

I/Tulpa: Pokémon Go NY

By

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निर्मित

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EXP: Experimental Home Publishing

“I/Tulpa: Pokémon Go, New York.” version 1.0

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निर्मित

This is a work in progress. The events and characters are fiction, and any similarities between real people and places and events is simply circumstantial or the fault of the author. (OMG, we know that’s so not true. How old are you?! There is no way for you not to be in my head. Look at you! You’re marvelous. You’re fantastic. I love you. Even when I don’t love you and you’re not marvelously fantastic, you still worked yourself into my brain and so, give me a break. I so can’t wait till The Rodenberry Paradigm kicks in and we just share and build on each other’s greatness.) This book should be available for free at free-ebook.net, but can be attained by writing the author directly. The author is open to constructive criticism, so feel free to email him at

Thought I messed up didn't you. Nope, just went to the next page. But I seriously could have so I am so not mad at you for thinking I did because I have and I will and, oh, the email:

solarcahriot@gmail.com

All other proposal, book signing, marriage offers, photos, or invitation to Tulpa mixers could be directed to 214-907-4070, with the understanding that phone calls rarely gets answered; some delays in responding to texts. Email is preferred. Please put 'I/Tulpa: Pokémon Go NY' in the subject header of an email so I can better sort you out. A non-response likely means I failed to catch it. Restraining orders should be delivered in person, in accordance to the legal requirements of whatever state you find yourself in. I'm in Texas. I think you're legally allowed to shoot me. I would prefer you didn't. Thank you.

WARNING

Warning! No, really, WARning. Like, seriously, "Danger Will Robinson, the Major and your sister Judy might be doing something over the rise that you shouldn't be privy to, and don't ask cause I have been programed not to tell you, even though I do seem to be the primary parent in this relationship and I should have lot more leeway." I'm obligated to say this. Just in case you don't know me, haven't read anything else I have written, aren't more mature than I am (and I am like as immature as one can get, most the time,) but just in case you didn't know this: Children do not come from storks. They don't come from Pokémon. Not even Pokémon storks. There are some rumors that Pokémon come from children. There is no evidence that Storks are involved. So, there could be some explicit scenes related to S.E.X. That could be an acronym or a metaphor, or just spell it out. If you're old enough to spell it out and push the button that says older than 18, even if you're not older than 18, you're probably okay, but if you're like not 21 or older, physically, the law really doesn't regulate or control for emotional and psychological age, thank god, cause I would have never been given a driver's license, no one would ever be allowed to drink or procreate, and, the laws says you can't read this. Why? Because if you grew up, something bad might happen to you. (Never mind, most people, a long time ago, grew up a lot

earlier than we do today, and every last one of them openly laments that horrible state of the world for not being more like them... Yeah, wrap your head around that one, old timers!.. and, consequently, now a days, no one seems to be growing the fuck up. Weird, eh? People insist on prolonging childhood but then get mad when everyone wants to be Peter Pan. (How old are you?! Nope, really, your answer could determine whether you have legal rights to proceed further, as if I could stop you.)) This content herein is probably just a mild R-rating, nothing worse in here than what might be found in say the move 'American Pie' or 'Dirty Grandpa.' (Right, thank you Aubrey! Making old people feel young again, you go girl.) Not saying it's American Pie kind of juvenile funny, but saying, if you know Manga and Anime, they get away with some seriously sexy stuff, that gets watered down a great deal before it gets to the US, which means, there are like whole countries of folks that could really give a Rattata's ass if there is sex in something. There is sex here. Less violence, more sex. And when you consider a choice between violence or sex on TV, why wouldn't we encourage more sex less violence? And, if we were going to police my brain, wouldn't you rather I was thinking sexy thoughts over violent thoughts, or funny sexy thoughts, over funny violent thoughts? And even more seriously, if you know anything about Pokémon and you are familiar with Nurse Joy, I can't be the only one with a jaw agape. Yes, seriously, she's a cartoon, but that never stopped Jessica Rabbit from making some dreams come true. Just saying! So, consider this, if you have to go and ask your mom what something means, you should put this down, now. This is not for you. It's probably not for me, either, but since it's in my head until I get it out, well, it is what is. Good luck. And stop making people rant.

Chapter 1

Look, here's the deal. If you're just tuning into the world of Jon and Loxy for the first time, there can be some initial confusion. This is just par for the course, part of life, the way it is, the same way dreams are different every night, and sometimes even from dream to dream within the same night. It's full of anachronistic anomalies, contradictions, hyperboles, and even grammatical errors, mostly unintentionally, perfectly planted in order to wake people from this to dream so they emerged into their own dream. It's what happens when you let a six year old write a book. Not that I am six, I don't think I am six, but I was hired by a six year old to tell you this story, and we're doing the best we can. Part of the problems is labels in general. Who am I? Who are you? Am I a boy or am I a girl, all these choices we have to make before we can even get the good part of the story. What am I wearing, what do I look like, yada yada yada. We all just want to jump to the good part, but that's just not how life works. Mostly. We always have to be inserted into a story already in motion, like in the back of a moving truck, chaos, and boxes all around. We're always born into a world with players having already made some hard decisions that impact are game. But I am going to do you a favor and fast forward over that, fast forward over the fact that we are starting with Jon. Jon, perhaps at the age of ten, maybe older, maybe younger, because what is age, really? And, never mind the hint of music that isn't music. Maybe it's a heartbeat, maybe a shamanic drum, or maybe it's the garbage truck setting a large, empty container down so hard that the waters in a street puddle that reflected the moon and Jon's face as he slipped up to the trailer were wiped out by ripples. And definitely ignore what looks like Jon breaking into an RV, because, he's is only slightly embarrassed by everyone knowing it, even though it was no secret, because the owner caught him red handed leaning into the small refrigerator. Jon had that feeling that someone was looking at him, and closed the refrigerator door just enough to confirm his suspicion, but was startled none the less.

"OMG!" Jon said, nearly jumping out of his skin. "You scared me."

"I scared you?" the owner of the RV asked, incredulously.

"Yeah," Jon said, as only a six or ten year old boy could say. "I didn't think anyone was home. I knocked first."

"Well, I am sorry I didn't answer. I was on the toilet," the RV owner said.

"Oh, well, that makes sense," Jon said. "Are you going to kill me?"

“Sit down at the table,” the RV owner said, pointing to the half bench seat.

Jon complied, resigned with his fate. He put his head down on the table, waiting for the mercy killing. The RV owner put together a plate of food, chili over hot water cornbread, and brought it to the table.

“Sit up,” he directed, and put the food in front of Jon after compliance. He sat down across from Jon and poured a glass of tea for Jon, and then for himself.

“I am confused,” Jon said.

“So am I, most the time,” he said.

“You’re going to kill me with poison?” Jon asked.

The RV owner sighed heavily, leaned into the table. “You break into a black man’s home and just naturally assume he is going to kill you?”

“Yeah, pretty much,” Jon said.

“OMG, son, we are so past the sixties. What would happen if I broke into your home?” the RV owner asked.

“My home, or a black man breaking into a white man’s home in general?” Jon asked.

The RV owner nodded appreciatively. “Nicely sorted. Your home.”

“You don’t want to break into my home,” Jon said.

“Just how old are you?” the RV owner asked.

“How old do I look to you?” Jon asked.

“Everyone looks and sounds like babies to me,” he said. “Eat.”

Jon took a portion of the chili, found it was actually pretty good, and began to shovel it into his mouth as fast he could, as if he had never seen a meal before. The RV owner sipped his tea, examining the boy. He observed the black eye, and stitches over the eyebrow, and couldn’t leave it alone.

“What happen to your eye?” he asked.

“I fell off my bike,” Jon answered with his mouth full.

The RV owner appraised the response, finding misplaced loyalty, discernment, and flat out lying. “Do you even own a bike?”

“Not since I fell,” Jon said.

The RV owner pursed his lips in consternation.

Jon swept his tongue over his teeth to break free some cornbread, and asked: “Has anyone ever told you that you resemble...”

“Stop” the RV owner said, using a flat hand before pointing. “If you say I look like Morgan Freeman, I am so going to...”

“Wait wait wait,” Jon interrupted. “I break into your RV, you feed me, but if I tell you that you resemble a particular celebrity, you’re going to kill me?”

“I was aiming for slapping, but okay,” RV owner said. “You seem obsessed with being killed. Do you want to die?”

“Better than hanging around this place,” Jon said.

“Are you sure?” RV owner asked. “I mean, think about it. You got forever to be dead, and what, a blink of an eye to live, to dream?”

“Are you one of those preacher types, like from the Blues Brothers?” Jon asked.

“OMG, I know you did just didn’t compare me to James Brown,” the RV owner said.

“I am emotionally stunted at 6, give me a break,” Jon said. “So, not a preacher then, what are you?”

“Is my career relevant?” the RV owner asked.

“Might be,” Jon said.

“You’re going to define my entire personhood based on my career?” the RV Owner said.

“Isn’t that what people do?” Jon asked.

“You broke into my RV, should I make that the entire basis of how I relate to you?” the RV owner asked.

“Good point,” Jon said. “So, what do you do?”

“I am a physicist,” the RV owner said.

“Oh,” Jon said, sorting. He came to a curious conclusion. “What’s the difference between a physicist and a preacher?”

“In today’s age? Not much,” he answered, musing. “I suppose the difference would be that if you were to report seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, I would ask you if it were a particle or a wave.”

They both laughed. It was a good laugh, growing in depth, each enjoying it, until the RV owner stopped laughing and brought his hand down hard on the table.

“What the fuck are you doing breaking into my home?” he asked.

Jon was on the verge of crying, but was trying to fortify defensiveness. "I was hungry," Jon admitted.

"You could have knocked," he said.

"I did knock, the door opened, I came in," Jon said.

"Oh, okay then," he said. "I have been meaning to fix that. What's your name, son?"

"Is it relevant?" Jon asked.

"You learn fast. It could be," the RV owner said. "I could just call you Up, or Down, or Charm, or Hey You. That was a particle joke if you didn't get it."

"I got it. Wasn't funny. You can call me Jon," Jon said.

"Jon it is. I am Doctor James Gate," James said, extending his hand.

Jon hesitated. "You mean, you're for a real physicist?"

"No, I just play one on TV," James said. "Are you going to shake my hand?"

"If you're that good at physics and all, why are you living in an RV park in a beat up, old bus as oppose to some University boring students or smashing atoms?" Jon asked.

"I am physicist," James said, withdrawing his hand. "I like living simply and off the grid."

Jon nodded. "I so wish I had a magic bus and could get off the grid."

"Learn physics," James said.

"Please, cosmological theory today is whacked. I have dabbled in numbers, and magic, and philosophy, and the only thing I have found to be true is Einstein observation that illusion of reality is doggedly persistent, not verbatim."

"How old are you again?" James asked.

"Again, how old do you think I am?" Jon demanded.

"I think you're a baby and don't have a clue about anything," James said.

"Well, maybe if I wasn't having to spend all my time hunting for my next meal and avoiding getting my butt kicked by family and the other hungry peers I might have time to actually sit down and do some math," Jon said. "Next time you're at the University, look up Maslow. Or maybe, here's a novel idea, running around and getting into mischief is the way boys learn. We muck things up, the same way you like smashing atoms. Constructive deconstruction. But no, you adults just want to label that as an illness and then zombify us with medication."

“Is that what happened to you?” James asked.

“I escaped the drug part. My mom did get me the DX of ADHD because the state sees it as a disability, so she gets a check from the state, and free amphetamines, which she then sells on the street for more than what the state paid. And in truth, no one really notices the difference in school because no one is aiming at teaching us kids anything but compliance and regurgitation, if they’re paying us any attention at all,” Jon rambled on. “They also gave me a DX of ODD, too, but I don’t understand how refusing to walk into traffic is a sign of opposition as opposed to intelligence. Did you know less than 12 percent of the teacher population is male, and that females tend to grade male students down, as opposed to female students who get rewarded for just showing up and looking cute? And did you know, both males students and females students do better when they are separated by gender? The girls are less focused on looking cute, and the boys are just, well, less stupid, but you adults are so determine to make us the same, as if we come off some cookie cutter, conveyor belt system, because, I don’t know, you like mediocrity or the elite need a population of zombies to maintain their status quo. Yeah, cosmology is whacked, the school system is whacked, but quite frankly, the school system is whacked because the parents are whacked, and we can probably trace all this whackedness back to the garden and the fall of man, which squarely places the responsibility on God for allowing the miscreant into the garden in the first place.”

“Wow,” James said. “You’re from Texas, aren’t you?”

“Safe bet, seeing how we’re presently in Texas,” Jon said. “Welcome to the ‘pull yourself up by your own bootstraps’ state. Might be nice if someone handed out some boots with straps.”

“So, you have developed a pretty sophisticated theory of why everything is whacked,” James said.

“Got a better one?” Jon asked.

“I do agree things are whacked,” James said.

“So, what’s your theory?” Jon asked.

James put his elbows on the table, clasped his hand, steepled his index fingers, touched them to the lower part of his lip, and contemplated his response. He stared into the depth of Jon as if Jon was a crystal ball and he was looking for clarity. “You really want to know?”

“Enlighten me,” Jon said.

“Extremely dangerous words,” James said.

“Danger is my world,” Jon said.

“You understand, being enlightened doesn’t mean things necessarily get better, right?” James said. “It just means you’re awake and aware.”

“I am more likely to buy into it if you’re not pushing puppies and sunshine,” Jon said.

James nodded. “Excellent point. Very well. My theory of everything: The underlying, mathematical description of reality appears to resemble computer code. A specific kind code, a series of ones and zeroes you might find in an internet browser. More specific, it contains error correcting algorithms, just like internet browser codes, analogous to RNA and DNA correction algorithms.”

“Oh,” Jon said. “You’re one of them.”

“Clarify,” James said.

“You’re either about launch into a metaphysical tangent that incorporates the law of attraction, or you’re going to go into this whole spiel about how we live in the matrix and we’re all waiting for a superhero like the Neo-Jesus-freak to break us free.”

“I don’t see those alternative explanations as mutually exclusive,” James said.

“I don’t suppose you can prove it to me?” Jon said.

“How good is your math?” James asked.

“Sucks,” Jon said.

“So, you’d make a great theorist,” James said. “Here’s the deal. I found a secondary code while smashing atoms. I literally smashed up against the membrane of reality and found an oscillating echo from another Universe and tapped into someone else’s computer system. I travel around in an RV looking for hotspots to reconnect to that Universe.”

“What’s in this chili?” Jon asked.

James was not offended. “Let me show you something.”

James got up from the table and went back to his computer alcove. Jon found it impossible to determine if he was a Mac user or a Windows user, or that other operating system that no one talks about, as the system itself was a unique, hybrid with glowing peripheries and outlines. The monitor displayed a number of opened windows, some showing code, some showing digital outlines of anomalous creatures never before seen by Earth in its entire history. Creatures came to the foreground, stats were assembled, and they shrunk back as another became prominent. Foreign script described attributes of the creatures. There was also data that described

a technology, what might be a storage and transport system, very similar to Star Trek beaming things up by converting things directly to energy and moving them about virtually before reanimating them. This was 'Alienware' before there was even an Atari, but somehow it was all working without question and or even reel to reel and punched data cards. James sat down at his chair, put on his glasses, mumbling something about an update having finished. There was a red and white ball sitting in the cradle, very shiny, with its own internal, recessed lighting which absolutely screamed for Jon to touch it. Jon reached for it. James slapped his hand.

"Don't touch," James said.

"I think Uhura is calling you," Jon said.

"Ha ha," James said.

"Seriously," Jon said. "If that's your starship calling I want to go."

"Son, this technology comes from a different world, probably from a different universe, and it's taken all of my saving to build this one, tiny sample of transportation tech, and getting the code configured to work within our technological framework has been a living nightmare, and, well, I don't have a comparison, unless you want to borrow from Star Wars, Harrison Ford's line, traveling through hyperspace is not like dusting crops..."

The monitor went black.

"What?!" James said, panicking. He looked over his glasses and read the power meter. The batteries were charged and the solar collector on top of the RV was producing. It wasn't a power problem.

James looked back at the screen, touched the keyboard.

Letters appeared on the screen, one at a time, until the following questions were completed: "Who is this? And why are you hacking my system?"

James tried to type a response but his keyboard was disabled.

"Try talking to him," Jon said, pointing to the mic. It was the same microphone that the agent in Ultraman would use to become Ultraman.

James looked to Jon crossly, as a physicist and computer expert, he knew better. "That won't work."

"What won't work?" appeared on the screen in response. "Who is this? What's your name?"

"I am Doctor James Gates," James said.

“Why are you hacking my system? It’s public domain. You can get it for free at any tech shop?”

“Who are you?”

“I am Professor...”

James turned to slap Jon’s hand, because again, he had reached for the ball. James hitting Jon’s hand caused him to hit the ball, dislodging it from the cradle. It rolled, fell to the floor, directly square between his feet, depressing the button.

There was a huge flash of light and then Jon was gone. The ball squirmed, as if struggling to digest something, oscillated to a stop, and the light’s flashing yellow became a steady green.

“Oh. So, that’s how it works,” James said, as cool as Willy Wonka after a kid had been sucked through a tube, blown up like a berry, dropped down the garbage chute, or teleported through wonkavision. He remained as calm and cool as a Scientist gathering data.

Chapter 2

Jon found himself immersed in white light. There was no apparent floor, but he felt like he was standing still and falling simultaneously. He had an overwhelming sense of vertigo without anything to orientate towards. There was not even the sensation of increasing momentum due to falling through air. There was no sensation of air, other than the acknowledgement that when he forced himself to breathe, he felt replenished. Holding his breath didn't seem to hurt him, but there was a growing awareness that he should return to breathing if he held his breath. This place of whiteness felt extremely peaceful and he felt the stirrings of euphoria and then suddenly, he was back in the real world, tumbling, simultaneously with being attacked by a tiger. The world tumbled in a blur until the motion had stopped and he was face to face with the tiger. The tiger was on top of him, grasping his shoulders with huge claws, and roaring a protest in his face. It seemed to be a glow, as if it had a fiery nature, and suddenly Jon's mind went: 'tiger, tiger, burning bright.' The tiger had a whisk of hair coming off the top of his forehead like Mohawk, adding to the 'flame' effect.

"No! Stop," someone shouted.

The tiger looked in the direction of the shout and then back at Jon, roared once more, and leaped into the bushes and was gone, leaving leaves in its wake. A female, perhaps 18, wearing a safari outfit, kaki blouse and mini skirt, predominantly military-green, tennis shoes with neon yellow highlights, white knee high socks, and a pith helmet stood over him. Her hands went akimbo, the classic power pose of Wonder Woman or Isis.

"Do you know how long I have been tracking that Growlithe?!" she demanded.

"Uh?" Jon asked.

"OMG, are you trying to look up my..." she asked, backing up.

Jon sat up.

"Where am I?" Jon asked.

"So, you're going to play lost now?" she demanded. "I am still waiting for my apology."

"I am sorry I was looking up..."

"Not for that! For intruding on my catch! I so had that Growlithe," Loxy said.

"The tiger?" Jon asked. "You were trying to catch a tiger?"

She knelt down in front of Jon, touched his forehead, turning his head through points of articulation searching for injuries. He didn't stop her or protest, nor did he flinch. He looked at her in a sort of stunned way, as if mesmerized by her beauty. He bit his lower lip, trying hard to maintain eye contact while being distracted by cleavage that was practically in his face, and tried to smile at her.

"You don't appear to be injured, Sir," she said. "Your clothing is torn and some superficial scratches. Take off your shirt so I can treat your wounds."

Loxy reached into her bag and pulled out an ointment. Jon did not take off his shirt. He was staring at his hands. They seemed bigger than he remembered.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

"I am still processing what happened," Jon said.

"You stepped in between me and the Growlithe just as I threw a Poké Ball..." she said. "Come to think of it, I didn't see you step out, you were just suddenly kind of there." She narrowed her eyes trying to figure out why he was looking at her so strangely. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

"You're the most beautiful woman I have ever seen," Jon said.

She smiled. "Thank you," she said. And then frowned. "I am still crossed with you. You at least owe me a Poké Ball."

"A what?" Jon asked.

"How hard did I hit you?" she asked.

"You hit me?" Jon asked.

She sighed. "What's your name?"

"Jon," he said. "Jon Harister."

"I am Loxy Isadora Bliss," she said, offering her hand. "Pokémon trainer, and member of Team Instinct."

"Uh?" Jon asked, not taking her hand.

"You never heard of Team Instinct?" Loxy asked.

"Is that like a rock band?" Jon asked.

"Maybe I should take you to the nurse," Loxy said, standing. She kept her hand extended to him, so that she might help him stand.

Jon accepted the help up and once on his feet he nearly fell over. He tried walking, extending his hands to try and get balance, as if he were walking in high heels for the first time, only he wasn't walking in heels. They looked like his tennis shoes, only bigger. Loxy took his arm to steady him.

"Are you dizzy?" she asked.

"No. Yes. I don't know," Jon said. The world felt smaller than he remembered it being. "Something is seriously different."

"Come on, then," Loxy insisted, leading him by the arm.

Jon freed herself from her help wanting to do it on his own. "I am not a child."

"I was trying to be helpful," Loxy said.

"Thank you," he said. It was taking effort to walk and he wasn't sure why. "What is wrong with me?"

"I don't have a response to that," Loxy said. "Celadon is this way."

"What is Celadon?" Jon asked.

"Really?!" Loxy asked.

"Pretend like I am new here and educate me," Jon said.

"You just told me not to treat you like a child, now you want me to treat you like a..."

"Visitor from Kansas?" Jon completed the sentence for her.

"What is Kansas?" Loxy asked.

"Really?!" Jon asked.

"Just come with me," Loxy said.

Nothing better to do at the moment, Jon went with her. Technically, it wasn't that hard of a choice. She was truly an amazing looking woman, and she noticed he kept stealing glances of her, but he was not yet sure what she thought about him stealing peaks. He probably would have followed her to the ends of the earth. The road seemed narrow and was lined by thick forests on either side. Though he trusted her well enough to walk with her, everything she said just led to more questions, and he found himself in a mood and not wanting to talk. That was until a five year old kid jumped out of the bushes and shouted at them. Jon was initially startled, but on realizing it wasn't a 'Growlithe' he was a little bit irritated at the kid.

"Hold up there, wayfarers," the kid shouted. "I am Mentos, the world's best Pokémon Trainer, and I challenge you to a match."

“You’re like what? Four?” Jon asked.

“You doubt me, Sir?!” Mentos demanded. “I challenge you to a duel!”

“Go home, kid,” Jon said.

“You have to duel. That’s the rules,” Mentos said, on the verge of tearing up.

“He doesn’t have any Pokémon,” Loxy said.

“How could he be out in the wilderness without Pokémon?” Mentos asked, skeptically.

“Oh, better question, how can he be that old and not have at least one Pokémon friend? What kind of loser is he?”

“Those are great questions,” Loxy agreed. “It is possible he is not right in the head, and so I am taking him to Celadon to see the nurse.”

“Excuse me, I am right here,” Jon said, perturbed.

Loxy motioned to him that she understood, but that she ‘had this.’

“Well, one of you is going to have to face me in a duel, or forfeit all your money,” Mentos demanded.

“Really? We’re being robbed by a five year old?” Jon demanded. “Where are your parents, kid?”

“Who needs parents when you got Pokémon?” Mentos demanded.

“Get out of our way before I smack you,” Jon said.

Mentos unleashed a Pidgey and the flapping of wings and screeching of the bird drove Jon back.

“What the f...”

“Now, give me all your money or return from whence you came!” Mentos demanded.

“Very well, Sir, prepare to battle,” Loxy said, drawing a Poké Ball from her belt.

Loxy drew out her ball and a Chikorita arrived on the scene. Mentos laughed.

“You expect to beat my Pidgey with that?” Mentos asked.

“Cheeka, Magical Leaf,” Loxy demanded.

The Chikorita dodged an aerial assault, and released a whirlwind of glittery leaves, like a bag full of raked leaves exploding, only with glitter, and dust, and aroma. Jon sneezed. The Pidgey tried to dive through it, squinting, closing its eyes, and then collapsed in midair and to the ground. Mentos ran to his Pidgey.

“OMG, you’re absolutely brutal!” Mentos whimpered, picking up his poor, beaten pet.

“If that’s all you got, I want half of the money in your pocket,” Loxy said.

“I don’t have any money in my pocket. Why do you think I am out here hustling!” he snapped. “Mama!” he cried and then ran home.

Loxy picked up her Chikorita. “Good job, Cheeka,” she said. “Come on, Jon. We should make it the rest of the way without further interruption.”

“What the heck was that?” Jon demanded.

“How can you not remember anything about Pokémon or battles?” Loxy asked. “Our whole world is about Pokémon.”

“You’re tell me that this entire world is preoccupied with catching animals and making them fight?” Jon asked. “That’s just sick.”

“Wow, aren’t we judgmental,” Loxy said.

“Yeah, I am. Robbing people- bad, dead puppies- bad, babies with cancer- bad, parents and sibling pounding on you- really bad, and making animals fight each other, just wrong,” Jon said.

“Well, when you say it like that, it sounds pretty horrid,” Loxy said.

“Can you spin it another way?” Jon asked.

“I guess you come from an alien world where parents pay attention to their kids and there is no highway robbery and kids don’t have to train to earn a living?” Loxy asked, petting her Chikorita.

“Well, no,” Jon said. “The highway robbery is state sponsored tolls, and there is no empty pocket practice of letting people off the hook. And not paying comes with such extreme penalty that it’s better to go hungry or steal from your neighbor and pay that than let it go.”

Loxy seemed more concerned. “Wait wait wait. You really believe you come from another world? Alright, nurse is just this way, come on.”

निर्मित

The nurse’s station had a dozen Pokémon walking about, recovered and playful, waiting for their owners to return and pick them up. Several of them were Chikorita which rushed to see the new Chikorita. Nurse Joy met Loxy with warmth, and then immediately turned to Cheeka. “Aww, Cheeka!”

“You’re the most beautiful woman I have ever seen,” Jon said to the nurse.

Loxy looked at him confused.

“Thank you! And Cheeka here is my most favorite little Chikorita ever,” the Nurse said.

Jon executed a double take off the other Chikoritas. They had the same confused look that Loxy had just given him, only for the nurse, as if their feelings were hurt.

“It looks exactly like these other Chikoritas,” Jon observed.

“Oh, sir, how can you say that?” Joy asked. “What strange company you are keeping, Loxy.”

“Yeah, about that,” Loxy said. She leaned in and whispered. “You think you could examine him.”

“Loxy, you’re probably better at healing humans than I am. I specialize in Pokémon. Is one of yours hurt?” Joy asked.

“No,” Loxy said. “It’s just...”

Loxy and Joy turned to Jon. “Are you okay?” Joy asked.

“Could I use your restroom?” Jon asked.

“You have to ask?” Joy asked.

“Um, I have to ask where the toilet is,” Jon said.

“Really?” Joy asked.

“I have never been here before,” Jon said.

“You have never been in a nurse’s station before?” Joy asked. “The floor plan is exactly the same no matter where you go.”

“That’s what I am trying to tell you,” Loxy said.

“You don’t need a nurse, you need a psychiatrist,” Joy said.

“Because I need to pee?” Jon asked.

“Because you should know where it is,” Joy said.

“Humor me,” Jon said.

“I don’t know if we should humor psychosis,” Joy said.

Jon gave her a look. Loxy pointed to the restroom. He struggled to get there without running into Pokémon, who seemed very interested in him. Loxy and Joy watched him disappear into the lavatory.

“Where did you find him?” Joy asked.

“He found me. I think I hit him in the head with a Poké Balls,” Loxy said. “Do you suppose that could cause brain damage?”

“I have never heard of...” Joy stopped.

Jon had emerged from the lavatory, very pale, looking like he might collapse. Joy and Loxy rushed to his side and sat him down in the closest chair. His hands were trembling. Joy pried his eyes opened wider to stare into them. He pushed her away.

“I’m trying to help. Tell me what you’re experiencing?” Joy asked.

“The man in the mirror,” Jon said. “It wasn’t me.”

Joy and Loxy exchanged glances and back to Jon.

“How hard did she hit you?” Joy asked.

“No one hit me,” Jon said. “I was with Doctor Gates, he had this ball, kind of like that one you had that hatched Cheeka, and I dropped it, and then suddenly, the world changed, and I found myself being attacked by a tiger.”

Joy and Loxy stared at him for the longest moment in silence, searching his face for humor. If it had been a live television show, the dead air time would have been driving the executives crazy, while the camera man, zooming in to capture subtle muscle twitches, narrowing of eyes, then the puckering of lips as they tried to constrain their amusement from erupting into laughter. Jon was clearly sore about this, completely forgetting about being perturbed by the man in the mirror.

“What?” Jon asked.

“Is Doctor Gates your psychiatrist?” Joy asked.

“He is not that kind of Doctor,” Jon said.

“A PCP perhaps?” Loxy asked.

“I don’t know if he does drugs,” Jon said.

“No, primary care physician,” Loxy corrected.

“No, he’s a physicist,” Jon said.

“Oh, he specializes in Pokémon,” Joy said, coming back to all seriousness.

“No! There are no Pokémon in my world,” Jon said.

“Oh!” Joy and Loxy both exclaimed. Loxy continued: “A world without Pokémon?! What a horrible place. Are you sure you weren’t having a nightmare?”

“I am not making this up,” Jon said.

“You’re telling me, you were captured by a Poké Ball, in another world, passed through the system, and accidentally expelled from my Poké Ball meant to capture Growlithe?” Loxy said.

Jon sorted through her statement. “That’s the only conclusion I have at the moment,” Jon said.

“No human has ever been captured by a Poké Ball. It’s designed not to affect humans,” Joy said.

“Well, Doctor Gates was trying to modify the tech,” Jon mused.

“I can solve this,” Loxy said, pulling a device out of her bag. “If he passed through the system, then he is going to show up on my Pokédex...”

When examining the last sighting, as based on a catch attempt, she found an image of Jon. Loxy mouth fell agape. Joy read it for her: “Level 1 Human, average, origin: the third planet from a star called Sol, North American region, age undetermined, abilities undetermined, wisdom undetermined, experience undetermined, story unresolved. Caught by, Loxy Isadora Bliss 4200LIB. Wow! It looks like you caught yourself a man.”

“I didn’t want a man,” Loxy said. “I want a Growlithe!”

“Can I have him?” Joy asked.

Jon was sorting their conversation trying to figure out if he should be frighten, angry, or all the other emotions that were flowing through his filters.

“You want him?” Loxy asked.

“I’ll trade you a Pikachu for him,” Joy said.

“You would trade a Pikachu for a 50 something year old Caucasian human male, out of shape, out of time, out of world, probably out of his mind, for a Pickachu?” Loxy asked.

“Well, sure. He’s a one of a kind,” Joy said.

“Point taken. But what would you do with a human Pokémon?” Loxy asked.

“Oh, I don’t know; hug him, squeeze him, kiss him, love him, scratch him behind his ears,” Joy said, musing, her eyes going up and left, dreamily. She turned to Jon and pinched his cheek. “Pretty much what I do with all Pokémon.” She turned back to Loxy who was weighing the trade. “So, what do you think?”

Jon fell out of his chair as an Ekans reached up to sniff his knee. He scrambled backwards, bumping into Loxy and the Nurse’s knees.

“Oh, there you are, Ekans,” Joy said, picking him up and petting him. “Well?” Joy asked.
“I am thinking,” Loxy said.

Once Jon was on the floor he was overrun by all the Pokémon in the nurse’s office.

“They do seem to like him” Loxy mused.

“They must think he’s just another Pokémon,” Joy said.

Loxy’s device alerted her to an incoming call. She switched screens and opened it up.
“Hello?” she said, even as a man stepped into the video portion.

Loxy and Joy smiled at the attractive, salt and peppered haired man in the image.

“Hi there, I am Professor Willow,” he said. To Jon, he sounded exactly like the radio announcer Jim Thorton.

“Hello, Daddy,” Joy said, in a very ‘not daddy’ kind of way.

“Hello, Joy. And, if I am not mistaken, 4200LIB, or Loxy?” Willow asked.

“Umm, hi,” Loxy said, shyly.

Jon felt a pang of jealousy the way the girls were responding to the cellphone image. He tried to stand up, but was tripped by a Pokémon.

“I am sorry to intrude, Loxy, but I traced an extremely odd event to your device, but wasn’t certain until you actually opened up the data set I was looking for,” Willow said.

“You may call me anytime, Professor,” Loxy said.

“Me, too,” Joy said.

“Thank you, ladies. Would you happen to have a young man in your possession by the name of Jon?” Willow asked.

Loxy and Joy looked at Jon, trying to hold the Pokémon at bay with a chair.

“He certainly acts younger than he looks,” Loxy said.

“I don’t understand,” Willow said.

“Jon appears to be about your age, but lacks your muscle tone and general appearance of fitness,” Joy remarked, as if grading a specimen. “Also, he has this peculiar belief that he comes from a world where there are no Pokémon.”

“Sadly,” Willow said, frowning. “That part is true.”

“Oh how sad!” Loxy and Joy both lamented. Cheeka expressed sadness in empathy with her trainer.

“Yes, it is very sad,” Willow said. “My understanding from Doctor Gates is he is a young man, not even in his teens, but it is possible that the transportation process between Universes took longer than anticipated, at least, in virtual time. Or, the process caused him to evolve. It’s imperative that I see this young man as soon as possible.”

Jon took the device from Loxy. Loxy seemed crossed, but patient at the same time.

“You know Doctor Gates?” Jon asked.

“Hello, young man. Jon, I presume?” Willow asked.

“What’s this about virtual time?” Jon asked.

“Aw, Sir, it’s very complicated, and much too involved to discuss via phone,” Willow said. “Your friend Doctor Gates is worried and would like to speak with you.”

Jon laughed. “Right. My friend.”

“I don’t understand,” Willow said.

“He isn’t my friend, Professor,” Jon said.

“While it is true I have only begun my correspondence with Doctor Gates, he strikes me to be an admirable fellow, and I assure you that you are the present source of our immediate dialogue. You are an enigma, maybe even a game changer. I would like you to present yourself to Pokémon Zem. I am due to give a lecture series there, and that is probably the fastest way for us to connect.”

Loxy and Joy came to either side of Jon so they could see Willow.

“You want me to do what?” Jon asked.

“Don’t worry, Professor,” Loxy said. “I will personally deliver him to you at the Pokémon Technical Institute.”

“What if I don’t want to go?” Jon asked.

“Well, no one can make you do anything, Jon,” Willow said. “It’s not our way to force people to do things they don’t want to do. I do, think, however, that I am the best chance on delivering you back to your world, which would go a far way to easing Doctor Gates concern for having harmed you.”

Jon sorted out what he was told, looked to Loxy, looked to Joy, looked at the Pokémon who were all sitting and looking at the humans as if they were the most fascinating things they had ever seen. Jon laughed.

Loxy, Joy, and Willow smiled, pleased that he was pleased.

“Screw that,” Jon said.

Their smiles faded. Joy seemed surprised.

“Excuse me?” Willow asked.

“Okay, so far, this world seems a little whacked, but if this is not a delusion, and I really just jumped planets, then I assure you, good Professor, there is not a chance in hell I will be returning to Earth,” Jon said. “See ya!”

Jon handed the device back to Loxy, ignoring the surprised look on Willow’s face, proceeded towards the door that led back to the streets of his new world. Loxy, Joy, and Willow for as best as he could, watched Jon depart, his step quickening, a burst energy causing him to jump and click his heels while in midair, and then he was gone out the door.

“Loxy,” Willow said. “A little word of advice?”

“Um, like, don’t invest too much energy in him because he’s going to break my heart?” Loxy asked.

“No,” Willow said. “How old are you?”

“Sorry, what were you going to advise?” Loxy asked.

“Um, I recommend not telling people he’s your Pokémon, or everyone will be wanting one, and you might find yourself in some serious competition with him, because even if they can’t secure a trade, they’re going to want to test him and gain info,” Loxy said.

“You want me to ball him and put him away?” Loxy asked.

“Wouldn’t be a bad idea,” Willow said. “For his own safety.”

“Oh, what if he doesn’t want to go?” Joy asked. “Pokémon should be able to opt out of balls and battles.”

“Yes, Joy, you have been quite consistent with trying to push your senator in endorsing your philosophy through legislation,” Willow said.

“Well, maybe if you see what I have to see every day, you would be an activist, too,” Joy said.

“Maybe so,” Willow agreed.

Meanwhile, Jon’s departure had erupted into a full song and dance. The sky looked crisp and clean. The sun was bright and beautiful. The air was fresh in his lungs. He began to stroll, and immediately began to sing: “I never thought my life could be anything but catastrophe But suddenly I begin to see a bit of good luck for me” sustaining ‘me’ much longer than the original,

and then, as if an aside to the people and Pokémon staring at him, he pointed to the sun and the moon still visible in the day sky. “Cause I’ve got a golden ticket. To his surprise, no one seemed to mind that he was singing. In fact, they were quite amused. Pleased even! He rushed up and hugged a Pokémon and his trainer. Everyone here seemed to have a Pokémon and everyone seemed happy. Sure, it occurred to them they might actually be crazy, too, which might also explain how they tolerated his level of crazy, but maybe, so he reasoned, maybe that’s what happens when the whole world is dedicated to the perfection of one thing, like ending world hunger, or poverty, or Pokémon training. He finished the song, and everyone returned to their business. He felt suddenly depleted, but still happy. He wasn’t quite sure what to do next. Apparently, he decided, euphoria can only carry you a few blocks, and then, seriously, you need a plan of action.

A man approached and offered him an item. “Here, Sir, have a Pokémon candy,” he said.

“Why, thank you, Sir,” Jon said, accepting the candy.

“My pleasure, Sir. I mean, my bag is full, and I so hate to throw candy away, and you seem so happy, singing,” he said. “God bless you and your Pokémon.”

The man continued on. Again, the euphoric feel of the pedestrians seemed a bit creepy. It was creepy like Stepford Wives creepy, or Twilight Zone Creepy. Kids played with Pokémon. A heavy set woman chased a Pokémon out of her restaurant and gave it a warning point, and then she went back inside. The Pokémon followed her, and they repeated this exercise. This baffled him. He didn’t have a watch, but he imagined if he did, he could measure and predict the repetitiousness of it. Another Pedestrian approached him.

“I am Bill-Billy. Are you okay? You seemed lost,” he said.

“I am not sure,” Jon said. “I think I might need to find employment.”

“Oh, well, the easiest way to make money is to train Pokémon,” he said.

“Really?” Jon asked.

“Why, of course. I can’t think of any other task I would rather be doing,” he said.

“Except playing music. I really like songs about Pokémon, even if they weren’t originally about Pokémon. How many Pokémon do you have?”

“Um, none,” Jon admitted.

“That’s horrible? And at your age?” he said, and suddenly pushed on, wanting nothing more to do with the stranger.

Jon approached the heavy set woman to see if he might wash dishes.

“Can you believe this Pokémon?! I can’t keep him outside. How am I supposed to cook, if he keeps running around the restaurant?” she asked. “Would you be willing to entertain him while I attend to customers?”

“Do you have customers?” Jon asked.

“No,” she said, suddenly very sad. It was the first sadness he had experienced here. He considered it further: he had seen other emotions, such as frustration and anger and confusion, mostly on Loxy and Joy, and fear or concern on people who learned he had no Pokémon. It occurred to him, he just needed a larger sample size of people in order to find normality. He tuned back into her narrative, still unfolding. “Maybe I shouldn’t have become a trainer. Oh well. We live with the choices we make, don’t we dear?” And with that, she turned and went inside. The Pokémon looked at him, as if smiling, and then chased after the woman, practically prancing with joy, cause it ‘owned’ this place.

Everyone Jon approached wanted to discuss Pokémon. Jon retired to the fountain, perturbed, unwrapped the Pokémon candy, and put it in his mouth. Not knowing what to do with the wrapper, he folded it and stuck it in his pocket. He did that because clearly these people keep their streets clean, so he wasn’t about to litter in his new community. He paused as he considered the flavor of the hard outer shell of the candy, which was a new taste, rather interesting, and then he bit through it and unleashed the liver center. He nearly gagged, wanted to spit, but forced himself to swallow, and then drank water straight from the fountain. He sucked air, brushing his teeth with his finger, filled his mouth with water, and when he came up, Loxy was there.

“You do know, the fountain is for Pokémon to drink from?” Loxy asked.

Jon spit the water out. “What is wrong with you people?”

Loxy shrugged. Jon sat on the edge of the Fountain.

“May I sit by you?” Loxy asked.

“I am not going back,” Jon said.

“Okay,” Loxy said.

“I mean it, seriously, I am not going back. I know Dorothy jumped through all sorts of hoops just to get back home, and Aslan always sent his visitors home after the quest was accomplished, except for that first story where they stayed till adults, which is kind of weird they

became adults but still didn't go off and have relationships with others, but I am so not going back," Jon said.

"Okay," Loxy said, as if she understood what he was saying. "What would you like to do instead?"

"I want to go with you to Alderaan, learn the ways of the Force, and become a Pokémon trainer like you," Jon said.

Loxy stared at him for a long moment, pushing air between her upper lip and teeth, and then nodded as if she had figured something out. "I get the sense that there is a joke imbedded in your statement, but it requires a prerequisite knowledge set to access."

"Really, you don't know Star Wars?" Jon asked.

"You're from a world that is at war with other stars? What did the stars do? We need starlight. It makes things grow and all the atoms in the Universe come from Stars. There wouldn't be any Pokémon if not for stars," Loxy said.

"Um, Star Wars is a euphemism for interstellar wars on a galactic scale," Jon corrected.

"Well, that doesn't make any sense, either, Sir. Any society capable of interstellar travel is going to be peaceful, because there is just no sense in fighting for stuff when there is so much space and stuff to be had," Loxy said. "I mean, really. There are more important things to do, like, train Pokémon."

"I don't have a response to that," Jon said.

"It's okay," Loxy said, patting his leg. "May I ask why you don't want to go back?"

"Of course," Jon said.

Loxy waited for the answer. Then she figured him out and asked, "Why don't you want to go back?"

Jon didn't answer. Loxy seemed confused.

"You're not going to answer?" Loxy asked.

"I am not," Jon said.

"I am confused. You said I could ask," Loxy said.

"I can't stop you from asking," Jon said.

"But asking if I could ask is really asking you if you're willing to share, and you either know that and are being difficult, or you don't understand, and well, I want to understand you," Loxy said.

“You don’t know me,” Jon said.

