cold steel tiles. "Urck! No!"
"What the hell are you doing?!" shouted Ein. But the Cipher scientist grew as silent as Evice at the sight of Fredrick's RAIL gun bearing down on him with Braviary eyes.

"I'm doing what I need to do," he said, aiming his weapons at both of the Evercrest scientists. "It's… nothing personal." While Ein's Magneton floated defensively in front of Cipher's lean admin, the Pokémon would be made short work of by the ion rifle.

"You can't!" Ein insisted through gritting teeth. "Another Full Stop will short-circuit everything in a mile radius with an integrated circuit board! …You know what that means!"

"I know," answered the determined man.

"You're not able to do it without severe consequences!" Ein said sternly. "You know that you won't be able to survive the fallout! I might, Evice might, and Feyera will! The same cannot be said for you! You won't last for an instant in that solar radiation!"

"Oh? I'll endure, Gideon. I'll endure at your expense. I'll end your plans here once and for all. I'll make sure the base's shields stay down. You'll lose everything. From Feyera's Angelus work to Evice himself!"

Ein, trying desperately to make up for lost ground, spoke quickly "If you kill Evice, we're going to lose everything. And if you prevent him from reactivating the Solaris Shields, you're going to lose everything too!"

"D—Don't let him kill me!" pleaded Evice, "GIDEON! Don't let the madman kill me! Gideon!" Evice howled in pain. "Stop him!" Evice stumbled, blood pouring out from the gun-wound. However, the truculent "click, click!" sound of the magnum's reloading mechanism halted Evice's struggle to get back on his feet.

"He knows better than to do that. He's bluffing; playing a game…" Ein said jadedly "…and I know why." Ein's creeping distraught was all too obvious to the young man who had become rather perceptive to discerning emotion. It was the slight smile fading off Ein's face. The tiny twitch in the admin's right eye. The way he played with his RAIL gun to account for the sweat on his palms. Feyera felt like he was being sucked into what Ein was feeling. It was a bizarre sensation to say the least. "You love him like a son, don't you? You want to protect him, don't you?" Ein pointed his ion gun at Feyera. "How lucky do you feel? He's nothing," Ein said with a shrug, "but the research we have on Gardevoir is essential for the next phase of Cipher's objectives. And those… unique… objectives may have a way of complementing your own."

"Hmm." Fredrick grinned. "About time you considered others, Gideon. How thoughtful of you to do so in your final hour."

"Don't be a fool. Only a fool would do what you're trying to do!" huffed Ein. "You'll perish! And so will all of your hope to save her!"

"I don't matter any longer. And I won't let you control me through my daughter's ailment any longer!" Fredrick said with sharp conviction "Don't you see? Feyera's different! Feyera has a reason to fight. And that reason goes beyond what you're capable of understanding!"

"How dare you! You ruined him with your guiding armlet. Phaeton was my answer to your possessive grip!"

"Ad quod dannum," Fredrick spoke in ancient tongue, "…protection is responsibility more than accountability."
"Don't lecture me about 'accounting for damages',' Ein quickly translated, "Feyera's damaged goods to begin with, no thanks to you!"

"I'm still here you know!" Feyera wanted to shout. "What are you talking about?! What did you do to me?" However he could not utter a word, for he was trapped in a sphere of heavy, asphyxiating air. The miasma even had a distinct taste – it reminded Feyera of the petals imported from Petalburg. Their spicy, glowing warmth dazzled his mind with vivid, lucid memories that felt so real, he was inclined to try and wake himself from this hibernating slumber of paralysis. Attempting to shake his arms, he became afraid that he could not, and consequently fell to the ground.

"Mister Feyera isn't your test subject any longer, Gideon. If you don't yield, I'll kill Evice."

"Pah! I knew I couldn't rely on you. You have a filthy, bleeding heart after all! Compassion will get you nowhere though!"

"I will not compromise in what I must do. Whether my objective coincides with what you call 'compassion' is nothing more than a coincidence."

"Denying the inherent weakness of kindheartedness is the first step to embracing such an exogenous fallacy. You're delusional as Feyera himself. Buried in ideas rather than truth. Some things never change!' Ein spat, "which is why, if anything, your true use was to stall Feyera long enough for the Mercurium to disburse throughout his system. You've accomplished that! Hah! Know that even in your most strident efforts to defy me; you'll always work to further my objectives!"

"Point taken. He's here in front of you," Fredrick nodded with a tip of his brimmed hat, "but are you going to be able to claim him as your own? You've already shown enough incompetence to warrant sanctioning. Why, when the KNRA gets wind of the ion storm from your Phaeton, not to mention the murder of Justice Carese's daughter here on Penta, things are going to become very difficult for you to cover up. In times like these, a janitor needs to play his part by cleaning up your mess. And be warned, it will become known that you're the one responsible for this mess!"

"–You don't know anything, you ancient relic! You're outdated! Replaced! Policy has changed," Angrily, Ein threw a hand straight up into the air. "It's money! All that matters is that the government maintains their invisible monopoly through Silph. Don't you see? It's a superficial power! And – like the Rocket Organization – there's a lesson to be learned from their mistakes!"

"Hmm…"

"Only a greedy fool would join the ranks of Team Rocket! You know this better than most!" shouted Ein, "Don't you?!"

Feyera, still trapped in the trance peered up to hear Fredrick say, "You're words ring truth, but they do not encapsulate the gravity of the situation at hand. If you want to continue to conduct business as you have been, by willfully disregarding the lives of your test subjects, then by all means continue, but know this: Cipher will be withholding support. I'll be sure of that. Face it, Gideon: without the Obsidian, there's nothing left to protect your science fair from just retribution."

"You're wrong! Cipher needs me! The Angelus project will be completed, right before your eye."

Closing his right eye in a blend of furious disgust, Fredrick replied, "You're still harping on about Angelus? Pitiful. And you call me a relic."
"Archaic, but essential to produce Shadow Pokemon en masse I'll have you know. There was proof in Progenitor, proof in the Progenitor–Angelus hybrid project! Mercurium is the key!"

"No! Mercurium has brought humanity failure in more ways than you can ever imagine!" shouted the opposition. "WHY DO YOU THINK THE TERMINAL WAR TOOK PLACE?!"

"I've got news for you: the Terminal War was a resource war, just like any other; a wrestle for control over the most powerful types of technology imaginable. Mercurium is proof that the men fighting during the End War were gods –" Ein sneered sarcastically. "– and what is it that gods fight over? Mercurium can conquer death. You know this well, Aldaine. Tell me something: is it typical for a man to come to know the fear of death twice?"

"No!" Fredrick's pitch had changed slightly, as if a sensitive nerve had been pricked. "Mercurium has brought humanity nothing but failure, Gideon! The abuse has gone on long enough! I'm ending the cycle before it's too late!"

"Humph… My, a display of emotion, and oddly enough from you. I'd wager you've been spending too much time with that one." Ein raised a stiff finger and pointed at Feyera.

"Me? Did I instance or something?" thought the young man. But in this embryotic like trance, he couldn't even raise a hand, much less a telepathic thought.

"– Can you really be supportive of something so terribly lost? Look at the poor atrocity! Look at how he's changed! He's nothing but an empty shell awaiting the end! —Mercurium has broken who he is no thanks to you!"

"No! Feyera's not as empty as he may seem," Fredrick said. "His memory loss was not due to Progenitor. It was psychically imposed by merging his heart with a Gardevoir's. His memories are still there. That means he's able to recover from it. My Pokemon proved that."

"Regardless, Feyera's a prototype!" Ein exclaimed. "CIPHER'S PROTOTYPE!"

"I'm no one's prototype, you bastard!" growled the man in a muted scream. However the dense fabric of air seemed to capture his voice, spreading it all around him in vibrations. "…!" He felt a stinging sensation in the back of his neck tracing down his spine in feverish waves.

"Why should he be your prototype when he selflessly helped you on a project that inadvertently took his life — or at least part of it? You do realize Angelus is more complete than it ever was before no thanks to its instigator. Feyera's sacrificed more than you have, Gideon; and he's sacrificed with results," Fredrick said.

"Corrupting his body with rapacious Mercurium does not warrant proper scientific procedure! It was all an elaborate accident!"

"You're right. But I cannot allow you to take advantage of a cruel accident." Fredrick stiffened his posture. "Not again."

"Pah, still bitter, aren't you? It's all incidental; Feyera was first and foremost hell-bent on stealing the Reilken Mercurius! Don't you dare forget that!" Ein venomously shouted. "This never would have happened had he not been a crook! And, as the thief, he was ironically the one who stole the only thing you had left to live for!"

"Ugh…" Fredrick groaned. "No…he hasn't left…not yet…! Gideon, I heard him… you're wrong!"

"…Need I remind you about Celesta?" snarled Ein. "Take a look in to his eyes. Tell me that you do
not recognize the very same toxicosis symptoms that overtook her."

"…!" Fredrick reached for his chest-holstered Pokéball. "–I can't… no, not after…what happened to her…"

Hearing this, Ein smiled, knowing his verbal knife could be further twisted. "That's right, Aldaine. And he's exactly like the rest of the coldblooded criminals, deserving of his fate," emphasized the Cipher scientist. "You'd do well to not soon forget that! Now stand down before I put you down!"

"No." Fredrick stood silently before slowly addressing Ein, "Feyera's different. …He went along with your Progenitor project for too long here on Evercrest. He's seen both sides of it, and now has to live with the scars of that. But you… You were supposed to cancel Progenitor the moment Mercurium became more than a myth to Cipher. Yet you persisted with the gristly research far beyond the project's expiration date!"

Ein realigned his RAIL gun to point at the center of Fredrick's chest, "Science has no expiration date!"

"Perhaps." Fredrick didn't try hard to conceal a mischievous smile. "But your funding sure as hell does!"

"WHAT?!"

"You heard me! I'll make sure the solar radiation cooks this entire facility to a crisp!"

"–What gives you the right?!!" belted Ein. "This isn't your fight!"

"Feyera has the same rights that you have, Gideon. You only lack the skills to employ them properly. And that will be your undoing."

Ein shouted, "You'll lose everything!"

"No." Fredrick looked over at Feyera. "Not everything."

"Why defy Cipher with so much on the line?" Ein pointed at Feyera. "Is this Gardevoir weapon worth your life?"

"Gideon, if we don't end this war, it will have to end us."

"Damn you," Ein growled, charging up his RAIL. The bright light steam began to trace the streamlined contour of the cool silver metal. It glowed with wicked internal heat. "YOU'RE WRONG! DAMN YOU!"

"Peh…damn me?" Fredrick asked rhetorically. From afar, Feyera saw Fredrick look in his direction. A tight smile crossed his lips. "It's no use." Fredrick shook his head. "The things I've done… The things I haven't done…” "The promise to her I could only keep half of…” "Gideon! I'm already damned."

"Click!" went Ein's RAIL as it signaled a full charge. "Couldn't say it better myself. This new world has no place for the likes of you!" "#Zzzrrrrrr! FAAAAHHHHOOOOOOMMM!" A blinding burst of energy split out of Ein's RAIL, the searing heat blinding Feyera with its laser-like fineness.

"FREDRICK!" Feyera tried to yell. The dust cloud dissipated, and to Feyera's surprise, Fredrick had leapt out of the ray's destructive path. It didn't seem possible. "How could he have dodged
"BLAST!" Ein exclaimed, seeing the police agent still standing on his feet. With a flash of light, Ein called out, "GO, RHYDON!"

The luminous arch of Pokéball release flooded the room. Before them stood a monstrous creature, completely encased in rock-hewn flesh. "*RHY–DON!*" hollered the beast, its cry shaking the entire harbor.

"ARGH…!" shouted Fredrick as light once more filled the harbor, knocking him to his knees.

"Rhydon, use Earthquake!" ordered Ein.

"Fredrick!" thought Feyera, through his entombed prison in the center of his body. A terrible sensation of water pouring down from the back of his neck, and along his frozen spine made him want to scream in surprised torment. From where he was, he could only see, all of his other senses sent him into a frenzy of sensation.

Miraculously, Fredrick evaded Rhydon's shockwave with a deft leap into the air. Landing gracefully, he pointed in Feyera's direction. "Gideon, the Mercurium in Feyera's body is going to try to preserve itself!"

"Well, you should have thought about that before defying my will!" shouted the enraged admin. "Rhydon, Earthquake!"

Again, the beast rocked the harbor with a stomp of its rocky hooves. "DOOOOOOONN!" it cried, triggering another tremor causing pieces of the walls and ceiling to fall.

Fredrick lost his balance amid the shaking floor. As water splashed up from the harbor, he tumbled to the earth, dropping his rifle. "Guragh!" He stumbled to the ground, grasping the rifle just before it fell into the water. However, Ein's Magneton quickly darted towards the police agent issuing a volley of Thunderwave!

"FREDRICK!" exclaimed Feyera. "Look out!"

As if hearing a voice, Fredrick peered up in the nick of time to dodge an onslaught of electrical pulses from Magneton. "Gawah!" exclaimed the officer as he bounded out of the way, nearly falling off the dock.

"Feyera, is that you?" he asked between shaken breaths. "Get out of here; NOW!" exclaimed the police agent through swift breaths. "There isn't enough time!" He darted out of Magneton's range as the Pokemon fired off another volley of electrical attacks.

"I won't leave you!" shouted the Pokemon researcher, the psyonic surge tingling his every fiber of existence. "I'll protect you! I promise!" He looked at his quiet Pokemon, and ordered, "Brucie, use Flamethrower!" Unfortunately, the summoned scarlet flames did not come forth. Instead, Feyera could only see a blank expression in his Charmeleon's sapphire eyes. "Brucie?! Can you hear me?!"

"I said GO!" ordered Fredrick. "You need to get out of here!" Repelling the electrical blasts with his cape he yelled out, "Metagross!" and flung a silver-coated Pokéball towards Ein's beast.

"Gross!" exclaimed the steel coated Pokemon. The massive creature's face was riddled with deep scars, undoubtedly from countless battles.
"I expected a challenge, but not from you." Ein smirked at the sight, "Magneton, use Hidden Power! Fear the power of the sun! SUNBURST STRIKE!"

The Pokemon quickly arranged its Magnemite parts to create a series of reflective lenses that had a telescopic effect. The central Magnemite rose high up into the air on electromagnetic levitation towards the bright ray of sunshine now illuminating the harbor's upper half. A burst of white energy shot out from the center Magnemite's glowing eye, searing with a tremendous temperature as the light bounced from one reflective surface back to another, and then back to the original reflector for good measure. "*SISH!*" As the heat wave pulse of infrared light smashed into Fredrick's Metagross, the police agent's Pokemon attempted to shield its hardened face by raising its heavy arm. However the maneuver was futile, as burning scarlet encapsulated the Pokemon, licking its steel coating with an intense firestorm! "*FAWHHHOOM!*"

"Metagross!" called out Fredrick. But the megaton Pokemon was seared in a coat of flaming beams of light, reflected and amplified from the sun itself. "NO!"

"It's only a taste of things to come!" Ein said.

"Ready for this!? Use Meteor Mash!" Metagross, seared blackened with burs, raised its claw high into the air. Levitating on magnetism it swung its huge body up into the air. With a loud "MEETA…!" it swung its diamond clawed fist into the earth below, rupturing a fissure in the cliff itself. Quickly, the displaced water rushed about in all directions to fill the gap. Metagross lifted itself high up into the harbor; to the point where the dazzlingly bright sun reflected off its prism-like body.

"Decisive Megahorn!" ordered Ein as Metagross's magnetism began to falter unexpectedly. With a loud crash, Fredrick's Pokemon came tumbling to the ground, completely stunned!