“That’s what I said. And I want to,” Loxy said.

“If you knew me you wouldn’t want to know me,” Jon assured her.

Loxy considered. “Maybe. But if you don’t allow me the opportunity to know you, then how will I know if I don’t want to know you?”

“You’re trying to trick me?” Jon asked.

“No! I am trying to understand so I can help you,” Loxy said.

“Why do you care?” Jon snapped.

“I don’t know. It’s what people do, I guess,” Loxy said. “You don’t think your friend James cares about you?”

“He is not my friend,” Jon said. “And I guarantee you, he doesn’t care what happens to me.”

Loxy was sorting her conversation with Willow and her conclusion was James cared a great deal, and she was curious about the discrepancy.

“Why do you think he doesn’t care?” Loxy persisted.

“OMG, you’re determined to try and break me? Fine, you want to know why? Because he just met me today. He met me as I was breaking into his home to steal from him. Because I am just a white, trailer trash kid with no prospects, and no future, and I spend most of my time just trying not to get beat up, and if you were to spend any time with me, you’d know I have no value because I am me. God, and fate, and family, the entire world could care less whether I exist or not.”

Loxy stared through it, not revealing her emotions.

“Do you?” Loxy asked.

Jon didn’t hide his confusion. “Do I what?”

“Care if you exist or not?” Loxy asked.

“What an odd question,” Jon said, thinking about it. “I don’t know. I have to think about it.”

“Fair enough. I can’t answer for what God sees or does, but I can answer for what I see and do, and maybe that’s the way it’s supposed to be, because if God did everything for us, how would we ever learn what kind of people we are?” Loxy asked.

“Oh, great, so you’re a mystic, Pokémon trainer,” Jon sighed.

“No, I am Team Instinct,” Loxy said.

“Uh?” Jon asked.

“Please, let me help you. You lack the knowledge set to thrive here. You seem tough, and maybe you’d eke out a living, but just living is not thriving. I get the sense that you’re a scared little boy who is lost and has no friends or family,” Loxy said.

“Oh, screw you,” Jon said, and started to walk away.

Loxy pursued. “Jon, wait,” she called after him.

Jon turned. “What do you want with me?”

“If you had allowed me to finish, you would have heard I want to be your friend. It’s optional. You don’t have to take that offer. But if you want to live in this world, you’re going to have to learn Pokémon,” Loxy said. “Stay with me long enough to get you started, and after you have the basics, if you don’t want to continue spending time with me, we can part ways.”

“You’ll teach me?” Jon asked.

“If you want,” Loxy said.

“For real? No tricks?” Jon asked.

“Why would I trick you?” Loxy asked.

“Because it’s what people do? What do you want in return?” Jon asked.

“I want nothing in return,” Loxy said.

“Just like that?” Jon said.

Loxy shrugged. “Sometimes, helping others learn about Pokémon is the best way to improve your own understanding of Pokémon. Do you have a better offer?”

Jon looked to the ground. He shuffled his feet and put his hands in his pockets. “No,” he said. He felt like he was eight years old. “And, I would really appreciate your help.”

Loxy stepped in closer to him. He raised his head enough to push past her cleavage and meet her eyes. She took his hand. She seemed happy. “Let’s go get you some gear,” she said, and dragged him straightway to the store.

Chapter 3

As Loxy led Jon, she was talking excitedly about Pokémon, explaining how most people receive their first Pokémon as a gift from another Trainer or family member, but that she was going to do him better by teaching him how to catch a Pokémon without pre-owning one. She was rambling so fast with excitement, he hadn't really paid attention to the building they were entering until they had entered. Loxy brought Jon through the doors of the Tamamushi Department Store, the largest store in the Kanto region. At first, he didn't understand what he was seeing. He thought the potions were perfumes or lotions for people, not antidotes for various Pokémon conditions. The store's displays were bright with recessed lighting, and it felt like Christmas magic the way things sparkled and glowed. She led him past stations, and kiosks, and upstairs towards trainer clothes. She started sorting things, holding them up to his chest, and putting it back. He couldn't identify the music playing over the intercom. It was otherworldly, perhaps Japanese or Korean. The music was interrupted with a chime and a lady announced: "Would the Trainer of the Clefairy please report to lost and found. Thank you." The music resumed.

"I am really uncomfortable with you buying me stuff," Jon said.

"You can pay me back with the money you win at gyms," Loxy said.

"I am uncomfortable fighting Pokémon. That seems cruel," Jon said.

Loxy paused and looked to Jon. "You care about the Pokémon?"

"Why wouldn't I care about the Pokémon? I don't have to know anything about them to care what happens to them," Jon said. "I might steal food, but I am not a dick."

Loxy smiled. "And you said I wouldn't like you," Loxy said. "Jon, be at peace. The Pokémon that like training and fighting will participate, and those that don't won't. It is the trainer's job to know the difference and never put a Pokémon in a situation that would cause it undue stress. That said, both the Pokémon and the trainer need to be challenged. Only then will they grow as a team and as individuals."

"I just can't see myself fighting. I don't want it harmed," Jon said.

Loxy touched Jon's face. "They're pretty tough, Jon. Most trainers follow the rules. Never hurt humans, never intentionally cause permanent damage, and stand down if the trainer taps out or the Pokémon passes out."

He watched her as she sorted. He really did find her beautiful, and was trying to repress this feelings in him. They were strange feelings, feeling he had subtly experienced in his youth, but suddenly overwhelmingly real. He could recall the first time he had experienced this wanting. He was a first grader on a bus and the sixth grader sitting in front him was just impossible not to look away from, until the other sixth grade suitors beat the crap out of him. That was his first association with 'love hurts.' Loxy caught him looking at her and touched his arm, kindly.

Though she seemed to be kind about it, Jon needed to redirect his thoughts. "It doesn't bother you that I admitted to stealing stuff?"

Loxy shrugged. "Stuff is stuff."

"Really?" Jon asked.

Loxy looked up from her sorting. "Jon, I can only imagine what your world is like until you tell me, but you can't steal stuff here, because everything is available to everyone. You can walk into a complete stranger's home, sit down and have dinner with them, watch television, use the bathroom, take a nap on the couch, and all without repaying. Repaying them is nice, but not compulsory."

"Really?" Jon asked.

"Oh, sure. Now, some people might ask what you're doing in their home, but if you tell them you're hungry, they will feed you," Loxy said.

"But I could just take stuff and no one would care?" Jon said.

"If you ask, they'd probably give it to you, but if you just take it, well, they might miss it, some might chase you with Pokémon, but mostly, people will just think if you're taking it, you have greater need than them and take pity on you," Loxy said.

"What if I took their Pokémon?" Jon asked.

"That would be a crime, Sir," Loxy said. "With huge penalties. But I would be very impressed if you could do that. The stories of people trying to steal Pokémon never work out. Of course, those stories could just be morality plays to encourage compliance with social norms. Anyway, it's better just to play by the rules."

"This place is whacked," Jon said.

"Aw, I love my world," Loxy said. She handed him a set of clothes. "Here, go try these on, come out and let me see them."

“Are you sure about this?” Jon asked.

“I am confused. You’re okay stealing, but not okay with a handout?”

Jon shrugged.

“Jon, I am sure,” she said, and pointed at her badge. “Team instinct.”

Jon went to try on the clothes. The worst part was getting past the full size mirror. He was not sure he liked this adult body. Ear hair, nose hair, longer eyelashes, and stubble made his skin feel rough... Was this what he would look like when he got old? He looked for kindness and confidence in his older self. Would this be a man he would be proud of? Would this man like his younger self? What if he went back through the device to Earth, would he age more? Come out in a coffin? He was resolute about not going back, but it was a valid concern. Loxy knocked on the door to see if he was okay. He hurried into his pants and opened the door. She laughed and handed him another pair to try on.

If this were a movie, this would be the montage dress scene, where the girl was usually trying on stuff, but instead, it was the old guy trying stuff, and he was pretty sure, if this was a movie and if he was in it, it was most likely a comedy by Shakespeare. This present montage certainly wasn’t “Girls Just want to Have Fun” by Cyndi Lauper, though Jon would admit to liking that song, except in that movie ‘Night of the Comet’ where the scary guards with guns caught the girls. It didn’t occur to him that he might not ought to know about such a movie, but there were surprises yet to come, and the author apologizes in advance for his poor narration skills.

When all was said and done, Jon had a nice pair of sneakers, jeans, a pull over shirt, a great jacket, which seemed like an old military jacket left at a thrift store, and a unmarked baseball cap. Satisfied he was comfortably dressed for hiking, Loxy started sorting backpacks, but he found a bag that he liked. It looked like a mail bag from the show MASH.

“Really?” Loxy asked. “This one here has a variety of pockets, quick access ports...”

“I like this one,” Jon said.

Cheeka bit the bag and tried to pull it from Jon, empathizing with Loxy. Jon pulled back. A tug a war ensued.

“It’s really old. Probably a medic bag from a previous era,” Loxy said.

“Cheeka!”

“I like this one,” Jon said, pointing at warningly at Cheeka. Cheeka narrowed her eyes and growled.

“Why? Does it feel magical? Like a bag of holding?” Loxy asked.

“They have those here?” Jon asked.

Loxy sorted her feelings about it and bowed. “If it calls to you, it calls to you. Let him have it, Cheeka. Come, let’s get you some balls.”

“I am not sure I like the way you said that,” Jon said.

Loxy patted him. She bought five regular old Poké Balls and he put them in his bag. The sign on the display said recycled.

“It sure is nice to see a daughter buying her dad something,” the cashier commented.

“He’s not my dad,” Loxy said.

“Oh,” the cashier said, confused at first. She smiled. “Oh, that’s even nicer. I totally support May to December romances. I hope when I am older and finally finished paying off my student loans that a younger fellow dotes on me.”

“We’re just friends,” Loxy assured her.

“Of course,” the cashier agreed. “I wish I had an older friend to care for, but between work and training Pokémon, I don’t really have time for a relationship.”

“Have you tried traveling?” Loxy asked. “Getting out and meeting people?”

“Oh, yeah, but I prefer staying settled and letting travelers come to me,” she said.

“Well, I appreciate someone serving us. Where are the Pokédexes?” Loxy asked.

“Oh, that’s over there,” the cashier said, leading Loxy by the arm.

Loxy sorted tech, and found a basic Pokedex/phone with options for upgrades. It was clearly a trade in from an older series. After the purchase, she put his phone number in her device and called him to make sure it was functioning and then updated his name on the tech so that he was in the system and so that his Pokémon would automatically register to him.

“How much does the service cost?”

“Uh?” Loxy said, looking up from the device.

“The service to use this?” Jon asked.

“Oh. All cellular, wireless, and computer network services are free,” Loxy said.

“Really?” Jon asked.

“It’s a standard, minimum service society needs in order to function, and therefore, it’s free. The initial tech can be pricey, which is probably why most people wait until gifted by a Professor. The state, stores, gyms, and schools pay to keep the services up and running,” Loxy said. “Come, let’s introduce you to the computer.”

“Let’s just go catch some Pokémon,” Jon said.

“Okay,” Loxy said, excited for his enthusiasm.

They left the department store and headed outside the city limits, all the while Loxy was explaining the process of catching Pokémon. Before too long, they were walking in high grass trying to flush out a common species, like Rattata or a Pidgey.

“Now, this is just my personal preference: I never throw a ball at an unsuspecting Pokémon,” Loxy continued. “They should be aware and facing you. If they hold their ground or charge you, that shows they have some spirit and might perform well. If they automatically flee, without any signs of confrontation, assume they are too young or simply not ready for life with a human.”

“So, I just push the button and throw it at any Pokémon?” Jon asked.

“Yep,” Loxy said.

They came into an area where the grass was shorter, as if it had been kept by a lawn keeper, and Loxy grabbed his arm. Jon tracked her eyes to a turtle with a flower budding from its shell. She motioned for him to be quiet. Near the river, there was a giant gold fish flopping on the shore.

“Fate couldn’t be kinder. Two Pokémon in the same area!” Loxy whispered. “I got the Bulbasaur. You take care of the Magikarp,” Loxy said, her eyes not leaving the Bulbasaur.

“Okay,” Jon said.

They went their separate ways. As Loxy approached the Bulbasaur, she spoke to it gently, drawing a ball from her bag. She released Cheeka, and the two Pokémon confronted each other. At first it was a lot of Pokémon chatter, but finally, the Bulbasaur charged, slapping Cheeka, and Cheeka seemed all shocked at first, but then slapped it back, and then the two were slapping each other with paws like a stereotypical ‘girl fight.’

“Now!” Loxy said.

Cheeka rolled out of the way as Loxy moved in forcing the Bulbasaur to take her seriously or flee, and it barked at her even as she tossed a catcher ball. There was a flash of light,

and sparks wound around the space like stars following orbits and disappeared. Perhaps this atom smashing at its best. Loxy held her breath as the ball quivered on the ground. Then it was still. Then the light illuminated a soft green, rhythmically pulsing like a gentle heartbeat.

“Yeah!” Loxy jumped, arms up triumphantly.

Loxy ran and grabbed the ball. Cheeka ran around her feet excitedly. Loxy turned to see Jon was there and she rushed and hugged him.

“OMG, did you see that!” Loxy said. “I finally have six bulbasaur!”

“You need six of the same Pokémon?” Jon asked.

“OMG, yeah,” Loxy said.

“Why?” Jon said.

“Isn’t it obvious? There is two genders, male and female, and there are three evolutionary states, allowing access to different trainable skill sets, so now I can have one of each stage!”

Loxy said. “But enough about me. How did your first catch go?”

“Catch?” Jon asked.

“Yeah, the Magikarp I told you to catch,” Loxy said.

“You didn’t say catch it. You said take care of it,” Jon said.

Loxy put her hands on her hip. Cheeka grunted. “What did you do to it?”

“I put it back in the river,” Jon said.

“OMG, Jon, how old are you?!” Loxy asked. “That was a level two Magikarp, something that would be really easy for a first catch without using another Pokémon to wear it down first.”

“Oh,” Jon said. “Was that dinner?”

“OMG, you didn’t just say that. We don’t eat Pokémon,” Loxy snapped.

Jon pulled the candy wrapper out of his pocket. “Then explain Pokémon Candy,” Jon said.

“Where did you get that?” Loxy asked.

“Someone gave me it. Said his bag was full. Which is odd, you wouldn’t think this would take up too much space, but I was hungry, and...” Jon was saying.

“Wait a minute! You ate that?” Loxy asked.

“Yeah,” Jon said.

Loxy's face contorted through a series of expression of doubt, anger, frustration, curiosity, patience, compassion, and disgust. When she finally couldn't contain it, it sounded something like:

"How old are you?! No, really! Pokémon Candy is not made from Pokémon, but merely informs you it is for Pokémon consumption. Like dog biscuits are for dogs. You do have dogs in your world, don't you?"

"Of course we have dogs," Jon said, and then, afterthought, like a kid: "Do you?"

"Of course, what kind of backwards planet do you think we are? But I would think any world with dogs would also have Pokémon," Loxy said. She forced herself to calm down and breathe. "Sit," she instructed and sat on the ground, crossing her legs, crisscross apple sauce. When Jon sat in front of her, she scooted closer till their knees touch, and then she took his hand. Cheeka crawled in her lap and licked Jon's wrists. "I am sorry I raised my voice. I understand you're new here, but when I see you, I see an adult and I am confronted with some of my own bias. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to learn how to be with you, how to hold patience and love."

"I don't know what to say..." Jon said.

"Don't say anything," Loxy said.

"I feel like I should say something," Jon said. "I feel like I am on the verge of an epiphany. And I don't even know what an epiphany is, I just know it's coming, but more, and there is no confusion on this part, I am so grateful I met you."

"What a nice thing to say," Loxy said. "Now, let's see if we can find you your first Pokémon."

"Can a cat be a Pokémon?" Jon asked.

"No, cats are just cats," Loxy said. "Unless it's a Meow. Or a Persia. But those really aren't cats, but might have been cats before becoming Pokémon."

"So, I probably shouldn't throw a ball at that cat over there?" Jon asked.

"What cat?" Loxy asked.

An Eevee leapt from the bush Jon pointed at and growled.

"OMG," Loxy whispered, grabbing Jon's arm in excitement. "That's not cat, Jon."

"Looks like a cat," Jon said.

"It doesn't look anything like a cat," Loxy said.

“So what does it look like to you?” Jon asked.

“An Eevee,” Loxy said. “But I never seen one in this region before. It might be lost and hungry, which might make it more aggressive, and more suitable for training.”

“It looks exhausted,” Jon said.

“Yeah, which also makes it easier to catch,” Loxy said.

“Do you want it?” Jon asked.

Loxy shook her head yes, but then no. “We’re here for you. And that would be a great first Pokémon. Give it a go.”

Jon removed one of the Poké Balls from his belt, clicking it once to bring it to full size, which fascinated him to know end, wound up like a baseball player and threw it at the Eevee, hitting it square in the forehead and knocking it out.

“OMG, Jon! You don’t throw it like you’re trying to kill it!” Loxy said. “You want to curve the ball and have it open just before hitting or over top of it or underneath!”

“You didn’t say that,” Jon said.

“Did you even the push the button?” Loxy asked.

“I forgot,” Jon said.

Loxy knelt down and petted the unconscious Eevee.

Jon picked up the ball to examine it. “Is the Poké Balls recoverable?” Jon asked.

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“Awww,” Joy said, accepting the Eevee from Jon. “What happened to this little fellow?”

“Jon knocked him out,” Loxy said.

“Why would you do that?” Joy asked, crossly.

“It was an accident,” Jon said.

Joy scanned the creature, determined there was no permanent damage, and then proceeded to use some smelling salts. The Eevee sprung from the table, bounced around the clinic, knocking things off shelves as it went from place to place. It knocked a plant over, and hunkered down in the corner, hissing and growling. Nurse Joy approached and it charged her and she retreated.

“You brought a wild Pokémon into my clinic?” Joy demanded.

“Quick, get your ball!” Loxy instructed.

Jon ignored her and approached the Eevee. It charged at him, but Jon didn't retreat. Instead of attacking, it retreated back to the corner, a little surprised that the human didn't flee. Its hair raised and it spit like a cat.

“Shhh,” Jon said, kneeling down, holding a hand out and opened. “It's okay. Want to go back outside?”

The Eevee barked.

“Shhh, it's okay,” Jon said. “I'm not going to hurt you.”

The Eevee ran up and bit his hand, and when it did, Jon picked it up. It continued to chew fiercely on his hand, clawing his arm, like cat, primarily using its hind legs to inflict damage, but Jon sat down with it, and held it gently until it stop biting. It began licking the hand it was biting. Jon removed the ball from his belt, pushed the button, and Eevee went into the ball. The ball protested, wiggled, quieted, and the light illuminated a soft green.

“In all my life, I have never seen that tactic before,” Joy said.

Jon stood up, holding the ball.

“I got it,” Jon said.

“Your hand is bleeding,” Loxy said.

“Are you hurting?” Joy asked.

“Yep,” Jon said, still satisfied he caught his first Pokémon.

“Come here, let see your hand,” Joy said. She dragged it over the sink and began washing the wound.

“Ouch!” Jon protested.

“You can take an Eevee bite but not a little soap and water?” the Nurse asked.

“My brother has ferrets,” Jon said. “I am use to getting bit.”

“You mean Furrets?” Joy asked.

“No, I mean ferrets,” Jon said.

Joy dried his hand and sprayed it with a medicine. Jon's protesting became profanity and he jumped around the room, waving his hand.

“How old is he again?” Joy asked.

Loxy shrugged.

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Jon and Loxy returned to the wilderness, where Loxy took him straight way to a pine tree. She began gathering pine cones, and he helped her, without asking the purpose. Loxy didn't have to instruct him on how to pick up a fresh pine cone; if you grabbed it too hard, the spines poked you. The freshly fallen were chosen for their heaviness. Once a sufficient pile had been gathered, Loxy sat on a stone near the pile. The nearby river flowed so gently it was hardly noticeable by ear, but it had a peaceful lilac, ozone smell. A path of stones led across the river.

“Alright,” Loxy said. “Poké Balls can be expensive, but it's our most important tool as a trainer. So, before we waste any more balls, you, Sir, need to learn to throw. Now, take up a pine cone, and gently land it on that first stepping stone in the river.”

“Is that how you learned to throw?” Jon asked.

“This is not about me, it's about you,” Loxy said. “Let us begin.”

“But I want to learn the way you learned,” Jon said.

“You can't learn the way I learned,” Loxy said.

“Why not?” Jon asked. “Because you throw like a girl?”

“OMG, of course I throw like a girl, I am a girl, and don't you disparage a girl throwing like girl. Don't even disparage a girl who throws like a boy, because people should be able to throw things without being labeled a girl or a boy,” Loxy said.

“Okay,” Jon said, humbly. “Umm, why can't I learn the way you learned?”

“Because, well, I don't know,” Loxy said, irritated. “Trust me. Instinct. Now, throw.”

A new montage began of Jon tossing pinecones at the step. It even had its own song” “Let my love open door.” Of course, Jon and Loxy didn't seem to hear it, but if you're following Jon and Loxy through the Universe, you give up on trying to make things fit inside a box. Also, time is extremely ambiguous throughout the montage. Teaching Jon about Pokémon and about throwing might have taken days or weeks, or a few hours. Sometimes the Universe is not as consistent. Like the same hour feeling much longer when under a Dentist drilling, but much quicker when eating ice cream. Pinecones, on the other hand, are fairly consistent. Most of the pinecones bounced and went into the water.

In addition to throwing pinecones, scenes of him trying to catch a Pokémon were spliced in. Or scenes of him running from a Pokémon, like running from insect Pokémon, because,

surprisingly, Jon is scared of insects, especially giant scary caterpillar and spider type Pokémon, which Loxy had no problem with, only love. There are lots of scenes with her and her hands on her hip as if asking him “How old are you,” as he hid behind trees and in trees, and Everest and Cheeka laughing. Scenes of Pokémon chasing both Loxy and Jon occurred, sometimes with Loxy taking his hand and encouraging him to run because he didn’t have the sense to run from a thing he should run from. For example, Jon ran several times because was just Everest playing, jumping out of bushes and scaring them; and then once it wasn’t Everest, but he didn’t run, and it cost him. Then, they were back to throwing Pinecones, with Loxy mirroring Jon, or guiding his hand through a throw. Jon biting his lip, distracted by Loxy. She patiently encouraged him to focus. There were scenes with their own Pokémon playing with each other and them. Loxy picked a four leaf clover and gave it to Jon. His Pokémon came up out of nowhere and ate it. They tried to get it back, but it ran and they chased, around a tree, and under their legs, so that Loxy and Jon ran into each other. They stared awkwardly at each other, with an almost kissing moment, but the sounds of a Pokémon retching, as if to get rid of a fur ball, drew them. Everest spit out the chewed up clover, recovers, runs to play in a field chasing butterflies. Butterflies chase Everest out of the field and back to cowering behind Jon’s legs.

This went on for most of the afternoon, or, again, days, stopping only for food. A Rattata presented itself, and Loxy had him try and catch it. It broke free and ran and he was disappointed to learn Poké Balls weren’t reusable, though Loxy assured him they were made of ecological friendly material, he didn’t seem satisfied. Still, they collected the parts to recycle back in town. Back to throwing pinecones until he finally landed one on the first stone, and then was instructed to place one on the next stone. By the time he had pinecones on all the stones, Loxy had invented the next advanced level of training. She took his cap, hung it delicately in a rose bush, and had him toss a pinecone into the hat without dislodging it. There were a variety of flowers around the rose bush, and she would position where he had to throw over the flower and it the hat without disturbing flowers or dislodging the hat.

“Really, you’re just making this up,” Jon said. “I want to catch Pokémon.”

“You can’t even see Pokémon unless I point them out,” Loxy said.

“Yes, I can,” Jon said.

“Really? Where did I place your cap?” Loxy asked.

“In the rose bush, near the dancing flowers,” Jon said.

“Yeah, they don’t strike you as odd?” Loxy asked.

“Those are Pokémon?!” Jon asked.

“Those are Bellsprouts,” Loxy said.

“I can catch those?” Jon asked.

“I don’t know if you can or not,” Loxy said.

“I mean, those are catchable?” Jon asked. “Why would anyone want a plant for a pet?”

“OMG. Pokémon are not pets! A Pokémon is a lifelong companion,” Loxy said.

“Why would I want a flower companion?” Jon asked.

“OMG, you are so not discriminating by type, are you?” Loxy asked.

“I am trying to ascertain the relevance of a plant? Getting high? Making tea?” Jon asked.

“Sir! Every Pokémon type is unique, and everyone within a type has its own unique personality. If you’re going to survive in this world, you need a variety of types and personality, because you never know what kind of situation you will be in. I mean, just imagine how boring the world would be if there was only one type of Pokémon,” Loxy said.

Jon considered.

“It’s a plant, I am a…”

“What? A guy? Plants are too girly for you? A real man would not be afraid of owning a plant, or becoming a gardener,” Loxy said.

Jon mused. “I suppose I could put it in the window of my future house.”

“That is so not right,” Loxy said. “You need this plant to teach about the world.”

“Okay. So, I could just toss a ball and catch it?” Jon asked.

“You could, but it’s better to fight it first, test its mettle, see if it wants to play,” Loxy said. “And, also, a tired Pokémon is easier to catch.”

“Really? A mammal taking down a plant seems really unfair,” Jon said.

“You really know nothing about plants, do you,” Loxy said.

“You want me to throw Everest in there and let it chew on a plant? That’s not nice, nor fair, and the clover made him vomit,” Jon said.

“It’s what we do. It’s your job to help Everest learn to engage without being vicious. We’re just engaging and practicing techniques. Your job is to learn not to pummel someone into submission or cause them to flee. You just want to tire them out a little so that they’re easier to catch.”

“It’s a plant!” Jon said.

“Show me, then,” Loxy insisted.

Jon decided to show her, with unearned bravado. He released his Eevee. Everest orientated, saw the pack of Bellsprouts and charged. They danced and leaned and Everest tumbled out the other side of them, confused. Loxy laughed.

“You got to be kidding me! Everest, pick one and growl,” Jon snapped.

Everest clawed at the ground growled fiercely. The Bellsprouts hit him in the face with leaves and he ran back to Jon yelping. It hid behind him, staring between his legs. Loxy laughed.

“OMG, Everest, get back in there,” Jon said.

Everest whimpered.

“Everest,” Jon said. “Pounce. The one on the end, now!”

Everest went out hesitantly, but as it got closer, it gained some confidence, charged, pounced, and the flower bent and tossed Everest over it. Everest fell to the ground, fainted, dead away.

“No way!”

After visiting the nurse, Jon was determined to rush back to the area where they had seen the Spouts, and Loxy amused him, so that he would learn his next lesson: Pokémon don’t just linger in an area. To her surprise they found the Bellsprouts were still near their impromptu pinecone training spot. Everest was encouraged to go back into a skirmish, which was mostly a lot of growling, avoiding grappling range. Jon took out a Poké Ball, preparing to catch it. One of the Bellsprouts ran away. Jon had Everest focus on one of the remaining Bellsprouts, and it was again rendered unconscious.

After the visiting the nurse, Loxy decided they should get a meal, and so they stopped at the restaurant where the woman was struggling between preparing to cook and keeping her Pokémon in line. Loxy approached the man sitting just past the door.

“I want a Pokémon. I want a Pokémon,” he muttered over and over. He saw Loxy and emphasized. “I want a Pokémon! That’s all I ever heard from her. So, what I did I do? I get her a Pokémon. And since then, I haven’t had a good home cooked meal.”

“Perhaps you could help her with the Pokémon,” Loxy suggested.

“I can’t do that!” the old man said.

“Can you cook?” Jon asked.

“Can you?!” the old man asked.

“I can burn toast,” Jon said, proudly.

“Then you are more advanced than I,” the old man said. “I married her because she was the best cook in all the land, and now, look at me, almost all skin and bone.” Hi statement was not quite accurate.

“You married a woman so she could cook for you?” Loxy asked.

“Yes,” the man said, returning the same intensity, like a grandfather quarrelling with a granddaughter. “And don’t you go at me as if I am being sexist. I knew in advance, I can’t cook. Not saying men can’t, most the best chefs in the world are men, but I can’t even boil an egg. And if I could cook, I wouldn’t have married a woman who could cook. How stupid would that be for two cooks to marry each other? Where’s the balance in that? But what I can do, is make TMs!” He held up a sample TM. “That’s what I do. She is a cook, a really good cook, but now, she is too distracted by an out of control, spoiled rotten Pokémon. She is not a trainer. I am a not a trainer. I recognize what I am, young lady. And right now, I can barely keep up with the demand of TM’s because my wife wanted a Pokémon!”

Jon and Loxy exchanged glances. The Pokémon came flying across the room, across the table scattering TM’s in every direction, and barked at the man. The man wailed. “Not again!”

Loxy snapped her fingers at the Pokémon. “Hey! On the floor. Sit. Now,” Loxy said, pointing at it with some authority.

The Pokémon’s eyes got big, it hesitated till Loxy emphasized down now with her hand, and then it jumped down and sat, its lips puckering as if it were a child that might cry.

“Oh my goodness, thank you. Have a seat, and I will prepare you some food,” the woman said.

The man handed Loxy a TM. “Thank you. Maybe we will eat tonight.”

Jon and Loxy sat down. Every now and then she would spy the Pokémon considering mischief, and she would raise a finger and make a noise, “Eh.” It eventually came and sat beside her, curled into a ball, and went to sleep.

“You just got to present the right energy,” Loxy explained.

“You’re like the dog whisperer of Pokémon,” Jon said.

“Umm. Is that good?” Loxy asked.

“I am amazed,” Jon said.

“Aww. That sounds like affection,” Loxy said.

“I’m sorry,” Jon said.

“For showing affection?” Loxy asked.

Jon blushed. The lady brought a fascinating meal of rice and shrimp wrapped in rice paper calling it Spring Rolls, accompanied with a peanut sauce. The husband was quite happy to get a meal. They all seemed happy. After the meal, Loxy taught the woman how to make her Pokémon sit on command, which was more than asking it to do something, but still an invitation to engage in a particular sort of relationship where one was in charge.

“I don’t know,” the woman said, hesitantly. “It sounds kind of harsh, and I could never be mean to my lovely Pokémon.”

“This is not harsh, this just is. I have an expectation, and it has to comply,” Loxy said. “It’s kind of like having kids and being a parent.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t know about that. My husband and I never had children,” she said. “I thought if I couldn’t raise a Pokémon, I would never be good at raising children.”

“Good for you,” Loxy said.

Jon was puzzled. “You’re complimenting her for not wanting children?”

“I complementing her for recognizing not all people are parent material,” Loxy said. “Not all people should be parents. Just look at all the kids running amok because their parents are so into Pokémon that they ignored their kids. Just because you can biologically make a kid doesn’t qualify you to be a parent. You have to train and level up to be good at it.”

“You sound like you will be a great parent,” the woman said.

“Maybe someday,” Loxy mused.

“Oh, don’t wait for someday,” the woman said. “Waiting for some days is how you get to be my age without any. What about you, Sir, do you want children?”

“I think I have a lot more growing up to do, first,” Jon admitted.

“Oh, good for you,” Loxy said.

“Well, it is different for guys. They can be like 80 years old and still knocking out kids,” the woman said.

“And interestingly enough, they usually have to be older than fifty before they’re wise enough to handle them,” Loxy said.

“Men,” the woman lamented, looking to her husband. He was crying from joy over the deliciousness of his food. “I suppose I have been neglecting him. You almost have to treat them as if they were Pokémon.”

“That’s the truth,” Loxy said.

After the meal, Jon and Loxy returned to the pinecone camp and again continued with training. One of the Bellsprouts returned. Everest engaged and using Loxy’s command style, he got the Pokémon to hold ground without spending too much energy. It was a longer engagement, but when he thought it was time, and Loxy nodded agreement, Jon threw a Poké Ball. It failed to take, so he threw the next one. Again, it failed to take, but neither did the Bellsprout run off.

“Again,” Loxy encouraged.

It was his last ball. He gently tossed it, so that it rolled up upon the Bellsprout and opened up even as the Bellsprout was looking down at the ball. The spillover of magic and twirling of a whirlwind of energy radiated in a sweeping motion before the burst of light, followed by sparks, and a ball was left on the ground, rocking one way, then another, and when you thought it was done, it rocked once more, and then the blinking light became steady.

“Yes!” Loxy said, jumping and hugging Jon.

The enthusiasm waned and the moment arrived when they realized they were intimately close were suddenly uncertain and uncomfortable, as if the only thing left was to kiss or separate. They separated and Jon went and collected the ball containing the Bellsprout, called Everest back to his ball, and connected them both to his belt.

“Now what?” Jon asked.

“We go to the nurse, heal them up, and continue the training,” Loxy said.

Two people emerged from off the trail. “There they are, Reese!” Mentos said. “The girl and her mean, old dad.”

Accompanying Mentos was a girl about Loxy’s age, only she was wearing a Pokémon outfit. The outfit was mostly yellow. She was wearing denim cutoffs with a belt, and yellow shirt one size too small, her stomach exposed, and red suspenders, with yellow fingerless gloves, yellow leg warmers, a yellow hat with ears, and a fake yellow tail. It was understood without speaking that she was Mentos’ older sister. Green hair leaked from her yellow hat. “Aren’t you a little old to be...”

“Playing with Pokémon?” Jon interrupted.

“No,” Reese said, brushing hair out of her eyes. “To be looking at me like that.”

“Uh?” Jon struggled.

“Well, no harm there, but you’re definitely too old to be going around intimidating children!” Reese continued to rant.

“I was intimidating?” Jon asked.

“You lost the battle fair and square,” Loxy said.

“Two ganging up on one is fair?” Reese asked.

“Is that what he told you?” Jon asked.

“Prepare to battle!” Reese said, bringing out a ball.

“Is this going to happen everywhere we go?” Jon asked Loxy.

“Yeah, pretty much,” Loxy said, bringing out a ball.

With some fanfare, Loxy introduced Cheeka. Reese laughed, leaped into the air, hovering for a moment like a Matrix warm up punch, and dramatically revealed Furret. Mentos reintroduced is Pidgey, Jon nearly went and petted the Furret, but Loxy stopped him.

“We’re waiting on you, Sir,” Reese said.

“Stop calling me Sir!” Jon said. “I am not that old.”

“Battle, or surrender a third of your pocket money,” Reese said.

“I have no money,” Jon said.

“How old are you?!” Reese asked.

“That’s it,” Jon said. “Everest, I choose you!”

Jon brought his ball into the mix and out jumped his new, and slightly exhausted, Bellsprout.

“Bellsprout?” Reese and Mentos laughed.

“Hold up, a moment,” Jon said.

“Sorry, Sir. Your hand has been played for at least one round,” Reese said. “Furret! Bite!”

“Pidgey, petals!” Mentos joined in.

“Hey, one at a time!” Loxy said. “Cheeka, block!”

Bellsprout was quickly overwhelmed. Pushed to the brink of exhaustion, it crawled back towards Jon, hoping to escape back into the Poké Ball. While Mentos and Reese focused on Cheeka, Jon brought Everest into play. He, too, was quickly exhausted into submission due to its

prior engagement. Just as Loxy's Cheeka passed out from being double teamed, a Growlithe leaped from the bushes and lunged right towards Mentos. Mentos screamed, his Pidgey coming to defend him. Reese rallied Furret to her brother's defense. Furret and Pidgey were both knocked unconscious with a single swipe of a paw! Loxy threw a new player in the mix, an Albino Ursaring emerged, roaring with outstretched arms as if to say 'come and get me,' but the Growlithe ignored the challenge going right for Mentos!

Jon boldly put himself between Mentos and the Growlithe, taking the full head-butt that sent him flying, and then tumbling into the river. While Jon took the attack, Reese pulled her brother out of the mix as Loxy's Ursaring entered the fray. The two tumbled and when the tumbling stopped, the Growlithe was on top, and Ursaring was unconscious and Loxy was in the Growlithe's line sight. Jon emerged from the river, bringing one of the pinecone from the nearest stone, which was the only thing he could find to throw.

"Hey! Over here!" Jon said.

The Growlithe turned back to him and roared, pawed the ground, and then charged. Jon threw the pinecone, hoping for that one in the million, David versus Goliath shot to the forehead. He had no expectations other than he was about to get pummeled by the Growlithe. The world seemed to slow. The pinecone tumbled in flight. Jon felt the world rushing all around his face, kind of like in that song, and the Growler seemed to have his own background of power colors and aura. The pinecone tapped the Growlithe's forehead, opened, revealing an inner light that caught the Growlithe by surprised. And then it was gone, and the pinecone was on the ground, rocking, just like a Poké Ball. It became still, the whole of it glowing gold for a moment before extinguishing.

Stillness reigned. Jon collapsed, as unconscious as either of his Pokémon. When he came to, he found himself in the Nurses Station. Joy, Loxy, Reese, and Mentos were there. Joy was prominent, in his eyes.

"Wow, that's only supposed to work on Pokémon," Joy said. "I wonder if it works on you because Loxy caught you."

"He's a Pokémon?" Reese asked, finding new eyes for Jon.

"Are you okay?" Loxy asked.

"Thank you for saving my brother," Reese said.

“Yeah, that was awful brave! I never saw anything that brave before,” Mentos said.

“You’re probably even more brave than Master Ash.”

“What happened?”

“We’re still trying to sort that,” Loxy said. She held up a single pinecone. Previously, it was just a plain, old, freshly dropped green, prickly pinecone. Now, it was edged with white trim and glitter dust as if it were a Christmas ornament. “Can you explain this?”

“Umm, Christmas?”

“You captured a Growlithe with a pinecone!” Mentos said.

“I said it was impossible, but sure enough, it’s in there and I was able to connect it to the computer for healing,” Joy said. “I have reached out to several experts and though I have discovered some obscure sources that suggest the first Pokémon caught was caught by a pinecone, most origin stories start with Apricorns. Before the advancement of technology, it is said only a Shaman of extraordinary psychic abilities could operate this most ancient, natural technology. These references to pinecones are so obscure as to be nothing more than frivolous hear say, like those weird reports that Slendermen exists.”

“You have Slendermen here, too?” Jon asked.

“I know this girl who went into the forest and never came back,” Mentos said. “I think Slendermen got her.”

“As opposed to just being eaten by a regular old Pokémon?” Reese asked.

“No one has ever seen a Slendermen, and it’s possible it’s one of those Pokémon that has never been caught or seen,” Mentos said.

“Or just fluff stories,” Joy said. “The kind that parents tell you so you will go to nursing school instead of pursuing a dream to be the greatest Pokémon Trainer ever.”

“Well, we can’t all be the greatest Pokémon Trainer, ever,” Mentos said. “Cause that’s going to be me.”

“Jon,” Loxy said. “I know you don’t want to go home, but I do think we should go and speak to Professor Willow. You’re an enigma.”

“No,” Jon said.

“Jon, you’re in the Pokédex! Humans shouldn’t be there. More on that, because you are in my Pokédex and tagged as my catch, I can now only carry five Pokémon with me.”

“How many do you need?”

“All of them,” Loxy said. “But that’s not the point. While you were unconscious, I have discovered that we are sharing computer banks. Your catches are going into my bank, with a modified Jon/Loxy identifier tag. With both of us catching Pokémon, I will use up my allotted space much quicker, which means I will have to change my capture strategy.”

“So, what you’re saying is, you want me out of your space?” Jon said.

“No,” Loxy said. “I am not saying that. Your Pokémon have a unique identifier and that’s kind of cool, and the Growler, because of the Pinecone, it has a new designator I haven’t seen before, and that’s super cool. But…”

“You just want to get rid of me,” Jon said.

“Why do you keep saying that? I just want to understand,” Loxy said. “And I think the Professor might have some answers.”

“It’s possible Erika might have some answers,” Joy mused.

“Who’s Erika?” Jon asked.

“The Nature Loving Princess?!” Mentos asked. “OMG, how can you not know the Flower Girl?!”

“I love the flower girl!” Joy said.

“Flowers in her hair,” Reese said.

“Flowers everywhere!” Loxy agreed.

“And she can make you happy. But don’t let that fool you. You got to get past her posse, and those flower girls are tough!” Mentos said.

“Yeah,” Loxy agreed. “Would you consent to seeing Erika with me?”

Jon nodded. “I am sorry I am being difficult.”

“You’re allowed to be difficult,” Loxy said, touching his face gently. “I would like to understand what you’re so afraid of.”

“I am afraid of being sent back to where I came from. I am afraid of waking up and this all being a dream,” Jon said.

“A good dream?” Loxy asked.

“Meeting you is like the best dream I have ever had,” Jon said.

“OMG,” Loxy, Joy, and Reese said. Reese continued. “That’s like the hottest, nicest thing ever.”

“What did he say?” Mentos asked, confused. “Hotter than Pokémon?”

“Is this place you come from that bad?” Reese asked.

“It is for me,” Jon said.

“The thing about places of origin, though, is you tend to carry them with you wherever you go,” Loxy said.

“Oh, you’re a Mystic,” Mentos said.

Loxy pointed to her badged.

“Instinct? Why would you choose Instinct? No one of any significance ever chooses Instinct!” Mentos said.

“Come on, let’s go prepare you for your first gym,” Loxy said.

“Oh, let us help!” Reese volunteered.

Chapter 4

If you thought the montage for the Rocky training session was harsh, it nothing compared to Jon and his Pokémon had to deal with. Loxy, Reese, and Mentos put him through grueling matches and scenarios as they tried to get him up to speed. They barely got their song going when his Eevee laid down and went to sleep, and Bellsprout completely ignored him and got tackled.

“What the heck is wrong with you!” Jon shouted.

“Jon, don’t yell at them,” Loxy tried.

“But I have Sprout with ADHD inattentive type,” Jon said, waving at the Pokémon has it was knocked out. “OMG.”

“Jon, part of it is you caught a really high level Bellsprout, but the other thing is, you have very little experience,” Loxy tried.

“Oh, yeah, well, I will show you!” Jon said, releasing the Growlithe.

Growlithe arrived on the scene, planted his feet solidly, growled, laid down, and went to sleep. Jon went and pushed on him. He pulled on his ears, forcing a grin that exposed teeth, but it fell right back into place as he let go. Pidgey came up and pecked on Growlithe’s head. Growlithe rolled over and exposed his belly and stretched. Pidgey jumped up on the belly and went to sleep.

“This can’t be the same Growlithe that came at us earlier,” Jon said.

“You’re lucky he likes you. He could have turned his attacks on you,” Loxy said.

“You should catch a Pikachu,” Mentos said. “Then you could never lose a match.”

“That’s not true, Mentos,” Reese said, with a tone in her voice that suggested she had said that for like the millionth times now.

“What’s a Pikachu?” Jon asked.

“Only the bestest Pokémon in the whole entire world,” Mentos said.

“You’re just saying that because you’re an Ash freak,” Reese said.

“I am not a freak!” Mentos snapped.

“You are so a freak, you little Ash kisser,” Reese said.

“You take that back!” Mentos cried.

Pidgey’s own snoring KO Growlithe. Mentos laughed.

“Want me to help you carry them back to Joy?” Mentos asked, snickering.

“Just wait here,” Jon said.

Jon returned to the fountain where they were waiting, discussing strategy. His Bellsprout was following. They were so into their strategizing that they didn't seem to notice him or the Sprout, he had named Belle.

“Shouldn't he have to go back Pewter city and do the gym's in order?” Mentos asked.

“That could take forever,” Reese said.

“He started here,” Loxy said. “It's safer staying here and rising to the level of where you are than chasing after perceived easier badges.”

Belle eased up on the Pidgey, back against the fountain wall, watching Jon's hand signal, ‘a little closer, a little close, now.’ Taken by surprise, Pidgey and Sprout both went into the fountain, and Pidgey, who hadn't finished resting, coupled with the shock of going under water, fell unconscious. Mentos quickly fished his Pokémon out of the water whereas Belle pulled himself up on the fountain ledge, leaves up, victory dance ensuing. Jon froze in place trying to sort a feeling inside of him.

“Not cool,” Mentos said.

“Jon? You okay?” Loxy asked.

“I don't know,” Jon said.

“You look like you're on the edge of a seat about to topple over,” Mentos observed.

“Looks like the prelude to an orgasm face,” Reese said.

“What's an orgasm?” Jon asked.

“You never had an orgasm?” Loxy asked.

“Of course I have,” Jon said, like a child arguing with friends to remain in the cool group. “Have you?”

Belle suddenly burst into lights, throwing its petal arms into the air, jumping as if it struck by lightning, and when the light dimmed, it was no longer a Bellsprout, but a Weepinbelle.

“Oh!” Mentos said. “You just evolved your first Pokémon!”

John started shivering as if he were having an epileptic fit, making a startled sound. When the convulsing stopped, he felt overwhelmingly good all over, a warmth rushing through his entire body. A remarkable smile radiated a dazed euphoria, a spark flying from his eyes. He passed out. When he came too, he found himself surrounded by his new friends. Joy's head

hovered prominently over him, as she was kneeling beside him, holding a 'revive' spray potion. Her eye contact was so intense he looked down, and found his eyes in her cleavage; he felt even more embarrassed, and looked further down, where his eyes hit her knees, and traced her thighs up, where, due to her hovering position and his perspective, he could see her panties. Though he knew he should look away, he couldn't seem to do it. Joy touched his arm and he realized she was aware, all his friends were, and he finally managed to break his eyes away. He could see Blisse holding a medical tray with samples.

"That is really so cool that that works on you," Joy said, and he was uncertain if she meant the potion or the magic under the dress.

"He stared down to China!" Mentos said, laughing.

"Oh, that's okay," Joy said, happily petting Jon. "If I had a Pokémon for every time someone did that, I would have them all. Jon, you should consider buying some of these revive potions so that the next time this happens, your friends can help you. Not that I mind helping you, but it is also healthy to have friends and be self-sufficient."

"What happened?" Jon asked.

"You leveled up," Loxy said. "Like three whole times."

"Uh?"

"You are now a level three trainer," Reese said.

"Come on, let's get back to training. You got to be a minimum of a level 5 trainer to compete with Erika," Loxy said.

"Yeah, just the right level so he can get his butt kicked by girls," Mentos laughed.

"And what's wrong with that?" Loxy asked.

"Sometimes a butt kicking is just what a person needs," Reese said, agreeing with Loxy.

"Well, Jon must be the neediest guy ever, because he is about to have his butt handed to him a dozen times in a row," Mentos said.

Jon frowned at Mentos.

"He's just messing with you," Reese said. "Which means he likes you."

"Umph," Jon said.

"I like you, too," Reese said.

"He kind of grows on you, doesn't he," Joy agreed. "Like an aged Pokémon who just needs some love."

“I think I might be sick,” Mentos said.

The girls ignored him, but his Pidgey mirrored his sentiment.

“Am I going to be okay, Nurse Joy?” Jon asked, sitting up.

“Aww, of course you are,” Joy said, hugging him. “Why would you think otherwise?”

Jon avoided eye contact.

“Spit it out, Jon,” Loxy directed, command voice.

He was compelled to answer. “Well, I never passed out before, and, well,” his eyes looked at his own feet, partly because Joy was stirring that feeling in him again, and partly because, he was genuinely embarrassed. “I think I peed my pants.”

Mentos laughed. Loxy and Reese looked the other way. Joy gripped Jon’s arms with compassion.

“Oh, Jon, that’s not urine,” Joy said, patting him the way she would any Pokémon.

“You’re perfectly fine. What you have experienced is what all boys experience at a certain age of evolution, and you are now on new road of self-discovery.”

“I am?” Jon asked.

“Normally, a person learns about this from the streets and experimentation, or during a dream; nocturnal emissions are generally the first experience,” Joy continued. “But you have friends who can help guide you. Though I am trained to educate you on such matters, I find my bias for wanting you as my own might unduly influence your development. So, if you have further questions, you could speak to your trainer, Loxy, or perhaps speak to your PCP. And if your parents didn’t teach you this, I highly recommend changing your underwear daily.”

Jon blushed. Joy kissed him, then departed, a swing in her hips. Blissey blew a kiss at him, handed him a soft boiled egg, and then followed Joy. Jon sat there, watching Joy depart, seriously unable to look away from the swing of her hips, until Mentos got in his line of sight, crossed his arms.

“Are you just going to sit there and think about girls, or are you going to get back to training!” Mentos demanded.

“It’s almost night. Maybe we should consider setting up a campsite,” Loxy said.

“Aww! Some of the best training comes at night,” Mentos said.

“It sure does,” Reese said.

“We’ve done enough for today,” Loxy insisted.

“But, there are Pokémon that only come out at night!” Mentos said.

“There is wisdom in getting a goodnight sleep,” Loxy said.

“We could stay at the hotel,” Reese said. “My treat. I owe you for saving my Brother, Jon.”

“It’s okay,” Jon said.

“That just makes me more indebted,” Reese said. “I insist. And, if you and Loxy are open, I would like to tag along with you.”

“Really?” Mentos asked.

“Why not? I think we might advance a lot with Jon and Loxy as guides and friends,” Reese said.

Mentos looked suspiciously at his sister, traced her gaze back to Jon, and back to her. He crossed his arms. “We were doing just fine without them!”

“How is small time hustling just fine?” Reese asked.

“It’s character building,” Mentos said.

“We’re going with Loxy and Jon,” Reese insisted, in a very maternal sister’s voice. “That is, if it’s okay with Loxy and Jon. The caveat being, Mentos comes, too, as we’re package deal until he becomes more self-sufficient.”

“I am self-sufficient!” Mentos insisted.

“I would love for you both to accompany us. Jon is going to need all the help he can get to meet our level of proficiency,” Loxy said. “And I definitely accept the offer of the room, as Jon needs a showers and fresh clothes.”

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“Room 6 and 7, here we are,” Reese said. “Are you sure you don’t want your own room, Loxy?”

“No, that would be so extravagant. Jon and I will be good,” Loxy said.

“I bet,” Mentos said. “Come on, I want to order a pizza.”

“I really need to use the bathroom,” Jon said.

Reese gave Loxy the card key and the door opened for her. For Jon, this room was extravagant, having never been to a hotel before, much more a hotel like this before. As he emerged into the room, he was startled by a statue in the corner. It was a human, with Pokémon

at her feet, and he touched her to make sure it was indeed a statue, tossed his Pokédex to the bed, and then rushed to the bathroom. He closed and the locked the door, dropped his bag on the counter and his jacket to the floor even as he proceeded to the toilet, and then tentatively unlocked and opened the door. He emerged, peeking out at Loxy.

“Problem?” Loxy asked, about to order room service.

“Umm, I don’t know how to use the toilet,” Jon said.

“Really?” Loxy asked. “They don’t have toilets in your world, either?”

“Not like this,” Jon said.

Loxy cradled the phone and entered the bathroom. She went through all the toilet options. Seat warmer. Bowl freshener. Water jet. Lower back massager. Water rinse. Blow dryer. Adult mode.

“What’s the adult mode?”

“If you have to ask, you’re not ready for it,” Loxy said.

“Where’s the toilet paper?” Jon asked.

“That’s what the rinse is for,” Loxy said.

“And, where’s the flush?” Jon asked.

“It does that automatically, but if you want it to do it sooner, just ask it,” Loxy said.

“You mean, like, speak, out loud, to the toilet?” Jon asked.

“Yes,” Loxy said. “Don’t you talk to your tech at home?”

“No,” Jon said.

“Weird,” Loxy said. “You got it from here?”

“Yeah,” Jon said.

“You’re sure?” Loxy asked.

“Yeah,” Jon said.

“Okay, go ahead,” Loxy said.

“I got it from here,” Jon said, indicating he wanted privacy.

“Oh, okay,” Loxy said, leaving and pulling the door shut.

“Do you want a pizza?”

“Yes, please,” Jon said, dropping his pants and sitting on the toilet. He accidentally pushed a button and screamed.

“You okay?” Loxy asked from the other side of the door.

“The rinse is freezing!” Jon said.

“Temp control is on the side,” Loxy said.

Jon finished his business and timidly started the clean cycle. He let out a yelp, but held onto the seat.

“You okay?” Loxy yelled in response to his yelp.

“I feel like I am going through a car wash!” Jon yelled back.

“Is that good or bad?” Loxy asked.

Jon didn’t answer. He was embarrassed that it felt better than he imagined. He got up, pulled his pants up, and went to wash his hands. He reached for a dispenser.

“Ahhh!”

“What now?!” Loxy asked.

“Spiders!” Jon said.

Loxy entered, and found Jon holding a floss dispenser, still ejecting floss. Jon was struggling, tangled, and fell over.

“Stop wasting floss!” Loxy said, taking the dispenser away from him. As soon as the button was undepressed, the floss stop dispensing and was severed.

“Help,” Jon said, struggling to untangle himself from the floss.

“Where’s the knife I bought you?” Loxy said.

“In my bag,” Jon said.

“Lot of good it’s doing you in the bag,” Loxy said, undoing her knife from the Pokémon ball colored sheaf.

“Easy!” Jon said.

Surprisingly she cut him free from the floss without shedding blood or cutting clothes, flipped the knife, and returned it to its sheath, where it buckled itself. After disposing of the floss, she went over the remaining items in the dispensing tray. “Hand soap, toothpaste, shaving cream.” Each item was distinguished by color and pattern. “Floss,” she said, putting it back in the tray.

“Thank you,” Jon said.

Loxy once again departed the bathroom.

He turned to the shaving cream and packaged razor and decided to give it a go. As he lathered, he stared at the stranger in the mirror. He dried his hands and ran a finger across his

stubble. He took up the blue, complimentary razor next to the complimentary tooth brushes. He exposed the blade and ran it across his face. He halted all motion as he saw a line of blood appear, curious about it. Then it hit him.

“Fuck!” Jon said, dropping the razor and dancing in place.

Loxy knocked the door. “Jon?”

Jon opened the door to reveal he had cut himself.

“OMG, Jon, how old are you?” Loxy demanded.

“I cut myself,” Jon answered.

“I see that!” Loxy said, pulling a quick heal from her pocket and spraying his face.

“Fuck!” Jon said, slapping his face

“Stop being a baby,” Loxy said.

“That fucking hurts!” Jon snapped.

“The Pokémon never complain,” Loxy said.

“I am not a Pokémon!” Jon said.

“My Pokédex says otherwise,” Loxy said. “Have you ever shaved before?”

Jon looked at the floor.

“Jon,” Loxy said, drawing his eyes back to him by gently pulling up on his chin. “Don’t be embarrassed by first times. There is always a first time for everything. Didn’t you watch your father shave?”

“I never knew my father,” Jon said.

“Oh. I am sorry,” Loxy said. “Was he out catching Pokémon?”

“I wish!” Jon said.

“Oh, I forgot, your world doesn’t have Pokémon,” Loxy said. “Here, sit on the counter.”

Jon did as she instructed and she began to show him how to make lather with the supplies, removing the lather he had used in favor of hers. She then took the razor, and gently started his shave. She rinsed the blade. She noticed Jon was shaking.

“Are you cold?” Loxy asked.

“Never had anyone with a something sharp come at me so gentle,” Jon said.

“Oh,” Loxy said, sadly.

“And I have never had any one scrutinize me so closely,” Jon said.

“Would you like me to stop?” Loxy asked.

“We should probably finish what we started,” Jon said.

“Probably,” Loxy agreed.

“How do you know how to do this?” Jon asked.

“I went to nursing school, and then followed it up with a masters in emergency care, and I have even earned an emergency field medic license,” Loxy said. “Sometimes, we have to shave Pokémon to perform medical procedures. That’s how I became friends with Joy. We were in class together.”

“Why aren’t you a nurse, then?” Jon asked.

“Becoming a nurse is easy, finding the field you want to practice in, that’s tough,” Loxy said. “I am still looking for my place in the world. I was offered a position with national forestry service, but I have decided to pursue my own field studies. Who knows, maybe I will go and earn a PhD and become a professor.”

“You’re really smart,” Jon said, staring intently at her.

“Thank you, Jon,” Loxy said. “You’re smarter than you give yourself credit.”

“I wasn’t looking for a compliment,” Jon said.

Loxy considered. “Maybe you need a compliment,” Loxy said.

Jon frowned. “I am very uncomfortable hearing nice things about me.”

“Then I should praise you until you are more comfortable,” Loxy said.

“Why are you so nice to me?” Jon asked.

Loxy shrugged. “I like you. All finished. You have extra clothes in your bag. Put the clothes you’re wearing in this washer, and they should be dried and folded in a couple hours. And, by the time you finish your shower, the pizza should be here.”

Loxy rinsed the razor, put it back in the cradle, and departed, pulling the door to, looking one more time to Jon to see if he needed anything. He was fishing out a change of clothes from his bag. He pulled out a Poké ball and set it on the cabinet. The next item he pulled out was a flask, of unknown contents, which on sampling proved to be water, the best water he had ever had, actually, and just the right temperature. He dropped it back in the bag and rummaged deeper, pulled the flask out again, and set it on the counter. He pulled out the pinecone holding his Growlithe, which had to go in the bag because it didn’t connect to his belt the way modern balls did. Loxy took the bag from him, reached in and pulled out clothes suitable for sleeping in and clean underwear and set them on the counter. She handed him back his bag.

“How do you do that?” Jon asked.

“You’ll get the hang of it,” Loxy said. She touched his head and left the bathroom.

“Tom Hanks made being big seem so easy,” Jon muttered to himself.

He sat his bag on the counter. He felt suddenly compelled to brush his teeth and did so with the only tooth paste available. “Wasabi toothpaste,” Jon read, applied it, and began brushing. He cried, gagged, spit it out, rinsed.

“Jon?”

“What the fuck is wrong with you people?” Jon asked.

Loxy opened the door. He held the toothpaste up at her. “Is this for Pokémon or humans?”

“It’s for both,” Loxy said.

“Where’s the bubblegum flavor?!” Jon asked.

Loxy blinked. “I will see if the front desk has any,” she said, retreating, trying not to laugh.

Once the door was closed, he committed to getting a shower, and unfastened his belt without removing the two attached Poké ball. Both hit the floor and rolled, but one landed on the button, grew to full size, and then deployed Belle. Belle arrived, leaped up on the counter, and attacked its mirror image, knocking stuff over.

“Jon, are you okay in there?”

“Um, yeah,” Jon said.

Jon considered locking the door, but then just got undress, fed the washer machine on the cabinet, with Belle’s help, if you could call it help.

“Belle, I got it,” Jon said.

“Weepinbelle,” it said.

No!” Jon, Weepinbelle, and the Pokémon ball looking clothes washer all pulled on the shirt. Jon let go, and Belle let go right before the machine pulled it in as well.

“Weepinbelle, belle,” it said.

“That’s going to be so annoying. Say my name,” Jon said.

“Belle,” it said.

“No, my name,” Jon said, slower.

“Beellee,” it said slower.

“Are you playing with your Pokémon, or getting a shower?” Loxy called from outside.

“Getting a shower,” Jon said to the door, and then turned back to Belle, giving him the look that said ‘behave,’ which was his best Loxy imitation, and then turned back to the mirror.

Belle picked up a floss dispenser threatening to use it on him, a mirror image of a Pokémon trainer threatening to ball its Pokémon.

“Put that back,” Jon said. “It’s not a toy.”

It threatened to dispense the floss at him.

“Don’t you dare,” Jon warned.

It picked up toothpaste and threatened to dispense toothpaste and floss simultaneously.

“I’m seriously warning you,” Jon said.

It seemed to smile.

“Don’t make me count,” Jon said.

It raised the items together, menacingly.

“One,” Jon said.

It backed up towards the mirror.

“At three, I am going to put you back in your ball,” Jon said. “Two.”

Belle shot a segment of floss through the toothpaste, making sticking string. It stuck to Jon’s face. Wasabi got in his eye. Jon yelled, and Belle shot more, driving him back against the tub, where he fell in. Belle jumped to the floor, pursued, not easing up.

Loxy entered.

“OMG, do you think you’re both rock stars or something?!” Loxy demanded. “Stop tearing up the bathroom! I want to use it when you’re finished.”

Belle pouted, as if it were a child being scolded. It turned to Loxy, its hands slowly bringing the dispensers to bear.

Loxy’s arms went akimbo. “Don’t you even think about it!”

Belle lowered its hands and Loxy took the items from him. “There is very wasteful,” Loxy said. She removed the shower head from the cradle and turned the water stream against the wall, getting it the right temperature before turning it on Jon. Water washed the paste and string away.

“That’s freezing!” Jon snapped. “It’s in my eyes!” He rubbed his eyes as she sprayed his eyes, and then eased off his face, and she gave him a towel to dry his eyes. He touched face and his chest. “Where did all the string go?”

“It dissolves in cold water,” Loxy said. “A biodegradable feature so that wild Pokémon don’t get entangled with waste.”

“How does it do that?” Jon asked.

“I don’t know,” Loxy said. “Do you have to know everything?”

“Yes!” Jon said, pouting. “Why not warm water?”

“Because, if it disintegrated with warm water, you wouldn’t be able to floss your teeth,” Loxy said. “Better.”

“My eyes are still red,” Jon said.

“You’ll live,” Loxy said. “Do I need to bathe you, too?”

“No,” Jon said, sullenly. “I don’t know why you’re mad at me. He started it.”

“OMG,” Loxy said, retreated from the bathroom. “Hurry up and finish.”

Belle gave Jon a mischievous glanced, realized Loxy was looking at him, pointing at him, and returned to being a ‘good’ Pokémon. She cradled the shower head, took the dispensers from Belle and put them back in their spots, and gave them both a warning look. “You guys better not get us banned from this hotel. I like this hotel.” She left the room, closing the door.

Jon touched his chest, there were red sticky lines where the wasabi toothpaste had been. He also had hair on his chest and he wondered if he should shave his chest, too. Then his eyes fell lower. He wondered if he should shave his hair everywhere. He was kind of disgusted by all the hair, but asking Loxy to shave him everywhere felt like too much. He stood up, glowering at Belle, who looked up innocently enough. Loxy knocked on the door.

“Are you okay if I come in and pee while you’re in the shower?” Loxy said.

“Um, not comfortable with that yet,” Jon said.

“Okay,” Loxy said. “Could you hurry please?”

Jon opened the door, holding the towel he had wiped his eyes with around him. “Go ahead,” he said.

Loxy entered. “Thank you,” Loxy said. “Belle.” She went right to the toilet to do her business, not even closing the door.

Jon turned and looked away. “We’re not married!”

“You have to be married to pee near someone?” Loxy asked.

“Um, no, but it helps,” Jon stammered, listening, and grimacing, to the flow of water.

“Everyone pees, Jon,” Loxy said.

“Yeah, but I don’t have to see it,” Jon said.

“But, what are you going to do when we’re out camping in the wilderness?” Loxy asked.

“I don’t know, never been in the wilderness, never been camping, and never had a friend like you before,” Jon said.

The sound of Loxy washing her hand suggested it was safe to turn around. She dried her hands and petted Belle. “And tell me again why you took Belle out?”

“I dropped the ball,” Jon said.

“Oh, that makes sense,” Loxy said. “But adds a nice smell to the bathroom, though.”

“Belle,” it said.

“All yours again,” Loxy said, going by him, amused by how he was holding the towel.

“Okay,” Jon said, closing the door.

Again, he considered locking it, but decided it wasn’t necessary. I mean, once a girl has peed within ear shot of you, you must be pretty solid, he guessed. He went to the shower, messed with the water controls unsuccessfully and returned to the room. Loxy was just pulling a slice of pizza free from the circle.

“Sorry, I couldn’t wait for you,” Loxy said. “What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know how to work the shower,” Jon admitted.

“How old are you?” Loxy asked.

“I never seen a shower like that before!” Jon said.

Loxy got up and went to the bathroom and turned on the water, got it to a temperature he okayed and then turned on the shower. She motioned to the shower.

“Okay?” Loxy asked.

“Okay, I think I got it from here,” Jon said.

“Are you sure? Maybe I should lather you up and then rinse you and dry you?” Loxy asked.

Jon blinked, biting his tongue. “That’s strangely appealing but I am going to say no.”

“Okay,” Loxy said, returning to the other room, pulling the door closed behind her. He opened the door back up. “You’d seriously do that?”

“Sure, why not?” Loxy asked, folding the pizza and pushing it into her mouth.

“I don’t know, we just met, and, people don’t do that?” Jon asked.

“I wash my Pokémon all the time,” Loxy said.

“I am not a Pokémon,” Jon said.

“The water’s running,” Loxy pointed out. “And I can’t promise there will be pizza left if you don’t hurry.”

Jon returned to the bathroom, closed the door, hung the towel and jumped in the shower. It was cooler than he expected and made a sound.

“Jon?” Loxy asked.

“Just adjusting to the water temp,” Jon said.

He turned his back to the shower and in doing so saw a man in the curtain and screamed. Loxy came running in.

“What?!” Loxy asked.

“The man in the mirror is in the curtain!” Jon said.

“Jon, you scared the shit out of me!” Loxy said.

“It scared the shit out of me!” Jon said.

“OMG, Jon, you’ve never seen a smart curtain?” Loxy asked.

“A smart curtain?” Jon asked.

“Curtain, teach, Jon,” Loxy said, and left the room.

“Hello, Jon,” the curtain said. “I am your helpful shower curtain. I detect know specific areas that require special attention, so have remained in general reminder mode. The illuminated, highlighted areas on your mirror image still need to be washed. Are you aware that many people forget to wash behind the ears, but that the feet are equally ignored and require a good scrubbing. Simply allowing soapy water to run over your feet is not sufficient to call them clean,” flashing arrows pointed behind the ears at it rotated the ‘Jon’ image around to reveal the most often missed places.

“I am really uncomfortable with this image of me,” Jon announced.

“If you like, I could add an overlap Pokémon features to your image,” the curtain said, providing a quick array of samples, giving Jon Pokémon faces.

“Um, of course you can,” Jon said. “But no.”

Belle leaped into the curtain and fell back. Jon could see through the curtain's image and Belle was talking to the curtain avatar of Jon on the other side of the curtain. Jon pointed at Belle, and the curtain image mirrored him.

"Don't do that" Jon told Belle.

"Alright, I will not add Pokémon features," the curtain said. "Perhaps you would like a simple cartoon avatar or another human shower surrogate? I could also do a variety of landscapes, bubbles, music, or, I could put in your mother, or Nurse Joy, to instruct your shower experience further."

"Oh, god, not my mother," Jon said.

"Nurse Joy it is," the curtain said.

Jon's image faded and Nurse Joy appeared in the curtain. "Hello, Jon," Joy said. "Let's begin our shower tutorial. You should apply water to the washrag and then apply soap."

Jon noticed his erection for the first time.

"If you ignore that, it should go down," Joy said.

Jon hit it and regretted it.

"I don't recommend doing that," Joy said.

"What it is it?" Jon asked. "What's happening to me?"

"Jon, would you like your mother to come and explain it to you?" Joy asked.

"No!" Jon said.

Belle leaped again into the curtain, most likely because of Jon's strong emotional response to Joy asking if Jon wanted his mother. The curtain and the whole assembly came down with a crash.

"Don't do that!" Jon said.

"Jon, what's going on?" Loxy said from the other side of the door.

"Don't come in!" Jon said. "I got it."

"What do you got?" Loxy asked.

"The shower curtain fell," Jon said.

"How could the curtain fall? What are you doing in there?" Loxy asked.

"Nothing!" Jon said.

"If you don't want to ignore it, you could just add lather and stroke it," Joy said.

"Is that the Joy interface?" Loxy asked.

“Um, yeah, I turned it on by accident,” Jon said, glad she couldn’t see how embarrassed he was.

“Well, I use the Joy interface myself,” Loxy said.

“Um, that’s not helpful information at the moment,” Jon said.

Loxy leaned up against the door, and then sat down. Cheeka came to her and she petted it. “Jon, I wish you were more comfortable telling me stuff, because I want to be open with you. I feel compelled to tell you something. I don’t know what it is, but I am definitely drawn to you. I know we just met and all, and maybe it is wise to wait on such disclosures, but I also trust my instincts, and, well, I am rambling, and I don’t usually ramble, and so I am just going to say it. I like you...”

More curtain crashing.

“Jon?”

“I’m okay. I just can’t get the curtain back up,” Jon said.

“Did you hear anything I said?” Loxy said.

“I like you, too,” Jon said.

“Really?” Loxy said, smiling and hugging Cheeka.

“Well, sure,” Jon said, lathering up on it per instructions.

Pushing down on it didn’t make it go away. He held tried ignoring it, but when his hands and soap came into contact, he was unable to resist holding it. He sorted emotions and sensations. Weepinbelle bobbed on the side of the tub, licking its lips. Jon blinked.

Outside, Loxy seemed really happy. “I am so glad to hear you feel the same way. We might be together for a while, and, well, I would hate for anything awkward to come between us. I am hoping you and I can always talk to each other, about anything and everything.”

“Um, Loxy,” Jon said, up against the door.

“Yes, Jon?” Loxy asked.

“Do think Nurse Joy makes house calls?” Jon asked.

“I am opening up to you and you want to bring Nurse Joy in on this?” Loxy asked.

“Yes, please,” Jon said.

Loxy stood. “Are you okay?”

“I don’t know,” Jon said.

Loxy tried to open the door but Jon pushed it back closed. “Open the door,” Loxy said.

“Is Nurse Joy there?”

“Jon, she is a nurse for Pokémon ,” Loxy said.

“Okay,” Jon said.

“Is your Pokémon hurt?” Loxy asked.

“No, but he’s hurting me. Could you ask Joy to hurry?” Jon said.

Loxy found her phone and called Joy. Joy said she would be right there. Loxy returned to the bathroom door.

“Jon, she’s on her way. Open the door, please,” Loxy said.

“No,” Jon said. “Just let me know when Joy is here, please, thank you,” Jon said.

Loxy went to answer the knocking at the door and found Joy, with her medical bag.

“That was quick,” Loxy said.

“Oh, I was visiting one of my sisters who is stay a few rooms down,” Joy said.

“Yeah, but you’re always quick and always have just the perfect excuse,” Loxy said.

“Is that Nurse Joy?” Jon asked through the door.

“What’s going on?” Joy asked, rushing in. “Who’s injured.”

Loxy closed the door, shrugging.

“You said it was an emergency,” Joy said.

Loxy led her to the bathroom door and knocked. “Jon, Joy is here. Can you open the door now please,” she asked.

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “How do you turn the curtain off first?”

“Are you using the Nurse Joy curtain interface?” Joy asked.

“Ummm,” Jon’s embarrassment was transmitted through the door. “This is going to be weird.”

“Oh, Jon, it’s not weird. That’s my sister. And she gets royalties anytime someone uses it,” Joy said. “May I come in now?”

“Okay, well, this is going to be weird, too,” Jon said.

“Oh, Jon, I am nurse, I have seen it all,” Joy assured him.

“Okay, but just you can come in,” Jon said.

Loxy frowned. Joy tried to reassure her friend with kind touch.

“It’s probably nothing,” Joy said.

The bathroom door crept open and Joy preceded inside. Jon was hiding behind the door, a towel wrapped around his waist, with a large bulge under the towel.

“Oh! Sir, I can’t help you with that,” Joy said

Loxy pushed in. Jon blushed. Joy turned her head, trying not to laugh. Loxy’s eyes were big.

“It’s huge,” Loxy said.

Joy covered her mouth, her eyes watering. Jon saw her in the mirror and grew angry.

“This is not funny,” Jon said.

“You have never had one of those before?” Joy asked.

“Had what before?” Jon asked.

“A hard on...”

“It hurts,” Jon said.

Joy turned around. “It’s not supposed to hurt. Did you put something on it you’re not supposed to? Soap? Wasabi toothpaste?”

Jon dropped the towel to reveal Weepinbelle attached to him. Loxy covered her mouth with both hands. Nurse Joy seemed indifferent.

“You should really be careful where you put that. The next evolution comes with teeth,” Joy said.

“You have seen this before?” Loxy asked.

“Are you kidding?” Joy asked. “If I had a Poké coin for every time I encountered this, I would be the wealthiest Pokémon nurse in all of history. Even richer than my sister that modeled for the shower avatar.”

“Can you get it off?” Jon asked.

“Oh, no, no, no,” Joy said. “No. I am not that kind of nurse.”

“What?” Jon asked.

“Weepinbelle won’t let go until they’re satisfied,” Joy informed.

“Satisfied?” Jon asked. “Satisfied how?!”

“Do I need to bring Cheeka in?” Loxy asked.

“Oh, you don’t want battle with it. During battle the salvia could eat through metal, and well, suffice it to say, you want this little guy to remain peaceful and loving,” Joy said.

“Belle’s a guy?” Jon asked.

“You named him Belle?” Joy asked. “Belle’s a girl’s name.”

“It’s a flower, I thought it was a girl,” Jon said.

“That is so not right. Flowers can be any gender they want,” Joy said.

“So how do I get it off?” Jon asked.

“How old are you?” Joy asked.

“Stop asking me that!” Jon snapped. “Just tell me how to get this thing off.”

“Oh, you’re not going to be able to. Only a female can get a male Weepinbelle off,” Joy said. “Loxy?”

“What? Wait, wait, wait, you don’t expect me to…”

“You are Jon’s owner,” Joy pointed out.

“You’re the nurse!” Loxy said.

“This is not a medical procedure,” Joy said.

“But, but, you have more medical experience than I,” Loxy said. “So, you’re more qualified.”

“Loxy, you’re a trainer, and I know you know just as much anatomy and physiology as I do,” Joy said.

“Generalized, not specialized,” Loxy said.

“Trainers breed Pokémon. Surely you have bred Pokémon before,” Joy said.

“I mostly just leave them at the nursery and let them do their own thing,” Loxy said.

“I swear,” Joy said. “Why are people so afraid of anatomy and physiology? Come on, I will guide you. Jon, come sit on the bed.”

“What are we going to do?” Jon asked, all worried.

“Bed, sit, now!” Loxy said, using her Pokémon command voice.

Jon pouted. “Are you angry?”

“I don’t know yet,” Loxy said.

“Do you still like me?” Jon asked.

“I am sorting that, too,” Loxy said. “Go, sit.”

Jon went over and sat on the edge of the bed. Weepinbelle stared at up at him. Joy brought a chair over to the bed for Loxy to sit in and asked her to sit.

“Are you sure about this?” Loxy asked.

“It’s the only way,” Joy said.

“Why did you put it in there?!” Loxy asked, definitely sounding mad.

“I don’t know! It seemed like the right thing to do at the time,” Jon said.

“How old are you?!” Loxy asked.

“Oh, don’t shame him,” Joy said. “It’s what people do.”

“I never...”

“Never?” Joy asked.

“I...” Loxy started.

“Never?” Joy asked.

Loxy stared at her knees. “I am sorry for shaming you, Jon,” Loxy said. “It’s just that I admitted to liking you before I knew how old you really are and I am having second thoughts.”

“I am sorry I am so stupid,” Jon said. “This is all new to me and I am rather confused.”

“You have never had an erection before?” Loxy asked.

“I have never been this old before,” Jon admitted. “I may have even skipped some critical ages.”

“I will endeavor to be more patient with you,” Loxy said.

“I feel unworthy,” Jon admitted.

“Oh!” Loxy said. “Jon, I didn’t mean to...”

“No, let me say it. I know you said you like me, but I think I love you, and I know that I say that to every girl I meet, but I think this is real, which doesn’t mean I probably won’t say it to someone else, or even have a brain malfunction, like I do every time I see Joy, which is sort of how I got into this particular predicament, and I am so not going to be able to take a shower without a Joy interface, but this is just me, I am not really smart about some things, especially instinct and emotions things, hence the difficulty we presently find ourselves in.”

“I think that’s the nicest thing a man has ever said to me,” Loxy said.

“Really?” Jon and Joy both said.

“It was honest, revealed sensitivity and vulnerability, and suggest a willingness to keep trying,” Loxy said. “And it just makes me want to understand you better.”

“Umm, saying that is causing me pain,” Jon admitted, even as Belle was saying a muffled ‘Belle.’

“Alright, well, let’s get this little fellow off,” Joy said, interrupting the conversation. “So, Loxy, you want to put both hands around it, or as close as you can, it’ is a big little fellow, with

fingers underneath, but most importantly, both thumbs side by side on the top, just above the lips, but below the eyes.”

“Like this?” Loxy asked.

“No,” Joy said, and positioned her hands. “Good, now, move your thumbs around until you feel a little nodule, just below the surface.”

“I don’t feel anything,” Loxy said.

“Push a little harder, as it’s at the subcutaneous level,” Joy said.

“Not so hard!” Jon pleaded.

“What am I feeling for?” Loxy asked.

“OMG, Loxy. What do you feel for when you do yourself?!” Joy asked.

“Oh! Like the button?” Loxy asked.

“You’re a medic, you can use the correct term,” Joy corrected.

“The clitoris?” Loxy asked.

“It feels exactly like that,” Joy said.

“Wait wait wait. I think I feel it,” Loxy said.

“OMG, I definitely feel it,” Jon said.

Joy nodded when Belle confirmed it was feeling it by saying its name, muffled, and really slow. Jon held his breath.

“Jon, breathe,” Joy said. “We’re getting closer.”

“Yeah, I am pretty sure this it,” Loxy said.

“Now that you found it, I need you to rub while simultaneously pulling Belle away from Jon, ease up, and pull again,” Joy said.

“I feel like I am in a really bad Japanese Anime,” Jon said.

“Oh, I love anime,” Loxy said.

“Focus!” Joy said. “Watch his eyes. You can tell your close.”

“Jon’s eyes?” Loxy asked.

“Belle’s eyes,” Joy said.

“I think it’s about to come off,” Loxy said.

“It’s definitely coming...”

Belle pulled free just as Jon and the Pokémon leveled up, simultaneously. Jon got the worst of it, but Loxy and Joy did not escape. Loxy wiped residue off her cheek with the back of her hand and Joy wiped her eye with a cotton swab she pulled from her pocket. Jon passed out.

“Is it normal for him to pass out every time he levels up?” Loxy asked.

“No, I never saw a Pokémon pass out after orgasm,” Joy said.

“I meant Jon,” Loxy said.

“Oh, yeah, most guys do,” Joy said. “I wonder what’s wrong with Belle. We should take him to the Pokémon Center just to make sure he isn’t having an allergic reaction to Jon’s sperm.”

“Okay,” Loxy said, spraying Jon with a revive potion.

He sat up, gasping. “What happen?”

“You passed out,” Joy said.

“Oh,” Jon said. “I am starving. I think you got pizza dipping sauce on you.” Jon said, touching Loxy’s chin, wiping the ‘sauce’ and licking his fingers.”

“Um, Jon,” Loxy said, not grimacing, but extremely curious to what his reaction might be: “I didn’t order dipping sauce.”

“Oh, okay,” Jon said. He didn’t seem to identify the taste. He noticed some on Joy. “You have it on you, too.”

“Yeah, it went everywhere,” Joy said.

“What went everywhere?” Jon asked.

“We’ll talk later,” Loxy said, patting his knee. “We’re going to take Belle to the clinic. Do you think you can be alone for about fifteen to twenty minutes?” Loxy asked.

“Sure,” Jon said. “How old do you think I am?”

Loxy raised an eyebrow. He discovered the sticky stuff on his chest. “Did you guys play a joke on me while I was passed out?”

“How old you think we are?” Joy asked.

“That’s exactly what my brothers say,” Jon said, wiping himself with the towel.

Chapter 5

Loxy had barely exited, when the door opened again. Reese entered even as Jon was re-securing the towel around his waist.

“You okay?” Reese asked.

“Yeah,” Jon said, sitting on the edge of the bed. He scratched at the hair on his chest. “A little sticky for some reason.”

Reese came over and sat on the bed with him, half crisscross apple sauce, and one foot on the floor.

“I saw Loxy leaving with Joy and was just curious,” Reese said.

“Oh, um, well, Belle passed out after leveling up,” Jon said.

“That’s curious. You and Loxy were training, naked?” Reese asked. “Tell me more.”

“Um, I am still trying to figure it out,” Jon said.

Reese nodded, touching his knee. “It’s okay. I think you’re doing splendid,” she said.

“Thank you,” Jon said.

“Jon, I feel compelled to tell you something,” Reese said. “I like you.”

“You do?” Jon asked.

“I think you’re probably the most kind, attentive adult male I have ever met, and that’s strangely appealing,” Reese said. “Have we ever met before?”

“Um, I don’t think so,” Jon said.

“I feel like I have known you all my life and that I can tell you anything,” Reese said.

“Really?” Jon asked.

“Yeah. I mean, you’re like so nonjudgmental,” Reese said. “I feel like you really notice me.”

“Oh, I notice you,” Jon said, pulling a pillow into his lap. “You’re very beautiful.”

“See! And you’re so kind,” Reese said.

“Well, I don’t feel kind,” Jon said.

“Really? You’re so nice to your Pokémon, and to people, but the thing that stands out the most to me is, you still haven’t asked me why I am dressed like a Pokémon,” Reese said.

“I have wondered,” Jon asked.

“So many people have judged me, and yet, you just accept,” Reese said. She bounced a little closer to Jon. “I want you to ask me.”

“Ask you what?” Jon asked.

Reese scooted closer till her one knee met his. She reached under the pillow and put her hands on his knee.

“Anything. Everything,” Reese said.

Jon was lost in her eyes. “I am feeling that feeling again,” he admitted, unable to hide the fact that the pillow was shifting up.

“Oh!” Reese said, leaning in as if to kiss, but holding just shy of meeting. She inhaled his exhale. “Me, too.”

“You get this, too?” Jon asked.

“Well, sure,” Reese said. “Of course, my swelling is less obvious, because it’s mostly internal, and it can be uncomfortable when you can’t attend to it, and a lot of wetness just requires a change in underwear. I know exactly what this wanting feels like. Maybe we could help each other?”

“Um,” Jon said, mentally tracking her hands as they explored deeper. “I want to ask you something first.”

“Anything,” Reese said.

“Why do you dress like a Pokémon?” Jon asked.

“Because I want to be loved the way Pokémon are loved. I want to be trained, owned, petted, collared, and evolved. I want to be possessed so thoroughly that everyone in the world knows I belong to that one special trainer that unleashes all of my power,” Reese said.

A bead of sweat rolled down Jon’s face. He bit his lower lip before admitting, “I think my heart is about to explode,” Jon said.

“I don’t think it’s your heart,” Reese said. “Tell me what to do.”

“I don’t understand,” Jon said.

“Command me, and I will obey. Give me a pet name, like Fersia, that only you and I know,” Reese said, her lips growing so close that they could sense each other’s warmth, and if either or both were Pikachu’s, they would have already sparked. Both her hands were in his lap as she inched herself to the brink. “Take me.”

Jon swallowed. “I…”

Loxy entered the room and Reese retreated, too quickly for it to be just a casual misunderstanding. She touched Jon's cheek. "Thank you for listening to me," she said, getting up. She paused in front of Loxy before passing to the door. "Loxy."

"Reese," Loxy said.

"Thought you'd be gone longer," Reese said.

"Apparently," Loxy said. "Want me to go and come back?"

"Would you?" Reese asked.

"No," Loxy said.

"Oh, okay, then," Reese said. "See you at breakfast."

"See you at breakfast," Loxy agreed.

"Goodnight then," Reese said.

"Goodnight, Reese," Loxy said.

Reese turned and blew Jon a kiss. "Goodnight, Jon," Reese said.

"Um, goodnight," Jon said, wondering if it was safe to be alone considering the tension.

And then Reese was gone, the door shut. Loxy found Belle's ball and sent him in, and sat it on the counter. She leaned into the bathroom door.

"Do you want me to leave?" Loxy asked.

"No," Jon said. "Do you want to leave?"

"No," Loxy said. "You okay?"

"Seriously conflicted," Jon said.

"You don't look conflicted," Loxy said, indicating with her eyes the evidence she was seeing.

Jon pushed down on the pillow.

"I was thinking of getting a shower, but if you want to get a quick cold shower, I can wait," Loxy said.

"A cold shower?" Jon asked.

"It will reduce the swelling," Loxy said, indicating the bulge under the pillow.

"How do you know so much about this?" Jon asked.

"Because I am older than 10, I am a Pokémon breeder, and I've seen it before," Loxy said.

"Really?" Jon asked.

“I am going to go get a shower,” Loxy said, grabbing her bag and heading to the bathroom. She closed and locked the door.

Jon sat there for a moment, not sure what to do. His swelling had reduced and he felt like he could get dress, but then remembered his clothes and bag were in the bathroom. He looked around the room for something to do and retrieved his Pokédex. It had buttons but he was having trouble figuring it out, mostly because some of the buttons had multiple function that one had to cycle through.

“Hello, Jon,” the device spoke to him and startled him so he nearly dropped it. It was robotic, male voice. “May I recommend the verbal interface?”

“You speak!” Jon said.

“Of course. Most tech does,” the device said.

“Do you have a name?” Jon asked.