"Metagross?!" But it was too late, the landing Pokemon had been drilled straight up from underneath by Rhydon's rising Megahorn. The impact sent a paralyzed Metagross bouncing in the direction of Feyera's Gyarados. "Des! Get out of the way!"

The Metagross barely missed the bow of the yacht where Feyera's Gyarados was perched, coiled around like a bow ornament. From the looks of things, she couldn't hear Feyera, or even sense that he was trying to save her from his mental prison.

"And now Earthquake again!" ordered Ein.

"*GRRR…DOOOOON!*" echoed Rhydon, a heavily armored beast, smashing both its palms into the harbor's dock, triggering an immense shockwave knocking everyone to their knees. Metagross collapsed under the tremendous combination of Ein's attacks, from which there was no shelter. Magneton's searing heat, coupled with Rhydon's impressive Earthquake was more than a match for the veteran Pokemon.

"Christian, get out of here, NOW!" ordered Fredrick as he reached for his powered-up RAIL gun.

"Zzzzrrrrrr…click...click..."

"NO!" Feyera said, his telepathic voice shaking, "I won't leave you! I—I promised! I'll protect you!"

Fredrick ran towards Feyera. He knelt next to the paralyzed man, lifting his limp body up onto a broad shoulder. "No… you have other things to protect now. I—I think I can finally understand that now."

"Fredrick!" he desperately wished he could talk. He wished he could reach out and hug him.
"You…do care…"

"—You have to move!"

But he couldn't. "Fredrick…! Fredrick!" echoed the crystalline heart's telepathy. "I can't move!"

"WHAT?" exclaimed Fredrick in amazement. "I–impossible…!"

"That's right! You're trapped all right!" yelled Evice with a maniac's grin. "GO!" he said whipping a fine whip of strung together Pokéballs onto the dock-boards with a loud "Crackle!" Before the Cipher scientist appeared six more Pokemon, each as vicious as the next! Their howls resonated throughout the expansive harbor. Still holding onto his bleeding arm, Evice furiously shouted, "Kill them! Kill them all!"

"Scizor!" roared a massive Bug Pokemon. It raised its pincers high into the air making it appear as though it had three heads!

A huge ape charged onto the field as well, coated in a dark aura. "Sla–KING!" it howled, as it beat two enormous fists against its imposing torso. *THUMP! THUMP!*

"AGGRON!" rumbled another behemoth of a Pokemon, beside Slaking, completely encapsulated in metal plating. The Pokemon smashed its steel gauntlet hands into the floor, sending out a shockwave that ripped the dock in two.

"CHAMP– MAH–CHAMP!" A terrifying creature, comprised almost entirely of muscle, swung its massive four arms through the air. Each arm carried a weapon, save for one – which was clenched tightly into a permanently blackened fist. The other three arms held weapons of increasing ferocity; from an enlarged Lambda Xtella (which – thankfully – wasn't humming with electrical energy), to a massive, jagged two-handed cleaver supported on the Pokemon's broad shoulder, to a thin, metal-tipped wooden javelin decorated with fallen Ho–oh feathers. "CHAMP!" it roared swinging weapons around manically, the Pokemon howled louder and with increasing ferocity while Evice whipped the chain of six Pokéballs to command the various Pokemon.

"GAAAWOOOHHHH! MENCE!" hissed a large dragon as it unfurled is coiled wings. Their sharp edges dripped with a mixture of black shadow aura and perspiration. The beast roared, spewing massive fireballs across the harbor in every direction. Stretching its wingspan, the Pokemon generated a huge wave with one flap of the imposing blade-edged wings.

*THUMP!* *THUMP!* *CRASH!* Evice's final Pokemon didn't even utter a battle cry as it viciously smashed its heavy rock tail into the hull of a boat opposite the war cruiser. The frightening beast's extension split the thirty-something–foot ship in two with a frightening *SNAP!* Shards and bits of the hull's solid sheet metal – broken like plywood – flew around the beast as a wicking maelstrom of dust surrounded its terrifying physique. *CRASH! Creeeeeek!* went the metal framework as they sunk into the increasingly turbulent harbor water.

"TYRANITAR!" boomed the beast as the ship it had cut in half sunk almost immediately. It raised its reptilian head high into the air, towering well over three stories high, and roaring with enough ferocity to bring Fredrick and his Metagross to their knees. Feyera tried to dash, to run, to do anything, but his feet held him firmly in place. Locked in fear, he could only helplessly watch as Fredrick was utterly outstripped and outmatched by Cipher's scientists. For once, Feyera saw the idolized father figure completely helpless.

"Steady!" ordered the police agent to his terribly outnumbered Pokemon. While Metagross was comprised of two Metang, and subsequently four Beldum, division would greatly reduce the
Pokemon's strength and stopping-power in exchange for dexterity and numbers. "Hold it together now!" commanded Fredrick. "EARTHQUAKE!"

A pulse of molten energy spread like ripples in a shallow pool as Metagross slammed a massive Beldum arm into the iron dock boards. The ensuing wave caused enough force to stagger the various Pokemon, and managed to cause Scizor to lose its balance. But before Feyera could see whether the attack had significantly changed the odds for his escape, a cascade of translucent water distorted his sight entirely.

"Feyera…" he heard himself say. A terrible shiver ran up his spine. His voice seemed to echo and resound from within himself.

"Huh?" Trapped within an opaque prison of crimson glass, the young man wondered what had happened. He tried to look around, but found that he could not. He was paralyzed, imprisoned below red clouds and a ceiling of stained glass.

"Feyera!" Again his voice echoed. It was the same boyish tone he had always heard, albeit not from the third person. It sounded strange, different, and above all else it felt high above him; as if the voice had been traveling down a very deep well to reach his ears.

"Who's there!?" Feyera wondered, trying to cup his ears to hear the mysterious voice resembling his own. However, try as he might, the young man could not even feel his ears. Indeed, he had been completely bound in place. Stranded. Entombed in a prison of ever-changing miasma. "Sana!"

"No. It's me," he answered himself.

"ME?" exclaimed the researcher. "Damn! I can't move!" Attempting to thrash about, Feyera found himself unable to budge a single muscle. "This is…impossible! Has someone taken my body over?!" His eyes no longer could blink, and the sight before him – radiant in kaleidoscopic colors – continued to shift and morph before him.

Then, almost as if to mock him, there was movement all around. He felt himself moving, but not on his own will! The volition itself had seemingly been bypassed; Feyera could only watch his legs extend to run from a bizarrely detached perspective. A surge of rouge energy from Evice's Pokemon arced through the air, zipping straight in front of his chosen path. Stumbling slightly, he fell to the ground, unable to do anything to break his own fall. "Oof!" exclaimed Feyera's voice.

"S–shit!" With the cold floor pressed against him, he bellowed mentally, "What's happening to me?!"

Panting from above seemed to answer his question in the most unusual of ways as he felt himself getting up on trembling legs. "*Pant… pant* Your body has such unwieldy legs…” said the voice, which now Feyera was positive was his own.

"M–my body?" "…!" "What are you talking about!?!"

"Urgh!" Rising up, the young man found himself darting in the direction of Lorelei's white yacht. Everything had gone numb, he could only watch as his body undertook various feats that were not the product of his command. "For now…” huffed the young man as he ran clumsily along the dock and away from the battle.

Feyera's perspective had been shaken from the motion of running, and what the young researcher soon realized was that he had not been viewing the world from his eyes at all. Everything was too
tall for that. Unless he had shrunk, it would be impossible! The glowing walls of red all around him that he could see the world through gave it away in an awful revelation. "I'm...not!" Trying to reach out to touch the world, he only could press his consciousness against the transparent crimson wall. It jolted his mind with stinging volleys of sensation; the very same terrifying sensation felt when he had touched the Gardevoir heart from the outside. "I can't be...!" he thought in frenzied worry. "NOOO!" However, that didn't stop his body from automatically running, dragging him along in this zombified state of sapped existence.

"*Huff* ...If we can get out of this alive – I promise *gasp* I'll return it to you!"

"Ah! Watch out!"

"Fools! Unite and descent!" With a mighty crack of a silvery whip stitching his Pokéballs together into a long chain Evice ordered, "Slaking, Crush Claw! Scizor, use Metal Claw! Salamence, Aerial Ace! Fuse your attacks into one... *CRACK!* ... BLADE GALE! Destroy everything in sight!" A volley of sinister energy spun out from the whip at his command. Slaking charged first, a surprise considering the monster's girth. With a merciless smash, it ripped the metal dock boards clear up into the air from their resting places; hurling the already bent metal from when Aggron had arrived on scene. Scizor, buzzing on its compact wings, flew up after the beams and – using a quick series of chomping motions from its claws – further split apart the boards of metal into jagged sword like projectiles. Salamence, which had risen high above Scizor, unleashed a gale-force wind with a mighty beat of the dragon's curved wings. Razor blade projectiles rained down from above. Feyera watched as Metagross dived in front of the hail of knives to protect Fredrick. The metal rattled off Metagross' thick hide. A few of the blades dug into the Pokemon's body with incredible piercing power.

"ARGH!"

"Fredrick! No!"

Springing to his feet "There's no time!" insisted the paranormal force controlling his body like a puppet. "You can't defy nature!"

"N–NO! Stop! –Didn't you hear what he said to me?!"

"–You mean us?" asked Feyera's voice hauntingly.

"Us...?" Hearing his familiar human voice from an external, detached perspective terrified the young researcher. It was as if his every unique annunciation had been robbed right out from under him! And he could hear it all as if he were a separate entity entirely! As if it had all been recorded! But something else burned at whatever consciousness he had left; tugging at what he had come to know as his heart. "Fredrick... He called me his son!"

"–Then you can't let his sacrifice be in vain!" said Feyera's familiar, boyish voice. "This is the moment to live! *Gah!* The moment to flee!"

"No! I...you need to help him! ...Please, if you have any mercy left...! *gasp!* Urghh! Help – *GAH!* fight for him! Fight for Fredrick!"

"I can't do that!" The sternness of his separated voice shocked Feyera nearly as much as how perceptive he had become to every detail. Every pitch, every syllable had meaning. Felt meaning.

"Why not?"

"Because –" Feyera's possessed body tumbled to the side of the wide dock as another Earthquake
rocked the entire base "– because, I'm using all of my Psychic power to keep your consciousness alive!"

"Ahhh!" Feyera tried to scream, yet his mental outcries could only reach the mind of the Pokemon that had overtaken his body. "What?! You can't be serious!"

"I am!" echoed the voice of his commandeered body. "Without Serethrium to confine the Mercurium to one part of your body, there's nothing preventing a merger of consciousness!"

"NO! That can't be…!" Feyera didn't want to believe it! He couldn't! Yet here he was trapped within the crystal that had been on his chest all this time! None of it made sense, but all of it felt sensible! Everything felt sensible! Choking on the perceivable ecstasy, he asked, "How can consciousness merge…?!"

"Mercurium – the silver nanotechnology of the ancients – will only allow for one consciousness to exist!"

"–NO! You ha– HA! AGH! – have to stop it!" begged Feyera.

"–I can't stop it. Nothing can. Mercurium… is meant to do exactly what is taking place."

"…!" No words or language could make sense of anything that was taking place! The sensitivity, the heavenly sensation, the prospect of completely letting go of the shackles binding Edge. Each word seduced his mind with a gradual encroachment of passionate excitement. Feyera tied to twist, to move, to budge. However, all of those familiar capacities vanished as soon as he had invoked them!

"Feyera, – merging and sharing a mind – what we're doing temporary – is a misnomer. This won't – can't – last. Mercurium is a toxin to the genetic code; it will not allow two organisms to exist indefinitely… there can only be one!"

"This doesn't make any – ah! *AHH!* – A–any–sense!" Asphyxiating in shallow gasps for air, Feyera madly tried to break free from the imprisonment – the crushing – of his existence. He was being forced out of his own body! But before all sensation was lost in the maddening spiral of distorted, colored perception, a sharp pain pelted from within his chest; dragging him back into his body with a kick. "*AH!*" He felt his skin brush against a low steel wall. "Urgh… huh?" The coldness against a warm object such as his arm never felt so good and full of significance before. Unfortunately, the familiar embodied sensation was short-lived. Like the a glint of light, control vanished as his body staggered back up from the brief stumble, taking with it any hope of repossessing what was righteously his body.

"*Huff* If your memories are any teacher, then this is exactly what happened to Celesta! I–I don't believe it, after all this time in dormancy, I'm alive again in your body!"

"ARGH! Celesta!? Who's that?!

"Celesta was a matriarch. Her heart was pure, and her spiritual core sought to live on, even when it was imprisoned in Deirdre Aldaine… an associate of yours."

"WHAT?! Wait, so you're saying I'm going to end up like her? With you overtaking my body?! NO!"

"…Feyera, if there is a battle for dominion, my Psychic powers will overrun your human mind entirely. I can already sense the onset of it… I– I feel like I'm coming back to life; your breaths are becoming my own!"
"..." Words, language, were all escaping, fleeing from him! All their origins came back in damaged poetry, inexplicable emotions he could hardly comprehend! If he only knew how to understand it! If he only knew how to transcribe what he was feeling! "NOOOOO!"

"I'm doing all I can to prolong it! I've buried your consciousness into the safest place, my – our – heart."

"Heart?!

"That's why you haven't yet disappeared entirely."

"Wait... if I disappear then...does that mean...?" Lost for words, the feeling of utter helplessness splintered his mind with streams of emotion.

"It means – I'll completely overtake your body," answered the Gardevoir using Feyera's own lips. "You'll cease to exist. I'll be you in every regard. Your lost memories are already filling my consciousness. Your knowledge, your intellect, your feelings are rapidly becoming my own."

"...!" Terrified Feyera screamed out in a language he never knew existed before. "Noooo!" he howled beating against the foggy prison walls of the heart's exterior. Each desperate pounding of his fists against the crystal separating him from the outside world mimicked the steady beating of a heart. He could barely control himself. Had he not been completely trapped within the crystalline heart, he surely would have been thrashing to wrestle free.

"–Feyera... Doctor Feyera... with the power of Mercurium, there's only enough room for one of us to exist in this physical vessel."

"This vessel is MY GODAMN BODY!"

"– I know, it... belongs to you. But it doesn't change the fact that in order to live, one of us must die."

Feyera couldn't command the moment of panicked frenzy. "I...!" Even the familiar pounding of his Alterieno boots beneath him could not be felt. Everything had become so detached. So foreign. It was all there, right in front of him, but none of it could be felt. Locked within the metaphorical perch of his chest, Feyera could not help but wonder "Is this really the end for me? The end of my life?!"

"–I'm doing my best not to take life away from you, but the liquid Mercurium spreading throughout your body isn't making things any easier for me! There isn't enough time!"

"DON'T LET ME FADE AWAY!" bellowed the Pokemon researcher. "You can't! You won't!"

"Don't you see?! You're still not her! You're not like Celesta! ...Not yet! —I'm fighting it... I'm fighting nature for you! If I had willed it, you'd be gone already!" chastised the Gardevoir through Feyera's voice.

"Celesta?"

"According to your research: human minds cannot resist the higher sentience level of a Gardevoir for very long. Mercurium favors neuron synapses that humans have yet to evolve! That's why this is so difficult to do...!"

"W–what? How do you know this? How am I still here? And... Why am I still here?"
"Because of our mutual destiny!"

"LOOK OUT!"

"HAHAHA!" yelled Evice. "Face your demise! Salamence, Fireblast! Scizor, Bug Buzz! Tyranitar, Shadow Blitz! *KER-whip!* … Attack everything in sight! Leave nothing alive!"