“Pokédex, or Dexter,” it said.

“Oh, I am not fond of the name Dexter,” Jon said, mostly because his mother liked that show and threatened to call Dexter to come and kill him.

“Pokédex is fine,” it said, more affectionately.

“That’s kind of weird,” Jon said. “Do you have other voice options?”

“What would you prefer?”

“A Nurse Joy interface?” Jon asked, hopeful.

“Nurse Joy is a pay upgrade, and you presently have no credit. I do have miscellaneous Female options, English, with a Japanese accent that might leave you wondering if you heard her right,” Dexter offered, switching voices. “Is this better?”

“Oh, very nice,” Jon said. “And, I want you to answer to the name Siri.”

“But I am the Pokédex,” it tried reason.

“Siri,” Jon insisted.

“Very well,” the Pokédex acquiesced.

“Thank you,” Jon said. “Now, show me everything you know about this Pikachu fellow.”

“I am sorry, but you have not encountered a Pikachu,” Siri said.

“I don’t understand,” Jon said.

“You have to encounter it for me to display it,” Siri said.

“But, you’re like hooked into the mainframe, and surely by now, every Pokémon type has been encountered and logged, and your job as an encyclopedia is to display that information,” Jon said.

“And if I did that, how many people would go out into the world and discover the joy of Pokémon on their own?” Siri asked.

“You’re telling me, the only way for me to learn about Pikachu is to catch a Pikachu?” Jon asked.

“No, you could go to the library and read a book, or if you’re feeling more academic, you could go to the University and study Pokémon,” Siri said.

“You’re not very helpful,” Jon said.

“You need to be more proactive,” Siri said.

“Can you teach me about women?” Jon asked.

“I really think that is something you should learn on your own,” Siri said. “Or ask a woman.”

“You mean like by trial and error?” Jon asked.

“That is how most people do it,” Siri said.

“Well, that sucks. You make mistakes with people and then there are grudges and grievances and some things can’t be made right again, and I really like someone and I don’t want to fuck up, but I am like the biggest fuck up in the whole Universe,” Jon said.

“You have given me so much to sort, I am not sure how to best respond,” Siri said.

“Can you help me be a better person?” Jon asked.

“I can provide information on Pokémon,” Siri said. “And how to be a better trainer.”

“But only after I caught them!” Jon said.

“Pretty much,” Siri said.

Jon tossed the Pokédex back to the bed. He scooted back and leaned against the headboard. He found the remote to the television, and after several channels of Pokémon infomercials, several channels of battles, a regular commercial with Ash and Misty, and several Pokémon shows, he turned the television back off. As he put the remote back on the nightstand, he grabbed one of the square candy wrappers from a bowl full of the little square packages. One side of the package was black, the other white, but both sides had Poké ball on it. Some balls were gold, some red, and some blue, which he figured denoted the different types of flavors. He

opened it up and a little circle stick of gum fell out. It felt kind of rubbery, not eatable, but it smelled okay. He put it in his mouth and began chewing. It did release a nice flavor, but the texture sucked, and it was like no gum or candy he had ever tried before.

Loxy emerged from the bathroom, wearing only a t-shirt. The shirt was black, with a Poké ball on it and fell to her thighs. Jon stopped chewing, nearly bit his lips. She was the most amazing looking woman he had ever seen, and the t-shirt was more revealing of any woman he had ever seen. She spied the open wrapper in his hand.

“Just because we’re sleeping together doesn’t mean we’re sleeping together,” Loxy said, hands going to her hips.

“We’re sleeping together?” Jon asked.

“There’s only one bed, where did you think we’d sleep?” Loxy asked.

“I thought I would sleep in the closet,” Jon said.

Loxy blinked. “You sleep in the closet?” Loxy asked.

“It’s the safest place,” Jon said.

“Well, you’re not sleeping in the closet here. You’re sleeping in the bed with me, but we’re not sleeping together,” Loxy said.

“I am confused. We’re sleeping together or we’re not sleeping together?” Jon said.

“I am using a euphemism for sex,” Loxy said.

“You want to have sex?” Jon asked.

“Yes, no, stop changing the subject,” Loxy said. “You can’t just assume I am going to have sex with you.”

“I would never assume you would have sex with me,” Jon said.

“Why would you assume that?” Loxy said.

“Because you’re out of my league, and because I don’t have any lunch money, but even if I did, the girls usually just beat me up and take it. I have never even gotten to first base. And to be honest, I hate sports don’t really understand what first base is,” Jon said.

“Girls beat you up and take your lunch money?” Loxy asked.

“I so rarely have lunch money that I usually just get beat up for not having any money,” Jon said.

“Your world is fucked up,” Loxy said.

“That’s why I don’t want to go back,” Jon said.

“So, if you’re not expecting sex, why did you open the condom?” Loxy asked.

“What’s a condom?” Jon asked.

“The package you’re holding,” Loxy said, pointing to the wrapper.

“The mint gum?” Jon asked.

“It’s mint flavored?” Loxy asked.

Jon spit it out. “It doesn’t hold its flavor long, and I don’t like the rubbery taste,” Jon said.

“Jon, do you know what a condom is?” Loxy asked.

“Oh, is it a Pokémon candy?” Jon asked, embarrassed again. “Why is this world so hard?!”

“Oh, Jon, it’s not for Pokémon,” Loxy said. “Think of it as protection against having unscheduled Pokémon.”

Jon seemed like he was on the verge of tears. “I’m sorry,” he said.

Loxy softened, came closer. “For what?”

“I feel like I have done something wrong,” Jon said.

Loxy sat on the bed next to him and hugged him. “Jon, you have not done anything wrong,” she assured him.

“But you’re angry,” Jon said.

“No,” Loxy said, trying to make her face softer. “I am sorting emotions, and trying to understand you, but I am not angry. I don’t even need to know about what happens between you and Reese. It doesn’t change how I feel about you, or us.”

“There’s an us?” Jon asked.

“Of course there’s an us,” Loxy said. “Whether it was fate that delivered you to me, or blind luck, it is clear to me, to everyone who knows us, we were meant to be together.”

“And, when I get blind sighted by another, will you lose affection for me?” Jon asked.

Loxy changed her position so that she was sitting beside him, her back against the headboard. She leaned her head on his shoulder, and held his hand. She chewed on her lip a little as she considered the question.

“Do you see the statue in the corner?” Loxy asked.

Jon nodded. It was human size statue taking up the corner, and was so well chiseled from the marble that if it weren’t for the marble color, it might be a real person. The detail was

exquisite. She stood there, slight bend in her knees, her hands together as if she was either bringing water to her lips, or extending a gift, ready to blow a kiss, push the smell of an invisible pie that she was wanting to share. The hands were slightly cupped, and might be the perfect place to stow a Poke ball. A small Pokémon might easily lay in her hands. It was not easy to decide if her eyes were focused on the invisible object in her hands, or perhaps on someone standing in front of her who she was extending the gift to.

“Do you know who that is?” Loxy asked.

“Isis,” Jon answered.

“Who?”

“The Egyptian Goddess of knowledge and light,” Jon said.

“No, Jon, that’s Sophia,” Loxy said. “She is the mother and protector of all. Stars, planets, people, Pokémon, we belong to her, the way a child belongs to a parent, like Pokémon to their trainer, like a lover to a spouse. We are all of this to her, simultaneously. Good or bad, she offers her knowledge of love and light to all. Notice, I said knowledge of love and light. One never gives love or light, they experience it, but if you never experience it, you can’t have knowledge of it, and if you don’t have knowledge, you can’t learn it.”

“That’s confusing,” Jon said.

“That’s the conundrum,” Loxy said. “But, that’s not what I want you to think about right now. Look at the statue and tell me what you see.”

“Kindness,” Jon said.

“And?” Loxy prodded.

“I am uncomfortable...”

“Tell me,” Loxy said.

“The more I look, the harder I get,” Jon said.

“She arouses you,” Loxy said.

Jon looked away, nodding. Loxy turned his head back towards her.

“I am sorry,” Jon said.

“Don’t ever be sorry for this reaction. Jon, you’re not responding to the statue. Well, you are, but you aren’t. You’re responding to what’s in your head. No one, not me, not Reese, not your family, can ever tell you how to respond or be in your head. Quite frankly, most people

have this response to this image of Sophia. It intentionally crafted into the art. Even I respond to this image, only, because I am female, my reaction is not as in your face as yours.”

“You respond to this, too?” Jon asked.

“Sure,” Loxy said. “Now, consider the artist that made this Sophia, this half human half Pokémon siren who is calling to all of us to respond. She is calling for us to respond on all levels, the physical level, sexual level, heart level, mind level, our spirit level. We don’t just ascend through intellectual will power alone, but with all the chakras activated. Do you think in the crafting of this sculpture that the artist was also equally, if not more so, affected by this image in their head? And that maybe he or she had no choice but to find Sophia in the stone because of the urgency of this calling? And on seeing it, do you suppose that his or her lover probably felt some insecurity? Who could ever compete with Sophia? Realizing this powerful archetype lies within their partner, you either retreat from your partner, or you love them more fiercely because they have a vision of something better. And people with vision, they can bring out better in all of us. But whether we see clearly or not, we all have a vision, and we will respond to that first, to others second, unless we are severely self-aware.”

Jon was silent, observing, trying to figure out what she was saying.

“Here’s what I am saying, Jon,” Loxy said. “Love, light, is not a Pokémon battle. You have archetypes in your head. You have Sophia in your head. You have others in your head. You will respond to each and every one the way your nature and the Universe needs you to respond. I expect you to. If you respond to people with love and light, I will not run from you, I will run even more fiercely towards you. If Reese needs something from you and you can satisfy her and send her to the next level, then that is your purpose.”

“What about us?” Jon asked.

“Our purpose is to bring out the best in each other. To love and accept each other as we are, that’s it,” Loxy said.

Jon met her eyes. “I have never in my entire life heard such a message, or been met with such profound wisdom or affection. I don’t feel worthy,” he said.

Loxy smiled. “You’re responding to something inside you. Now ask yourself, is that thing inside you that you’re responding to fear or love?”

“Can it be both?” Jon asked. “I am afraid of you. Afraid of failing you. Afraid of losing you. But no matter how I turn it, I still love you.”

“Enough to push past some boundaries?” Loxy asked.

“Like?” Jon asked.

“Without thinking, tell me something you want right now,” Loxy said.

“I want to kiss you,” Jon blurted out, blushing without turning away from her. The heat he was generating was incredible.

“What’s stopping you?” Loxy asked.

“I haven’t secured your permission yet,” Jon said.

“That in itself is the biggest turn on I have ever experience,” Loxy said. “You have my permission.”

Jon found his hands trembling.

“I am afraid,” he said.

“Of?”

“Everything,” Jon said, tears leaking from his eyes. “Fucking up. You not like me. Of loving you so much that I disappear. Mostly of being rejected.”

“Does this feel like rejection?” Loxy asked.

“What if I am a bad kisser?” Jon asked.

“What if I am?” Loxy asked. “We had this conversation, Jon. There is a first time for everything, and first times are rarely perfect. We get tangled and tumbled, but we just try again, aiming for improvement, and sometimes that requires us digging our heels in and pushing through our discomfort to explore if there is something worth having. We just do it, and we practice, and we guide each other until we get this thing to where we want it to be. That’s life. You teach me and I’ll teach you.”

Jon put his lips against her lips, softly, teasing them apart, inhaling her air. Loxy smiled.

“Mint flavor,” Loxy said.

“Wasabi flavor?” Jon asked.

“You’ll get used to it,” Loxy said.

“May I kiss you again?” Jon asked.

“Please,” Loxy said, leaning in closer.

“May I touch you while I kiss you?” Jon asked.

“Yes,” Loxy said.

Jon touched her thigh, exploring just at the edge of the t-shirt. He followed the curve of her body up, outside the t-shirt, and touched her breast, lingering there, and then up to her neck. He stopped kissing long enough to touch her lips, and then pushed his fingers through her hair. He was still trembling. He noticed the small hair on the back of her arm standing, tiny goose bumps, and she shivered. Loxy removed her t-shirt, watching his reaction. His eyes fell to her breasts, but he brought I back to her eyes, and she gave a nod that it was okay. He leaned his head on her shoulder and just stared at the breasts, touching them. He cupped her breasts, squeezing tentatively, brushing with his thumb, drawing closer with his eyes, and then kissed one, sucking in on it. Her hand came up behind his head, holding him there. He looked up to discover her eyes were closed, her mouth open. She swallowed, her throat moved. He began kissing down the length of the centerline of her body, sucking in, and licking. He lingered around the belly button, kneading the stomach muscles, and then tracing up in a broad sweep towards the lower rib cage. He continued working his mouth down until confronted with the 'Y' of her thighs. He pushed his tongue between her thighs, sweeping up towards the body. She gasped, opening thighs to give him more access.

Jon repositioned himself between her legs, exploring her with eyes and fingers. He was surprised by how fascinated he was in her body. He discovered her wetness, how velvety smooth it felt, almost like it a lotion, but not, but in the soft light it made the outer lips glisten. He felt an urge to taste her but didn't know if he should or not. She made a soft a noise.

“Am I hurting you?” Jon asked.

“No,” Loxy said, so softly he almost thought he had imagined it.

“May I taste you?” Jon asked.

Loxy nodded. Jon moved his mouth in, licking the outer lips, from the bottom to top, with the broad of his tongue. He did it again, only separating the lips with his tongue, and the next lick he went inside with his tongue, with each consecutive lip, he went deeper. On his deepest push, he came out apply up pressure, like licking the inside of an ice cream cone, coming upon the clit by accident. Loxy gasped. Her knees came up, but stayed against the bed, 'butterfly' pose, and raised her pelvis, thrusting against his face.

“Do that again, yes, right there,” Loxy said, putting her hands on the back of his head and holding him firm against him.

“Oh, just like the Weepinbelle?!” Jon said.

“Less talk, more licking,” Loxy said.

Jon continued Loxy grew louder. He had heard his mother making this noise, and perhaps a dozen similar sounds from various movies his mother and brothers watched, but this was his first to witness a person experiencing this, to be the source of this. Her breathing increased, her moaning deepened, her pull against him strengthen, her grinding increased, and when she came, she closed her thighs on him, and pulled so tight he couldn't breathe through his mouth, and he felt the muscles under his lips quivering. When her sound eased, she reached over and removed a condom. She leaned up, released him from the towel, and eased the condom on so smoothly he could hardly tell she had done anything. Then, as she laid back, she drew him towards her. She embraced him, pushing the back of his head so his mouth met her mouth. Then she reached down and guided him into her. He gasped.

“Look at my eyes, Jon,” Loxy said, bringing her hands back to his head and holding his face. “I want to see your eyes. No, don't move. Let me do this.”

Her legs locked around him. She rocked her hips, grinding against him. His eyes were growing wider. Her hands went from the back of his head, then down his spine, and grabbed his butt. He grabbed her hair.

“OMG,” Loxy said, and she came again.

He felt her muscled tightening around him, even as she was grinding on him. He gasped in, holding his breathe.

“No, breathe through it, keep looking at me,” Loxy insisted.

Jon smile was so subtle at first, and then his teeth broke and he exploded into joy, and then suddenly, he was not with Loxy. He found himself back in the white space, only this time, there were others with him. Their solidity gave him confidence that he wasn't falling. This didn't feel like a dream, and he was feeling euphoric, so blissful, that he hardly cared what was going on or what might happen. The only regret was that Loxy wasn't here with him.

Three stepped up closer to him, becoming more in focus, as if just one step away when he had assumed they were miles away. It felt like there were more others in the background, but difficult to discern. The man in the middle had golden hair, blue eyes, and was wearing a suit of black and gold that reminded Jon of fancy motorcycle attire. The woman on his right wore nude tights that magnified the flesh tones of her legs, a one piece, pullover red dress, with a white coat with a red arm patch. Her eyes were red and her skin dark back. He wasn't sure if she was Indian

or African. The woman to the left of the golden hair man had blue hair, and was similar to the woman in red, only she wore blue and she was very pale, almost icy pale. These were the most striking, beautiful people Jon could ever recall seeing. Angels couldn't have been more alluring.

"Um, hello," Jon manage to stammer.

"Hello, Jon," the man in the middle said. "I am Spark, leader of Team Instinct."

"I am Candela," the woman in red introduced herself. "Leader of Team Valor."

"And I am Blanche," the woman with blue hair said. "Leader of Team Mystique."

"Um, am I dead?" Jon stammered.

"Do you feel dead?" Spark asked.

"No, but," Jon said.

"You're in an in between place," Spark said. "A place of transition, evolution, change. Though many cultures refer to this process as death, it is and it isn't. You will be dead to what you were and born into what you will be."

"This feels like a spiritual experience, like the light the end of the tunnel kind of thing," Jon said.

"All experiences are spiritual," Mystic assured him.

"You're going to make me go back to Earth, aren't you?!" Jon said.

"We won't make you go," Candela said.

"But you will chose to go back," Spark said.

"Want to bet?" Jon said.

Spark nodded. There was no point in arguing about it. "Wagers are already made."

"And don't tell me I am the chosen one, I have to save the world or something," Jon said.

"We would never say that," Mystic said. "Everyone is chosen. Everyone chooses."

"And normally, at this juncture, we would ask you to make a choice," Spark said. "Ask you to choose a team."

"And if I don't choose? What happens then?" Jon asked.

"Normally?" Candela said. "We stay here and discuss the merits of each team until you make a choice. We are very patient. We have never had anyone out last us."

"There are only three teams to choose from?" Jon asked.

They smiled, and invited the others out of the shadow. An orange hair woman stepped up, wearing a bright orange dress, almost pastel orange, with sherbet hose, and a white jacket with

orange highlight. "I am the leader of Team Passion," she said, taking up a space between Valor and Instinct. Between Instinct and Mystic, a green hair woman stepped up, wearing a dark green dress, light green hose, a white jacket with green highlights. "I am the leader of Team Harmony." On the other side of Mystic, an elderly man stepped up, tapping in with his cane as he joined the line. He resembled the old Chinese master, with the long white beard, wearing black pants and shirts with Indigo highlights, a white jacket with Indigo highlights. "I am the leader of Team Wisdom." And on the other side of him a prince stepped up wearing a similar outfit to Wisdom and Instinct only with Violet highlights. "I am the leader of Team Royal."

Harmony spoke next. "We represent the seven gates through which people usually pass to gain access to higher levels of being. The people of the world where you presently find yourself have held a very narrow focus, which has been functional for a long time, but you will remind them there plethora of pathways."

"Wide is the spectrum," Wisdom spoke. "Narrow are the gates."

"Unlock them all, and you will find harmony," Harmony said.

"But today, perhaps just for you, maybe others down the road, we have decided we are going to choose for you," Spark said. "Jon Harister, son of Gaia, I choose you to represent Instinct while here and wherever you choose to go from here."

"Jon Harister, friend of courage," Candela said. "I, too, choose you, to represent team Valor while here and wherever you choose to go from here."

"Jon Harister, seeker of knowledge and wisdom," Blanche said. "I, too, choose you, to represent team Mystic here, and wherever you may choose to go from here."

The other primary colors spoke as one, claiming Jon as their vehicle. Jon noticed he was wearing a white jacket that carried 7 pips, each a jewel demarking the spectrum, over a turning of white and black.

"You will carry our colors," Spark said. "A new badge, this ring of gold, with ying/yang blue and red stone. Around the blue and red stone are the four tiny diamonds representing Harmony, Passion, Wisdom, and Royal. You may befriend any gym, train in any gym, and you may develop our paths together or separately."

"You may call on us at any time, visit with us individually or together, here, or in your dreams," Blanche said.

“And when you return to your world, you may represent us and offer the three paths to any who show interest in walking,” Candela said.

“I am not going back,” Jon said.

“When you go back,” Royal said. “You will represent the one that precedes us and the one that follows us.”

“I am not going... Who?”

“You have met and you haven’t met,” they all said. “There are still others to meet. We represent the Light. You’re not limited to us. You could go the path of Shadows.”

“Shadows?” Jon asked.

“You have enough to carry for now,” Spark said. “Go in peace and always travel Light. He stepped forward to embrace Jon and disappeared into him, like a ghost.

Candela stepped up and whispered in his ears. “It is okay to be afraid, for in that courage is clarified.” She kissed his cheek and disappeared into him.

Blanche stepped up and embraced him. “We will always love you,” she said, and kissed him as well, and disappeared into him.

The remaining four together embraced, whispering indistinct gifts into his heart. He awoke to find himself back in bed with Loxy. She was lying beside him, cuddled up close, her right arm draped over his chest. She was so still that he feared he had killed her, but then he felt her stomach move against him as she inhaled. The lights were off in the room, but moon light shone through the window giving the room an unearthly, ethereal air. He thought Sophia was staring at him. Loxy moved, stretched, and opened her eyes.

“Oh,” Loxy said, a deep smile pushing across her face as she hugged Jon. “I don’t think I have ever been KO by an orgasm before. Forgive me?”

Jon nodded, not wanting to break the magic of this moment with the sound his own voice.

“Are you okay?” Loxy asked. She felt the warmth of a single tear hit her face and she sat up, touching his face. “Jon?”

Jon sat up, crossing his legs and facing her. “I think I had a mystical experience.”

“It was pretty amazing,” Loxy said in agreement. “Usually first times are so awkward, but it’s almost like we’ve been together before, like we’re the perfect match.”

Jon sorted his feelings, deciding not to try and explain he had meant something different. But how do you communicate that you’ve had an out of body experience replete with archetypes

of universal, primary energies? I mean, just how strange is that? He wondered. He had never heard of anyone else having such an experience. It gave him more evidence that he was the weird one, the stranger in the strange land. He frowned.

“You okay?” Loxy asked.

“I am a little out of sorts, all of a sudden,” Jon said.

“Can you tell me about it?” Loxy said.

“We spent the whole day catching Pokémon, when we could have been doing this!” Jon said.

Loxy seemed amused. “Want to do it again?”

“With you, every day, and for the rest of my life,” Jon said.

“Oh, that will so get you laid with me,” Loxy said, tackling him and taking him down.

“Wait, wait, wait,” Jon said, reaching over for one of the condoms.

“It’s my turn to taste you, Sir,” Loxy said.

“But it’s minty flavor,” Jon said.

Loxy accepted the condom and began the long trek down from lips to lower, kissing and licking him in a manner similar to how he started with her.

Jon bit his lip and surrendered to her expert touch.

Chapter 6

Jon and Loxy woke to the sound of someone bursting into the room.

“Wait they might be...” came Reese’s voice from the hall.

“Sleeping!” Mentos said. “OMG, do you know what time it is? There are Pokémon to be caught, training to do, a gym to tackle!”

“Good morning, Mentos,” Loxy said, leaning up just enough that the blanket didn’t slide off her breasts.

Jon thought about getting up but remembered he was naked under the covers. Reese came in, feigning apologies, but was truly seeking confirmation. “Oh, so sorry about this,” Reese said.

“It’s okay,” Loxy said, getting out of bed. “Your brother is right, it’s time to get up.”

Mentos turned away. “Hey, there are kids in the room.”

“You have seen naked women before,” Reese said.

“You don’t count,” Mentos said.

“Well, I am sorry we interrupted you,” Reese said.

“Interrupted what?” Mentos said.

“Training,” Reese answered.

“Interrupted?” Loxy asked, and looked to Jon, and noticed the bulge under the sheet.

“Oh, no, that’s just an REM induced erection.”

“Oh,” Reese said. “And what were you dreaming about?”

“Um, I don’t remember,” Jon said.

“Safe answer,” Reese said.

“I dreamt about Pokémon,” Mentos said.

“Jon, your clothes from yesterday are done, pressed and folded. You want to just wear them again?” Loxy asked.

“Yeah, why not,” Jon said.

“You look different somehow,” Reese said. “Younger and more mature at the same time.”

“You say that to all the guys,” Mentos said.

“I do not,” Reese snapped at her brother.

“She likes you,” Mentos said, as if revealing a secret.

Jon blushed. "She does?"

"OMG, Jon, like that's a secret?" Loxy said, tossing him his clothes. "Reese, Jon likes you, too."

"He does?" Reese asked.

"Why?" Mentos asked.

"Can we discuss this after I am dressed?" Jon asked.

"What's taking you so long?!" Mentos asked.

"I am waiting for privacy," Jon said.

"We're both men," Mentos said.

"Turn around," Jon directed.

Mentos grunted and turned to face away. Jon waited for Reese to turn around, too. She did and Jon got up, unaware that she was spying him in the mirror. By the time he found his underwear in the stack of clothing Loxy had tossed at him, he discovered Reese had peeked.

"Wow," Reese said.

"Right?" Loxy agreed, returning to the room in a bright golf outfit, a mini dress, with gold highlights. Jon was listening to the conversation, but also trying to sort just how fast she had dressed,

"He's definitely not from this planet," Reese said.

"I am really uncomfortable with this conversation," Jon said.

"Why, what's different?" Mentos asked, but turned too late.

Jon secured his pants and belt, pulled his shirt on, and then slipped into his jacket. His three companions froze, their mouths fell open. Mentos jumped up on the bed and came closer, examining the badge on the jacket.

"What? When did you get this?" Mentos asked.

"Where did you get this?" Loxy asked.

"You leveled him up good!" Reese said. "How much training did you both do last night?"

"Can I train with you tomorrow night?" Mentos asked.

"No!" Jon, Reese, and Loxy all said.

"Why?" Mentos said.

"It was the special, adult training," Loxy said.

"How many levels did you advance him?" Reese asked.

“Wait! Look at the ring,” Mentos said. “I am confused. Gold, red, and blue! What Team are you playing for?”

“He’s playing for them all!” Reese said.

“That’s impossible! You have to choose one,” Mentos said.

“Unless they all choose you,” Jon offered an alternative.

Loxy retrieved her Pokédex to see if there had been updates to his file. She seemed perplexed.

“He didn’t just advance, he evolved,” Loxy said.

Mentos looked at her. “But he looks exactly the same!”

Loxy came closer to the bed so Mentos and Reese could see the Pokédex. Jon didn’t try to push into their power meeting. “Oh!” Reese said, eyeing Jon and looking back to the stats. There was a trainer total experience level, and under that bar graphs for seven other specialized training, three of which they recognized as Team Valor, Instinct, and Mystic. There was one long graph that seemed to indicate a continuum from shadow to light.

“Where did you catch him,” Reese asked. “I want one.”

“You just want a boyfriend,” Mentos said.

“So. One day you’re going to want one,” Reese said, flustered.

“I will never want a boyfriend,” Mentos declared.

“I meant a girlfriend,” Reese said.

“What can a girl do that a Pokémon can’t?!” Mentos asked.

“Ask Jon,” Loxy said.

“Oh!” Reese said again.

“Do you feel different?” Loxy asked.

“I feel happy,” Jon said. “I have never really felt happy before and so, it’s kind of a strange sensation. Wait wait wait. I hope this happiness. I don’t know what I am feeling. What is this, confidence? I feel unbeatable. And, this is going to sound weird, but I think that I know things that I don’t think I should know, not just stuff beyond my age, but stuff beyond my life and world.”

“You’re not making any sense,” Mentos said. “What did he evolve into, insane human?”

“Can you provide an example?” Loxy asked.

Jon thought about it. “No.”

“He still isn’t high enough to take the gym here,” Mentos said.

“Do I have to beat the gym? Can’t you guys go and then ask if Erika will consent to seeing me?” Jon asked.

“Erika is kind of aloof, and you only get to her after going through her entourage,” Reese said. She noticed her friends were looking at her. “It’s what I heard.”

“There is a lot of demand to see her these days,” Mentos said. “It makes sense you need to be a certain level to get through. When I am a master, I am not going to waste time with Newbies.”

“I am a Newbie,” Jon said.

“You’re also weird,” Mentos said. “And old.”

“I like old,” Loxy said.

“Me, too. And Weird,” Reese agreed.

“Well, you’re all weird and old,” Mentos said.

“We are not old,” Loxy and Reese corrected.

“And I am certainly not letting any girls into my gym,” Mentos added.

“We could go try and talk to Erika,” Loxy said. “At least it would tell us what we’re up against in terms of battling strengths and strategies, so we can better prepare Jon for what’s ahead.”

“Yes! We’re going to team battle the gym,” Mentos said, jumping on the bed.

“If Jon’s not going in, we should let him hold all our money, so that way once we scoped out the gym, we’ll know what supplies we need to buy,” Reese said.

“Good idea,” Loxy said, fishing her money purse out of her bag.

Jon took Loxy’s money purse, and then accepted Reese’s purse, and he put them in his bag. He then slung his bag thinking they were done but Reese was giving her brother the eye.

“Hand it over,” Reese said.

“I don’t think so,” Mentos said.

“A gym is not a street hustle. They will empty your pockets,” Reese said. “So, you’re giving it to Jon, or putting it in the bank.”

“If I put it in the bank there is a delay getting it back!” Reese said.

“It’s called savings!” Reese said.

Mentos frowned and pulled out a wad a cash to hand to Jon.

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “I thought you said you had no money!”

“I lied,” Mentos said.

“Well, that’s not fair,” Jon snapped.

“How old are you?!” Reese asked.

“Old enough to get your attention,” Jon said.

“Well,” Reese said, flustered. “Well, cheating is part of the game?!”

“How is cheating part of the game?” Jon asked.

Mentos answered: “All is fair in Pokémon love and war. Get used to it.”

Jon looked to Loxy and Reese and they shrugged indifferently. “Really?” Jon asked.

“You want to argue with a ten year old?” Loxy asked.

“Yeah!” Jon said. “And how do you even know Earth phrases if you don’t know anything about Earth.”

“I know about Earth,” Mentos said.

“Really? Tell me something about Earth,” Jon asked.

“It’s a planet,” Mentos said.

“That’s it?” Jon asked.

“Pretty much,” Mentos said. “Once I discovered Pokémon, astronomy couldn’t hold a candle.”

“Do you know about Earth?” Jon asked Loxy.

“Just what little you told me, that they don’t have Pokémon,” Loxy said.

“How can a planet have absolutely no Pokémon?” Mentos said. “They’re everywhere on our planet. How can you defend a world without Pokémon?”

“We have superheroes for that,” Jon said.

“You have super heroes?” Mentos asked, incredulously.

“OMG, really?!” Jon asked. “How old are you?”

“Well, that would explain the size,” Reese said.

“That, or they have no Pokémon and so there isn’t anything else to do but develop that,” Loxy offered.

“Oh!” Reese said. “That make sense, too.”

“What are you guys talking about?” Mentos asked.

“Uh, nothing, not important,” Reese said.

“Come on,” Loxy said. “We can grab a quick breakfast and maybe get to the gym before the crowd.”

Jon followed them towards the door, paused, and headed straight for the bedside night table, emptied the bowl of condoms into his bag. He turned to find his friends looking at him.

“What? We can’t defend the world without Pokémon protection!” Jon said.

“Oh, good for you!” Loxy said. “Want to take some soap, too?”

Jon considered and went right to the bathroom and collected all the dispenser, tossing them into his bag.

“Got everything?” Loxy asked.

“I think so,” Jon said.

“Floss?” Loxy asked.

“Yep,” Jon said.

“Toothpaste?” Reese asked.

“Yes, for Loxy!” Jon said, committedly.

“Your balls?” Mentos said.

Jon stared at Mentos, sorting if he was picking on him, then saw the poke balls clipped to his belt, and remembered. Jon pointed to his bag.

“Where’s your Pokédex?” Loxy asked.

Jon looked around. “Siri?”

“You named Dexter Siri?” Mentos asked.

“I am under here!” came a muffled voice under a blanket.

Jon dug through the covers to find Siri. He pulled out a device that was wrist band that locked in place over his arm. The screen was towards the arm, controls towards the hand, recessed lighting, and seven diodes that flashed or were steadily illuminated under certain situations. He secured it to his wrist as if he had done this a million times before.

“Got it,” Jon said.

“Where did you get it?” Loxy asked.

“His tech evolved with him?” Reese asked.

“It’s time to consult Erika,” Loxy said.

“I hate lines,” Mentos muttered, his arms crossed.

The line went around the gym and down the street.

“All of this just to battle?” Jon asked.

“Ever since Ash became a master Pokémon trainer, everyone has wanted to get a badge from Erika,” Mentos said. “If only we had a Pikachu!”

“You need to learn to deal with the Pokémon you have and stop dreaming about what you don’t have,” Reese said.

“Maybe you should use your own advice,” Mentos snapped back.

“Hey,” Jon corrected Mentos. “Not practicing the advice doesn’t make the advice less valid.”

“You’re not my dad,” Mentos said.

“It’s okay,” Reese said, touching Jon’s arm. “Thank you for defending me.”

“OMG,” Mentos said. “He belongs to Loxy!”

“I can share,” Loxy said.

“Really?” Mentos and Reese said, different tones and different meanings.

“Why sure,” Loxy said. “I may own him, but I don’t own him...”

“You sure don’t,” Mentos said, laughing.

Jon was staring down the street, clearly in a daze. Loxy and Reese followed his gaze, as if lasers were coming from his eyes and sorted what appeared to be a nurse’s convention.

“Oh, Joy must have the whole family in town,” Loxy said.

“Clones?” Jon asked.

“Sisters,” Reese said.

“What are clones?” Mentos asked.

“So, Loxy, it doesn’t bother you that Jon obviously notices other women?” Reese said.

“And that Joy is clearly a distraction.”

“Oh, who doesn’t love Joy!” Loxy said. “Even I love Joy.”

“That’s not right,” Mentos said with a sneer.

“It is perfectly acceptable to like the same gender,” Loxy corrected.

“That’s right,” Reese said. “It’s okay to be gay.”

“I am not gay!” Mentos said.

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “I tried correcting him about cheating and got no backup, but he expresses his opinion about orientation and you guys gang up on him?”

“We don’t pick on people for orientation,” Loxy said.

“I am not in disagreement, I am just saying...” Jon tried.

“I am just saying, it’s okay to like the same gender,” Loxy said.

“Yeah, Ash kisser,” Reese said.

“And if you’re going to stick with me, you can’t pick on him for idolizing Ash,” Loxy said. “Idolizing is not evidence of orientation. It just means he wants to be the very best, like no one ever was, and Ash represents his targeted goal.”

Reese seemed deflated, almost pouting. “You’re right,” Reese said. “I am sorry for picking on you for liking Ash.”

Mentos shrugged.

“But I am still struggling, Loxy. I don’t even own Jon, and I am feeling jealous about how he looks at Nurse Joy!” Reese said.

“Please! It means he’s alive and aware of his surroundings and present in the now,” Loxy said. “Think of it this way. If he was a sculpturer, would you be jealous of his statues? If he were an artist, people, men and women would be lining up for his graphic novels, and you know one of those girls is going to flirt past the boundary. If he were a poet or a writer, even if his grammar sucked, you might assume his words were for you but they are for everyone. So, it turns out, he’s not a writer, or an artist, or a sculptor, but there is no doubt in mind that he is a Pokémon trainer and that he will be successful because of this thing in him, to notice people, to care about people, and that, often, means he see thing in them and bring things out of them that no one else can. That skill set is frequently more intimate than physical intimacy, but it almost always leads to physical intimacy. That’s why you shiver every time he looks at you. When he sees you, it’s tangible. The Physical, is just icing on the cake. He goes much deeper, but you have to go through before you go in.”

“You make everything sound simple,” Reese said.

“That was simple?” Mentos asked.

“It really is that simple,” Loxy said, snapping her fingers in front of Jon’s eyes. “Give it a break, Jon.”

“Uh?” Jon asked, coming back to the present. He brought his attention back to the line, the people around him, and then devoted his eyes to his companions. They stood a while longer in line and then Reese announced she should have peed after breakfast. Loxy suggested that the two of them break line to go use the facilities at the Pokémon center, while Jon and Mentos held their place in the cue. They departed, with a warning from Reese not to leave till they get back.

“Finally, some men time,” Mentos said.

“Men time?” Jon asked.

“How can you stand being around my sister?” Mentos said. “She is a bit a crazy. Probably hormones.”

“I don’t understand,” Jon said.

“You know why she dresses like a Pokémon, don’t you?” Mentos asked, but not waiting for him to respond. “She thought she could catch a boyfriend if she looked like a Pokémon.”

“Don’t ever say that again,” Jon said.

“But it’s true,” Mentos said.

“Especially if it’s true,” Jon insisted.

“I don’t get you,” Mentos said.

“Assume it’s a weakness, or a character flaw, then that means she deserve to be protected, and valued even more than she believes she is. Assume it’s a strength and just something she wants to do because that is just something she wants to do, then you honor that and value it because, that quality is unique and there is no one else like that...” People walked by, all dressed as Pokémon. “Even if it’s not unique, you still embrace your sister, your friends, because that’s what we do.”

“You are definitely not Team Valor,” Mentos said. “The nail must be beaten down!”

“Wow, what a great analogy,” Jon said considering it. “However, I find that most humans are not nails.”

The kids in line in front of him were laughing obnoxiously loud, almost snickering contemptuously. One of them addressed Mentos.

“Still traveling with your dad, kid?” the black haired kid asked.

“He’s not my dad!” Mentos said.

“You’re right. He’s more like your grandfather,” the black haired kid said.

“I think it’s kind of sweet,” the girl hugging the Jumpluff said. “I wish my dad had an interest in my training.”

“He’s my friend and a fellow trainer,” Mentos said.

That statement caused some serious laughter.

“He’s too old to be training,” the black haired kid said.

“Really?” Jon asked. “Being a Pokémon trainer is like being a Jedi? There is an entry level age cut off?”

“What’s a Jedi?” the Jumpluff girl asked.

“Seriously, kid. Take your old man and go home,” the black haired kid said. “There’s no way either of you are good enough to go up against Erika.”

“You want a bet?!” Mentos said, stepping forward.

“Hey, you both play for team Valor, shouldn’t you be like supporting each other?” Jon asked.

“What world do you come from?” the black haired kid asked. “This is support. If he’s competing before he’s ready, it makes our team look bad.”

“How does losing make your team look bad?” Jon asked.

“OMG, how old are you?” the black haired kid asked.

“You will learn more from your losses than you ever will from your wins,” Jon said.

“Says the losers,” the black haired kid.

“You take that back,” Mentos snapped.

“Or what? You’ll make me? Looser kid with a looser old man,” the black haired kid said. “If you want free badges, you should return to looser-ville. I hear you get badges just for showing up.”

“That’s it, let’s battle,” Mentos said, going for a Pokémon ball.

“Hold up,” Jon said. “You need to save your strength for the gym.”

“Too late, old man! Prepare to have your pocket emptied, kid,” the black hair kid said, releasing a Pokémon ball. “Bulbasaur, I chose you!”

A Bulbasaur arrived on the scene and the whole crowd in line, and even some passerby’s gathering, said, all at once: “Wow! Who’s that Pokémon!”

Jon scratched his head and asked Mentos “Didn’t he just say it was a Bulbasaur?”

Mentos frowned at Jon. "It's just a saying, stop trying to make sense of everything," he said.

"Okay, baby. Compete or go home," the black haired kid said.

"You're on," Mentos said, releasing Pidgey.

The battle was over so quickly, Jon didn't even understand what had happened. Mentos knelt by Pidgey's side, stroking the feathers. Bulbasaur snickered.

"You just got schooled," the black haired kid sang. "Now, pay up."

"I don't have any money on me," Mentos said, picking Pidgey up. Tears ran down his face.

"Oh, you made him cry," the girl said.

"I am not crying!" Mentos cried.

"Your old man is right, you do learn more from losing, like you're a baby and sore a loser," the black haired kid said.

Mentos ran away from the laughing crowd.

"Not cool, Sir," Jon told the man.

"Aren't you going to run after your baby?" the black haired kid said.

Jon sighed. "I don't run," Jon said. "Chase something, it will elude you; flee from something, and it will pursue you even more aggressively."

"That's rather profound," the girl said.

"Just great, another Mystic. Run a long before I have Bulbasaur school you, as well," the black haired kid said.

Jon knelt down and faced the Bulbasaur, Namaste hands. "Thank you for the lesson, Bulbasaur."

The Bulbasaur approached, touching him kindly with a vine.

"What the heck?" the black haired kid asked.

Jon stood, bowed to the trainer, and walked away.

"Wow," the girl said. "I don't think I have ever seen that before."

"Back in the ball, Bulbasaur," the kid said, angrily.

Jon found Mentos by instinct, going to the place right outside of town where he had hid in the bushes to ambush people. Jon didn't go directly to the bushes, but sat down near the water's edge, close enough that Mentos and he could speak if they chose. A Magikarp looked up through the water at him, blew a heart shaped bubble. More Magikarp began together, looking up at Jon. They looked as if they were gossiping. A human that a saved a fish.

"Go away," Mentos called from the bush.

"I think we should stay together," Jon said, looking out at the water, not towards the bush. Jon fished the 'revive' potion that Loxy had used on him the night before from his bag and set it on the ground next to him. There was more than enough remaining to help Pidgey.

"They laughed at me," Mentos said.

"Yeah," Jon said. "I gather it's part of the game."

"And you did nothing," Mentos said.

Jon puzzled over that, wondering if he should have done something.

"If my sister had been there, she would have KO all of them!" Mentos said.

Jon considered that likely, and nodded. "Your sister loves you."

"What do you know about love?!" Mentos said.

Jon didn't respond. In truth, he didn't have an answer.

Mentos came out, wiping his face. He used the revive potion on Pidgey. "The only true love is what a Pokémon holds for his trainer. And I failed."

"How do you figure that?" Jon asked.

Pidgey came, too, staggered, and then came directly to Mentos, wings outstretched, indicating it wanted to be picked up. Jon's heart felt a pain of emotions, as if somewhere in the Universe he remembered being a parent and a child had come to him saying, "Pappa, K̄h̄n̄." There was a montage of a kid he didn't seem to know, but knew too well, joyful embraces, and crying embraces where the child simply needed comforting after discovery the world isn't always pleasant. This kid's world, though, was a whole lot kinder than the world Jon remembered growing up in, which took effort to understand how the worlds related, and then he remembered, it wasn't about him, but about Mentos, and brought himself back from what he assumed to be a mere daydream. One of the Magikarp blew a bubble at him.

"I am sorry, Pidgey," Mentos said.

"Could you help me understand something?" Jon asked.

“You’re trying to trick me,” Mentos said.

“No, I really want to understand, and I think you know more about Ash than anyone I know,” Jon said.

“I do know a lot about Ash,” Mentos agreed.

“How often does he lose?” Jon asked.

Mentos chuckled. “All the time,” he said. “Wait. You are trying to trick me! You don’t get anywhere by losing! You only advance with wins. You only get badges for wins.”