"FAWWHOOOM!" Salamence expelled a vicious five-pronged star of heat in Feyera's direction. Trying to duck for cover, an earsplitting disorienting sound knocked him in front of the dock's next bulkhead. He held his ears, rolling to the side in a desperate attempt to flee from the looming shadow approaching him.

"Metagross, Agility coverage!" hollered Fredrick. Hovering on magnetic power, the massive steel-encased Pokemon spun in front of the blast, taking the full brunt of the attack, its sleek metal hide slowly dripping away from hellishly intense flames. The searing heat against his face and neck forced him to his knees as the massive Pokemon barely guarded his frail physique from an inferno of shadowy clouds. However, the black aura accompanying Tyranitar quickly engulfed Metagross. "Now's your chance, aim for number five: ICE PUNCH!" Concealed in the swirling sand stream, Metagross gathered one of its steel claws together, forming a snowstorm of artic energy, and with a mighty thrust, launched a projectile Beldum. "Psshwep!" screeched the ice cold Pokemon as it flew through the air; soring with gale-like speed it managed to upper-cut Salamence's long neck with devastating impact. Both the makeshift elemental mortar and Evice's dragon Pokemon fell frozen to the ground; Salamence's gaping mouth still rearing in an attack position.

Crawling behind cover, Feyera glared anxiously at the distance he still had to traverse to reach the end of the dock. Figuring he could cover the distance in a ten-second sprint meant nothing with Evice and Ein's Pokemon destroying everything in their path.

"Destroy his escape route!" yelled Ein. "Don't let him escape! Magneton, Magnet Rise! Rhydon, use Earthquake!"

"Evade!" shouted Fredrick from afar.

"Follow it up! …Let nothing stand as you split the earth's mantle!" boomed Evice. "Aggron, Machamp, Slaking, Tyranitar: EARTHQUAKE! *Whip!* CONCENTRATED TREMOR!"

"Metagross! Rise above with Magnet Rise!"

*KWHHOOOMMMM!* Gaping fissures, the size of houses, opened up bottomless rifts bellow the harbor, shaking everything above water violently and causing massive whirlpools to flood the cracks. *Creeeeeak!* The vaulted harbor ceiling began to buckle from the combined tremors. Paralyzed from the dock's traumatic vibrations, Feyera could only hold on to the bulkhead for dear life, and unable to see combat unfolding, he looked over in the direction he was heading to see Desperado uncoiling herself from the ship. The aftershock of the unison Earthquake splintered what was left of the dock, crippling Feyera's straight-path exit strategy.

"Reflect!" Fredrick ordered. Spheres of blue light surrounded Metagross, functioning as a force-field to delay Cipher's brutal eight Pokemon armada.

"Split through the center of their defenses; you can't miss! Magneton, Lock On! Rhydon, Stone Edge!" "Psshew!" A haunting red laser beam shot out from each of Magneton's eyes; the beams converged on Metagross with peerless precision.

"Raargh! Scizor, Brick Break!" Evice shouted with a flick of his chained-together Pokéballs.
"Aggron, Double Edge! Machamp, Close Combat! Synchronize your attacks into one! *CA–WHIP!* …CRUEL DEVASTATION!" Scizor's ironclad claws shattered the Reflect barrier with impunity, leaving Metagross and the rest of the dock completely exposed. With nowhere to flee too, Metagross took the full brunt of a charging Rhydon's stone-sheathed elbows, and Aggron's hulking physique easily toppled Metagross. With a wicked howl, Machamp slammed the massive Xtellia club up into Metagross' venerable underbelly. Lobbing the embedded mace along with the Pokemon, Machamp hurled both with a powerful Fling, using its free arms to score additional punches. "*AWWOOOH!*" bellowed a distant Tyranitar as Metagross was tossed high into the air, landing just shy of the dreadnaught's reinforced hull. All appeared to be lost; the mechanized beast had been demolished by a united front of Cipher's ruthless attacks.

"DES!" Feyera called out as she dove with her serpentine body into the water exposed beneath the fractured dock. "I'm coming Des!" But, unfortunately, his projected telepathy did not seem to reach her; locked in the crystalline prison, it felt as if nothing could come in or out.

"It's no use…! *Huff*" wheezed Feyera's voice. "She can't hear you!"

Surprisingly, the natural frustration-born anger did not reach the depths of where his consciousness was bound. "No!" he thought realizing how helpless he really was. With a wild look in her eyes, she charged at the scene of combat, order-less and unresponsive. "DES! Answer me! Please!"

"–We're running out of time!" insisted the ties upon his body. "It's now or never, Feyera!"

"Why! Why do you want to help me!?" he asked the controlling force. "What am I to you?!"

"I – *cough* – Christian, you weren't who I thought you were…" answered the sincere voice. "You…became more than that."

"What are you talking about? Relinquish my body at once!"

"Indeed… our time is brief. Des is giving us a clear break for the yacht. If you can order her with your mind, she may respond to your telepathic voice."

That was all Feyera needed to hear. "DES!" he bellowed from deep within the crystalline core.

[Hoss?! Is that you?!] Des silently spun around in a wide arc, spraying water to deflect some of the expelled dark energy.

"Des!" called Feyera from inside the tomb of sensation and distance alike. "Yes! I'm still alive! You need to fight for me! Fight for us all!" Waves of water and spirit clashed together producing frightful hymns of energy. "Use Dragon Dance!" Her fins glistened with draconic energy, shimmering like the surface of the water beneath her, and she let out a deafening roar of power. "GARRROH!"

"Rhydon, return!" snarled Ein from afar.

"Gideon's switching his Pokemon. He can't have both out on the field at the same time… We have to time this!" Feyera's body snarled, yelling to Fredrick, "Wait for Magneton's next move, then use Ice Punch as a projectile!"

"Use ZAP CANNON!" Ein said, quickly withdrawing his Rhydon. "Full power!" *CRACKLE! KA-WHOOOM!* the bolt of lightning split down and throughout the harbor, drawing ionic energy from the sun's growing intensity. Everything became tangled up in a web of static and sparks. Massive arcs of raw electrical power coiled above on the massive harbor ceiling. But the inflicted electrical paralysis did not stop their adversaries, rather the bolts accelerated the resolve of
Metagross. Fearing the stationary supercomputer had not been fully paralyzed by the last onslaught, Ein predictably realigned his Pokemon. "Rhydon, front and center! EARTHQUAKE! Magneton, follow with a Discharge attack!"

However Rhydon's vulnerable underbelly was met by Metagross' icy uppercut. "META!" it shouted, drilling the Rhydon with talons coated an electrical field which sapped enough heat from the local atmosphere to that of dry ice. The agent's supercomputer dug its strong metal fist right into Rhydon with a second Bullet Punch. With a tearing stroke – piercing hide and bone alike – Metagross dug right up and into Rhydon's chest. In an instant, the beast's crushed heart stopped beating.

Ein swore and released his Magneton again from stasis. "Go for the trainer, hit everything! Use Thunderbolt!"

The dock was set aglow with electrical light from Magneton's wicked thunderbolts. Fredrick was knocked over by the initial pulse, and Desperado lurched out in pain as the wide-spread shockwave slammed into her body, freezing her cold.

"DES!" Feyera yelled and screamed from inside whatever hell he had been trapped in, but the man's voice did not travel far before returning to him in waves of distant yet palpable radiance.

Feyera's Gyarados, though small, fell down alongside Fredrick's stunned Metagross. Her muscles had been snap–frozen by the creature's single greatest weakness: lightning. Des wobbled off the yacht's bow, in free–fall her muscles unable to respond to ease her harsh impact with the dock.