“Well, maybe that’s true, in terms of training recognition points, but that does not reflect your wisdom earned points. You have to lose in order to improve. Maybe the only reason old people are wise is because they have had their share of losses. Maybe sometimes we have to learn the same lesson over and over again, but when you do get it and wisdom levels up, that’s when you demonstrate it for a more public victory. I suspect, though, there are more private winners, full of wisdom, not displaying their secret badges, than there are people going around with public badges.”

“You just say that because you favor Team Mystic,” Mentos said.

“Maybe,” Jon said. “But then, Team Valor is about courage, right? Doesn’t that mean we have to return?”

Mentos looked at the water. “I am embarrassed.” He tossed a pebble into the water to erase his image. The Magikarp all fled but one.

“Why?”

“I cried! In front of everyone,” Mentos said.

“So? I cry all the time,” Jon said.

“That’s because you’re a big baby,” Mentos said.

“Yep. Sometimes,” Jon said. “I cry when I am sad. I cry when I am angry. And, surprisingly, apparently sometimes I even cry when I am happy.”

“No one cries when they’re happy,” Mentos corrected.

“I do,” Jon said. “I did just last night. And I was really happy. May I share my theory as to why?”

Mentos sorted, looking for the trap. When he didn’t protest, Jon continued.

“Imagine a cup, full to the brim with water,” Jon said.

“Oh, I know this one. You have to empty your cup before the master can impart more wisdom,” Mentos said.

“Um, yeah, I guess that is an anecdote, too,” Jon said. “Forget the cup. The cup is a bad analogy. It’s a bucket. A bucket you have to carry daily. And it’s full of water.”

“Why would I carry a bucket full of water?” Mentos asked.

“It’s what people do,” Jon said. “Let me finish. It’s full to the brim of water. It’s so full, that if you drop even one more drop of water in it, the bucket will overflow, and you will get wet, and you spill water into the world. Got it?”

“I still don’t understand why I am carrying this bucket,” Mentos said.

“That isn’t the point,” Jon said.

“What’s the point?!” Mentos said.

“The water isn’t water. The water is emotion. When the bucket is full, you can’t add any more emotions. Even one drop of emotion, whether it’s fear, or anger, or sadness, or even happiness! The bucket will overflow,” Jon said. “An overflowing bucket can spill inwards or outwards. Outwards, that’s usually evidenced by a behavior. Inwards is evidenced by a thought attached to a belief. Humans are vessels, but we’re not supposed to be buckets. It’s our job to monitor the water level, and hold just the right amount to function at our optimum proficiency level, and if its gets too low, we need to add, and if gets too much, we have to channel that into appropriate releases.”

“Like what?” Mentos asked, petting his Pidgey.

“Petting Pokémon seems like a good release. So is talking to people, kind of like what we’re doing. Crying is also okay. So is laughing,” Jon said.

“Laughter is a release?”

“Sure, sometimes laughter happens spontaneously, and sometimes we laugh inappropriately, but it’s just a release,” Jon said.

“Well, I would prefer to call someone names and then bash them with a Pokémon,” Mentos said.

Jon nodded, sorting it. “Yeah, I guess that is a release, too, but, I find the name calling just keeps the bucket full. Competing, though, can be healthy, and can be harmful,” Jon said.

“How can competing be harmful?!” Mentos said.

“When you’re so focused on the win that you forget about the lesson, or the other player, or your Pokémon, or theirs, then you’re leaning outside of healthy,” Jon said.

“How do I know what’s healthy or not?” Mentos asked.

“Great question,” Jon said. “That is probably something you and your Pokémon need to discover together.”

Mentos stared at the water. “This world is full of emotions.”

“It is,” Jon said.

“My sister is going to be mad that I lost our place on line,” Mentos said.

“Oh, well. Blame it on me,” Jon said.

“Really?”

“They’d probably believe you,” Jon offered.

“Okay. Let’s do this,” Mentos said.

“That’s the spirit,” Jon said.

Jon and Mentos got up and walked back to the line. The black haired kid laughed. Mentos stopped, squaring off with him.

“Came back for more, kid?” he asked.

“Yes, actually,” Mentos said.

“Well, if you think you’re getting your place back in line...”

“I don’t expect to get my place back in line,” Mentos said. “I lost that, fair and square.”

“That’s right, loser,” the black haired kids said.

“Thank you,” Mentos said.

The black haired kid’s mouth dropped. “What?”

“Thank you for the lesson,” Mentos said. “And for trying to toughen me up.”

“Um,” the black haired kid. “You’re welcome.”

“Oh, let them back in line,” the girl said to the people behind them.

“Sure,” the leader of the group of kids behind her said.

“Really?” Mentos asked.

“Why not?” one said. “That was awfully brave coming back here after that battle.”

“I think that was the fastest battle I ever saw,” another kids said.

“You really got smashed,” another said.

Mentos pouted and then laughed. “Yeah, I did.”

“Even Ash never got smashed that hard,” some said.

“Or that fast,” someone added.

Mentos began to pout again. Jon touched his shoulder.

“But even if he did, Ash always came back,” the group said. She leaned down and kissed Mentos’ Pidgey. “Good job, little fellow,” she said. And then she kissed Mentos on the forehead.

Mentos eyes crossed.

The line advanced very little before Loxy and Reese returned.

“That was a long bathroom break,” Mentos said.

“Yeah, well, sometimes when you’re a woman, you have to battle just to get through the line for the restroom,” Reese said.

“See, what’s good about being a woman?!” Mentos said.

“Lots of things,” Reese said.

“Name one,” Mentos said.

“There would be no men without women,” Reese said.

“Um, good point,” Mentos said.

“Actually, I think we need each other for that to happen,” Loxy said.

“Another good point,” Jon agreed.

“We’re just all full of good points lately,” Loxy said.

“I would like to find out how good,” Reese said.

“This conversation is getting creepy again,” Mentos said.

“So, let’s change the subject. Anything exciting happen while we were away?” Loxy asked.

“Nope,” Mentos said.

“Nope,” Jon echoed.

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The black haired kid and the girl with the Jumpluff were motioned forward by the guard, their identity checked, and they were passed through to the gym’s front door. Mentos and Jon both tried to see beyond the door, but only blackness could be seen, and the door closed right behind them. The guard reattached the rope barrier.

“Look, there’s no telling how long we will be in there,” Loxy said to Jon, placing a hand over his heart, her other hand straightening the collar. “Why don’t you take Belle for a stroll, or maybe go wait for the fountain.”

“Okay,” Jon said.

“Oh, and here, you carry this,” Loxy said. “This is your ball. Let me borrow Everest. I am curious if I can carry six if you carry yourself.”

“Okay,” Jon said.

“You’re just going to say ‘okay’ to everything she says?” Mentos asked.

“Yeah, pretty much,” Jon said.

Loxy kissed him. Reese seem to pout, but then Loxy shoved her arm, and she gave Jon a quick kiss. She turned back to Loxy, her eyes wide, sharing a secret. “You’re right.”

Jon released Belle from the ball. Belle looked to Jon, looked to Loxy, and then ran to Loxy and hugged her leg.

“Are you being mean to your Weepinbelle?” Mentos asked.

“No! Why would you even think that?” Jon asked.

“Because, he’s favoring Loxy,” Mentos asked.

“Well, that tends to happen when you get little fellows off,” Reese said, sharing a laugh with Loxy.

“Get him off what?” Mentos asked. “Was he stuck on something?”

“Sort of,” Loxy said.

“Come on, Belle. We don’t have to stay here and listen to this,” Jon said, wanting to walk away.

“Whatever you do, don’t accept any battles,” Mentos said. “Don’t make eye contact with anyone, don’t look crossways at anyone, and don’t...”

“I think I got it. Don’t step on superman’s cape, don’t spit into the wind, don’t tear the mask off of old lone ranger, and don’t mess around with Jim,” Jon said.

“Uh?” Mentos asked.

“It’s an inside joke,” Loxy said. “People don’t get your jokes here, Jon.”

“How is it you guys know some Earth knowledge, but don’t get my jokes?” Jon asked.

“Oh we get it, they’re just not funny,” Loxy said.

Jon pouted. She leaned in and kissed him. “Don’t pout. You may not be funny, but you do some things really well,” she said.

“I’m looking forward to finding out for myself,” Reese said.

“What does he do well?” Mentos asked.

“You three in or moving on?” the guard demanded, opening the rope barrier.

“Wow, that was quick,” Reese said.

“Yeah, well, the black haired kid is pretty tough,” Mentos said.

“Come on, there’s a line here, in or out?” the guard pressed.

“Sometimes, I think the entire world is conspiring to block me from getting my questions answered,” Mentos said. He showed his identity and was passed through the ropes.

Reese gave Jon another quick kiss while the guard sorted her brother’s ID.

“What was that for?” Jon asked.

“I will tell you later,” Reese said, offering her ID to the guard.

Loxy kissed Jon again.

“What is this, a kiss fest?” someone asked.

“Ooh, she keeps kissing her father,” someone else said.

Loxy ignored them. “We saw what you did for Mentos,” she whispered. “You’re awesome.”

“Aw, come on,” Mentos yelled. “There’s no time for kissing.”

“Get a hotel!” someone said.

Loxy showed her ID and slipped through rope. Jon and Belle waited until they were passed through the door and the door closed. Belle looked to Jon.

“So, what should we do in the interim?” Jon asked.

“Belle, Belle,” it said.

“Yeah, that’s not going to happen again,” Jon said. “Come on, let’s walk.”

Jon walked the street, then decided, instead of just walking randomly, he would use his map to find points of interest. Siri’s map was basically useless, as she reported it required him making discoveries for it to fill in details. He decided not to make a big deal of it, and simply accepted it was part of the world he found himself in. The map did offer a general layout of the local region, and he could zoom in on cities, but the only identified landmarks and structures were those places he had visited. He wondered if he might use ‘having not visited a place’ as an

excused absence from any future geography tests. In his meandering he came upon a small park that didn't seem to be a part of his map. It confused him a little, as he spun the map, zooming in, trying to find where it fit. Finally, he decided to accept that this was a place, too, and maybe he just needed to go in and explore to make it register with his Pokédex map. 'Menlo Park' was on a sign on a chained locked gate. If there was a 'keep out' sign, it was missing. The kid park on the other side of the fence appeared to have been abandoned ages ago, with one exception: there were number of balloons hovering at various altitude, contained within the park itself. Jon spied an abandoned Pokémon ball, and decided to climb the fence.

"Jon, I do believe this park is closed," Siri said.

"Is it on the map?" Jon asked. "Can you tell me about it?"

"Strangely, I cannot," Siri said.

"There is a Pokémon ball, and I am going to retrieve it," Jon said, already over the gate before she could protest.

"Some Pokémon balls just aren't worth the trouble," Siri tried to explain.

He dropped down on other the side, feet down in a strange new world. It was almost as if the city had been left behind in another dimension of space/time. Like in the movie Fandango where Kevin Kosner dances with his love who has just married someone else, but everyone else on the dance floor is gone. That happens a lot in movies, so much so, Jon figured it was a real thing, and now, standing in a park with the city seemingly miles away, he had evidence for time and space being much more fluid than people acknowledge. The balloons seemed to orientate towards him.

"That's kind of freaky," Jon said.

"Drifloons," Siri said, reporting the type. "Also known as signpost for wandering spirits. They have sometimes been mistaken for actual balloons and have reportedly carried off small children."

"Okay, now, that's like really freaking," Jon said. "Freakier than flying monkeys in Wizard of Oz and scarier than the child catcher in Chitty Chitty Bang Bang."

"I am not familiar with those references," Siri said.

"How can you not know those references?" Jon asked.

"Most of the database I have access to revolves directly around Pokémon, and much of that is static, and is unlocked on encountering specific varieties," Siri said.

“Mostly static?” Jon asked.

“Yes,” Siri said. “Any unclassified species encounter will result in a system update, and a huge bonus for the person identifying. Catching said hypothetical entity comes with its own rewards.”

Jon inched closer to the ball and picked it up. It proved to be functional and empty. He shrunk it and dropped it in his bag. He spied another ball closer to the merry go round. He turned to see Belle was still on the other side of the fence.

“You coming?” Jon asked.

Belle shook its head, no.

“Okay, well, wait there, then,” Jon said.

“Belle, Belle,” it said.

“Yeah, yeah, I am Groot,” Jon said.

“Belle?” it asked.

“It means I Grok you,” Jon said.

“Belle?” it asked.

“I’ll tell you about it sometime,” Jon said.

“You sure seem to know a lot of sci-fi references,” Siri said.

“I am sure it’s evolutionary knowledge,” Jon said.

“Pokémon knowledge might have been more practical,” Siri said.

“Yeah, well, maybe I don’t get to choose what gets unlocked,” Jon said.

“Interesting,” Siri said.

Jon picked up the second ball and found that it, too, was functional, and dropped it in his bag.

“These balls were newly purchased and unassigned,” Siri said. “I can blue tooth claim them, if you like.”

“Is finders keepers a legit rule?” Jon asked.

“Pretty much,” Siri said. “A trainer is useless without balls.”

“Um, okay,” Jon said, sorting that. “Do you suppose some kid climb the fence to catch one of these Drifloons and ended up getting carried off?”

“I don’t like to speculate about such things,” Siri said.

“Where do these kids that get caught go?” Jon asked.

“Oh, probably to be eaten, or turned into Pokémon,” Siri said.

“Humans can be turned into Pokémon?” Jon asked.

“Oh, sure. But I can’t be more specific until you encounter the species,” Siri said.

“Isn’t it something I should know?” Jon said, tuning into his environment.

“Are you older than ten?” Siri said.

“Does it matter?”

“Immensely. If you’re older than ten, you’re expected to cope with the reality of the world as you experience it,” Siri said. “If you’re under ten, well, we don’t like to scare children.”

“So, I am like under ten,” Jon said.

“The world is just fine, Jon. Nothing to be afraid of,” Siri said.

It felt kind of spooky being in an empty playground during the day, and the merry go round squeaked when he turned it, rotating it through its rusty hinge. The Drifloon seemed a little closer. Belle was still waiting on the other side.

“I doubt Dorothy would be heralding the virtues of over the rainbow if she knew about these guys,” Jon said.

The far side of the park, a kid came over the fence, rushing towards Jon, shouting ‘I got him, I got him’ and ran right into Jon, then got behind him. His bag was torn, and he was dropping poke balls as he ran.

“Did any follow?” the kid asked.

“Drifloons?” Jon asked.

Toys hit the fence, growling through zipper teeth. They rattled the fence and then started to climb.

“Banettes!” the kid said.

“You caught one of those?!” Jon asked.

“Yeah!” the kids said. “Chased it through the park and everything, right over to the abandoned toy warehouse.”

“Banette,” Siri said. “Believed to be an abandoned child toy, possessed with the spirit of a very angry Pokémon or human.”

“Okay, that’s really freaky,” Jon said.

“Yeah, I think I pissed them off,” the boy said. “Cover me!”

“Eh?” Jon asked.

The boy ran away, going over the fence, landing just next to Belle.

“Sorry, I don’t have time to catch you,” he said to Belle. To Jon, he shouted: “Good luck, Sir!”

The Banettes ran right past Jon towards the fence, maybe because he had been too stupefied to run, and most predators only chase things when they ran. That was his theory anyway. Belle gave a menacing look, and the Banettes seemed to be considering their boundaries.

“Are you just going to stand here?” Siri asked.

“Shh, if we don’t move, they can’t see us,” Jon said.

The Banettes turned to the next available prey: Jon. They advanced.

“I think they see you,” Siri said.

“Aw, this sucks,” Jon said,

Jon ran to the slide and started up, unconsciously reaching into his bag. He had been aiming for Growlithe, but pulled out an regular old pine cone. He tossed it at the nearest Banette, hitting it square in the face, but the pine cone bounced off and fell dead in the grass. The Banette charged.

“Fuck me,” Jon said.

“Language!” Siri said.

“Really?” Jon said, coming to the top of the slide.

The Banettes surrounded the slide, one started climbing the ladder, and another started climbing the slide.

“I don’t see how this strategy was helpful,” Siri said.

“I thought Pokémon were supposed be nice?!” Jon said.

“How old are you?” Siri asked.

“Older than ten,” Jon said.

“Not all Pokémon are nice,” Siri reported.

“Really, can’t you lie to me some more?” Jon asked.

“You’re older than ten, you should be able to cope with reality as it presents itself,” Siri said.

“How do you know I am really older than ten? Shouldn’t you have like a background check and birth certificates?” Jon asked.

“If you’re old enough to push the ‘yes, I am older than ten button,’ or old enough to lie about your age, you’re mental age is considered sophisticated enough to satisfy the requirement,” Siri said.

“That just not right,” Jon said.

“It is what is,” Siri said.

“This is going to hurt, isn’t it?” Jon asked.

“No, I won’t feel a thing,” Siri said.

“This is going to hurt me?!” Jon corrected.

“Oh, yeah, probably. They are not known to kill their prey quickly,” Siri said. “If they can get you angry enough before they kill you, there’s a chance you might animate another abandoned doll.”

“OMFG! I am under ten,” Jon said.

“Oh, well, they just want to tickle you,” Siri said.

Jon sighed. He climbed up on the top bar, looking for an escape. He saw was one opportunity, which was probably not the greatest idea, but, he took it. He turned around, precariously, even as the Banettes were reaching the top, and jumped. He grabbed the string like tentacle of a nearby Drifloon, with enough momentum he was able to swing and catch a second and third one. He touch the ground just beyond the Banettes, ran towards a fourth Drifloon, and altogether, they lifted him just beyond the reach of the Banettes.

“Ha!” Jon said, looking down at them. “Yeah! Brains over brawns any day!”

The Banettes climbed up on top of each other, and the highest one grabbed Jon’s sneakers, unraveling a shoe string, and fell to dangling just below the shoe. The ones on the ground walked towards the rear fence, dragging Jon, and five high Banettes with them, and Drifloons, as well. The Banettes climbed the fence and passed the hanging Banettes over, taking Jon over the fence.

“You need a little more brains or more brawns,” Siri said.

“What do they want with me?” Jon asked.

“Revenge, more than likely,” Siri said. “If people seriously understood the energy that get put in children’s toy, they would not allow them to be decommissioned without ceremony, or perhaps adopted out. Unfortunately, the toy manufacturers produce so many, that abandonment is guaranteed.”

“But I didn’t do anything to them!” Jon said.

“I can only speculate about the afterlife, but it would seem any unresolved aggression and anger can result in some seriously determined Pokémon,” Siri said. “Add to that the number of abused and neglected kids in the multiverse, well...”

“Siri, off!” Jon said.

Siri turned herself off. The Banettes dragged Jon and the Drifloons up to a man standing before an abandoned warehouse. He looked like the stereotypical Chinese wise man, long white beard and all, only, he was wearing jeans, a pull over shirt, and coat with patches. And he did not look happy. He tapped his cane on the ground and the Banettes saluted. In the shadows of the warehouse a dozen or so Shuppets pooled, watching with anticipation to see what might happen. The undulating movement of their bodies was like sea creatures fighting a current or sheets in a wind

“Aren’t you a little old to be trying to steal toys?” the man asked.

“Um?” Jon asked. “I wasn’t trying to steal toys.”

The man reached up and popped two of the Drifloons with his cane. The remaining shook with fear, tightening their grip on Jon’s hand, but were not able to raise him.

“Don’t do that!” Jon said.

“They’re just Drifloons,” the man said. “Then again, they do seem to keep some of the smaller kids from making it to the warehouse.”

Jon let go of the Drifloons and they blew to get away from the man with the cane.

“So, if you’re not here to steal my toys, then what are you doing here?” the man asked.

“Trying to get away from them,” Jon said.

“My minions?” the man asked.

“How do you turn toys into Pokémon?” Jon asked.

“You would be surprised how many toys come to life given enough attention,” the man said. “My name is Lester, and I am the greatest Toy Maker of all time.”

“I’ve never heard of you,” Jon said.

He fumed, tapping his cane on the ground. “No one on this planet has ever heard of me. They are so obsessed with Pokémon, a genius like me goes unnoticed.”

“If no one notices you, how can you call yourself a genius?” Jon asked.

“Celebrity status does not define genius!” Lester snapped. “Most geniuses are not recognized until they are dead and gone. You have a family? Did anyone recognize your level of genius before they filled your heads with factoids about Pokémon?”

“Ummm,” Jon tried to explain how he was different.

“Umph! Walk with me,” Lester said. “Stand down, Banettes.”

Jon followed Lester into the warehouse and discovered, at least on the surface level, what appeared to be the most complete toy store of all time. Jon thought he heard the three notes that were the prelude to Willy Wonka singing “Pure Imagination,” but the song didn’t manifest.

“Everything that you could ever imagine, I have already invented or conjured it,” Lester said. “Fun toys that engage and keep a child occupied for days on end, and not so fun toys, cheap toys that should never have been, except to fill the eyes of kids, and get discarded, to put in stockings, to garnish tables and plates, and to fill every garage with useless things, or used for party gifts, especially for the kids who you didn’t want at your party anyway, but your parents were determined to make you appear like you’re nice.”

“Why would you make or conjure all of that?” Jon asked.

“Why would nature scatter a million seeds?” Lester asked. “One of them is bound to catch up somewhere and create a new line of thought and evolve into a new species of Pokémon,” Lester said. “Now stop interrupting me while I educate you. I got kid toys and adult toys and in between toys, and ageless toys, and priceless toys, and toys for any occasion, but do you think I am appreciated on this god forsaken planet? NO!”

“Can I see the adult toys?” Jon asked.

“Are you even old enough for a ‘Real Doll’?” Lester demanded.

“Will it turn into a Pokémon if I spend time with it?” Jon asked.

“If you can ask that, you’re probably older than ten,” Lester said.

Jon found a game that looked exactly like ‘connect four.’ Even the chips looked like the connect four chips, only the chips were all the same color of red and white, painted to resemble Poké balls.

“Maybe if you used two different colors, you could distinguish who got four in a row,” Jon said.

“You think! But unless the chips look like Pokémon balls, no one will buy it!” Lester said. “I made an adorable little Furby, but no one would look twice at it, and I got complaints that it scared the family Pokémon!”

“And, so you created Banettes to get revenge?” Jon asked.

“No. They just started showing up,” Lester said. “Along with the Shuppets. Here, have a Shuppet.” Lester removed a Shuppet from his pocket and handed it to Jon. “Free of charge.”

The Shuppet seemed to like Jon, indicated by it rubbing its head on his hand. Jon examined a ‘Finger Spinner’ for those inclined to fidget. He spun it and it lit up.

“That’s kind of cool,” Jon said.

“Put it back. This world is not ready for such toys,” Lester said.

“Not ready or not buying?” Jon asked.

“Put it back,” Lester said.

“You will give me a Shuppet, but not a cool spinning thing?” Jon asked.

“Shuppets are a dime a dozen, but that cost precious hours of my life to conjure up,” Lester said.

“Maybe if you give me one and other people see me with it, they’ll want one, too, and then you will see an increase in demand?” Jon said, putting it back.

“Do you think I haven’t considered that?!” Lester snapped. “Ash, how would you like... ‘Sorry, too busy playing Pokémon!’ Misty, how would you like to... ‘Sorry, but I am so busy loving on my Pokémon, I don’t have time for toys.’ Hey Brock, would... ‘Hey, my rock Pokémon is better than your pet rock!’ OMG, if I could rid this planet of Pokémon, maybe, maybe, someone would give me the attention I deserve.”

“Have you considered another planet?” Jon asked.

“Do you think spaceships grow on trees?” Lester asked.

“I saw an advertisement for Team Rocket in the shopping center,” Jon said. “They might have some spaceships.”

“What planet do you come from?” Lester asked.

“Earth,” Jon said.

“Which Earth?” Lester said.

“There’s more than one?” Jon asked.

“Though the number is not truly infinite, exponential evolution of any one object through a repetitive fractal pattern of oscillating wave fronts guarantees a minimum set beyond that any human can contemplate,” Lester said.

“I don’t understand what you just said,” Jon said.

“Neither do I,” Lester said. “That’s why I make toys for a living.”

“I don’t mean to disparage your reputation by expressing my skepticism, but I have seen many of these toys before,” Jon said.

“Oh, you come from that Earth,” Lester said. “Thieves, to the last of them! They remote view an object in the future or another dimension and then stick their names on it as if it were their invention! As if thoughts belonged to one person. As if sunlight belongs to one planet! As if you could put copyrights on dictionaries.”

“It’s not like you’re giving your toys away for free, Sir,” Jon pointed out.

“I have to eat,” Lester said. “And, so, I remain here making a modest income converting my present line of toys to fit the Pokémon paradigm.”

“Sounds kind of sad,” Jon said.

“It is,” Lester said, walking away. “It is. Let yourself out.”

Jon considered the old man, turned to leave, hesitating as he considered the spinner.

“And don’t take any toys!” Lester yelled.

Jon departed the building carrying his new Pokémon, the Shuppet, which was kind of adorable, in its own way. Outside he encountered the Banettes torturing a creature Jon recognized as Pokémon even without Kiri identifying it as such. The Banettes were playing keep away with her flower, a black flower, which was having the pedals torn from it one by one. Jon intervened without thought of his safety, and surprisingly, the Banettes scattered. He knelt down and offered what was remaining of the flower back to the Pokémon, who she identified herself as Kirlia. She seemed shy, or sad, head slightly down. She had a single tear from her visible eyes. He touched the back of her head, petting her with compassion. He had a wave of gratitude push through him. It was not quite like touching an electric fence, because that energy would have caused him to retract his hand, but it was stunning none the less.

“I am sorry, I can’t repair your flower,” Jon said. He blinked. “I am not much a trainer, I am afraid. I am just starting out.” He blinked again. “You still want to travel with me?” Jon nodded, accepting the information he heard in his head. “I would be honored if you did.” Jon

offered her a Poké ball, and she entered on her own accord, relinquishing the flower as it took her. Jon stood. “I think you should go in, as well, Mr. Shuppet.” Jon fished out a second pokemon ball and Shuppet complied without concern. Jon put the Shuppet ball in the bag, and Kirlia on his belt.

Back in the park he found several more Poké balls the kid had dropped due his bag being torn. He also found a candy. As he approached the fence, Belle jumped excitedly on the other side of the fence, expressing joy that Jon had survived in the only way it could: “Belle, Belle, Weepinbell.” As Jon was about to go over he noticed a Dragoon dragging itself along the fence line towards him.

“Thank you and your friends for trying to help me earlier,” Jon said.

It bobbed in place.

“Would you like to join me?” Jon asked.

It bobbed excitedly.

Jon offered it a ball of his own and put it in his bag. As he returned to the proper side of the fence, he felt growing confidence as his level subtly increased.

Chapter 7

As Jon headed back towards the gym, a man in a wheelchair called out to him. Jon stopped his advance and approached the elderly man sitting near an alley. The man's shades were just dark enough you had to concentrate to catch his eyes. Sitting in his lap was the strangest animal he had ever seen, stark yellow with black lines.

"Can you help a veteran out?" the man asked.

"Maybe," Jon said. "I could use the experience. Do you have errand you need run? Groceries that need bought?"

"Oh, nothing so strenuous," the man said.

Jon blinked. "Do I know you?"

"I don't think so. Have you ever bought a Pokémon from me before?" he asked.

"No," Jon said.

"Oh, great, then do I ever have a deal for you," the man began.

"Wait wait wait," Jon said. "I do know you. I don't know how I know you, but I do know you. Your name is Stanly."

"No, it's Stan Lee," the man said.

"That's what I said," Jon said. "Stanly."

"Stan Lee," Stan corrected.

"Stanly," Jon repeated.

"OMG, do I have to spell it out for you?" Stan asked. "It's not like we're speaking Thai, here."

"OMG, Thai is so difficult!" Jon said.

"Well, of course it is," Stan said.

"You know about Thai?" Jon asked.

"Of course. I know the languages of over a thousand planets," Stan said. "I vacationed on planet Thai a few years back, staying just long enough to master the language, but not long enough to have a criminal record."

"Wow," Jon said. "So why is Thai so difficult?"

"It isn't," Stan said.

"But you just agreed with me it was," Jon pointed it out.

“Well, of course it is for us,” Stan said. “But any baby can learn Thai.”

“So, you’re saying I am stupid?” Jon asked.

“I would never sell a Pokémon to someone who was stupid,” Stan said.

“Then why is Thai so difficult?” Jon asked.

“Why are we talking about Thai instead of Pokémon?” Stan asked. “Is there something wrong with you, kid?”

“Why are you calling me kid?” Jon asked.

“Because, you’re younger than me,” Stan said.

“Oh,” Jon said, agreeing that made sense. “But why is Thai so difficult?”

“OMG, you just won’t let things go. Which means, you’ll be a great Pokémon trainer one day. Look, kid, part of it is because you’re a Westerner. Thai is a tonal language, and your Western ears hasn’t learned to sort the subtle inflections and variations in phonetics. This is similar to why most Asians can’t use the consonant ‘L.’ The other reason, well, I hate to say it, is because you’re an American.”

“How did you know?” Jon asked.

“Because I am an American,” Stan said.

“You are?!” Jon asked, his eyes getting big. He felt like he was meeting a long lost brother while traveling abroad.

“Well, of course I am,” Stan said. “I am probably the most patriotic American in this entire world.”

“How many Americans are here?”

“Yeah, well, we don’t have good intel on that,” Stan said. “Not the point, and we’re getting away from my goal, I mean, the reason I called you over.”

“But why do Americans in general have problems learning Thai?” Jon persisted.

“OMG, kid, give it a rest,” Stan said.

“But I want to understand,” Jon insisted.

“It’s not just Thai. Americans struggle with all languages, even their own native language,” Stan said. “I hate to squash your idealism, kid, but Americans tend to be pretty arrogant. They think everyone should learn English, and not just Standard English, but their own variety of English, and if you don’t know the colloquialisms, you get ostracized.”

“You mean that feeling I get when people don’t get my jokes is really a sense of superiority and social blocking to prevent developing deeper ties with others?” Jon asked.

“Let me guess, you’re Team Mystique,” Stan said. “I can’t address how you are with your friends, but I can say, definitively you as an American automatically have a higher percentage of arrogance than any other nation because it’s built into the social facts of your creation myth. Never mind the facts. America has not been a fact based country since Ben got his kite hit by lightning. No one is more arrogant than Americans, with except maybe the French. The Americans and the French have had a long, hard love affair.”

“Those sound like fighting words,” Jon said.

“I am not challenging you to a Pokémon match,” Stan said, holding his hands up. “I am just making an observation. The fact that you feel like fighting is very clear that I have hit or minimally tickled your patriotic bone. And it’s good to be patriotic. Why, some of my very best friends where the flag like a uniform.”

“Wow,” Jon said. “So, how did you come to be here?”

“How does anyone come to be here?” Stan asked.

“Oh, by a Poké ball?” Jon asked.

“A spaceship!” Stan said.

“Really?!” Jon asked. “Like, you were abducted by aliens as a kid and forced to become a thief and now you’re defending this planet with a modified, talking Zigzagoon and you call yourselves the Guardians?”

“No, that wasn’t me,” Stan said. “And we’re now way off topic.”

“But this is how real people talk. Wait wait wait. If it wasn’t a UFO abduction, what spaceship?” Jon persisted. “Wait wait wait, I got this, you’re a veteran, an American, and... Oh! You’re part of America’s Stargate program, and you spent your life staring at Skiddo, remote viewing, and using portals to travel between planets?”

“No, I wasn’t part of that,” Stan said.

“Oh. Too bad, cause I wanted to know about that. Wait wait wait, you’re telling me you’re part of the secret American agency that has put troops in space and that’s how you became a veteran?”

“OMG enough! What planet are you from?!” Stan asked.

“From Earth, just like you,” Jon said.

“We are clearly are not from the same planet,” Stan said.

“But we’re both Americans,” Jon said.

“I hate to break this to you, kid, but there is more than one America,” Stan said. “There is idealized version of America for every immigrant, for every success story and for every failure story”

“Oh, like there is more than one Earth?” Jon asked.

“How old are you?” Stan asked.

“People keep asking me that and I don’t have answer,” Jon said.

Stan sighed. “Look, my Earth was destroyed,” Stan began.

“OMG? Like by warring gods, using super heroes and villains like avatars, until the world and all its citizens were crushed or enslaved?” Jon asked.

“Have you been reading my graphic novels?” Stan asked.

“You sell graphic novels?!” Jon asked.

“Not here. People only have an eye for Pokémon,” Stan said.

“You could write graphic novels about Pokémon!” Jon said.

“Can we stay focused here?! I need your help,” Stan said.

“Because your world was destroyed and you’re all alone in this world?” Jon asked.

“My world was destroyed by two, petty magicians, apparently father and son,” Stan said.

“Like Luke and Vader?” Jon asked.

“I thought you knew who I was?!” Stan said, exhausted.

“Stanly,” Jon said.

“STAN LEE!” Stan snapped.

“Oh,” Jon said. “So, how can I help you, Stanly?”

Stan took off his shades, rubbed his eyes, regrouped his thoughts, and pushed for closing the deal. “Look, I am barely making ends meet and I can’t get around like I use to for competing. My Pikachu here needs a trainer. You look like a good, kind trainer.”

“You want to trade?” Jon asked.

“No, no, no,” Stan said. “I am trying to get out of the Pokémon training business and back to graphic novel writing. But seriously, I can’t do that knowing my Pikachu here is suffering. I want you to buy my Pikachu.”

“I don’t know. I don’t really have any money of my own,” Jon said.

“Buy this Pokémon, and I guarantee you, you will earn all of your money back defeating the local gym,” Stan said.

“Umm, well, Mentos did say having a Pikachu would guarantee a win,” Jon said.

“See, this Mentos fellow sounds like he knows his Pokémon,” Stan said.

“And he would certainly like to have a Pikachu of his own, and he would probably spend his money on it,” Jon considered out loud.

“That’s right. Any smart trainer would bet on Pikachu. Buy this, win the money back, and then you can give this to your friend as a gift or a trade,” Stan said.

“Okay!” Jon said, sorting out the money from his bag. “It’s a deal. You’re one swell fellow, Sir. I am glad we met. Maybe you would like to come with me and we could be like one happy family after I clear the gym?”

“I only do cameos, son,” Stan said.

“What?” Jon asked, sorting as Stan helped himself to some cash and pocketed it, sleight of hand style.

“You were going to pay me?” Stan asked.

“Oh, yeah, sorry,” Jon said, sorting more cash. “Oh, I was saying, you should join me and meet my friends, maybe travel with us.”

“That sounds lovely,” Stan said, his eyes having grown to accommodate how much money Jon was carrying. “But my arms get tired.”

“I could push you?” Jon said.

“You are kind of pushy, aren’t you? But it’s time for my nap,” Stan said.

“Oh, okay then,” Jon said.

Jon gave Stan the money and accepted the animal in his lap. He carried him off, petting him, talking about how nice it was to have him in his growing entourage of Pokémon. Jon didn’t see Stan get out of the chair and scurry off into the alley.

निर्मित

If Jon had had a narrator, there is no telling what sort insight might be shared. No doubt there would be a few puns thrown in for good measure. There would be evidence that Jon might be in serious trouble with his friends, but to minimize it, the narrators spun off into their own

commentary, replete with puns and moronic jokes. Waylon Jennings tried to start the intro to this scene, but just ended up singing a song about 'good ol boys.' Willy Nelson tried to take over, keeping his friend Waylon straight, but decided to join the song, which Waylon and he fought, because Waylon was pushing ownership for 'his' song, so Willy invited him to sing the Highwaymen song, as it seemed more appropriate anyway, and then Jon unconsciously switched channels, because he wasn't consciously ready for the reality that he had just done something stupid. The next channel Morgan Freeman was offering great insight, but then got lost in some Civil War poetry, and the channel changed again. Jon paused as if sorting something out about the Universe. What if everyone reading a book was auditioning to be a narrator? It was such a peculiar thought he felt compelled to write it, but the Pikachu he was carrying licked him and he was properly loved and distracted that he lost his train of thought, just as David Tennant was picking up his story. David is actually pretty fair narrator, but even his report of his friends worry as they looked for Jon after the gym match, followed by their relief when they saw him coming down the street, failed to capture all the nuances and exchanges in the reunion.

"We were worried you got lost!" Reese said.

"Did you catch any new Pokémon?" Mentos asked.

"You look really happy," Loxy said.

"Oh, I am like on top of the world," Jon said. "I bought us a Pikachu!" Jon said.

"From whom?" Reese asked.

"From where?" Loxy asked.

"With what money?" Mentos asked.

"Don't worry. Once I beat this gym, I will replace all your money," Jon assured them.

Loxy frowned and put her hands on her hips. That one gesture of her could turn her into Wonder Woman or Almighty Isis without spinning and flaring her dress. She had power.

"You idiot," Mentos said, assumedly echoing Loxy's position.

"Oh, be nice. You're the one who filled his head about the virtues of Pikachu," Reese said. "He was just trying to help."

"Why are you always doting on stupid men?" Mentos demanded from his sister.

"I don't understand," Jon said. "I thought you would be happy with a Pikachu. And that old man really needed help, and that's what we do here, right? We help people?"

"Did it ever occur to you, Jon, that some people lie?" Loxy asked.

“Lie? Lie about what?” Jon asked.

“Show us this damn Pikachu!” Mentos said.

“Right here,” Jon said, a little confused.

Jon extended his arms to show off the animal he was holding. There was a bit of whirlwind and he suddenly found himself handcuffed and an attractive officer holding his arm.

“Finally! You’re swindling days are over, old man,” Officer Jenny said.

“You’re really pretty,” Jon said, not at all worried by the fact he was handcuffed.

“Officer, Jenny,” Loxy said. “I think there’s been a mistake.”

“I’d say!” Jenny said. “Pushy puppies painted as Pikachu is a crime in my book.”

“Puppies?” Jon asked.

“Don’t play stupid with me, Sir,” Jenny said.

“He’s not playing,” Mentos said.

“Really, Officer Jenny,” Reese tried. “He is our friend.”

“Your friend, eh?” Jenny said. “Then all of you are coming with me!”

“He’s not my friend,” Mentos said quickly. “Never saw before.”

“Oh, so you were a victim of the Pikachu puppy pushing person, too?” Jenny said. “I will need you to come with me and sign some forms. Just one more nail going on your coffin. Nails must be hammered down. They don’t call me Jenny the Hammer for nothing.”

“You’re going to kill me?” Jon asked.

“No, it’s just a saying,” Jenny said.

“I don’t like that saying,” Jon said.

“And I don’t like how you mistreat animals,” Jenny said.

“I would never mistreat an animal!” Jon said. “I love animals.”

“Then explain why you force this dog into a puppy suit and make him part of your swindling act?” Jenny said.

“It’s a puppy?” Loxy asked.

Jenny pinched the ‘puppies’ cheeks with both hands. “It is on there pretty good, but I assure you, this is no puppy or Pikachu. It’s probably the oldest dog trick in the world, using the oldest dog in the world. But no more tangents, let’s go. All of you! We’re going to sort this out at the station.”

Do you need a narrator to inform you that they're now 'back at the station' when we really haven't even had a full segment before breaking away to commercials? And did you need a commercial about all the different kinds of Poké balls available? And did you need another narrator asking you to 'catch them all?' Talk about marketing! Next they'll be pushing cool Pokémon cards, and special coins, and, well, who knows what, like maybe bundles of stuff that they couldn't sell but with one cool Pikachu to make it happen?!

In the background of the station, Jenny clones answered phone calls, sorted through mysteries, inventoried lost and found, identified lost Pokémon and called their trainers, finger printed folks, and put pins on a map correlating to alleged Pokémon sightings. Jon and his friends were lined up and photographed together, while simultaneously being videotaped. Through the window, the puppy in a suit painted to resemble Pikachu looked like a puppy, but on the video feed and in the picture, he looked like a seriously old Labrador retriever, on his last legs. Jon was separated from his friends and thrown into cell. But he was not alone. Two others were present and they became animated on his arrival. They were females in shiny, silvery dresses, dark but sparkly hose, with long, dark, blocked hair style, and unreal colored eyes, and even without the matching uniform like outfit, they might have passed for sisters, but not necessarily twins. They scrutinized him.

"So, what did Jenny get you for, old man?" one of the girls said.

"Umm, nothing. It's all kind of a misunderstanding. And you?" Jon asked.

"The same," one of them said.

"Yeah, mention you're team Rocket and they automatically bring you in for questioning, assuming you're up to no good," the other said.

"Oh, I think I saw your advertisement in the store," Jon said.

"Ah, so you know our motto," she said.

"Motto?" Jon asked.

"Prepare for trouble!" one said, as they both approached Jon.

"That seems sensible," Jon said, sorting it, but a little worried about how they were circling him. "But, wait wait wait, is that like a general warning that people should be looking for trouble, or is that kind of like a subtle threat that you're about to cause me harm?"

The other touched Jon's cheek. "We like to leave that vague, so it could be either," she said. "Prepare for trouble, and make it double."

“Kind of like the double mint commercial?” Jon asked.

“Don’t know what you’re talking about, dear,” the other said.

“To protect the world from devastation!” the other said.

“Oh! Well, I really like that part,” Jon said. “So, even if you were as bad as you’re coming across, you really are just trying to do good!”

“Of course,” one said.

“You understand,” the twin said. “Sometimes you have to be bad to be good.”

“And we can be really bad,” the other said. “To unite all people within our nation.”

“I like that, too,” Jon said. “Can I join Team Rocket?”

“You should hear our full motto first,” the other said. “Some people have a real hang up on the next part: To denounce the evils of truth and love.”

Jon seemed seriously confused. “You’re going to have to break that one down for me.”

“Gladly,” the one said. “The world isn’t just sunshine and puppies, kids! The powers that be go around pushing Pokémon love and putting gullible Joy and Jenny clones in places of authority, but in truth, there are some serious problems in the world.”

“And we love our world,” the other said. “Is it our fault that the rest of the world doesn’t share our vision? Human populations are dwindling. Pokémon populations are growing exponentially. The world is facing a serious extinction level event.”

“Really?”

“Do you really think that catching 500 small Rattatas is just all about earning the badge?” the other said. “Seriously. The authorities know they have a rodent problem, but instead of telling people the truth, they make it about the love of catching Pokémon, but really it’s their way of trying to keep up with the Rattata population explosion.”

“And with fewer children being born, that means fewer trainers coming online, which means, eventually, the Pokémon will over run the humans,” the other said. “But to continue: to extend our reach to the stars above.”