"Now!" A rush of adrenaline reduced his sight. "OUTRAGE!" The creatures beside him became pinpoints, pawns in a grand game of chess. Everything was focused on this last gambit. Though unable to command his body, allowing the instinct-like behavior to occur without resistance allowed him to dart straight out into the open. Jumping on floating fragments of the shattered docks, he deftly sprung out into the open. Beams of light and shadow drenched his peripherals, but his heart remained fixed. With a mighty leap, he managed to clutch the edge of the Prima's anchoring rope, right before the log below him sunk into the chaotic water. Gasping for air, the thick twine rubbed against his heart as he struggled to climb up the line. Though his clothes were saturated and heavy from falling into the harbor, he squirmed vigorously up the side of the shallow hull – desperate for a promised escape he had taken hold of.

"Out of my way…! …THUNDER!" yelled Ein. A huge crackling light shot down from the gaping hole in Evercrest's high metal ceiling, arching and twisting in glistening splendor.

"Tyranitar, Thunder!" Evice ordered with a flick of the chain "Combine your fierce attacks and bring the sea serpent down… CHAIN LIGHTNING!"

"Des, look out!" *CRACKLE! KA-FOOWM!* However, before the beam of surging energy could rain down upon Desperado, a single metal nail – raised high into the air like a lightning rod – drew in every last roguish volt, frying Fredrick's Pokemon into complete paralysis. The supercomputer collapsed, completely short-circuited from the sheer voltage. "…bzz…".

"METAGROSS!" hollered Fredrick. "NOOOO!"

"Now you're finished! Machamp, use Close Combat! RIP THEM TO PIECES! LIMB FROM LIMB!"

"*Ugh!*" Fredrick fell to his knees. "*GAH!*" He reached for the RAIL rifle, but was cut off by a pulse of white light from Ein's pistol. The massive Machamp was nearly upon him, and the
muscular Pokemon was primed to use herculean strength to tear his limbs clean off. "Oh no, you don't!" Fortunately, Fredrick's revolver was quick to deter the rushing Pokemon, giving the agent enough time to get back to his feet. "Catch me if you can!" cried out the agent, dodging a double grab by the four-armed creature.

"There's no escape! Use Dragon Tail!" Evice ordered with a flick of the whip. Salamence's twisting tail slammed into Fredrick, sending the agent sailing through the air and against the massive warship's hull.

"FREDRICK! NO!" exclaimed Feyera from his crystalline confinement. He reached out his hand as if to reach out to Fredrick. However, Feyera's wavering sight could only muster a spiritual outline of an outstretched arm. For his true arm remained numb and locked at his side. Helpless, Feyera watched Evice turned to face a pack of shadow Houndoom that had recently gnawed their way out from the air ducts.

"Get in there, and use FLAMETHROWER!" commanded Evice. "BURN THEM ALL!"

"*AWWWOOOOO!*" howled the Houndoom. Three of the beasts sprayed alarmingly hot napalm from its shadow–clouded snout. "*FA–WHOOM!*"

"NO!"

Before the dust even settled, Evice shouted "Salamence: Hyper Beam! Machamp…GIGA IMPACT!" with a swing of his whip, which was comprised of several Pokéballs. "Merge all attacks into one!" he ordered. "SINGULARITY STRIKE!" The chilling control of the whip caused the agonizing cries of Evice's Pokemon to be perfectly synchronized. And, if only for a brief moment, caused everything to pause. Indeed, time itself drew to a sluggish pace as a brilliant combination of radiant energy beams shook the very foundations of the air. Each individual beam of light from Evice's six shadow Pokemon shone in a different colored light – from the color of chocolate wine all the way around to the violet summer evening's sky. Merging into one, with searing temperatures the white light singed the warship's plated hull, melting the ebony paint clean off. The steel then drooped from the heat, surrounding the police agent under a waterfall of molten metal. The sound barrier was shattered apart by the sonic boom of the Pokemon's combined power, knocking him and the rest of his team back as the massive wake of energy toppled them all. Feyera could not hear the officer scream through the pulse of extraordinary combined power from Ein and Evice's Pokemon alike.

There was hardly a lull as Evice's Pokemon recovered from the tremendous unleashing of energy attacks. Ein quickly stepped in with commands to cripple Feyera now that Fredrick had been taken out. "Stop the runt from getting away with a Thunder Wave!"

Indeed, he could only do one thing at this point: "Run!" Surprisingly gaining a sudden sense of control over his legs, Feyera ran as fast as he could towards the dock, dodging the tumbling wooden planks and falling metal sheets from above. The trainer's dash was soon confronted by the cold front of Scizor's Bullet Punch. Out of thin air, Evice's Pokemon slugged the trainer directly in the heart, knocking him clear off the docks and in towards the molten black ship Fredrick had been seared underneath. Unable to scream and flying through the air, Feyera was surprised to feel a cushiony pad rather than the scorching temperatures of molten metal. Peering out of his panicked eyes, he saw his Gyarados glaring furiously in the direction of Ein and Evice.

"Des... " Feyera whispered mutely. "Thank you...!"

But she did not answer his telepathy. Instead, she swung her massive aquatic tail against the docks. The deafening roar followed by a high arch of water gave the Pokemon trainer enough time to
grasp onto her hide.

"Fredrick!"

"You have to keep running!" said the Pokemon trainer hastily to his heart. "Fredrick gave you a clear escape path!"

"I–I… NO!"

"You're not in charge of me!"

"I'm suppressing my Psychic powers so you can stay alive within MY heart!"

"Why?! Why would you – the Pokemon I murdered – ever do that?!"

"Don't you see? You took more away from me than my life."

He knew what the Gardevoir meant. "Sanaria," he whispered, as an image of her flashed before his eyes.

"Feyera, I only want to see her one last time before I –"

"Jump!" he hollered just in time, before his body tripped over ceiling debris. "Seph, I cannot live like this…"

"I know," replied the creature controlling his body's every movement. "I know all too well that it is no way to live."

"…! You've been living inside this heart the entire time?"

"It shouldn't surprise you; after all, it is my own."

"THUNDER!" Ein shouted. "Unite… and Descend!" The three Magnemite linked together forming a ray of pure plasma between their supercharged bodies. They spun in a spiral and released the crackling energy in a booming pulse.

"Order your Pokemon!" echoed Feyera's voice; however, so synchronized was the telepathic connection that hardly a delay followed. "Brucie, use Flamethrower to disorient Magneton's attack!"

"*CHAAARRR! FAWOOHOM!*" Brucie exhaled a brutal stream of blue flares at Magneton, causing the creature to separate and scatter mid-attack just in order to dodge the devastating Flamethrower.

"Crunch!" Evice ordered the hounds chasing after Feyera and his Pokemon. With glistening green fangs, the Houndoom recklessly charged at Brucie, missing with the main attack, but still managing to nail Feyera's Pokemon with a sharp jab from raising its armored knee straight into the Charmeleon's chest.

"Chaar!" howled Brucie as he went sailing helplessly through the air high over Des and Feyera and into the water. "PLUNK! Hiss…!"

"NOOOOOOOO!" screamed Feyera at the top of his lungs as a huge splash of harbor water signaled his very first Pokemon's demise. "BRUCIE! No… you can't be dead! NO! YOU CAN'T BE
DEAD! NOOOO!" He could see violent splashing as the Pokemon struggled to remain afloat in a sea of certain death. "ARGHHHHH!"

"Heh." Ein turned to Evice and smiled. "Ready?"

"Hahaha! They're finished!"

"It's time! Magneton, use Wild Charge!"

"Houndoom, Fire Fang!" said Evice.

The obedient hound leapt high up into the air, further than any of the other Pokemon aiming right at Desperado's neck. Feyera found himself being flung off from Desperado's back. He fell on something hard. But he could not tell up or down, only watch as in a crackle of heavenly thunder, Houndoom's shadow-lined fur stood on end as it was electrocuted as a makeshift-electrical conductor for Magneton's attack. The fire hound had bit straight into Des. Magneton then set the Pokemon ablaze with enough volts to kill it outright. The body of the shadow Pokemon convulsed and turned to ash as its fangs evaporated while still imbedded in the Gyarados' neck.