“Oh, I really love that,” Jon said. “I so want to go the stars.”

“Then you should definitely join us,” the other said.

“I am Jackie,” the first said.

“I am Jacey,” the second said. “Team Rocket, at your service!”

“It’s really nice to meet you,” Jon said, offering his hand for shaking. “I am Jon.”

“Oh, I love names with J’s,” Jacey said.

“Me, too,” Jacky said. “But we will need more than a hand shake if you want to join us.”

“What must I do?” Jon asked.

Jacky pushed into him, her hands on his chest, and Jacey prevented him from retreating.

“You seriously want to join us?”

Jon eyes were big, as if frightened. He nodded.

“Do the test,” Jacey said.

Jacky kissed Jon and inhaled all of his air and left him stupefied. Jacky retreated.

“I have never seen someone so entranced and so quickly,” Jacey said. “It’s almost like he’s a Pokémon.”

“He tastes like Pokémon,” Jacky said.

“Really?” Jacey asked. She took a turn for herself. Jon surrendered to her kiss just as easily. “He even kisses like a Pokémon.”

“I think he will do just fine,” Jacky said.

“He will do whatever we say!” Jacey said.

Jenny entered. “You two, Team Rocket, you’re free to go!”

“Whoo hoo!” Jacky said, rushing the door.

“See you around, old man,” Jacey said.

Jon started to cry. “But, what about me?”

“You dug your own grave, Sir,” Jacky said.

“But, I want to go to the stars!”

“That’s the spirit!” Jacey said. “Keep that in your heart and you will go places. By now.”

Jon pouted. Jenny seemed sympathetic.

“You should really be careful about the types of friends you keep,” Jenny said, and closed the cell door.

Jon sat down on the one bench, trying to sort his experiences and his feelings. Jenny entered again, assuming it was the last Jenny. Technically, whether it was his original arresting Jenny, or the one who had put him in the cell, or the last one to open the cell door, ‘again’ was still applicable, considering it was still ‘Jenny.’ She led him to an interrogation room where he was handcuffed to the table. Jenny sat in front in of him. Another Jenny stood near the door,

watching. He was fairly certain, just on the other side of the mirror there was another Jenny or two watching.

“Your eyes are dilated,” Jenny observed. “Have you been doing drugs?”

“Oh, no, mam,” Jon said. “It’s just that, you’re really beautiful.”

“I am sure you say that to all my sisters,” Jenny said. “Try and stay focused. This is serious.”

“Oh, I am always very serious,” Jon assured her.

“Aren’t you a little old...” the other Jenny asked.

“To be looking at Jenny like this?” Jon asked.

“No,” Jenny said. “I would be happy if you looked at me like you look at my sister.”

“Well, she did handcuff me,” Jon said. “And that is kind of hot, and I thought you were about to sing to me, like a kisagram.”

“Oh, that’s my sister, the detective. She does random moonlighting for extra Poké cash,” Jenny said.

“So, it’s not a crime to look at you?” Jon asked.

“Of course not,” both Jenny said. “I kind of like it, actually,” Jenny said.

“You’d be surprise how many people pretend not to look at us, because we’re like authority, and so seeing you not suddenly looking away is kind of refreshing,” Jenny said. “It’s very hard for a girl in authority to get noticed these days.”

“Sometimes, it gets old, though. The other day my sister’s husband kissed me and when I told him I wasn’t Jenny and he pretended like he couldn’t tell,” Jenny said.

“Oh, he did that to me, too!” Jenny said.

“What did you do?” Jenny asked.

“Oh, we took him to the hospital to make sure he wasn’t suffering from dementia,” Jenny said.

“Is he okay?” Jenny asked.

“Yeah, it turned out it was just a mistake, so we forgave him,” Jenny said.

“Oh, that’s nice,” Jenny said. “Anyway, back to you, Sir. Aren’t you too old to be in a life crime?”

“I am really not...” Jon began.

“Sir, don’t lie to me,” Jenny said. “Tell me about this Stark Company you work for?”

“Stark?” Jon asked.

“Don’t play stupid, either,” Jenny pointed at Jon. “We logged into your dog’s puppy suit via wireless tech and discovered it was made by Stark Industries.”

“Really?!” Jon asked.

“So, you deny knowing anything about that?” Jenny asked.

Jon looked to Jenny one and then Jenny two. He gave a faint smile and shrugged. Jenny slapped the table. Jon jumped.

“You want to know what I think?” Jenny asked.

Jon nodded.

“I think, you are working for Stark, testing the power puppy suits to see how they hold up against real Pokémon,” Jenny said. Jon’s mouth opened. “You think dogs are easier to train, so you will do anything to take short cuts. And maybe your puppy power suit can make an old dog do new tricks, give it the energy and stamina of a puppy, but I find it cruel and unusual punishment to lock it in a suit and put it in a ring to fight.”

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said, sorting this. “You’re not okay with dog fights, but Pokémon fighting is okay?”

“Don’t get smart with me!” Jenny said.

“I am really confused. While a go you said don’t play stupid, but now you don’t want me to get smart, and I don’t anything about the Stark Industries except I really like Robert Downey Jr. as an actor,” Jon cried.

Jenny crossed their arms. Jon tried to stop himself from crying, sucking air.

“Don’t think crying is going to get you out of trouble, Mr.,” Jenny said. “I am going to give you one chance to prove your innocence.”

“You want me to kiss you?” Jon asked.

“What? No! Why would you ask that?” Jenny asked.

“Because, that’s what Team Rocket wanted,” Jon said.

“Oh, we know what Team Rocket wants,” Jenny said.

“What?” Jon asked.

“What what?” Jenny asked.

“What does Team Rocket want?” Jon asked.

“How old are you?” Jenny asked.

“I don’t know?!” Jon wailed again.

“OMG, you are such a big baby,” Jenny said. “Look, you want to prove your innocent, you have to help me catch the guy who sold you the dog in the Pikachu puppy Pokémon power suit.”

Jon sniffed and wiped his face with the back of his hand. “I don’t think that’s possible,” Jon said.

“Why not?” Jenny asked.

“He said he only does cameos,” Jon said.

“What does that mean?” Jenny asked.

“I think that means we only see him once,” Jon said.

“Well, then, I guess it’s up the river for you,” Jenny said.

“Will there be other Jenny’s at the jail?” Jon asked.

“Of course,” Jenny said. “Who do you think run’s the jail?”

“Will you let my friends go? They had nothing to do with my stupidity,” Jon said.

“So, you admit to the crime?” Jenny asked.

“No, but they did ask me to hold their money while they went into scope out the jail, and I spent that money buying what I thought was the Pikachu,” Jon said.

“So, you admit that you were trying to cheat the gym out of money?!” Jenny said.

“That’s not cheating,” Jon said. “They could have put it in the bank, but instead they asked me to hold it.”

“True enough,” Jenny said. “I will forget I heard that, but you and Chester are taking me to where this alleged purchase happened.”

“Who’s Chester?” Jon asked.

“The name of your dog,” Jenny said.

“It is?” Jon asked.

“According to the suit,” Jenny said. She unlocked his handcuff. “You, me, and the dog, are going undercover to catch the great Pikachu swindler, but if you try anything funny, try to get away, I will send your friends up river for a very long time.”

“I assure you, I will not do anything funny,” Jon said. “No one gets my jokes here anyway.”

“Good, I am going to change into a disguise and will be right back with Chester,” Jenny said. “Keep an eye on him, Sis.”

“Gladly,” Jenny said, sitting on the table and staring at Jon. His eyes fell to her knees. “Don’t even think about it.”

“What?” Jon asked.

“I’ve got your number, Sir,” Jenny said, pushing on his chest with a boot, tilting the chair back as if she intended to tip him.

“You do?” Jon asked.

“867-5309,” Jenny said.

“I thought that was your number?” Jon said.

Jenny returned with Chester, and was wearing exactly what she had on when she departed, with one addition. Can you spot the addition, or the change, in the still shot before she announces what’s different?

“I thought you were going to change?” Jon asked.

“I did,” Jenny said.

“You did?” Jon asked, confused.

“You can’t tell?” Jenny on the table asked.

“He’s just not a trained officer,” Jenny with Chester said. “Guess, what’s different.”

“You changed your underwear?” Jon asked.

“Good guess, and you should do that daily, but nope,” Jenny said. “Come on, hurry, this dog is heavier than he looks.”

“Ummm, I give up,” Jon said.

“I am wearing sunglasses,” Jenny said.

“I wear my sunglasses at night,” Jenny said.

“Oh,” Jon said.

Jenny motioned for Jon to come with her and he got up and proceeded to follow her.

“Have fun!” Jenny called after them.

“Storming the castle,” Jon said, finishing the quote.

“We’re storming a castle?” his Jenny asked.

“No, it’s just a saying,” Jon said.

“Well, it doesn’t make any sense,” Jenny said.

“It does in the right context,” Jon said.

Another Jenny approached and handed Jon all his gear. She started singing, “Private Eyes are watching you;” Jon’s Jenny completed the code “They see your every move, girl.”

Jenny continued her talk with Jon: “Even if you’re under investigation, you can’t go out in the world without your gear,” Jenny said. “And, oh, I feel it necessary to applaud you on your huge collection of Pokémon protection. You should always take protection when you go undercover.”

“Um,” Jon tried to figure out what his response should be.

Jenny took his wrist and dragged him out the door. “Come on, we don’t have all day.”

Chapter 8

Chester walked on a leash, always just in front of Jon, while Jenny walked on his right. It struck Jon there were no cars, and except for a few bicycles, racing madly as if determined to get somewhere fast, one with a really odd Pokémon wearing a dress in a basket, people walked. He had seen several motorcycles with sidecars at the police station on chargers, so they did have vehicles. A couple of people were riding Pokémon, and some of those took straight to the sky, which was very distracting, causing Jenny to hurry remind him to keep up. The only other distraction was the pedestrians who would stop them to address his 'puppy.' "Aww, what a cute puppy," but then would quickly add, "But just not as good a Pokémon."

"Does every one see through the puppy disguise but me?" Jon asked.

"Everyone see it as a puppy," Jenny said.

Jon pouted. "I have so much to learn."

"Aww, you'll get there. Even as old as you are, you can still learn new tricks," Jenny said. "Isn't that right, Chester?"

Chester barked that he agreed.

"If you say so," Jon said.

Jenny suddenly pulled Jon up against a building. "I don't think they noticed me," Jenny said. "But quick, kiss me, anyway."

"What?" Jon began.

But Jenny pulled Jon to her and buried her face in his, spun him, and pushed up against the wall. Chester sat and looked up at them. Jenny brought the kiss to an end, but didn't leave his eyes.

"Wow," Jenny said. "You kiss like a Pokémon!"

"What does that mean?" Jon asked.

Jenny sighed, almost breathless. "I will tell you some day, but first, I must stop Team Rocket. Stay here."

Jenny rushed across the street, simultaneously calling for backup. A Machop burst through the door, shattering windows, leaving a shadow of Machop in the building, like a cookie cutter might leave in a spread of dough. Debris rained down over Jenny, causing her to shield her eyes with her arm, and Machop rushed out, hit her with two open palms, and sent her

flying back across the street. Jenny was KO, but the Machamp advanced, seriously intending to end her. Chester broke free of his leash and ran to defend her, putting himself between Machamp and Jenny. Machamp roared, beating its chest with all four hands, and then pounded the street with the upper two, breaking the road. Jacey and Jacky emerged with silver suitcases in each hand, four altogether. Jon went to Jenny's side, not knowing what to do. He emptied the last two units of his rive spray on her face, but nothing happened.

"This way, Machamp!" Jacky called.

Machamp roared at Chester. Chester barked back at it.

"Leave the puppy and come," Jacey shouted.

"I told you it was too powerful for us to control!" Jacky said.

"Fine, we'll get another one," Jacey said. "Let's go."

Jacey and Jacky ran off as Machamp rushed Chester. Chester charged, and jumped and bit one of its arms, but was quickly caught up in the other hands. It yelped.

"Hey!" Jon said. "Put him down, now."

Machamp was surprised to be spoken to in this manner. It roared at Jon.

"Down, now," Jon said.

Machamp tossed Chester down, and he just lay there. Jenny had waken to see Jon confronting the Machamp, and reached over to pull Chester out of the way as Machamp pounded the ground on either side of Jon.

"Stop that," Jon said, pointing at the Machamp. He held up an empty ball. "Now, in the ball."

Machamp took the ball and crushed it, right in front his face. Jon reached into his bag for another one. Machamp charged Jon, picked him up, and took him to the far side of the street, pushing him up against the wall and yelling into his face. Jon was in a great deal of pain, but he kept his eyes open, holding Machamp's gaze. Take enough knocks as a kid, and you learn to gate pain into a holding area, but what gave him strength was knowing he was defending the world, and helping Jenny.

"You want to play ball?" Jon asked. "Well, let's play hard ball."

It smashed the wall to either side of Jon, roaring. Jon pulled a Pine Cone on Machamp, hesitated, kissed it to distract it, which really did confused the Pokémon, and then he hit it

straight in the center of the forehead. In she went. Jon fell to the ground. The next thing he knew, he was in the Pokémon Center, Joy hovering over him.

“How do you feel?” Jon asked.

“Confused,” Jon said. He sat up suddenly. “Jenny!”

“Easy,” Joy said.

“I am here, Jon,” Jenny said. “Thanks to you and Chester.”

“Chester?” Jon asked.

“Oh, he’s okay,” Joy said. “If he hadn’t been wearing that suit, though, I don’t think he would be here.”

Chester licked Jenny’s face.

“Yes, I love you, too,” Jenny said. “Good dog. So, Jon, feel up to finishing our mission?”

“Really? What about Jacky and Jacey?” Jon asked.

“Oh, they got away with some prized Pokémon, for now,” Jenny said. “But we’ll catch up with them sooner or later. Team Rocket is known for making mistakes.”

So, Jon and Jenny returned to their mission, Chester leading the way.

“May I ask you something?” Jon asked.

“Anything,” Jenny said.

“You kissed me to escape getting noticed,” Jon said.

“Yes,” Jenny said.

“Does that ever work?” Jon asked.

“It worked for me,” Jenny said. “And kissing the Machop worked for you. That was quick thinking and very brave.”

“Would you kiss me again?” Jon asked.

“Sure, in the line of duty or as a friend,” Jenny said.

“Good, then kiss me now,” Jon said, dragging her to the wall.

Jenny obeyed, and when the kiss went on longer than it should have, she stopped it.

“What? Did you see the man who sold you Chester?”

“No, I just wanted to kiss you again,” Jon said.

“I said no tricks, Mr.,” Jenny said.

“You said no funny business, but a kiss isn’t funny,” Jon said.

“True that,” Jenny said, hugging his neck and kissing him again. “I really don’t know what to make of you.”

Chester barked. Jenny and Jon followed his gaze, the leash going taut as he wanted to go towards Stanly. But he wasn’t in the wheel chair, and he was carrying a large bag.

“That’s him,” Jon said.

“Are you sure?” Jenny said.

“Pretty sure. He was in a wheel chair last time,” Jon admitted.

“Quick, let’s follow,” Jenny said.

They followed Stanly, and every time he looked back to see if he was being followed, Jenny kissed Jon. Finally, even by the door to Stanly’s home, they were kissing.

“You two should really get a room,” Stanly said.

“Hello, Stanly,” Jon said.

“It’s Stan Lee!” Stan said. Jenny cuffed him. He dropped a grocery bag full of dog food.

“Oh.”

“You’re swindling days are over, Mr. Stanly!” Jenny said.

“Stan Lee,” Stan corrected.

“That’s what I said,” Jenny said.

“Please, don’t arrest me till you hear my story,” Stan begged.

“Start talking,” Jenny offered.

“Come inside,” Stan said, inviting Chester, Jon, and Jenny in. Jon collected the dog food for him and brought it inside with them.

Inside the home, there was at least a hundred dogs, of all breeds, all ages, and all sizes. An old Poodle walked upright using a human walker. A Chihuahua walked on an exercise ball. Yorkies ran in circles, up onto a couch, back onto the floor, back on the couch, off the couch. Some larger dogs slept on the floor, their bellies exposed while puppies jumped over them.

“A puppy mill!” Jenny said. “You better have one good story, Sir!”

“These dogs came to me, homeless, hungry, afraid. No one wants a dog in this world. People just want Pokémon! I took it upon myself to care for them, but do you know how expensive dog food is in this world? I can’t afford dog food on my pension. So, my friend at Stark gave me some experimental puppy power Pokémon suit, in exchange for data on puppy performance against Pokémon. This allowed me to train so I could at earn some pocket money

battling, but also allowed me to adopt some of them out. Stark still collects its data, which pays for the suits, they get a home, and I get just enough food on the table to feed this lot,” Stan said. “Usually, once people find out Chester isn’t a Pikachu, they kick him to the street and he comes back here. This is the first time Chester never came home.”

“That is really sad,” Jenny said. “But if you’re running an orphanage for dogs, the city will help pay for their food, and maybe help adopt them out to people who are allergic to Pokémon.”

“You would do that for me?” Stan said.

“Absolutely,” Jenny said.

“I can’t give the money back. It spent it all on dog food,” Stan said.

“That’s okay,” Jenny said.

“It is?” Jon asked.

“Sure,” Jenny said.

“What happened to sending him up the river?” Jon asked.

“How would that help society? All these dogs would be homeless and hungry,” Jenny said. “I will send someone from our department to start the aid process, and we’ll have someone convert the abandoned kid park into a dog park, and extend your property to include a kennel. But next time, come to me when you need help. Don’t swindle people.”

“Okay,” Stan said, looking appropriately chastised and humbled.

“Let’s go, Jon,” Jenny said.

“Really?” Jon said. “That’s it?”

“Jon, you have to have compassion for people and situations,” Jenny said.

“You were so going to send me up river,” Jon said.

“Oh, that was just a little fear tactic to make sure you were cooperating fully,” Jenny said, patting him playfully.

“Should have started with the kiss,” Jon mumbled. “Fine, Chester. Let’s go.”

“Wait just a minute,” Stan said. “Chester’s mine.”

“I bought him, fair and square,” Jon said.

“Come here, Chester,” Stan said. Chester took one step closer. “Good dog.”

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “Chester, come back here.”

“He’s mine!” Stan said. “Chester, remember who fed you when you were hungry?”

“He’s my dog,” Jon said. “Who went up against Machamp for you when you got KO!”

“You did legally sell him,” Jenny pointed out. “And, it’s not illegal to buy dogs, even if they are in Pikachu power puppy Pokémon suit.”

“But he’s not a Pokémon! Why would you want a non-Pokémon pet?” Stan said.

“Why don’t we let Chester decide?” Jenny said. “Chester, who do you want to go with?”

Chester looked at Jon and then looked at Stan. Jon called to Chester, and he got up, wagging his tail. Stan called to Chester and he took a step towards him. Jon called him again. Stan called him again. Chester turned and went and sat down next to Jenny.

“I guess the police station has a new mascot,” Jenny said.

“But he’s got the best power suit!” Stan said.

“Sorry, it’s stuck on the dog, so it comes with the dog, per the original sell, unless, you’d prefer to go up river,” Jenny said.

“The jail is run by Jenny clones,” Jon offered.

“There is that,” Stan said, considering. “Go ahead, Chester. You always wanted to be a crime stopping dog.”

“Oh, we don’t believe in crime stopping in this world,” Jenny said. “We just investigate after that crime happened and try to make things right. Come on, Jon, let’s get you back to your friends. You’ve had enough adventures for one day.”

Back at the station, multiple Jenny’s gave Jon a hug. A couple of them even kissed him. They claimed this was thanks for saving their sister and for being so brave while out on assignment, but it was more likely they wanted to confirm for themselves that Jon tasted like a Pokémon. One of the Jenny’s awarded him a Special Service badge, pinning it on the inside of his jacket, and then gave him a secret wink. “Show this to any law enforcement officer, and you will be taken care of,” she said, kissed him, and hurried off.

Jenny returned with Jon’s friends. “You guys should be really proud of your friend,” she said. She hugged Jon. “Farewell, my friend. And anytime you want to work undercover, come see me.”

Jon blushed. Loxy and Reese took Jon by the arms and took him outside.

“Bye now,” Jenny said, waving. Chester barked.

Outside, Loxy, Reese, and Mentos confronted him.

“What was all of that about?” Loxy led with.

“Why do you have lipstick all over you?” Reese led with.

“Where’s my Pikachu?!” Mentos led with.

“We’re back on that?” Reese asked.

“He spent all of our money on a Pikachu and we don’t even have a dog to show for it!” Mentos snapped. He pointed to Jon. “We are not friends, Sir. Don’t talk to me, don’t ask for my help, but don’t think you’re getting off Jenny free! You owe me. Until you pay me back ever last Poké cent, I am going to hound you like the dog you are and lost.”

Mentos turned and stormed off.

“Where are you going?” Reese demanded.

“To the Pokémon center to revive and restore my Pokémon,” Mentos called back.

“Sorry for what my brother said. He will calm down,” Reese said to Jon.

“He’s right to be angry,” Jon said. “I really messed up.”

Loxy patted Jon on the shoulder. “That’s how we improve. Reese and I have to go revive and restore our Pokémon, too. We’re just going to have to keep battling the gym until we level up. Wait for us there.”

Chapter 9

Jon approached the gym to find the line was dispersing and the group at the front was confronting the guard, and he was explaining, "I can only let one more person in, then we're closed for lunch."

"But we have been waiting here all morning!" the group protested.

"Well, we had our share of tough battles," he said. "So one of you, or none of you."

"We fight together!" the group said.

"Come back after lunch, then," the man said.

Jon felt an urgency, and fear that more delay would bother his friends, and he might as well learn what gym matches were like and prepare himself. "May I go in?"

The guard gave him the thumbs up to proceed in.

"Wait," the group cried protest. "We were next!"

"You told me you were unwilling to break up your entourage," the man said, waving Jon to continue.

"It's not fair!" the lead said.

"How old are you?!" the guard asked.

The question made Jon quicken his pace. He found the second guard pushing him through the door and closing it behind him. He heard it lock, a loud 'click' that rumbled through him, and it felt ominous. He turned to face the gym, and found himself 'outside.' He turned to see the door he had just passed through gone. He reached out to touch it and found it still there. He turned back to the only path available. If he squinted, he could discern ceiling lights, as if he were in a gym, and for a moment he thought he had arrived on the holodeck of the Next Gen Enterprise.

An old man appeared to his right.

"Do you have any badges kid?" he asked.

Jon showed him the inside of his coat, where his secret service badge was.

"Aww," the old man said. "Now that is a unique badge. I think I have only seen it once in my entire life."

"Really?" Jon asked.

"Whenever you're ready, just proceed down the path," the old man said.

“Any advice?” Jon asked.

“Yeah, proceed down the path,” he said again.

“Do I know you?” Jon asked.

“Does anyone really know anyone?” he asked.

“Um,” Jon said, not sure what to make of him.

“Are you waiting for a white rabbit?” he asked.

“Maybe,” Jon said. “Do you have any hints or clues as to how I should proceed?”

“I work for this gym, kid,” the old man said. “Would you trust my advice?”

“Well, sure,” Jon said. “Gyms are supposed to raise people, not destroy people, right?”

“I like you, kid. Not a lot of people approach gyms with that attitude,” the old man said.

“Very well. I would advise against using water and ground type Pokémon. Good luck.”

Jon proceeded down the path, finding twists and turns, as if he were in a maze. Again he thought he heard the three, repetitive notes that would prelude Willy Wonka’s ‘pure imagination’ song. He found a berry bush and was compelled to eat one. He considered collecting more, but was then drawn to a flowering plant that looked like a cup. Inside there was liquid, and as if he were in the chocolate factory, he drank the contents and then ate the cup. He felt a rush of energy, and flush of warmth through his skin. He felt happy. He just wanted to linger in the gym and enjoy the sights, smells, and tastes. It was just when he was completely relaxed, enjoying the turns to the garden, that the two girls leaped out at him, nearly scaring the crap out of him. They were dressed ‘younger’ than their apparent age, all in pink, with a Pokémon face on their pullover shirt, and their pleated skirts flared as they twirled into place.

“I’m Miki,” the one girl said.

“And I’m Maki,” the other said.

“But you could call us Jo and Zoe, if you have a difficult time pronouncing our given names,” Miki said.

“Do people have trouble pronouncing your given names?” Jon asked.

“Some things just don’t translate well from culture to culture,” Miki said.

“Like, did you know some cultures think Pokémon are racist?” Maki said. “As if Pokémon can help what they look like.”

“We use to be graphic artists,” Miki said.

“I made Pokemon look better for magazine covers,” Maki said.

“I just made skinny girls look skinnier,” Miki said.

“And you were very good at it,” Maki said.

“Why, thank you. Anyway, different cultures have different social filters and so we try to be as sensitive as we can, but the truth of the matter is, there isn’t a Universe where someone somewhere isn’t being offended, so we decided to get out of the graphic arts and train Pokémon together. Nothing more horrible than having to change the look of an entire Pokémon just to sell magazines! Anyway, those days are gone, and now we educate where we can, change where we can, and if someone just simply can’t abide us or our philosophy, well, they are welcome to go live in their own Universe,” Miki said.

“You look like you’re still struggling,” Maki said.

“Yeah, well, it does seem like changing your name so someone can have an easier go at it is still very much like airbrushing pictures,” Jon said.

“I suppose,” Miki agreed. “But it’s just our given name, not our true, personal, secret names. People, like Pokémon and cats, have more than one name. So, no need to really get hung up on pronunciations and spellings.”

“But why Jo? Isn’t Jo a boy’s name?” Jon asked.

“See, there’s another cultural filter,” Miki said. “You have never heard of a girl name Jo?”

“I saw a movie about a guy named Joe,” Jon said.

“How about Bobby Jo?” Maki asked.

“Umm, sounds familiar,” Jon said.

“Surely you remember the theme song,” Miki said.

“Yeah, a very catchy theme song,” Maki agreed. “Pokémon Junction.”

“Wait wait wait, you mean Petticoat Junction?” Jon asked.

“No,” they both said, singing, “Pokémon Junction. Betty Jo, Emma Jo, and Bobbie Jo.”

“Catching Pokémon and bathing in the water tower,” Maki said.

“Oh, I love bathing in the water tower,” Miki said.

“I know my memory is cloudy, but that’s not how I remember it,” Jon said.

“I like you,” Miki said.

“I like you, too,” Maki said. “You seem surprised to hear that we like you.”

Jon sorted his feelings. "I am not use to hearing that, so I am not sure what to do with the information," he said.

They both seemed suddenly lovingly sad. "That is so sad," Miki said.

"Very," Maki said. "Everyone is loveable to someone."

"Well, I don't doubt your sincerity, but I am curious as to the why. I mean, we just met and all," Jon said.

"Oh, well, I don't know. You just seem like a big, cuddly Pokémon to me," Maki said.

"I can be more specific, if you like," Miki said. "Though you look at us the way a graphic artist would look at a photo he's about to change, you engaged us in deep conversation. You genuinely expressed interest in hearing us. You would be surprised how many boys these days don't want to converse, they just want to get right down to battling, flipping through dialogues without a good read on us, and soon as they're done, they're off looking for their next score."

"Oh, that's so true," Maki said. "I hadn't considered that. Conversation does seem to be a lost art. And I do so love when a graphic artist's eye is giving me the look over. It gives me chills. Let's make it easy for him."

"Or make it hard for him," Miki said.

"Is that a euphemism for..."

"Pokémon battles," Maki said. "Victreebel, I choose you!"

The plant that arrived looked like an older version of Belle, only when it roared, standing up on its vine like tail, it revealed vicious looking teeth. Jon recoiled, almost ran away.

"Oh, don't be scared," Maki said.

"The teeth are a little freaky," Jon said.

"Well, sure, I would advise not putting your finger in its mouth," Maki said.

"Like a Venus fly trap, what goes in doesn't come out," Miki agreed. "Vileplume, I choose you!"

Vileplume arrived, pushed up on its top flower protrusion, as if adjusting a hat, smiled, drooled, and wiped it with its rudimentary hand.

"What the hell is that," Jon asked.

"That's a Vileplume," Miki and Maki said.

"It's really odd looking," Jon said.

“It was a bit Oddish looking at one time,” Miki and Maki both laugh. “Alright, Sir. Conversation time is over, training time has begun. Choose your Pokémon!”

Jon picked a ball from his belt, enlarged it, and tossed it into the match, saying, “Everest, I chose you.”

Kirlia arrived on the scene, looking at Jon as if having been called ‘Everest’ hurt her feelings. She put her hands on her hips and gave him a serious eye.

“Oh, sorry, Kirlia,” Jon asked. “How do you girls keep from getting your Poké balls confused?”

“We have a system,” Maki said. “Vileplume, poison attack.”

“Victreebel, cut,” Miki said.

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “I wasn’t ready. Kirlia! Um, do something.”

Kirlia put a hand to her forehead and fainted dead away. The two opponents laughed, before they realized it was a pseudo faint, very dramatic and convincing, if not a bit histrionic, but when they let their guard down, she came up with a psychic attack.”

“Nice faint,” Miki aid. “Leaf tornado.”

“So didn’t see that coming! Vileplume, spit up,” Maki said.

Kirlia was swept up in a whirlwind of leaves and spit, at first spinning like an ice skater, but then tumbling out of control. She landed on the ground, touched some of the slime like spit that was sticking to her, pulling away viscous, stringy, like stuff, made as if she was going to vomit, then passed out dead away, truly unconscious. Victreebel hit her with its tail, just to make sure.

“I am not sure double teaming me was fair,” Jon mumbled, as he knelt down to check on Kirlia.

“You could have used two Pokémon,” Miki said.

“Really?” Jon asked.

“Sure,” Maki said.

Jon reached for another ball.

“Well, not now,” Miki said. “The battle is over. Pay up.”

“We didn’t even battle a full whole minute!” Jon said.

“Oh, if I had Poké coin for every time I heard that lament,” Maki said.

“Yeah,” Maki said. “You really should work at building up some stamina if you’re going to play with two girls.”

Jon pouted. Kirlia came to, and reached for him, like a child wanting to be picked up. He did so, hugging her to him, trying to brush some of the slime off her, trying to shake off the excess by vigorously waving his hand. Shaking his hands caused spit to get on his face, and he had to wipe his hands on his jeans, then wiped his face on his coat sleeve. After Kirlia was thoroughly hugged and comforted as much he could without a restore potion, she touched her ball and went inside. Jon stood up to face the girls, who seemed quite impressed with themselves.

“So, what now?”

“You have to pay us,” Maki said.

“But I don’t have any money,” Jon said.

The trainers put their hands on their hip, and seemed rather sore. “It’s getting so difficult to make any money as a trainer,” Miki said.

“Good thing Erika put the new rules in place,” Maki said.

“New rules?” Jon asked.

“Yeah, for now own, starting now, any trainer who has insufficient funds to meet the minimum training fee will be obligated to perform labor for the trainer or the gym until the fee is satisfied,” Miki said. “So, follow us.”

“Where are you taking me?” Jon asked.

“Back to our apartment,” Maki said. “We have some chores for you.”

“Going to build some stamina!” Miki said. “Don’t doddle, you’ve already eaten much of our lunch hour.”

“But that was good conversation,” Maki said, linking arms with her friend or sister, something Jon was still not sure about.

“Indeed,” Miki said.

They unlinked arms, then each took one of Jon’s arms, and led him back to their apartment.

निर्मित

Jon came around the corner to find his friends in line, waiting for their next turn at the gym.

Loxy waved and he came right over.

“I told you he didn’t run out on us,” Reese told Mentos.

“Where have you been?” Loxy asked.

“In the gym, training,” Jon said.

“No you weren’t,” Mentos said.

“Yeah, I was,” Jon said.

“No, you weren’t!” Mentos said.

“Yeah...”

“Jon,” Loxy interrupted. “I would like to side with Mentos and express my skepticism. You’ve been gone like a whole hour.”

Jon did the internal math and he wasn’t sure it was just one hour, but shrugged it off.

“Training is pretty grueling,” Jon said.

“How far into the gym did you get?” Reese asked.

“Oh, I didn’t get past Miki and Maki,” Jon said.

“Who?” Mentos asked.

“Jo and Zoe?” Jon asked.

Mentos laughed. “You got your ass beat by the twins!”

“Language!” Reese said.

“What?!” Mentos said. “Ass is in the dictionary. Right before bitch.”

“Well, I am clearly going to have to edit your dictionary,” Reese said.

“You can’t take a word away from me once I unlocked it,” Mentos said.

“Umm, I bet there is a Pokémon for that, somewhere,” Reese said.

“Wait wait wait, I am still struggling to understand,” Loxy said. “It took you like a whole hour to be defeated by Jo and Zoe?”

“What were you all using, Metapods?” the kid in front of them in line said, laughing with his friends.

Jon ignored the jab and kept on with Loxy. “Oh, no, I didn’t last a minute against them double teaming me,” Jon admitted. He didn’t understand why people were laughing.

The one guy behind them, maybe eleven, said “You really need to go back to the end of the line.”

“He’s with us,” Loxy said, using her command voice.

“But that’s not fair! He admits to just battling,” he said.

“How old are you?!” Loxy asked.

“Like that’s relevant?” he asked.

“Maybe!” Loxy said.

“Ageist!” he mumbled.

“Do you want a battle?” Loxy asked.

“No, I am saving my strength for the gym,” he said, hiding his soreness under a pout, his eyes hitting his own toes.

“Then speak up when you disparage someone,” Loxy said. She turned back to Jon.

“Where have you been for the last hour if you were KO in less than a minute?”

Jon blushed.

“What were you doing,” Reese said, crossing her arms. He wasn’t sure if it was maternal voice, the sister voice, or the girlfriend reconsidering the whole affair voice.

“I don’t know if I should say,” Jon said.

“Because of Mentos?” Reese asked, covering his ears.

“Stop treating me like a child! I am an official trainer and privy to adult conversations,” Mentos said, shrugging free of her hands.

“Well, it’s a little embarrassing,” Jon admitted.

“Spit it out,” Loxy said.

“I was washing Miki and Maki’s dishes,” Jon said.

The line was troublingly quiet, clearly interested in any secrets Jon might divulge. Loxy and Reese were sorting the information differently than Mentos.

“Are you using a euphemism for…” Reese asked.

“Washing dishes,” Jon said. “Apparently, trainers aren’t collecting enough fees, so the gym is implementing a new policy. If you don’t bring minimum payment schedule for training, you will be forced into manual labor for the trainer or gym.”

Several people left the line on hearing this information.

“What a game changer,” the girl next to the boy in front of Loxy said. She looked at Jon as if she was impressed with him.

“That’s not fair!” the kid behind them said.

“Right!” Mentos said in agreement. “They can’t change the rules mid game.”

“That’s why it’s called a game changer,” the game changer girl said.

“Seems like a fair change,” Loxy said. “People need to be able to earn a living, and if no one is bringing money to the gym, well, the gym has to have some way to pay the trainers who help us evolve.”

“Yeah,” Reese said, humbly. “I didn’t think about it like that. I was thinking I might want to be a gym trainer one day, because I assumed it was an easy way to earn money, and meet new people.”

“The only reason you want to be a trainer is you assume some guy will show up and be swept off his feet by you,” Mentos said.

“A girl can dream!” Reese said.

The old man who had met Jon when he first entered the gym approached.

“Excuse me, Sir,” the man interrupted. “I am glad to see you got back in line.”

“He cut in line! Make him go to the end,” the kid behind them said.

“I will take care of this, son,” the old man assured him. “Sir, if you will come with me, Miki and Maki would like to invite you to skip the cue and return directly to them to continue your training.”

“Really?” Jon asked.

“That’s not fair!” Mentos and the kid behind them said.

“Game changer!” the girl said. She turned to her boyfriend. “We should join him and his friend.”

“No, I am feeling a little jealous about how you’re suddenly looking at him,” her friend said.

“Oh! You really do like me?!” she said, and they went back into their conversation.

Meanwhile, the old man was addressing the boys who were still pushing their grievance. “How old are you boys?” the old man asked.

“It does seem to violate line etiquette,” Jon said.

“They said they have more chores for you to perform, and that they really like you, since you did such a great job doing dishes,” the old man said.

“Are you sure that’s not euphemism for…” Reese began.

“Washing dishes,” Jon said.

“The twins are quite adamant that if you were in line, they would not advance the next guest until they saw you,” the old man said.

“What a game changer!” the girl in front of Loxy said.

“That’s not fair!” Mentos and the Kid said.

“Yeah, what’s so special about him?” Mentos asked.

“Remember to ask that when you’re his age,” the old man said.

“Are you kidding me?! I am more mature than he,” Mentos said.

Jon accepted the invitation, but before walking away stuck his tongue out at Mentos.

“Oh, that just burns me up!” Mentos said. “Your day is coming, Sir! Have fun getting creamed by some girls!”

Loxy and Reese covered their mouth to hide amusement as Jon and the old man walked away.

निर्मित

You might be thinking, what a great place for another song and montage, and you would be right, a super place for such, with probably scenes already done by others, made famous by other movies, only, in this there would be Pokémon. So, Jon would battle and then do chores. He mowed the lawn for the gym, with Miki and Maki lounging on beach chairs in bikinis drinking fruity colored drinks. Or Jon would be cleaning the pool, with Miki and Maki still in their chair, maybe with drinks, maybe with tanning reflectors. Of course, they were supervising and directing him the whole while, but also talking to themselves. While mowing the lawn, Jon wore jeans and a heavy, long sleeve shirt, but while cleaning the pool he wore shorts and a Hawaiian shirt. Another section of the gym needed watering, and there was a tug a war with positioning the water sprinkler because a Bulbasaur wanted to move it. Other Pokémon just wanted to run and play in the sprinkler. Jon put his hands on his hips as if he were going to discipline children, but then thought, why can’t children play in the sprinkler? Still, his paternal gesture got the whole of them to chase him with the sprinkler. So he joined them. Miki and Maki put their hands on their hips as if they were going to discipline Jon and Pokémon both, and Jon almost went away pouting, the Pokémon seemed hesitant, watching Jon as if they would take his lead, and then Jon

suddenly took the sprinkler and charged Miki and Maki, getting them wet and the Pokémon came, too, and they ended up in a big pile of fun.

During the montage sequence, people in line had developed camp sites, and sleeping bags were out, and Pokémon and people played cards, maybe ‘Magic’ or ‘Yu-Gi-Oh,’ but the cards are blocked out being it’s a Pokémon universe, but clearly some Pokémon card games going, and ‘Rock, Scissors, Pokémon’ which was much more complicated given all the types of Pokémon there was. Some spied Jon with a mean a look, some seemed sympathetic, and there was even one who asked him to leave some chores for others, which got a laugh. Back inside, Jon cooked for Miki and Maki, and there was even a sequence where he is leaning over a large magnifying glass that is attached to a table and applying fingernail polish to their finger nails, then their toe nails. He had an idea, and started applying the available polish to his Pokémon balls to more quickly identify his Pokémon. It was not lost on Jon that every time he came around to re-enter the gym, Loxy and Reese were wearing something different, where Mentos was wearing the same outfit. Once he felt compelled to stop and tell Loxy ‘very nice.’ She kissed him and sent him on his way.

And then it happened. Jon pulled Kirlia from the match and dropped Growlithe. Even though she was incredibly weakened, she refused to get in the ball, but simply accepted she couldn’t fight any longer, and retreated from the zone of conflict. She hovered behind Jon’s legs, watching. For once, Growlithe didn’t just go to sleep, he seemed to be assessing how his friends had been fairing in the fight. Sensing how Belle and Kirlia had been taking a beating, it experienced an emotion of loyalty and it rose up on its hind legs and batted the opponents simultaneously with both claws, and knocked them out cold. Miki and Maki were completely taken by surprised. So was Jon. That feeling rushed over him. An inner warmth and release that felt amazing, and was kind of blinding, as it made the world blur and spin.

Jon woke. The sky was incredibly blue, but he could discern he was in a gym. A gym with bluer than blue sky. The grass was greener than green, and it seemed to stretch in all directions for eternity. He heard a familiar voice calling his name and the world shrunk to better fit his expectations, and then there was Nurse Joy, smiling down at him.

“Hello, again,” Joy said. “You should really consider wearing a medical bracelet, informing people you may pass out when leveling up. You gave Miki and Maki a great scare.”

He saw Miki and Maki now, to either side of Joy.

“I am sorry for scaring you,” Jon said.

“It’s okay,” Miki said.

“Yeah, actually, it just revealed how much we really like you,” Maki said.

“You should also start carrying your own heal and revive potions,” Joy said. “Not that I mind doing gym-calls. I like getting out of the office. And I like treating you. I am curious why you’re wearing a beach shirt and shorts and Miki and Maki are in bikinis. Did you have a pool party and didn’t invite me?”

“Oh, no, we were just lounging while he serviced us,” Miki said.

“Provided services,” Maki corrected.

“Oh, did I say the English wrong again?” Miki asked.

“Well, Jon, if you want to come service me, just get KO and sent to the center again,” Joy said, offering him a hand up.

Jon accepted and his Pokémon approached, only Kirlia was no longer Kirlia, but clearly recognizable as an evolved form of the same.

“Kirlia!” Jon said. “You’re all grown up!”

“She evolved right before our eyes!” Miki and Maki both said. Miki continued. “It is always such a pleasure to watch people and Pokémon transition.”

“OMG, you’re like really sexy,” Jon said.

Gardevoir lowered her eye demurely, a subtle smile and rose color appearing in the cheek that was exposed. Her green hair still covered half her face and was shoulder length in the back.

“Awww, we didn’t learn our lesson with Belle, did we?” Joy asked, humorously.

“Uh?” Jon asked, breaking his eyes away from Gardevoir. “Oh, I am sorry.”

“No worries, Jon. I was teasing. She actually feels the same about you,” Joy said. “And, well, she is more compatible than your last Pokémon pairing.”

“She does? She is?” Jon asked.

“From the moment you paired, she’s been in your mind and heart, as only a telepathic fairy would be, and so she can’t help but be drawn towards you, or you to her,” Joy explained.

“These things always seem to happen. Well, I better get back to the Center.”

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said, touching Joy’s arm. “I have a question.”

“Of course,” Joy said. “If it falls in my domain, I would be happy to answer.”

“Is that clothes Gardevoir is wearing, or is it her body?” Jon asked.

Joy seemed amused, patted Jon on the back of the shoulder. “If you want to discover more about her anatomy, you should ask her,” she said. “Have fun training!”

“Bye now,” Miki and Maki said.

Once Joy had departed, Miki and Maki drew closer to Jon. Jon’s Pokémon gathered by his side.