"Des…! NO!" he shouted within the confinement originating in his chest. Lifting himself off the deck, he fought off the growing pressure pressing down on him. "No…They can't be dead…!"

Feyera looked down. The boat's controls were right there, though they seemed oddly closer to him. "Now's my only chance!" Detached, he felt his fingers fumbling with ignition key given to him by Fredrick. Twisting the start-up switch, the yacht's motor purred eagerly to life. "*Fuummm! FUROOM!*" groused the mighty engine, spewing harbor water as it lurched forward just in time to evade an incoming attack from Aggron.

"NO! DON'T LET HIM GET AWAY!"

Time seemed to crawl to a slow march forward. There were mysterious lights, shimmering from beyond the bulkhead's metal veil. The harbor suddenly shook from a massive tremor. Feyera strained to see what had caused the ruckus, but his eyes seeing from within the Gardevoir crystal had grown dim. The world around him had transformed into a churning sea of red. Faint glimmers of light shattered the grim darkness, shining brightly from far beyond the gates.

"GAH! What in damnation?!" Ein exclaimed. "NO! …IT CANNOT BE!" A massive curved bolt of lightning arched directly in front of the Cipher scientist, blocking him and his Pokemon from boarding the Prima.

Feeling a warm touch against his palm, Feyera could only attempt to shout out from within his prison, "SANA!"

Rather than answer his claim, the graceful figure appeared to float above him. Like a ghost, she descended from a pillar of light and swirling emotional color. And yet, she did not look at him. Instead, she appeared transfixed upon his vacant eyes. "Seph…" she said silently.

"Sana…" Uncontrollable words flowed from Feyera's lips, "it really is you. You're so beautiful. Such radiant splendor…"

"SEPH! SEPH! Come back to me!" pleaded the Pokemon, shaking his body.

"I can't, Sanaria. My time… has come to an end, the Mercurium will soon assimilate the one who resists the least. My power, my ability, my capacity to protect you, now belongs to the man who stands before you. If I overtake his body, all of our memories will be wiped clean. I… I don't want to forget, Sana. I can't… I won't forget you."
"SEPH! No! Please! You cannot leave me."

"…Don't you see? I never left your side, Sanaria; I've been here all along."

"Oh, Seph!"

"Although far from perfect, Feyera has taught me a valuable lesson in acceptance. I now can move on to the afterworld, knowing that in the end, the capacity for love in spite of hatred is what inspires true feeling…"

"SEPH! NOOO! PLEASE DON'T LEAVE! NOT AFTER ALL OF THIS! Don't you see?! I love you!"

"*GARGH! UNGH!*" Something had kicked him violently in the chest! "OW! Damn!" Feyera clenched his teeth, and the riveting sensation of his body slammed into his consciousness. He was back in control. Looking down at his chest, he quickly realized that crystal on his chest no long symbolized imprisonment, though it radiated with a power filling his entire body with strength. "*Gasp, gasp!*"

"Thas Feyera… Aren't you forgetting something?" asked a sweet voice beside him.

"S–Sanaria!?" he jumped in awestruck disbelief. "What happened?!"

Sanaria batted her eyes friendlily. "I think you know." Clutching her hands behind his neck, she continued to hold him in a tight embrace; each of their radiant hearts warmly gracing against the other's. Before Feyera could say anything else (much less do anything), she tilted her head towards a rapidly unwinding coil of rope. "Hmm? Aren't going to give me some snide remark about how this was all part of your master plan?"

"I– uh!?"

"Hm? No snide comment?" Playfully she mimicked his voice, "it's about time Sanaria saves the day'? Oh wait –" the Gardevoir looked around mockingly left to right "– Looks like there aren't any Bug Type Pokemon around here. Phew, I guess that means I don't get to embarrass you again! You must be relieved!"

"Sanaria…?" he asked. She appeared more vivid than he recalled. Not an ounce of color was lost. "Is it really you?"

"Huh?" she scoffed. "Of course it is!"

"Why did you come back?" he asked sincerely. "I was going to save you; even if it meant sacrificing myself."

She tried smiling lightheartedly. "To protect you." The wind blew her minty green hair as the yacht continued to accelerate right towards the broken gate aglow with fantastic sunlight. "Remember what I said before?"

"Yes! I–I can remember! How…? How is this possible…? How can I be…?"

Sana gave him a hesitant, perplexing look. "Veh Feyera?"

"Is 'Veh' my name?" he wondered. "I thought it was …uh…"

"No…" she smirked playfully, "but I like to call you that since it means – oh, never mind! Quit
"Huh?" Feyera scratched his bushy hair, and the texture pleasantly surprised him. "Cut anchor…? What?"

"You're hopeless!" Sana exclaimed with a laugh. "I swear, if Seph and I hadn't been seafaring Gardevoir…" She knelt down, reached to her side and plucked a crystalline feather from a pair of transparent wings. Soon, with the approaching afternoon sun, Sanaria's illusion of light began to fade away. "Let's just say you're lucky to have me at your side." "SHING!" With a sharp slash, she used the edge of the psychic crystal to shred the anchor's rapidly uncoiling rope right before the diamond feather faded into material nothingness.

"…!

"There! Now look out!"

"Where…?" he asked, peering off into the distance as the wind tunnel whipped air against him. "Where do you need me to look?"

"What are you doing, veh Feyera?! Get down!" she scolded as the yacht crashed through the harbor's gate at full power. Though exposed and without flat metal plating, the ship's skeleton burst through the damaged wall. From the mighty impact, Sanaria fell against Feyera, and the two fell onto the rocking deck now bathed in sunlight. "Ooof!" she exclaimed.

"Sanaria?" he asked in wonder. "Is it really you? …But who am I…?"

"Don't worry. We're on a journey to figure that all out. Right doc?"

"Uhh... 'doc'?" said Feyera. "You're confusing me!"

"I thought you got weirded out when I called you 'veh Feyera'. Make up your mind for goodness sake!"

"I…" However Feyera could not help but pause. Behind Sana, a beautiful tapestry of brightly colored light draped down from the low afternoon sun. Colors joined and merged in a seamless language that he never knew existed before.

*Click! Sisss! Hiss*

"You're …still alive? Even after all this?"

"Heh..." wheezed Fredrick. "It appears my cursed luck is just as strong as ever, Gideon! *Cough* Heaven still favors me alive…"

"Humph." Rolling his eyes in disgust, Ein approached, mounting his longboarded pistol over his narrow shoulder. "Aldaine, some say that failure in battle is a sign you'll live a shorter life."

"I haven't failed. …I've been deceived…by you! By your lies…! *Hack Cough!*…But not anymore!"

"Hmm. You've failed a lot, haven't you? …As a man. …As a father."

"…!"

"– I told you this last time: when you want something done right, you have to do it yourself." Ein brushed a vine-like black hair out of his vision. "The fight is done. The war is won. The damage is
"...You don't know that."

"Of course I do. You're good as no more. He'll come crawling back to me. Without you; he has to."

"This war can no longer continue. This destruction... These atrocities... Evil is all that's left in Cipher."

"The good and the evil always seem to account for what is necessary, Aldaine. Don't you see? There are no sides. There is no 'right'. Only a winner and a loser... And you've chosen the wrong side."

"No..."

"Yes," growled Ein. "By teasing Feyera with a noose-wand of control amid the ravenous spreading of the toxicosis...he'll have no other choice but to join Cipher."

"I don't believe you...!"

"You might deny it. But... your doubt remains, doesn't it? Hmm. It's the darker side of you, isn't it? I know... I understand... Your dreams... they deceive all you've seen. All you've perceived. Rationality is the only answer! You're nothing more than a lost hope to a perishing child. How does that feel?"

"To speak the name of the dead is to make them live again. However briefly: they are remembered."

"Humph! Fredrick Aldaine, you know as well as I do: recited phrases of old carry very little weight in the modern world. Unquestioning wisdom is a fragile and delirious prophet!"

"Exactly, Gideon." Sight wavering beyond control, Fredrick tried to point at Ein. "Which is why... *cough!* ...in the end, Feyera won't need your help!"

"Wrong," Ein said with a dark smirk. "Your pet's too far gone. He couldn't forgive himself from the self-imposed guilt and you know exactly what follows from a conflicted consciousness!"

"Consciousness isn't a tangible concept, and neither is forgiveness." Fredrick further lowered his head. The golden olive leaves adorning his high-strung military color had begun to drip. The golden rivers trickled freely down his pine-leaf colored suede vest. "Forgiveness doesn't come from within... it first comes from another...!"

"Hmm... At least you tried," Ein said with a sneer. "I thought you lost the ability to care after what was done to your little girl!"

"I...did. *Gasp!* ...But *urk!* I was able to get it back..." Fredrick desperately gulped at vanishing air "...! And...*wheeze*...if not fully, then at least for the brief timbre of a human heartbeat!"

"Oh really? Human, you say?" derided Ein, his thin lips feigning a non-existent sympathy. "How... touching. Pity." As Ein's lean shadow stretched far beyond the dock, the frail scientist gradually turned to face the rays of stellar light. Cipher's admin couldn't help but smile at the afternoon sun, which appeared brighter than ever before. The liquid gold sunlight pierced throughout the entire harbor. "-- Aldaine, this is the end for you--" Ein said coldly "--and whatever you couldn't manage to stand for in your miserable life!" Beginning to step away, his shadow no longer concealed
Fredrick's dark features.

"AARRRGHHHHH!" screamed the police agent – his face heavily burnt from the liquid metal pouring down from Cipher's warship. "HAA! ...AAARRRGGHHHHH!" Fredrick looked skyward, at the beautiful sunlight piercing through the widening gap above. The sunlight gleamed through the harbor's shattered gate brighter than ever before. "YOU'LL NEVER WIN!" he hollered, his tortured face gradually scalding from the warship's rivers of liquid flowing metal. Like awful, searing veins, they etched down his tormented expression, scalding his flesh into irreconcilable fragments. "AARGGGHHH!" he bellowed out in absolute agony. Bright sunlight seemed to melt his view from the inside out through countless, unbearably beautiful colors.

"–Hmm. How appropriate, Aldaine. Seems it's time to embrace the sunlight; the beauty you were ever-so-fond of!" Ein leered. "It must run in the family...Deirdre often complained that the sun wasn't present enough here in the laboratory. Of course, after I was through with her...she'd never see the sun the same way again. Ha–haha!"

"...!" As the first rays of the warm afternoon sun licked at his seared cheeks, he fought the temptation to hide his wounded face from the light. Instead, he stared resolutely in the direction Feyera had taken off in. The distant white yacht had just passed over the Southern Sea's golden horizon from beyond the bay. "No," he said, eyes transfixed upon the brightly illuminated metal panels beneath him. Softly he exhaled, "no..."

"Oh?" Ein paused, turning around to face the defiance. "'No', you say...? Not gone yet? Your little girl is dead. And her sweetheart Doctor Feyera will be next!"

"...H–he got away... *Wheeze* Feyera...my son-to-be...*cough* he found a way to escape from your madness." Before any shadow of doubt could be cast upon Ein, Fredrick's weary eyes grew glossy with a blank expression – steadily reflecting the luminous sunlight in countless shades of colors, like two glistening prisms, trapped within a worried man's expression. As the sunburst grew ever brighter, he closed one of shadowy bronze eyes, and his expression began to loosen. No longer was there any sense of fear, any danger of mortality; it was all here before him. Life, death, the cycle of creation and destruction glowed right before his charred eyelids. With a hushed wink, he lifelessly fell, tumbling face-first onto the dock's metal floor. "Thump!" Strangely, the metal sheets no longer felt cold, even against his gruff, unshaven face. In fact, it felt warmer than anything he could possibly recall. Warmer than anything he'd ever felt in this entire existence. As warm as his daughter's embrace, an incredible feeling he thought he had long since lost. There was nothing left behind but utter silence. A lonely, thin patch of ribbon-bound sunlight was all that remained; flickering, as if somehow left behind; hovering ominously over his lifeless body; vanishing like a wisp of cold breath lost in a bleak winter's morning.

"Well now... – " Ein's victorious simper softly resounded throughout the otherwise silent harbor

"Commander Celesta, sector five's gone completely offline!"

Her blood-colored eyes glared across the room. "What?" At first she felt a rush of shock, however her anger was soon quelled by a cooling light that illuminated the young woman's pointed chin. "Your stupid technology failed us? ...Again?"

Over the computers mounted onto the central table and at the man next to the central terminal. "Penta base has been exposed to intense cosmic radiation. The base is completely dark."

"NO...!" she belted in sharp telepathic angst.
The force of her angered thoughts caused the men around her to flinch. As her menacing red eyes narrowed disapprovingly at the face of failure, another lieutenant quickly answered on his colleague's behalf. "Commander, the sensor's picking up intense magnetic interference. Chief Ein's Phaeton Prototype might have punctured the ionosphere longer than the shields could hold! The magnetic field above flickered out of existence long enough to allow the full radiation of the sun to destroy the safeguards. There also might have been a confrontation..."

"Might have?" she murmured softly to her rigid military collar. "Agent Black..." She quickly turned her head skyward. "Fredrick Aldaine..." she hummed in telepathic wonder. "Tell me, do we have a means of contacting the Evercrest base?"

"No ma'am. Any exposed circuitry would destroyed. Your Serenithium supply would also be destroyed."

"Destroyed?" she asked chillingly. "I thought I was reborn into this human body as an immortal."

"I--I don't know for sure. This is just me putting the pieces together. Our intel says the weapon stationed there wasn't ready for deployment. Evice made it perfectly clear in his last transmission that he wanted to see Phaeton's effect in person."

"Hmph. So much for Gideon's Solaris Shield..." hummed the lean military general. Like a Valkyrie, her elegant commanding nature dominated the soldiers in the room. "It appears warfare's advancement has once again surpassed the protective ramparts. Hm." She shifted her eyes, swaying her long green hair; streaks of shimmering silver running through its wavy volume. "How do you propose we deal with this new adversity? This...hmm...Feyera..."

"C--commander Celesta?" the man asked in a nervous salute. "Gideon had on good authority that both Feyera and the Kanto police agent would be kept in custody until you could convert them to our cause...!"

"Forget it," she said shaking her youthful face, "that's not happening."

"Commander?"

The general's disarming smile was followed by a swift "silly, stumbling phrases will never amount to anything of worth!" The fair-skinned commander looked down at her glowing chest. A bright medallion, engraved with a five-pronged cross, failed to match the brilliant luminosity emanating from the eerily organic metal dividing her breasts, jutting through her body-hugging uniform. "— We will make our next course of action based upon instinct rather than reason."

A bright aurora of spectacular lights draped down from high above. The flash of brilliant color was unlike anything he had ever seen. Even from a distance, the colored ribbons of kaleidoscopic light danced as if they were breathing along with his heavy breaths, beating with his swollen heart.

Nevertheless, Feyera's heart was not alone in this dark world.

At his side were Brucie, Des, and July. True they were injured, but their lives were not lost thanks to the Gardevoir locking arms with him. Sanaria's scarlet eyes, a nebula of pristine refinement, were at eyelevel with Feyera's emerald eyes. Golden rivers of cascading, molten iron no longer flowed freely through the researcher's eyes. Instead, all that remained was a warm cerise glow, barely reminiscent of past decisions and their heavy scars.

Neither of them could fathom the bottomless confusion as they drew closer together caressing what little air they shared in this preciously fortunate moment. With a soft murmur, Sanaria opened her
mouth to say, "Fallen angel – here at my side – guide us out of this endless night."

Fin.

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