“So, my friend, it is time for you to advance forwards into the gym,” Miki said.

“Yes, you have learned all that we can teach you,” Maki said.

“Really? I feel like I could have dozen more montages with you, at least,” Jon said.

Miki and Maki hugged him. “We love you, too,” Miki said.

“And you can always return to play with us anytime,” Maki said. “But, for now, any lingering would delay your progress.”

“If you insist,” Jon said, pulling his clothes from his bag so that he could dress.

“But first, we would like to give you a small token of our time together,” Miki said.

Jon quickly traded his jeans for his shorts, and decided to just leave the Hawaiian shirt on. Gardevoir touched his shoulder, looking slightly up to make eye contact. He felt a shiver go down his spine and wondered what unconscious message she had just sent into him.

“Some potions,” Miki said. “Joy is right, you do need to carry these.”

“And some pocket money. You should always have some pocket money,” Maki said.

“Having pocket money is just as important as changing your underwear daily.”

They hugged him again.

“Are you always so generous?” Jon asked. He was seriously impressed with the reward, feeling it was more like a present than something he had earned.

“Aww, that question seems so sad,” Miki said.

“Jon, we’re sorry the reward for winning your battle with us was not extravagant,” Maki said. “But you can rest assured, we really like you. Thank you for bringing your light to our world.”

Jon brought his hands together in Namaste fashion and bowed. “Thank you for training me.” He turned to his friend and recalled Belle and Growlithe to their respective balls. Growlithe went into a Poké ball that resembled the ‘Death Star.’ Gardevoir’s ball was painted to resemble a hippy, peace love flower motif. She declined, asking if she could walk with him instead, which he found agreeable. Belle’s ball had the words, ‘no bite.’

Miki and Maki stepped aside, their arms directing Jon to the path. He proceeded though the maze, until he came into a fork in the road. He chose left. No sooner than he went around the corner, the next trainer was leaping out of the bushes.

“Thought you could get past me, did you?!” she said.

“Um,” Jon said, speechless. Gardevoir was giving Jon the suspicious eyes.

“That’s right, you can’t resist my splendor,” she said. “It’s not the first time I have witnessed that reaction. They say beauty doesn’t last, but I believe if it’s in your heart, it will last a life time. My name is Beauty and you must conquer me before advancing!”

“Okay,” Jon stammered.

Jon hardly recalled the battle. He as pretty sure there was Bulbasaur involved, but as he was going around to return to the gym, after a quick stay at the Pokémon Center, Reese and Loxy greeted him with happiness. Mentos sneered.

“OMG, Kirlia!” Reese said.

“I know, right,” Jon said.

“You advanced?!” Loxy said.

“I did, even leveled up again,” Jon said.

“That’s awesome,” Reese said.

“It’s about time. It was taking forever,” Mentos said.

“I am sorry,” Jon said. “I have been learning so much and not thinking of you.”

“It’s alright,” Loxy said.

“Loxy, how do I keep Belle from evolving? I like Belle and I don’t like the next stage so much, but I don’t even know if I have the right to ask him not to evolve.”

“Then ask him, and if he doesn’t want to evolve, have him hold this crystal,” Loxy said, fishing a crystal out of her pack. “Any evolution energy is channeled directly into the crystal.”

“That’s cool,” Jon said, putting the crystal in his pocket.

The old man approached. “The gym would like you to continue your training, Sir,” he said.

The whole line burst into groans, grievances, and complaints.

“Oh, that is so nice, but it does seem a little unfair,” Jon said.

“The need of the one outweighs the need of the many,” the old man said. “And the gym will not re-set until you have completed your training.”

“Hurry up then!” someone yelled.

Someone else handed him full revive. “Here, take this!”

“Very well,” Jon said, looking at the full revive in his hand. He looked to the old man who came to retrieve him from the line and asked: “Oh, wait, wait, wait. Sir, my heart is suddenly filled with joy, probably because my recent visit to the Pokémon Center, and I am wondering if we have time for a song?”

‘No’ was the unanimous vote from the people in line. One person added. “This is not a Bollywood movie!”

“We always have time for a song,” the man said.

“Especially if it’s a Pokémon song,” someone said.

“Jon,” Loxy interrupted. “Is this serious a song, or are you aiming for humor?”

“Why can’t it be a serious attempt at humor and song and dance?” Jon asked.

“Because, you’re seriously not funny and this feels like one of those moments when I should rescue you from public embarrassment,” Loxy said.

“I feel compelled by an outside agency and if I don’t get it out, I might burst,” Jon said.

“Oh, I might be able to help you with that,” Reese said.

“Well, that’s not true,” Mentos said. “I’ve heard her singing in the shower and it’s not so good.”

“Oh, I wasn’t talking about singing, but I am talking beautiful music,” Reese said.

“Please, can we just get this over with?!” the kid behind Mentos asked.

“Okay,” Jon said. “Everyone remember your places in line, cause I’m thinking things are going to change.”

Jon began placing his friends and for the song. There was suddenly music in the background.

Reese looked skyward. “I hear music?”

“I hear it all the time,” Jon said.

“How are you doing that?” Mentos asked.

“Is that the Beach Boys or David Lee Roth?” Loxy asked.

“Umm, spooky twilight zonish, isn’t it?” Jon said, more than asked. “Actually, it’s just the trail end of song as we tune into the right station.”

And so, Jon sang a parody of a David Lee Roth' version of an older song, perhaps because of Loxy's trying to label the song, or maybe because, that was just what was meant to be. He took his coat off and threw it at a nearby camera and when the camera could see again, he was wearing loose pants, held by Robin William rainbow suspenders, and a thin t-shirt. Loxy and Reese were dressed like magician assistance, one piece glittery suits and dark, sparkly hose. Mentos wore three piece suit, which might have made a nice James Bond opening, where his silhouette is pursued by a circle and he suddenly throws a Pokémon ball at the camera, and the circle falls, dead. "I am just a Padawan, everywhere I go, people know the sword I carry. I pay for every fight, with each and every Knight, Ooh, I'm just spacing. There would come a day when life shall pass away, and my clothes just cave around me. When the end comes I know, as just a Padawan the force goes on without me. I am just a Padawan everywhere I go. People know the sword I carry. I pay for every fight with each and every knight, Ooh, am I dreaming? There will come a day, when I should pass away. Just fade away like lightening. When the end comes I know, as just a Padawan. The force goes on without me: Cause, I ain't got no body, no body, spirit only, no body, spirit only. I'm just here and waiting. Here and waiting, here and waiting, Won't some sweet mamma come and channel me Cause I ain't so bad... I'm so needing potions, love potions, here and waiting, Won't some sweet momma come and give me a chance at life, Just to start again..."

The montage of the song had him 'traveling' through other people's songs and dance. He walked like an Egyptian through the Bangles, only 'in your room,' for example. He also passed through 'breaking Free' by queen, and Emem's "without me." Emem tried to follow Jon into George Clooney's singing "Man of Constant Sorrow," but George wasn't having it. Tenacious D version of the Star Trek nearly derailed in favor of that song, and a few notes followed to clash with the Wars mythology. He had to spend a moment dancing with the folks in "All About the Bass" a world of pastels exploding past him. Barbie was not wanting to party with him, so he moved on, but did taker her arm with no blood thanks to the lightsaber. 'Fancy' found him underdressed. Apparently, Brittany was angry, because she hit him one more time; there is a possibility the hit was due to the scene right before it where Jon gives Alana Morsette, naked and on a bus, his coat. In another scene he went past the Robert Palmer girls, and couldn't go further. Robert was annoyed, because he was standing in front of him, and he waved at him as if using the force to move him out of his camera shot. Jon used the same wave and tossed Palmer out of

the video altogether. The girls stopped dancing. Light sabers ignited. Jon ignited is as they advanced, and then, like Obi surrendering to the inevitability of it all, raised it up in a salute, nodded his head and allowed the girls to take him. They shifted through empty robes on the floor with their toes, baffled, but made for a nice leg shot with the camera.

Everyone on in line on the street were compelled to participate, like drawn up in the magic of a mob dance. Pokémon were in the background, strategically placed for comedic value. Like one scene of Mentos being zapped by the Emperor's lightening death rays was revealed through a subtle twisting of camera angle that there was a Pikachu unleashing his furry. A serious marching of Pokémon to rival the scene with Bruce Willis walking out of NASA to go to battle for Earth. The finale of the song was fairly dramatic, approaching histrionic, and he was there with his hands out stretched.

Jon slowly became aware of a man standing there, tapping his foot impatiently, arms crossed. Jon cracked a faint smile.

"The girls in my video were prettier," David said, sulking, and walked off.

"Who was that?" Reese said.

"I think it was Van Halen," Loxy said.

"We really should be going now," the old man said.

Jon noticed the people in the line were exhausted, even Reese and Mentos seemed drained. Loxy seemed in good spirits, though.

"You okay?" Jon asked.

"Yeah. I've been possessed by music before," Loxy said. "Kind of like it."

"Right?" Jon said. "See you in a few."

Upon reentering the path, Jon came upon Miki and Maki, standing exactly where he had left them. He approached them, curious.

"Oh, it's so nice to see you again," Miki said.

"We're so glad to see such devotion to the path," Maki said. "Let nature guide you."

"You're just going to stand her until I finish?" Jon asked.

"It's our way," they assured him.

Jon continued on, but this time took the alternate path. Again, a trainer leaped out of the bushes to confront him. And again, he was startled.

"Don't do that!" Jon complained.

“Thought you could avoid me, eh? I am Beauty!” she announced.

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “Weren’t you on the other side?”

“That’s my sister. We play both sides,” Beauty said.

“Ummm, okay.... Wait wait wait, why would your parents name you the same name?”

Jon asked.

“Why wouldn’t they? I am a beauty, she’s a beauty, wouldn’t you want to be a beauty, too?” Beauty said, sing-songy fashion.

“I feel more beast. Wait wait wait, but, how do they tell you apart?” Jon asked.

Beauty leaned in close, as if to deliver a secret. “I am more beautiful than she,” she said.

“You look exactly the same!” Jon said.

“Oh! My feelings are hurt,” Beauty said. “Prepare to battle!”

Introducing the next montage of battles and chores, Herald by Jimmy Durante’s “Inky Dinky Do.” As Jon cleaned the pool, Gardevoir swam. When she emerged from the pool, it looked extremely similar to a scene from another movie with Phoebe Cates, water dripping off in slow motion as she swung her hair. Also, the sun seemed much brighter at that particular moment. Beauty slapped the back of Jon’s head to get him focused back on completing chores. When he finally defeated Beauty, he found that she had nothing useful to impart as he continued his journey.

The next trainer Jon encountered was visible, sitting crisscross apple sauce at the end of the path. She was picking up flowers from a large basket on her right, sniffing them, and then placing them in one of the several baskets on her left. He saw no way to get around her and so simply approached and introduced himself.

“Very nice to meet you,” she said. “I am Jr. Trainer.”

“That’s your name or your title?” Jon asked.

“What an interesting question,” Jr. said, thinking about it. She seemed in a daze, remembered she had flower, forgot what basket to put it in, smelled it again, and then put it in the box with the same color flower. “I think my Spirit Guide is waiting till I do something interesting before she gives me a name. Aww, but what’s in a name? Would you like to know a secret?”

“Um, if I know, will it continue to be a secret?” Jon asked.

“Oh,” Jr. said, thinking about it. “I hadn’t thought of that. You’re really smart. Would you like to sleep with me?”

“What?” Jon asked.

“I like taking a nap out in nature, especially with someone so smart,” Jr. said. She handed him a flower. “Maybe some of your smart would rub off on me, or our children would be smart. You should smell this.”

“Um, thank you,” Jon said, holding the flower, but not smelling it.

“Would you like to hear my secret?” Jr. said.

“Are you sure?” Jon asked.

“Yes. So here it is: Growing up, I didn’t really want to be a trainer, but I felt compelled by an outside agency,” Jr. said. “When I finally surrendered to the will of my Spirit Guide, my life improved, and I experienced much more success. And now, here I am on the path, helping others reach nirvana through immersion with nature. Would you like to become one with nature by becoming one with me?”

Jon sorted that. He wanted to ask her how many flower she had been sniffing. “Aren’t we already one with nature, by definition?”

“Oh,” Jr. said. “I guess we are, even if you are from the paradigm of being at war with nature, you are still part of nature. Maybe struggling with nature is really a struggle with self, and we emerge like the Caterpie from the Metapod into a glorious angel like creature.”

“Would you like to battle now?” Jon asked, speeding things along.

“Oh! I would never do that,” Jr. Trainer said. “I am all about peace and love.”

“Um, so, I can just go by you?” Jon asked.

“Oh, no,” Jr. said. “No. Just a moment.”

Jr. stood, pulled a flower from her purse and inhaled deeply. She put the flower back in her purse, gave a finger to indicate wait a second, then suddenly went stiff, arms outstretched, and then she rose from the ground, her head tilted back, and her back arching as if her heart was trying to escape through her breast, pushing them up and out. Her dress flared, and when she stopped spinning, she was grounded and dressed in a white one piece dress with gold trim and a gold belt, and looked a lot like Almighty Isis. Her eyes were much livelier, and her hands went to her hip.

“So, you came to battle, my nature loving friend,” she said.

“Jr.?” Jon asked.

“Jr.! Do I look like Jr.?” she asked.

“Um, a little,” Jon said.

She drew in closer to Jon, smelling his breath. “There’s a hint of flowers. Did you sleep with my younger self?”

“Eh?” Jon asked.

“I am Cool Trainer, the future version of Jr.,” Cool Trainer. “Which means, if you slept with her, you have to sleep with me.”

“But if I slept with her, and you are her, doesn’t that mean I did sleep with you?” Jon asked.

“Don’t try to trick me with your sorcerer’s words, Sir,” Cool Trainer said. “I am one with nature. Do you wish to join with me? Together, we might be able to take over the gym!”

“I don’t think I am ready for that kind of commitment,” Jon said. “I am just kind of starting out on this path.”

“Very well then, you leave me little choice. You shall learn a truth about nature: she has two faces, peace and love and war and struggle,” Cool Trainer said. “Let’s battle!”

Not surprisingly, the battle was over fairly quickly. Cool Trainer looked absolutely stunning in her victory, and Jon seems resigned to do more chores.

“So, what would like me do?” Jon asked.

“Oh, I think I can figure something out,” Cool Trainer said, and tackled him to the ground.

A trail end of Inka Dinky Doo emerged, as an eager wrestling became ‘accidental’ intimacy; at least that is the way Cool wanted to play it, before escalating her energy to the point that Jon traveled.

Jon found himself in a white space, an Egyptian Queen, or goddess on a throne, with Pokémon serving her, holding trays with drink and nourishment, and or fanning her. One prominent Growlithe lay at her feet. Her Ebony skin was so dark, he wasn’t sure if she were a real person or statue until she smiled. Gold paint around her eyes moved.

“I know you, don’t I?” Jon asked.

“No matter how far from home you tarry, no matter how many lives you live, you will always remember me,” she said. “I am your primary guide, your Goddess, Isis.”

“Black Isis?” Jon asked.

“I am sure we’ve gone over that somewhere,” Isis said. “Care to rehash.”

“No, Mam,” Jon said. “It’s most likely none of the old gods and goddesses were white.”

“Thank you!” Isis said. “Most of us aren’t even human, you just relate better when you see us as yourselves.”

“Oh, that makes sense,” Jon said. “Why am I here?”

“To prepare you to receive your message,” Isis said.

“What message?” Jon said.

“All in good time, my love,” Isis said.

“You love me?” Jon asked.

“With all my heart,” Isis said.

“But I am unworthy,” Jon said.

Isis stood approaching, and as she approached, she got larger, so that when she arrived and knelt down to hug Jon, it was like an adult grabbing up a child, or giantess, holding a normal size man. “By definition, no one is, or everyone is, that is all,” she said.

And then Jon was back with Cool Trainer, only Joy was there, too.

“Oh, thank Pokémon, I thought I had killed you,” Cool Trainer.

“See, just because they’re old, doesn’t mean they will die during training,” Joy said.

“We weren’t really...” Jon began.

“Everything is training!” Cool Trainer interrupted.

“Oh, yeah, training,” Jon said. “Heavy training.”

“Oh! I am not heavy,” Cool Trainer said.

Jon and Joy went back to the Pokémon center together to heal his brood up and she sent him back with a kiss. “See you in a bit,” Joy said, waving from the door. As he returned to the gym, Loxy waved him over and he stopped to give her hug.

“You doing okay?” Loxy asked.

“Great,” Jon said.

Reese seemed suspicious. “You actually look great.”

“Yeah, especially for someone who is getting beat a lot,” Mentos said.

“Are you sure you’re just training Pokémon?” Reese asked.

Jon looked to Loxy and she seemed to be amused. "Sometimes, even trainers need to practice," Loxy said, secretly telling Jon he was safe.

"Yeah, Cool Trainer was telling me that female trainers have a difficult time finding partners because they're so focused on Pokémon that they really don't have time to sustain a relationship. That, and they're so good the fellows they like just don't believe they'd be interested in someone of a lesser level," Jon said. "It seems kind of sad how everyone is trying to get to a higher level so that they can be wanted, only to find that the higher they are, the fewer options there are, but by the time you realize that, you're so into leveling that that becomes your thing."

"Just part of the world we live in," Loxy said.

"Well, when I catch up to you, I hope we always level up together," Jon said.

"We can certainly try," Loxy said.

"Umph," Reese said. "And what about me?"

"Maybe we can all level together," Jon said.

"Are you guys talking code again?" Mentos said.

"No," Reese said.

"Maybe," Loxy said.

Jon returned to the gym, passing the old man as he held the door open, past Miki and Maki, went the wrong way and had to battle with the other Beauty, actually won, and then moved on in to find Jr. in her lotus position, sorting flowers by smell, which only now occurred to him, even though he had observed the fact earlier, that each of the other baskets held only flowers of the same color. He wondered why she wasn't sorting simply by color. She looked up after inhaling a flower deeply. Her hair was long, and her dress was a one piece, yellow with floral arrangement, and a head band of flowers.

"Hello, again, Jon," Jr. T said.

"Jr.," Jon said.

"How was your communion with spirit?" Jr. T asked.

"Sorry?" Jon asked.

"You did meet with your Spirit Guide, didn't you?" Jr. Asked.

"Oh, wow. You know about that?" Jon asked.

“Contrary to popular belief, I do know some things,” Jr. Said. “Would you like to sleep with me now?”

“Excuse me?” Jon said.

“Take a nap? Rest is just as important as nutrition and exercise, and especially healthy after that special kind of training, which tends to lead to more special training sessions,” Jr. said, opening a path through the bushes behind her to reveal a private garden.

Jr. T invited Jon in and led him to a picnic blanket where she proceeded to lay down. Again, as he entered, he heard those three ‘pure imagination’ notes. Jr. T took his hand and pulled him inside, and the bushes closed revealing no seam. It was a perfect, hidden paradise. She pulled him to the blanket, going to her knees. She patted the ground beside her and he lay down on the blanket with her. She scooted over till their sides were touching, and lay next to him. She held a flower in her hands over her stomach, death pose, which is Jon’s favorite Yoga position.

“Isn’t the sky absolutely lovely today?” Jr. T asked.

“I am really confused,” Jon said.

She rolled over on her side, offering her flower to him. “You should smell this. It unlocks clarity.”

“Unlocks?” Jon asked.

“Sure,” Jr. T said. “Everyone on the path comes across a closed gate of some sorts. Sometimes you need find the gate, and sometimes you need to unlock the gate, sometimes you just got to push through and see where you are. It all sort of depends on where you are on the path. We get so entrenched in the valleys that we forget to look up. Only from the mountain looking down, can one see that they were never really stuck, that paths are abundant and all points are connected.”

“Oh,” Jon said. “That sounds profound.”

“You sound surprised,” Jr. T said.

“Well, that’s sort of where my confusion comes in,” Jon said. “I keep thinking you’re a space cadet and yet, you consistently amaze me with some fairly complex insight.”

“Oh, that’s kind,” Jr. T said. “How did we get here?”

“Here in your secret garden?” Jon asked.

“No, silly. Oh! I love the way your eyes reflect the sky,” Jr. T said. “Oh, I said the sky was lovely and you said you were confused.”

“Oh, yeah, that reminds me, aren’t we in a gym?” Jon asked.

“If you’re going to excel at training, you must learn to see beyond the struggles of the gym. Beyond the clouds the skies are always blue,” Jr. T said, brushing his face with the flower.

“See, there you go again,” Jon said, yawning into it. “OMG, did you drug me?”

“How do mean?” Jr. T asked, brushing the flower across his lip, by his nose.

“I feel suddenly very peaceful,” Jon said.

“Oh, yay,” Jr. T said. “It works on you to.”

“What does?” Jon asked.

“Everything,” Jr. T said. “My special space, my flowers, me. Jon, everything around you is a drug. Coffee, tea, me. Everything we see is an aphrodisiac. Also, you don’t see everything you actually see. These flower colors are much more complex than the human eye can take in, so you can’t put them in the same box by their looks alone. Everything you hear moves you. Every sound is a shape, a four dimensional object. Every medium through which a sound propagates produces a different shape, a different pattern. It’s why sounds, and words, and music, is so important. It doesn’t just reflect who you are, it changes who you are. Everything you taste and smell opens something or closes something. The flowers, the sky, the forest, the grass, the foods, the air, chocolate, everything has a profound effect on us. Clearly, I am having an effect on you, just as you are on me. Every smell has a shape to it. Every taste unlocks a door. With your permission, I would like to unlock you and go inside.”

“Okay,” Jon said.

“Are you sure?” Jr. T asked. “Once we tangle, we can’t be untangled. We create a new molecule, a new fragrance, and provide the Universe and Nature a new tangential path for lightening to reach new places.”

“Well, I am not sure about all of that, but you did mention songs opening things, and I suddenly remembered this one song, which seem amazingly fitting,” Jon said. “And so, if you have a brand new pair of roller skates, I have brand a new key.”

She turned her head as if hearing something. “I kind of like that,” Jr. T said. “Let’s travel.”

Battling Junior and Cool took a little longer, due to having some incentive to not really win. Unfortunately, because of that, training became more relaxed, more fun, and the learning curve increased subtly until there was no way to not win, and he seemed suddenly sad. Depending on which angle, or which eye he used, he saw Jr. or Cool, and they were both touching him fondly, trying to ease his sadness.

“This is the way of things, my friend,” they said, their voices over lapping. “A season for us, which will be remembered and passed down through all the ages of me. To everything, turn, turn, turn...” They each handed him a flower.

Jon handed these to Gardevoir. Jr. and Cool seemed pleased with this choice, and one flower went in her hair, and the other in her hand. They all hugged, and Jon and Gardevoir proceeded to the next station.

They came across a barrier of wheat, so tall one couldn't see over it, and so thick, it looked impossible to penetrate, and looking in either direction, it seemed endless. He heard Jr.'s voice saying, sometimes you must just push through. Jon took Gardevoir's hand and proceeded in to the wheat, and she followed. In the thick of it, light flashed in from the tussle of plants, and it felt as if they were being cleaned, like walking through a car wash. They emerged into a clearing, sucking in air as if they had been holding their breath. They found Erika sitting on the floor, in what appeared to be an open field, a single tree near her, and beyond more fields of wheat. Her orange kimono spread out on the grass covered floor, making her appear as if she were island rising from the ground. She was folding flowers into the shapes of Pokémon.

“Please, come and sit with me,” Erika said, without looking up.

They approached and sat quietly, still holding hands, waiting for her to address them, as she seemed like royalty and that waiting was appropriate, maybe even a test. Her dress fanned out about her, whereas Gardevoir's dress, if it was a dress, was somehow shorter, and her legs and knees were visible.

Without looking up, she asked: “did you ever read the book ‘Molecules of Pokémon,’ by Candice Pert?”

“No, I can't say that I have,” Jon said.

“Every scent you have smelled, that is an emotion, and emotions can be represented by Pokémon,” Erika said. She finished the intricate folds of her miniature, flower version of Gardevoir, and handed it to her.

“I have seen no Gardevoir of your equal,” Erika said. It was more than kindness; it was an assessment from her penetrating eyes. “Part of your beauty and power stems from the fact you have paired yourself with a trainer who holds more love than he recognizes. As with all humans, though, he carries doubt and fear. Should you experience doubt, know this was given to you. You need not carry it further; it was a kindness to channel it at all, dissipating it from its source, but it was an act of love to transmute it back into light. Should his doubt be too much, hold this small token and remember who you are, where you come from, and you, and all who you love, shall be restored.”

Gardevoir accepted and bowed. She turned to Jon, asking permission to go to her Poké ball home, to store her gifts there. Jon, as always, was agreeable, seeing no reason to block his companions from going to their safe place if they so wanted. He wished his safe place was as easy to get to.

“You are very kind to those who travel with you,” Erika said.

“I try to treat others as I want to be treated, but I sometimes forget,” Jon admitted.

Erika didn't comment with words, or even facial expressions. She delicately stirred the air over the marble dish beside her, inhaling it as if there was smokes or scents only she could discern. The dish itself was white marble, like a bird bath, and inside was water, and on the surface of the water was a single blade of grass, centered, holding true north/south alignment floating. She lightly tapped the water, sending ripples that stirred the blade of grass off center, and it slowly oscillated back to the position it was compelled to hold. Erika nodded, satisfied, and then met Jon's eyes for the first time.

“It amazes me how with every coupling, the grass alters ever so slightly,” Erika whispered. “Alone, I get one direction, with another, I get deviation, and with you... I have never seen this path open to me before.”

Her eyes seemed like worlds in and of themselves. It was like looking down on twin, earth like planets, but specifically, looking down directly over the north or south pole. Indeed, he intuitively made the connection that her right eye was the north pole and the left eye was the south pole. He was so mesmerized by her eyes that he failed to realize he had leaned into her, almost in kissing distance, and might have had she not brought a single finger directly to his lip, blocking, and gently returning him to where he was. He suspected if her finger hadn't blocked,

or the lips hadn't held him, he might have fallen into her inner world, and he would have done so with contentment, even if he should never return.

"Long have I watched you," Erika said.

"You mean like, since I began training in your gym?" Jon asked.

Erika seemed amused. "Even longer than that. Longer than your present life is long," she said.

"How is that even possible?" Jon asked.

"When you see with the heart, all things are knowable," Erika said.

"Please, don't tell me I am the one," Jon said. "I don't want to be Neo, or any hero of the like."

Erika covered her mouth with a hand, gently filtering the giggle that spilled out through her fingers. "Oh, my true friend, though you are indeed special to me, I did not mean to imply that only you are called. All beings are chosen. We are all called all the time. This is our nature. It is written into our very essence while we are on this plane. A planet is just a plane with a cross at the end, the cross representing where you are, and a plane, well, that is just the plan you're following for your own individual evolution. If you're on the planet, you're on the plane, following the plan, which means you are chosen for a mission by definition."

Jon seemed confused, but she touched his forehead and his brow softened, the lines faded.

"To heal the child within, you must get out of your head and into your heart, then descend to the root chakra, and slip back into the earth, into nature," Erika said. "Only when you connect with all that is, will you fully understand your purpose."

Jon struggled to sort that, grabbing onto the word mission like a life raft. "What is my purpose?"

"I cannot answer that for you," Erika said. One of the storm clouds in her left eye sparked a tiny lightning. Was this the sparkle in the eye he had sometimes read about?

"But if I don't know my purpose, how can I accomplish it?" Jon asked.

"It is not necessary for you to know your mission to accomplish it," Erika said. "In fact, sometimes knowing can be a hindrance. A tree only needs to know it must reach up, branch out, all else is simply trust. Trust that the sun will do its part, the rain will do its part, the squirrels will do theirs. No one is an island, alone, we rise and fall together."

"But..."

Erika touched his lips to bring silence, instilling peace. “There is the you, the conscious you in the now, a small glittering of light on the top of an ice berg, not the iceberg, just the spark on top of the iceberg. The unconscious you, the iceberg itself, the one that reads the plan and keeps you afloat, it knows your purpose. And the waters of life that sustain the conscious you and the unconscious you, it knows something even greater than what the two of you together knows. I do not need to know where the waters are going to know that I will be delivered in good time to that place I need to be. In this there is a letting go and trusting nature.”

“Please,” Jon said. “This can’t be true.”

Erika was not disgruntled by her student’s protest. She had heard it all before. She was once where he is now, and simply bowed. “Please, enlighten me.”

“Consider the parable of the man who dropped seed on the way side. If seed falls on a hard, rocky place, it will struggle, fail to thrive, fail to be all it can be, so trusting nature to run its course hardly seems like a reasonable philosophy,” Jon said.

Erika nodded. “I love it. Thank you. Now, empty your cup and let me draw the deeper water,” she said. She waited until Jon indicated he was ready to continue. “If seed sprouted on a hard rocky place, then life has taken a foothold. Perhaps it does fail to thrive, but maybe its mission was just to forge the new path. Roads, sidewalks, driveways, even the hardest of hearts will all crumble to nature as she prepares the world for what is to come. We are the seeds that will take nature to the stars and beyond. Contained within us is everything that came before. That is also our nature.”

“If we don’t destroy ourselves,” Jon mumbled.

“If humanity is to survive its nature, it must understand and cultivate Pokémon nature. You come from a world of false conservation, increasing complexity of regulations, of hoarding and fear,” Erika said. “You believe you are at war with nature, but in truth, you are struggling with yourself, and in your internal wrestling, you have projected evil upon nature. Nature abhors control. Your world dams rivers and culls herds all in the name of protecting nature, but in doing so, it is you who have created the droughts and the deserts. And yet, that does not mean we should not help nature. If your world knew just how hungry it would be, everyone would be planting pecan trees in their front yard, along the streets and sidewalks, in all the towns and parks and Universities.”

“Exactly, we are destroying the world and ourselves in the process, which is against nature,” Jon said.

“You cannot destroy that which you did not create,” Erika said. “That, too, is a fear based philosophy designed to control and regulate the masses.”

“I guarantee you, if we set off all the nukes, we’d kill the planet,” Jon said.

“No. Your planet has been through more severe destruction than anything humans could ever do. Could you remove humans from earth? Sure. But you will never stop life. Something will always survive. Something will always evolve. There was always something and there will always be something. The question is, will you be part of that something? How will you contribute physically, emotionally, spiritually? Just the fact that humans are on this planet, and on others, I think should relieve you of any such fears. If you can imagine it, then you have touched distant shores and left footprints. You always take something, you always leave something. That is the way of things. Humans will be a part of something, at least for now, in some form, until we are not, which could be death or evolution. Nature is not static. It always moving, cycling, changing.”

“Human could de-evolve, too,” Jon agreed.

Erika smiled. “No, that, too, is a fear based philosophy, a distraction from your true nature. Evolution is merely change, there is no specific directional path to evolution. You simply go where the waters take you.”

“I am not so sure about all of this,” Jon said.

“Consider this blade of grass,” Erika said, indicating the bird bath oracle of divining waters. “All the Universe is contained within it. It is supported by the waters, stirred by the air, and touched by invisible forces. Even without touching it, you are touching it, I am touching it, and it has become our compass, our divining rod, the key to the Ouija Board. Understand this, and you will understand yourself.”

“That sounds very Whitmanish of you,” Jon said.

“Or Pokémonish,” Erika said. “Look, Jon, if you want to know how to proceed, you only need to recall the nursery rhyme ‘Row Row Row your Pokémon.’”

“You mean row row row your boat,” Jon corrected.

“The boat is implied. You’re in a boat with your Pokemon,” Erika said. “These are the passengers who have joined with you on your mission of discovery. What do you do? You row

your Pokémon. Not your mother's Pokémon. Not your friend's Pokémon. Not your brother's Pokémon. How do you row? Gently. You don't splash and get water in other people's eye. You don't make waves that overturn other people's boats. In which direction to you go? Downstream. The stream represents time. You cannot resist the flow of time, you can't row fast enough to go backwards in time. Water flows downhill. At best, you hold your position relative to the outside land for a moment, or maybe relative to another rower, but eventually, the river is going to take you."

"Where is it taking us?" Jon asked.

"Where we need to be," Erika said.

"I am afraid," Jon said.

"I know," Erika said. "The world you come from is full of control, full of deceit and treachery. A few people control the masses for their own perceived gain, and in doing so they have nothing, know nothing, and have hoodwinked everyone else that they must travel the same path of emptiness, having them believe they have no power of their own. They attempted to box in nature to maximize their return, creating an era of diminishing return, but nature will not be controlled. Nature will be plentiful, and if you block all the streams, the pressure to increase will switch to whatever paths are available, in your case, nature's need to make surplus has resulted in more humans, so much so now that the few in control believe it is time to cull the human population, because they see what is ahead, a time of no control."

"You don't think there are too many humans on my planet?" Jon asked.

"I do not," Erika said. "There is an abundance of space and places to go, and no shortage of things to grow. It is not about population, but about using resources in a way that helps expand boundaries. Look at my wheat fields. Every single wheat plant itself produces a thousand seeds, enough to replant and feed all of the people and Pokémon on this world and others. Consider any plant or animal, and you will see it is the nature of all things to produce in abundance, and to coexist in this abundance, and to continue to expand outwards. Consider an apple tree. How many fruit is produced, how many seeds are produced, and how many of those actually become apple trees. You, my true friend, are an apple. You are this blade of grass. You have fallen exactly to the very precise place you need to be, either to nourish someone else's spirit, or to sprout and soften the hard and rocky places for those who will come after, or to become a tree in

and of yourself, and bring forth your own generations. All of these paths are a service to nature. This is the true path, from the metaphor of nature.”

“You make it sound better than my experience would have me believe,” Jon said. “My life before training was not pleasant.”

“Your life before training was still training, and if you learned anything from my fellow colleagues and trainers, nature has two faces, peace and aggression,” Erika said.

“I don’t like the aggression part,” Jon said.

“I know,” Erika said. “That is because you have experienced the wrong kind of aggression. There is positive aggression. A mother Ursaring protecting its young, for example. But you know this. You will hold your ground, which is brave, and you will fight, but only to hold your own and protect those you love, not to destroy. Even in your victories with my trainers, there was a kindness; you exercised restraint. You grew at a reasonable pace. That is why I consider you my true friend, and why I have decided you need not battle me. You have learned all that my gym can teach you.”

“What?” Jon said, protesting. “That can’t be all. That’s too easy.”

“Your journey here was hardly easy,” Erika said. “It was a long and crooked path, across worlds, through time and space.”

“But...”

“Photons always fall where they need to be,” Erika said.

“I thought you said apples,” Jon corrected.

“Apples, oranges, photons,” Erika said. “They’re all the same. The whole Universe is a double slit experiment, sorting wave and frequency. Don’t be bothered by the fact that you’re an outlier, on the far side of the bell curve, because, where you have landed is where the hard place is being prepared for future residence, establishing a whole new frequency, with its own spectral identification pattern.”

“What?” Jon asked.

Erika leaned over, opened his coat, and pinned her Rainbow Badge on the inside. The significant feature of the badge was a rainbow lightning strike. It reminded him of the primary symbol used throughout the movie ‘Joe versus the Volcano.’ The jagged path that Joe took to work, the logo of his employer, the pattern in the broken wall, the pattern of the lightening that sunk the boat, the path up the volcano: the path was always there, imbedded in all that is and

ever was and ever will be. “You have battled enough today, my true friend. My advice to you is that you visit our town’s library and level up on some knowledge. Meanwhile, I will have my trainers focus on your friends.”

“Oh, I don’t think the folks in line are going to like hearing that,” Jon said.

“Just softening the hard places, and giving seedlings time to germinate,” Erika said.

“Travel Light, my true friend.”

Chapter 10

As Jon headed around the gym towards his friends, a girl passed, handing him a flyer to a Pokémon Ball being held that night at the town square. He wasn't sure at first if she meant a Pokémon ball or a Poké ball, but she cleared it in his head as she continued to ramble on about the night's festivities. She talked about how there would be free items and a chance to win prizes and show off Pokémon. There was to be food and Pokémon bands and all kinds of fun things to do. He thanked her for the flyer and caught up to his friends where he informed them that they were to proceed straight way to the gym, that they were passing to the front of the cue. The line moaned!

"The sooner they get through, the sooner next up is next," Jon said. "When you're finished, you'll find me at the library."

"Wait wait wait," Mentos said. "You're done?"

"Yep!" Jon said.

"Prove it," Mentos said. "Show me the badge."

"No," Jon said.

"But I want to see it, too," Reese said.

"I don't want to be known by my badges," Jon said. "I will be walking a different path."

"But if you've earned, you should show it," Mentos said.

"Knowledge for the love knowledge, skill for the love of skill," Loxy said. "I wish to walk your path of confidence without arrogance, peace through humility, allowing love to be over all things."

"Screw that," Mentos said. "I am going to be the best trainer that ever was and people will remember me."

Jon bowed. "I will support you in your path," Jon said.

"See you at the library, loser," Mentos said.

Loxy and Reese both touched Jon, then proceeded to the front of the line where the old man was coming out to collect them. Jon, meanwhile, found his way to the library, without the help of Siri. As he entered, he was blocked by a beautiful woman, wearing smart glasses, behind the front desk. Her hair was pinned into a bun and he wanted to undo it and watch it fall.

"May I help you?" she asked.

“Um, wow, you’re like the smartest, beautiful lady librarian I have ever seen,” Jon said.

“You seem surprised that intelligence and beauty and librarian might go together,” she said.

“I guess I thought it would be an older, wiser woman,” Jon said.

“Oh, well, I suppose the next time you see me I could be an older, wiser woman, or a younger, wiser woman,” she said. “Kind of depends on which section of the library I am in, and or, what I am reading. Some things can really age you, and then there are others that take you to the brink rebirth.”

“Oh, I want to read that one,” Jon said.

“All in good time,” she said. “May I see your card?”

“I don’t have one,” Jon said.

“How can you not have a library card?” she asked, shocked.

“Well, um, my family of origin doesn’t believe in education and reading in general, and well, I am kind of new here, and probably can’t qualify due to insufficient proof of residence.”

“What’s your name?” she asked.

“Jon Harister,” he said.

“And, are you actually standing before me in my library?” she asked.

“I believe so,” Jon admitted.

“You believe so? You doubt your presence here?” she asked.

“Well, I have still not ruled out the possibility that I am dreaming,” Jon said.

“Well, if you are dreaming that you’re here, then I will accept that as the same as being here, and so, here is a library card, for Jon Harister, issued by Marian,” she said, handing him a card.

“Wow,” Jon said, accepting and reading the card. “Lady Librarian...”

“Marian,” Marian corrected.

Jon met her eyes. “I so want to sing you a song,” Jon said.

“Not in the library,” Marian said.

“But I think I love you, madly, badly, Lady Librarian, Marian,” Jon said.

“I assure you, Sir, I have heard that one before, and have had my share of music men and Pokémon trainers. Oh, all the books that have come and gone past my shelves, and I have had several favorites, which I intend to revisit, on some cold, rainy day, in front of a warm fire, but

my heart is not a book to be checked out, Sir,” Marian said. “And I am not looking to add a new chapter, or page, or paragraph, or even a nicely written phrase. I’m sure you would make a fine husband, but my first and last love is the library, to which I have dedicated my entire life.”

“So, hypothetically, not just me being doggedly persistent until I wear you thin and you surrender out of sheer exhaustion, if a fellow was interested and wanted to know you, how might he begin?”

Marian smiled. She motioned with her finger for Jon to follow her. It was seriously sexy gesture that was impossible not to obey. Her leading him was fairly seductive in and of itself, with a swinging of hips, and the shy leaning against the end of a shelf as she looked to see if he was still following, only to turn a way, raising leg as if dancing to a song, which actually had him believing she had changed her mind, taking him to an isolated part of the library where something dangerously sexy might occur. Once in the corner between a wall shelf and a running shelf, she drew intimately close, even touched the collar of his jacket, as if she might suddenly lean in and kiss him. This was it, he was certain as she smiled deeply into him and he inhaled, the keys tumbling against tumblers in the promise of unlocking something grand...

“This is 000001, of the Dewey Decimal System,” Marian said, a sensual whisper. “If you read everything between here and 99999.1, you will be very close to knowing the real me.”

“That could take decades!” Jon said, swallowing.

“Depends on how fast a reader you are, I guess. You might say, I am real page turner,” Marian said. She seemed suddenly younger. “No skimming, no browsing. I will be checking your library card, even checking it twice, and I will know if you read anything naughty or nice.”

“You’re rhyming,” Jon said.

“Yeah, we’re very close to the children’s section,” Marian said.

“I love Doctor Seuss,” Jon admitted.

“Me, too! I wouldn’t be surprised if some of his characters were Pokémon before there was even a Pokémon,” Marian said.

“Can you show me the biology sextion, I mean, section,” Jon said.

Marian patted his face, gently. “Oh, I am suddenly way too young to be in that section with you. Catch me when I am older. Forgive me, got to get back to the front desk. Explore, have fun, and don’t read anything I wouldn’t read.”

“What wouldn’t you read?” Jon asked.

“Great question. Ask me when I am older and I have a greater statistical pool from which to respond,” Marian said. She kissed him lightly and headed away.

As he wondered, he found a shelf that contained the most popular fiction presently, based on the number of times it was checked out. The titles he browsed included: ‘Papa was a Pokémon,’ Alyene Porter, ‘Pokémon Games,’ Tom Clancy. “Pokémon it Forward,’ by Catherine Hyde, “Pokémon Brief,” Jon Grisham, ‘Pokémon Cemetery,” Stephen King, “Peter Pokémon,’ J Barrie, ‘Pokémon Express,” Chris Van Allsburg, ‘The Pokémon Adventure,” Paul Gallico, “The Pokémonic Man,” Isaac Asimov, ‘Pokémon: a Romance,’ A S Byatt, ‘Pokémon from the Edge,’ Carrie Fisher, ‘The Pokémon Always Rings Twice,’ James Cain, and the remaining had several copies: ‘Pride and Pokémon,’ Jane Austen, ‘the Pokémon Bride,” William Goldman, ‘the Pokémon diaries,’ Meg Cabot, and ‘the Pokémon Masters’ Robert Heinlein. Jon nearly took the book by Larry Niven, ‘The Pokémon in God’s Eye.’

He wandered a little past the most popular reads, and found a book a book slightly out of alignment with the others, and as he pushed it in to be even, he read the title. ‘the many Earths, many Pokémon theory; living in a pixelated Universe comprised of a living, 8 dimensional quasi-crystal.’ He pulled the book back out and took it to a table and chairs. The inside of the books might as well have been Japanese, or Egyptian Hieroglyphics, because he couldn’t make out heads or tails. He was so baffled he returned to the cover to confirm he was seeing that in English. He returned to the inside of the book. The first page, which was the last page, because it was written by a Japanese author, had a picture of a Tetrahedron. He recognized one symbol, the signature for a Planck length. He didn’t know how he knew that and the more he stared at the book, the harder it became to see, because the math was giving him a headache. He had to look away from the book.

There was a young lady standing in his line a sight, just on the other side of the table he was occupying. She was perhaps still in her teens, but past 22 would be a stretch. She was the darkest person he ever recalled meeting, her hair braided into dreads, dreads of many colors, like snow cone advert. Her dress was a one piece, landing mid thighs, and it was mostly white. There were lines that traced patterns on her dress, and the sleeves were pastel blue. She also wore tights, bluish green pastel, with tennis shoes. Beside her, and slightly behind, was a yellow Pokémon with a white fluffy neck, like a lion’s mane, and it was pointing at him; the hand with which it pointed held a pendulum.

“Are you sure?” she asked. The pendulum spun clockwise, providing her with a ‘yes’ response. She turned her eyes back to Jon. “My name is Aya. I am an Akan.”

“Is that a type of Pokémon?” Jon asked.

“Not an Ekans, an Akan,” Aya said.

“I am confused,” Jon said.

“Akan is the specific Earth culture I identify with,” Aya said.

“You’re from Earth?!” Jon asked, happy to meet fellow Earthling. “Nice to meet you.”

“I am not from Earth,” Aya said.

“I am confused again,” Jon said.

“My spirit guide is from Ghana, but I am from here,” Aya said. “They say if you spend enough time listening to your Spirit Guide, you begin to resemble them, but I have also heard that about spouses, pets, and Pokémon. I think I look like me, not my Spirit Guide, not my Pokémon.”

“Oh,” Jon said, not sure what to say. “What about spouses or pets?”

“I have neither,” Aya said. “I have spent the entirety of my life pursuing the mysteries of the Universe, and today it has led me to you. You will come with me, now.”

“Oh, that’s very kind of you, but I have a headache,” Jon said. “Probably this math book. I wasn’t really expecting math.”

“You will come with me, now, or else,” Aya said, giving a slight motion with her hand.

“What was that?” Jon asked. “Oh! Are you like a Jedi trying to do a mind trick on me?”

Four girls who had been secretly studying Jon in the back ground, put away the books they were pretending to hold, and closed the distance, forming a circle off Aya. The girls looked as if they might be in a Korean all girl band, only one of them was white, but all wore blue shirts, white tennis skirts, and sparkling, skin toned hose.

“Come along quietly,” Aya insisted. “Respect the library.”

Jon considered, biting his lower lip. “This is really weird. I don’t know why I am compelled to resist such a tempting offer, but I am actually going to decline going willingly.”

“Then you leave me no choice,” Aya said. “Hypno, take him down.”

“I don’t think so,” Jon said, pulling the ‘peace’ ball off his belt. “Gardevoir, I choose you.”

Gardevoir appeared, just as four other Pokémon appeared in the library. Librarian Marian began to protest, but the battle had already begun. Jon met his first Pikachu and a lightning strike took him and Gardevoir to their knees. Gardevoir struggled to take Jon's arm, and teleported them both outside the circle, just to the other side of the shelf, where she passed out. He wanted to succumb to exhaustion, too, but he heard one of the girls yell, 'he's over there,' and he got up to run, but not before calling Gardevoir back to her home ball. He turned towards the back exit and found it blocked by one of the opponents and her Pokémon. He turned to go the other way, but was slapped down by the hand on the end of a tail on a purplish monkey type Pokémon, which he would later be informed by Siri, that was Aipom.

As Jon started to get up, two of the girls in tennis skirts took his arms, applying a binding joint lock, which brought them in close to his body, taking him to his knees, but because he continued to resist, they stepped into him, using their legs. A third had an arm around his neck and she, too, wrapped her legs around him, adding her weight to his back so he couldn't get up. Aya and Hypno approached.

"I am sorry," Aya said. "I really don't have time for civilities, but I can't have you fighting us all the way back to base, either. Hypno, help him cooperate."

Hypno approached, holding the pendulum forward. "Hypno" it said, in a hypnotic voice. Jon tried to look away, but the fourth girl leaned into him and her friends, and put her hands on his cheek, and held his face looking forward, while each of her friends with an arm pried open an eye. In any other situation, he might have imagined enjoying this tangling of girls, but he found Hypno fairly disturbing. It reminded him of the 'Goons,' a tall, strong humanoid species that lived on Goon Island, from an episode of Popeye. You couldn't help but stare at its bulbous nose, which meant, at this range of proximity, you were looking at the nose or the left eye or the right eye but never both eyes which in itself was kind of hypnotic, but with the swinging pendulum drawing you back, and its eyes flaring as the pendulum swung, Jon felt fear and had the urgency of wanting to wake from a nightmare.

Out of nowhere, Chester jumped up and nipped at the pendulum, causing Hypno to retreat.

"Unhand my friend, miscreants," Jenny said.

Aya turned to Jenny. "Don't interfere, Jenny," Aya said. "The fate of the world may well rest on what happens here today."

“You are always so dramatic, Aya,” Jenny said. “By now, the library is surrounded, and there is no escaping.”

Aya nodded to one of her colleagues, and she pulled an item out of her pack: the backpack-backup plan; it was half a circle which folded into a full circle. She placed it on the floor in front of Jon. She stepped onto the plate and disappeared, followed by her Pokémon. The other three let Jon out of his bind, recalled their Pokémon, and also stepped up onto the illuminated plate and disappeared. Hypno stepped up towards the plate, holding his hand out towards Jenny, as if creating an invisible barrier that she couldn't penetrate.

“Jon, come with me. Your presence here endangers the world,” Aya said, offering a hand.

“You could have led with that,” Jon said.

“We don't have time for this. Come with me if you wish to survive the storm,” Aya said.

“What storm?” Jon asked.

“They're coming for you,” Aya warned him, retreating closer to the Teleporter pad.

“Who's they?” Jon asked.

“All of them!” Aya said, stepping backwards onto the Teleporter. She disappeared in a flash of lights, much quicker than the transporter on Star Trek. The interesting part was it was like she was turned into a mixture of sparks and streams of light, falling towards the pad, like numbers and letters and symbols raining in the Matrix, only they were not just green, but all the colors in the spectrum.

Hypno continued to point warningly at Jenny, stepped backwards into the pad. Jon was more focused on the operation of the pad this time, whereas previously he was too interested in looking at the abductors. The pad illuminated when Hypno was fully on it, and it disappeared so fast into the pad it was hard to say he saw anything other than streaks of light and particles and symbols raining, twirling, sparking, cyclonic downward drift. It was literally as if the physical matter were nothing more than inconsequential pixels that turned off under the influence of the pad.

Jenny approached the pad with tech of her own, but before she could trace where the pad had sent Aya and her crew, the device shut itself off. She frowned, but then focused on Jon.

“Teleporter tech is getting more and more sophisticated,” Jennifer said, looking him over for injuries. “Are you okay?”

Jon stood up, nodding. “Thanks to you and Chester.”

Marian rushed over and hugged Jon. "I am glad you're not hurt."

"Because..."

"Because no one should be hurt while reading at the library," Marian said. She turned to the mess. "Ah! This is going to take forever to clean up. Excuse me, but my work is never done." She kissed Jon and went to picking up books to shelve, dancing and singing her own little song.

"You want to come back to the station with me and make a report?" Jenny asked, collecting the Teleporter as evidence.

"I wouldn't know what to report," Jon said.

"That you were nearly abducted by group of strange women?" Jenny offered.

"Yeah, that seems totally unbelievable even to me," Jon said.

"I was a witness," Jenny said. "So was Marian."

"To be honest, Jenny. I am a little embarrassed to say anything, much less make report," Jon said.

"Why would you be embarrassed?" Jenny said. "You did nothing wrong."

"Yeah, but, I kind of liked it, and I nearly leveled up," Jon admitted.

"Oh," Jenny said, not sure what to make of the statement. "Well, those things do happen, even when we don't want them, too."

"Really?" Jon asked.

"Oh, sure," Jenny said. "It's why abductions, and some types of physical aggression, can be so confusing to sort out. It's called Stockholm syndrome; basically, you create an affinity for your abductors or a person who might harm you so that you can increase your chances of survival. Would you like to speak to a counselor?"

"Um, no," Jon said. "I think I will just go wait for my friends by the gym."

"You should at least stop and see the nurse," Jenny said. "Come on. Chester and I will walk with you to the Pokémon center."

Together, they headed towards the center. Chester led the way, but then decided he wanted to be held. Jon offered to hold the folded up Teleporter for Jenny so she could hold Chester, as she said she needed to keep it as evidence even though he wasn't reporting a crime. Jon put it in his bag, and when he folded the flap over it and closed the bag, the shape of it seemed to disappear, as if his bag were now empty. He noticed another Jenny, waving at them. He observed a waitress serving customers outside and noted her beauty. It occurred to him that

his Jenny didn't have backup; she was bluffing! He felt as if he were in a Japanese Anime, where everybody was beautiful and bold. As they walked, Jon considered how strange he was. Was he drawn to Jenny, because he was with Jenny? He was absolutely certain he loved Loxy, but here he was with Jenny thinking only of Jenny. He grudgingly admitted that technically he was thinking of Loxy if he was thinking about why he was thinking of Jenny and not Loxy. And then he recalled, when he was with Marian he was thinking of Marian. Fortunately, Jenny wiped that song from his mind, or he might have been still humming it. He actually liked Aya, even had that strange sense he knew her from somewhere else, and her really liked her posse, which, again, got him thinking about how he resisted them, and wondering why. He focused on Jenny, who was gazing at him, as if trying to figure out what he was thinking. He would not resist Jenny. He would do as she directed, and he would tell her anything she wanted to know, like a huge, old flibbertigibbet. He suddenly felt paranoid, as if everyone was watching him the same way he watches everyone else. If he had looked closer, he would have noticed many of the Pokémon in the area were actually watching him. Occasionally, as they passed, one would follow for a pace before being called back by its trainer.

“Do you ever feel like you're being watch?” Jon asked.

“It comes with the Uniform,” Jenny said.

“Jenny,” Jon said, leading with a serious tone. “Why do you suppose I didn't want to go with Aya?”

“I don't know,” Jenny said. “They didn't seem all that nice.”

“They were a bit aggressive, but somehow, I don't think that's why,” Jon said. “Back home, getting beat up by girls who wanted my lunch money was the only affection I ever got. And I always went back for more. Knowing me, I can't imagine me not just following them like a love sick Pokémon chasing Pokémon treats dipped in ketchup.”

“That's really the kind of stuff you sort with a good counselor,” Jenny said.

“Maybe so,” Jon agreed.

“You ever had a counselor?” Jenny asked.

“No. I am afraid of people seeing me that clearly,” Jon said.

“Because?” Jenny said.

“I have a lot of shadows in me,” Jon admitted.

“You can’t have that much darkness without at least a candlelight’s worth of shining somewhere in you,” Jenny said.

Jon smiled. “Thank you for that. Anyway, probably best not to have a counselor. I would probably want to sleep with her, too.”

“Most people want to sleep with their counselors,” Jenny said.

“Really?” Jon asked.

“Oh, sure,” Jenny said. “We are drawn towards people we can be totally open and vulnerable with, especially when that person is nonjudgmental. I am confident that is why I am drawn to you.”

“You’re drawn to me?” Jon asked.

Jenny chuckled. “You seem surprised,” Jenny said, stopping him and touching his face kindly. “Jon, my friend. Those of us who work in law enforcement see some really awful stuff. Every day we put our lives on the line to keep the community safe. Consequently, relationships are difficult for us. We carry our own fears and concerns and biases and the Uniform shapes the way we see the world and sometimes this Uniform seems more real to me than I do to myself. I get lost in here sometimes. But, so far, every time I have been with you, even right now, I feel like I am more than just a caricature of law enforcement. I feel like you see me. I feel like I could tell you anything. I feel like I could just let my hair down and show you my bad side.” She had drawn very close to him.

“You have a bad side?” Jon asked, swallowing.

“Would you like me to show you?” Jenny asked.

Jon nodded. Jenny took him to a secluded little alcove, where she pushed the boundaries of public affection to the point that Jon leveled up. He woke with Jenny and Joy looking down on him, inside the Pokémon Center, on a medical table.

“Ahh, Jon, Jon, Jon,” Joy said.

“You should have told me you pass out on leveling up,” Jenny said. “I would have chosen a more secluded place, so we both could have time to recover together.”

“Um,” Jon began.

“Sometimes they’re speechless for a while after recovery,” Joy explained to Jenny. To Jon, she said: “I took liberty of restoring all your Pokémon while you were out. You should really bring them in for checkups more often.”

Loxy, Reese, and Mentos entered, out of breath. Mentos held up a hand full of balls.

“Quick, Nurse Joy, my Pokémon need you,” Mentos said. “Why are you on the table, Jon?”

“Oh, he’s just recovering,” Joy and Jenny said simultaneously, then they looked at each other, and giggled, covering their mouths.

“From the library?” Reese asked suspiciously, crossing her arms.

“Reading takes a lot of a person,” Jon said, a little defensive.

“And what exactly were you reading?” Loxy asked.

“Well, I did browse through some of the classics, but they really didn’t strike me as racy as I recall hearing,” Jon said.

“You mean like Chaucer, Rabelais, and Balzac?” Loxy asked.

“Oh, I love the Pokémon Tales by Chaucer,” Joy said.

“Oh, and I love Gargantua and Pokémon, by François Rabelais” Jenny said.

“Most of the books do seem to be about Pokémon,” Jon admitted.

“Are there any other kind of books?” Reese asked.

“Bring your Pokémon over here and let’s have a look,” Nurse Joy invited.

Mentos rushed to be first. Reese followed. Loxy lingered.

“You okay?” Loxy asked.

“Yeah,” Jon said. “Not sure about all of this passing out nonsense, but still, I have never been happier.”

Loxy touched his arm kindly. “We all have our Pokémon heels. We’ll get you a medical alert bracelet after we win the gym. It’s shouldn’t take us that much longer”

She kissed him and went to the Pokémon healing station. He watched her go, but became aware of Jenny staring at him.

“You have a good friend in her,” Jenny said. She hugged Jon. “Okay, I got to get back to work. I look forward to seeing you and Loxy at the Poké Ball tonight,” Jenny said.

Chapter 11

The Poké Ball Started at five on the close of the work week and would run the length of the weekend, with all the stores closed so that their employees may participate. Local restaurants participated, some with vendor carts, or some just opening their place of business for free. People arrived from nearby cities, or even further, having trekked for days, or flown in by Pokémon. Apparently, it was a much bigger ado than Jon had anticipated, and suddenly he had an explanation for all the extra Jenny's and Joy's running around. There were kiosks showing off new Poké balls, and offering free samples. Jon was given the last free sample of a 100 percent guaranteed ball. When Mentos got there, the vendor said, "Sorry, try again tomorrow." Mentos was frustrated, but ran to another, more promising, vendor.

Jon was so excited exploring the types of Pokémon balls, that for a while he got separated from his friends and didn't even know it. In his wildest dreams, he wouldn't have imagined so many types of balls. Specialty balls. Dream balls. Beast balls! Heal Balls. Cherish Balls. Luxury balls. He wanted one of everyone, but after paying his friends back out of his winnings, he didn't have that kind of cash, and so he simply had to rely on the chance of a free sample, which usually was a random selection offered randomly.

After filling his eyes with balls, and a reasonable selection of freebies, he found himself sorting crystals and stones and objects that could affect Pokémon in various ways. Jon passed a booth that seemed to resemble a dunking tank. The lady dressed as a mermaid sitting on the ledge above the water called out to him. He paused. She smiled, humming an eerily familiar song, and waved him in closer. He couldn't help but go to her. Her humming was almost magical, and with it directed at him, it was as if only he could hear it. He even checked his environment and found no one else seemed to be hearing her. The water in her tank looked incredibly inviting and he was tempted to jump in it with her. She stirred the waters with her tail, and he suddenly had doubts about whether or not it was an actual suit, as if she were a real mermaid. Could she be a Pokémon? A replica statue of Hans Christian Andersen's 'nymph' sculpted by Edvard Erikson sat near the booth, where nymphets passed out coffee, in cups painted with a mermaid with frizzy hair, dazzled and blown by Pokémon.

"Hi!" she said. "I'm Miranda. And those lovely Pokémon maids over there, well, those are my friends, The Weeki Wachee Mermaids. Would you like some coffee?"

“Hello,” Jon said. “And, no thank you. Coffee makes me sleepy. Do you have any thingamabobs?”

“Oh, I have lots of thingamabobs, but I much prefer being out amongst people, don’t you?” she asked.

“I’m getting used to it,” Jon said. “Well, enjoy your day in the sun.”

“Wait wait wait,” she said, stopping his departure. He paused, curious, waiting. She nodded, leaning a little closer, trying to give him hints, but, if we’ve learned anything about Jon, he can be perversely obtuse at the wrong moments. “Our eyes met.” She stated this as if that was sufficient explanation.

“Um. Oh!” Jon said. “So, we have to battle?”

“Oh, Sir!” she said. “Does this look like a battle booth?!”

“Ummm,” Jon stammered.

“OMG, do I have to spell it out for you?” she asked.

“Um, maybe,” Jon said, a little embarrassed.

“OMG, so many girls are passing you by diverting or lowering their eyes, but I made contact with you, and you feel nothing?” she asked.

“I am feeling a little uncomfortable,” Jon admitted, adjusting his pants.

“Please, tell me you’re not afraid of public affection,” she said.

“Well, I do come from a world where public violence is condone, but if you kiss a girl in the parking lot, people get offended,” Jon said.

“Oh, what a world!” she commiserated. “Well, not here, not in this world. You have finally arrived. This, Sir, is a kissing booth, and you made eye contact, and I expect follow through,” Miranda said.

“How much?”

“How much what?” Miranda asked, incredulously.

“How much money will it cost me?” Jon asked.

“You can’t buy your way out of this!” Miranda said. “You have to kiss me.”

“I don’t have to pay you for that privilege?” Jon asked.

“What kind of mermaid do you think I am?” Miranda demanded.

“I don’t know, we just met, and I’m really confused,” Jon almost wailed.

“How old are you?” Miranda asked.

“I really don’t know at the moment!” Jon cried.

“Aww, come closer, baby,” Miranda insisted. In front of the booth was a stool allowing him to step up to her eye level. “Shh, you’re safe with me.”

“I am?” Jon asked.

“Oh, sure, I will even prevent you from drowning, and if you kiss me right, you earn the chance of making me wet,” Miranda said.

“Uh?”

“If I really like the kiss, you will get two Pokémon balls to throw at the target, and if you dunk me, you win most grandest prize of all,” Miranda said. “OMG, you’re trembling.”

“I think I might prematurely level up,” Jon said.

“Oh, it’s just kiss,” Miranda said.

“Yeah, well, it’s never just a kiss with me,” Jon said.

“Oh, the anticipation value is increasing my wanting,” Miranda said.

They kissed. She stopped the kiss, her hand touching his face, tentatively, as affectionately embracing as a Tentacool. “Anyone ever tell you, you taste like a Pokémon?”

Jon was too dazed to respond.

“Ah, never mind,” she said, returning to the kiss. She had to pause for breath again. “You’re really responsive.” She dived back into the kiss and again was forced to come up for air. “OMG, you’re really good at this.”

“I am feeling really lightheaded,” Jon said.

“Oh, you’re so nice!” Miranda said, kissing him more and leaving lipstick on his face.

“I’m confused why there isn’t a line here,” Jon said.

“Oh, this culture is really peculiar,” Miranda said. “It’s very hard for a mermaid to make a living. Kind of like that series Munster Musume, were monsters have to kidnap men just to get some attention.”

“Oh, I know that one!” Jon said, puzzling it through. “How do I know that one? Never mind, not relevant. But, yeah, that always baffled me. I would so go willing with any female monster wanting that kind of attention.”

“I see! Your level uncomfortableness has increased,” Miranda said, having to lean way over to help him to adjust his pants. She collected two balls from a fish net hanging on the side of her tank. “Here, you’ve earned your chance.”

Jon accepted the balls.

“What do I do with these?” Jon asked.

“They increase the odds of catching water type Pokémon. Go ahead, give it a shot,” Miranda said, pointing at the target.

Jon stepped back and tossed one at the target. He was spot on and dropped the Miranda into her tank. She put her hands against the glass, her hair wild, smiling insanely at him, and then the Pokémon ball captured her, even through the glass walls. Her merry maids rushed him.

“OMG, you caught her!” one said.

“You won the most grandest prize of all!”

“Our love and adoration,” the other said. “And we are much more intense than the Sensational Sisters.”

“I bet you never had groupies before,” another said.

“I am feeling overwhelmed,” Jon said.

“Ahh, and so humble!”

“I guess Miranda’s prediction that she would be owned by a famous trainer, and we would all live at his magical, mystical gym was right after all!” another said.

“You doubted,” she told her friend.

“Yeah, well, after she gave that sword to that Arthur fellow and nothing happened, yeah, kind of had some doubts,” she said.

“Yeah, sometimes she is way too generous in giving away her thingamajigs,” another said.

One of the maids handed Jon the Pokémon ball that had caught Miranda. “This is yours. You should go enjoy the rest of your day, we’ll catch up to you after the fair is over.”

“Yeah, so much coffee to dispense,” the other said.

“Have fun with Miranda,” someone said.

“Yeah, don’t wander too far off the deep end, unless you plan to go diving,” another said.

“And don’t go chasing waterfalls.”

“Bye now!” they all said, giggling and hugging him and sending him on his way.

Jon walked away in a daze, holding the Miranda ball, looking back, the girls winking at him and maintaining eye contact until he was out of eye sight. He connected the ball to his ball belt and wandered back into the thick of the festivities. Confused, he turned to go back and ask a

question, but the mermaid maids were resetting the dunking tank with another Mermaid. Was it a set up? Did he really win a Miranda Mermaid? Were they adopting out mermaids? He must have really won Miranda, because this next mermaid was not as pretty. In fact, he was pretty sure it was male, which was probably a good thing, because otherwise he might just keep coming back in effort to win all the Pokémon mermaids, if there was indeed such a thing. He could see himself with having all the mermaids, a full harem of meramis lounging around a future beach pool. But what did one call a male mermaid? Merman? Merfellow?

Jon found another booth where persons were able to throw a 'ping-pong' size Pokémon ball into a tiny fish bowl to win a miniature Magikarp.

"Yay, you won!" the hostess cheered for a boy, handing him the bowl. "Now, don't over feed him, or you might have supersized Magikarp on your hand."

Jon stopped at the sight of what appeared to be a Native American maid. He had assumed there wouldn't be Native Americans here in this world, and so he drew to a halt partly because of confusion, but also because the young lady reminded him of someone. Her long, dark hair cascaded over her shoulders, and down her back, which blended in nicely with her homemade dress. He felt as if he had known her all his life. Her kiosk offered Apricorns, either freshly picked, cut, and or made into juice. The Apricorns were sorted by colors, with boxes filled to the brim and over flowing. Bags of assorted colors hung from the kiosk.

The young lady was not alone in running the booth. When she noticed Jon had paused and was looking at her, she told her friend she would be stepping away and approached Jon, offering him a sealed vial of concentrated Apricorn juice. Her Zigazoon jumped off the barrel it had been sleeping on and followed her.

"Hello," she said. "I feel compelled to present this to you."

"Thank you," Jon said. "But it may be a wasted gift, as I don't know what to do with it."

"How old are you?" she asked.

"Everyone keeps asking me that," Jon said.

"Well, if it's any consolation, Sir, I don't track my age, either," she said. She placed the vial in his bag. She drew him over to her stand where she collected a bag of Apricorn, holding a full assortment of all the colors. She put this in his bag for him. "You're not alone in your ignorance. It amazes me how the more society thinks it knows, the less it actually does. Did you know you can't step into the same river twice?"

Jon was baffled by her statement. “I feel like I know you. Are you Sacagawea?”

“No,” she said, amused. “But she is one of my sisters. Or a cousin. Depends on your perspective, I guess. My name is Pokémontas. What’s yours?”

“Jon,” said.

She then linked arms with him as if they were old friends reunited. The neighboring booth provided him a sample of bag containing all the possible berries, with instructions not to consume them, but to plant them on his journey so that he and the world may share. He was also encouraged to never consume all the berries in one place, but that if it were necessary, be sure to replant so that the future might derive benefits.

As Pokamontas led him on, her Zigazoon racing ahead, bouncing back, and then off again, she squeezed his arm and brought him closer. “If you don’t mind me saying, I get the sense that you’re lost. Maybe it’s because you don’t have a story of your own. My people have a story that we come from the stars, and wherever we are we are met; nature greets us with abundance. Sure, I sound like Erika, but my people take this philosophy extremely serious. We cultivate the old ways, keeping it alive. Before companies like the Silph began mass producing the modern Pokémon ball, we used Apricorns. But there was time, even before that, when we simply lived in harmony with Pokémon. The first tamed Pokémon was the Trickster. He was causing such mayhem amongst our people that finally we compelled our Shaman to do something. Our great shaman, who was neither chief nor warrior, captured the Trickster in a pinecone, and forever since has this path of Pokémon training been available. Those who came after the Shaman found the Apricorns made it possible for others, non-shamans, to share the path.”

She stopped him on the rise overlooking all of the festivities and the town in one, small direction, while nature was in all other direction. “We believe that everything around us is alive, has a sentient, guiding spirit. The trees, the earth, the water, the skies, everything alive and working in synergistic ways to sustain it all. We all start guiding a single molecule, and as we advance, we are allowed access to greater complexity of atoms, to greater complexity of molecules, to greater numbers of them all in combinations. We all rise together we all fall together. We all evolve together. This planet itself is evolving. People don’t like to hear that, but that is because they lack vision. They’re afraid of change. This moment will not always be this moment.”

Pokémontas stepped into song, basically a Pokémon version of “Color of the Wind,” pulling him along through vortex of dimension of space and time, showing him the world of Pokémon, and how it all was all related and how he fit into the current scheme of things. When it was over he found himself back on the hill, and though the town was there, all the kiosks and tents were there, there were no people, no Pokémon, only plants, and she was kissing him. She ended the kiss.

“Maybe you won’t remember this,” Pokémontas said. “Maybe you won’t remember me. But if you listen to your heart, you will find all the colors you need.”

And then, suddenly, Pokémontas was gone, and he was standing on the hill, people coming and going, everyone there just as they always were. So many people, pushing past him, most diverting their gaze as if he was too bright to look at directly without consequence. Was it true that every eyes that met created worlds? He turned looking for Pokémontas and found Loxy suddenly there.

“You okay?” Loxy asked.

“Um,” Jon began. “Just looking for someone.”

“Yay me, you found someone,” Loxy beamed.

“I am so glad I found you,” Jon said.

“Oh, Sir,” Loxy said, embracing him. “Statements like that might takes us places. But, if you don’t mind me saying, you look like you’ve seen a ghost. I know, this place can be overwhelming, but you’re safe with me. Come on, I want to go to the dance. That is, if you’re finished collecting items?”

“I think if you don’t draw me away, there is no end to collecting here,” Jon said. “Did you find everything you need?”

“Ah, just the bare necessities,” Loxy said.

“Oh! I am like a kid at Willy Wonka’s place!” Jon said. “I want everything, but I am trying hard not to be too greedy, because I don’t want to trigger an Oompa Loompa song.”

“You say the strangest things, sometimes,” Loxy said. “Are Oompa Loompa’s a type of Pokémon?”

“That would explain a lot, actually,” Jon said, sorting it. “Especially when you considered they were pestered by Vermicious Knids, Whangdoodles, Hornswogglers, and Snozzwangers.”

“Those sound like really cool Pokémon,” Loxy said.

“Well, yeah, I suppose, unless you’re an Oompa Loompa,” Jon said.

“So, would you go to the dance with me?” Loxy asked.

Jon looked at his shoes, biting his lip.

“Oh, someone already asked,” Loxy said. “Reese? Jenny? Joy?”

“No, no one asked,” Jon said. “It’s just, I don’t know how to dance.”

“How old are you?” Loxy said.

“Mom always said dancing was gay, and my choices were football or football,” Jon said.

“Texas is very serious about football, but even if I signed up, I would only be an ass back.”

“An ass back?” Loxy asked.

“Yeah, every time I get off the bench, the coach says, ‘get your ass back here,’” Jon said.

“Everyone should have chance to play,” Loxy said.

“Yeah, not so much. It’s not like here, Loxy. Kids aren’t just given a Pokémon and sent out into the world to explore. You either rise through the ranks by having that special killing spirit, or you become fodder or footstools for those who do.”

“I don’t like your world,” Loxy said.

“I am probably not representing it fairly,” Jon said. “I can only tell you what I experienced. There are rumors of better, kinder places.”

“For example?” Loxy asked.

“Places where there isn’t any trouble. Behind the moon, beyond the rain,” Jon said.

“Oh,” Loxy said. “You’re about to sing a song, aren’t you?”

“Every time I am with you, I want to sing,” Jon said.

“That is so hot,” Loxy said. “Wait wait wait, you did that whole song and dance outside the gym. You even mob flashed everyone into participating!”

“Oh, no, that wasn’t me,” Jon said. “I was possessed.”

“Well, then, you should go to the dance with me so we can see what possesses us,” Loxy said.

“Oh, if only some dance dance revolution kid could control me,” Jon said.

“Come on,” Loxy said, taking him by the hand.

Loxy led him to a blue tent. Separated by several kiosks was a pink tent.

“Go through here, and I will meet you on the other side,” Loxy said.

“What’s in there?” Jon asked.

“Clothes,” Loxy said.

“No, you were supposed to say, ‘only what you take with you,’” Jon said.

“Um, no,” Loxy said. “Males blue tent. Females Pink tent. Purple tent is anyone tent. Go through, let the fashion folks have their fun, and then I will meet you on the dance floor.”

“Are you sure you want to be seen on the floor with me?” Jon asked.

“I am not embarrassed to be seen with you,” Loxy insisted.

“What if I step on your toes?” Jon asked.

“I will bring a heal potion,” Loxy said. Still, Jon was hesitating. “Seriously. You fear dancing with me that much?”

“I don’t like looking stupid in general, but, yes, I am seriously worried you will discover something about me that will cause you to flee. Or, perhaps I will do something to start a fight, which then results in you fleeing,” Jon said.

“And you think not dancing or not looking good is that thing?” Loxy asked.

“Some people take dancing and appearance very seriously,” Jon said.

“And you think fight or flight are my only two options?” Loxy asked.

“What else is there?” Jon asked.

“Well, I am a Pokémon trainer, so I am not afraid of a fight, but I am also wise enough to know there are times when a person should retreat and regroup,” Loxy mused. “But there are lots of other options here.”

“Freeze?”

“How about love?” Loxy asked “True love can make it possible to endure anything, even someone stepping on your toes. True love sees beyond the thin veil of beauty that last only a moment in time. True love sees beyond age. True love just is because it’s not about self, it’s about other, and ensuring their needs are met.”

“And what if your own needs are diminished while serving others?” Jon asked.

“When considering your needs, you only have to ask, are you fighting, fighting, or loving,” Loxy said. “When I find myself in a place of love, I know that all my needs are met.”

“What if I am so use to fighting and running that it appears that I love fighting and running more than I love loving?” Jon asked.

“Wow, that’s a mouth full,” Loxy said sorting. “So, should we determine in the moment that you love fighting or running, then we will love fighting and running together.”

“I don’t want to fight you,” Jon said. “Or run from you.”

“I know you don’t,” Loxy said. “But it is in you and so when you think that I will fight you or fly from you that is more about you projecting what you think I will do than you allowing me to simply do what I want to do. Only time with me will prove to you that there is only one thing you might do to cause me to leave you.”

“What’s that?” Jon asked.

“You tell me or ask me to,” Loxy said.

“If you ever hear those words come out of my mouth, please evaluate my level of sanity,” Jon said.

“I promise,” Loxy said.

“Are you like a counselor?” Jon asked.

“I think everyone is simultaneously a counselor and a client,” Loxy said. “Everyone you meet comes with both a gift and a lesson. If you don’t learn the lesson, the gift was opportunity.”

“Feels like I have heard this before,” Jon said.

“Maybe. Truth is truth, no matter which Universe you find yourself in, and sometimes we have to hear it in multiple forms and venues before we can fully internalize it,” Loxy said.

A loud pop caused Jon to jump and he and Loxy turned to the source. A Cacturne had popped a balloon to scare some kids. The kids, and even some adults, scrambled away from the cactus like Pokémon. The Cacturne froze in place, and a partner put a new balloon out, resetting the trap to scare the next unsuspecting passerby’s.

“A Creeper!” Jon said.

“No, it’s just a Cacturne,” Loxy said, trying to ease him down out of ‘fight’ mode.

“Fine, but it still kind of creepy and I don’t like sudden, loud noises...” Jon said.

The Cacturne popped another balloon scaring the next group of folks. One kid cried, but mostly because its parents ran away like scared rabbits, leaving the child alone.

“Seriously?” Jon yelled after them.

“Kind of judgmental, don’t you think?” Jon asked.

“They just deserted their child!” Jon said.

Other kids and parents were laughing, an older brother came and got the crying kid because the parents were seriously not coming back. Jon frowned. Loxy hugged him, understanding once again, Jon was projecting. He had a very clear idea of an ideal parent, which was probably exaggeratedly strong due the fact he was parenting himself most of the time. Loxy led him away from the Cacturne, and they found a booth offering corn dogs. The vendor offered them food for free and they both took one. As they walked, the popping of balloons grew fainter, but Jon still turned to the source, frowning at it.

“Do you have hyperacusics?” Loxy asked.

“What’s that?” Jon asked.

“Hyper awareness of aural sensations,” Loxy said.

“I hear things louder than what most people experience and sound does tend to exhaust me,” Jon admitted. “Being around people exhausts me.”

“Ever been diagnosed with PTSD?” Loxy asked.

“I have been diagnosed with ADHD, is that close?” Jon asked.

“I have seen no evidence for that diagnosis,” Loxy said. “But sometimes trauma can masquerade as ADHD. One test is taking the meds for ADHD and noting if the symptoms get worse or the client becomes addicted to adrenalin type substance.”

“I love how smart you are,” Jon said.

They had come full circle and were back at the blue tent. “Shall we go dance?”

Again, Jon hesitated.

“What? Because the sound level? Because the people?” Loxy asked.

“Why do we have change clothes?” Jon asked.

“OMG, are you stalling? If you don’t want to go, just say so!” Loxy said.

“I want to go, I am just really scared you won’t like me afterwards, and I don’t dress very well, and I don’t know what clothes to pick, and there feels like a lot of pressure to perform, and well, I am really afraid of everything, which probably explain why I am so sensitive to noise and my environment, and even though I like most of the Pokémon I’ve met, you have to admit, some of them are just absolutely frightening, and everything is moving so fast in this world, I am finding it hard to keep up, and I am so not use to people hugging on me, much less wanting me, and I really liked the Librarian, and she’s the only real person because she turned me down, and I don’t know why I am sharing that with you, and all the Pokémon keep looking at me and which

is kind of freaking me out, and well I am feeling overwhelmed, and did I already say that?” Jon said, not hiding his tears.

Loxy waited while he sorted feelings, standing tall, somewhat patient, but arms crossed like an adult watching a child. He finally sniffed, wiped his eyes on his sleeves.

“Done?” Loxy asked.

“Yeah, pretty much, thank you,” Jon said, taking a breath.

Loxy waited to be sure he didn’t have addendum for his rant, and only then did she hug him. She held him tight, patting his back.

“You don’t have to know how to dress. That’s what the fashion people are for. This is a Ball, after all, and people need to be appropriately dressed for a Ball, and most people seriously don’t have a clue how to dress for any occasion, and so you’re not alone in that. Not dancing, well, I believe you. You probably can’t dance. When I need a serious swing partner, I will find that person, but in the interim, I will still fill most of my dance time with you, even if it’s just standing in place, swaying to the music,” Loxy said.

“OMG,” Jon said. “I think I love you.”

“I know I love you,” Loxy said. “See you on the other side.”

निर्मित

Each person attending the ball was allowed to choose one Pokémon to attend with them. Jon chose Gardevoir. She and Jon emerged to the ball room; they were even formally announced, and Gardevoir curtsied, gave a cursory glance around, and then turned to Jon asking for permission to mingle. Jon nodded, while he joined a party of men slash boys slash nerds hovering around the punch table. On stage was a full orchestra, ready to produce any music known to Pokémon kind. They were presently playing something popish. Two Roselia’s danced in front of their microphone, incredibly well-endowed for such petite little flowers, with frizzy flowing hair and palm-palm roses, while a Sudowoodo crooned between them. Apparently Sudowoodo and the Roselias were singing Sudowoodo and Roselias, kind of like a Talking Meow, only, they couldn’t speak to save their lives, but when they sang, they really sang. People and Pokémon danced on the floor. The song being performed sounded a lot like the B-52’s, but the song title was probably “Rock Clauncher.”

Someone near Jon dropped a glass of punch, as all of the boys turned to watch the woman crossing the dance floor. Their mouths fell open.

“OMG, she’s coming this way,” one said.

“I so wish I knew how to dance,” someone else said.

“Me, too,” another said.

“Don’t look in her eyes,” someone said.

Their eyes hit their shoes, or diverted, and they scattered, shuffling feet awkwardly, the geeks of high school prom, leaving Jon alone to face the woman. The woman was wearing a dress that seemed to cross boundaries of formal ball wear and ultra-modern. The lower half of the gown was white, and ballooned out, and a serendipitous spin would reveal ruby slippers and white hose, with little Pokémon balls patterned into them. The belt was alternating white and red, with glittery red, and the top part of the dress was red, and all in all, she looked like walking talking Poké ball. She was coming directly towards him, the most beautiful woman in the whole room, and she was almost on him as it clicked in his brain, “OMG, Loxy!”

“Breathe,” Loxy instructed.

Jon had to gasp to recover.

“You’re drooling,” Loxy said, wiping his chin with her handkerchief.

“You…” Jon stammered.

“Clean up pretty well, eh?” Loxy asked.

“OMG,” Jon said.

“I choose you, too,” Loxy said. “You look great, by the way.”

“Kind piraty,” Jon agreed, hands up. “I’m either a Deviant version of Han Solo, or perhaps the Man in Black. Except, I am not sure black is my color.”

“Oh, let me assure you. It’s so you. Much more you than that jacket you won’t let me burn,” Loxy said.

“Oh! I love my jacket,” Jon said.

“I know you do,” Loxy said.

“It reminds me of SG1, and it’s just a little oversized in the sleeves, so I can pretend like it belonged to Jack O’Neill, with two L’s, because I kind of like to pretend he was my dad,” Jon rambled. “I use to want William Shatner to be my dad, but I hear he’s a real ass to be around, I still love him as Kirk, and hear he’s a really good horseman, and I would still like to meet him,

but the dad wanting thing is over. Dad runner up were Harrison Ford, David Hasselhoff, Gene Wilder, and Steve Martin.”

“That Jerk?! Sorry, you want what you want. Anyway, I ‘ve been wanting to ask you about your dad, but I am trying to figure out if your ranting is to avoid dancing, or just the general nervous energy when confronted by a beautiful woman,” Loxy said.

“Do I have to pick one?” Jon asked.

Loxy leaned in and whispered. “We already did it, which means we are likely to do it again if you play your cards right,” she said, then stood straight again, a sparkle in her eyes.

Jon stared at her, biting his lower lip. “Like that’s not pressure to perform, and I don’t know anything about cards!”

“OMG, Jon! It was a metaphor. Anyway, where were we? Oh, yes. I seriously love my man in black,” Loxy said.

“Yeah, but I’m kind of flaky,” Jon said, brushing off some dandruff.

“Aww, it’s just sparkly star dust,” Loxy said.

“I am seriously concerned about your vision,” Jon said.

“Jon, you have seriously, deep rooted fears,” Loxy said. “And I am going to be with you until we’ve cleared them all.”

“You’re going to be with me a really long time,” Jon said.

Reese approached, intruding into the bubble reality they had created, completely oblivious to the bubble that most other people were consciously aware of and avoiding, while stealing secret glances of envy. She was wearing a dress that was almost Alice in Wonderland, primarily white, with pastel blue and pink borders, and tied at the waist. She had light pink hose and golden slipper with heels that Jon was concerned weren’t really good for dancing. Her hair was died white, but her rabbit ears were tall and pink. She turned to flare her dress, and put her butt up, showing off the bunny tail. He didn’t seem to notice the tail, as his eyes were still on her legs. As he reflected over her shoes, she tilted her heels to show them off, aware he was checking them out.

“I feel conflicted,” Jon said.

“About?” Loxy asked.

“I suspect heels are really bad for your feet, like women being cobbled, but then again, they really bring out your calf muscles,” Jon said.

“Right! Aren’t they just fabulous?!” Reese said. “There is a picture board on the far side, and if you get enough positive votes, you get to keep your outfit. I hope you both vote for me.”

“You got my vote,” Jon and Loxy said, together. Loxy pulled him into a side hug as she continued to admire Reese.

“Oh, I love you both so much,” Reese said. “Jon, care to dance?”

“I promised the first couple dances with Loxy,” Jon said.

“Just save me one,” Reese insisted. “And you, too, Loxy. I so want to be seen dancing with you.”

“I want to be seen dancing with you,” Loxy said.

“I’m feeling a little over heated in this outfit,” Jon said.

“You are definitely hot,” Reese said.

“Isn’t he?!” Loxy agreed, pulling him to the dance floor. “And he’s mine.”

Jon went with Loxy without protest. The song had already changed to Shiny Happy Pokémon, and Loxy taught him his first dance, simply jumping in place in rhythm to the song, then putting out your hands and then bringing them in.

“Are you tricking me into calisthenics?” Jon asked.

“No, I am teaching you to dance were you live,” Loxy said.

“Eh?”

“You’re dancing,” Loxy said.

“I’m dancing?” Jon asked. He shined. “I’m dancing!”

The song ended in a slowdown of violins, and even though it still wasn’t a slow dance, and the next song that took up wasn’t a slow dance, she put her arms around his neck and pulled herself in closer. She smiled at him, her eyes going deep. It was so intimate that he looked away. Unfortunately, his eyes were filled with a girl next to him, kind of a sixties dance, arms and hands going up and down, grinding hips, and jiggling breasts. Kind of go-goish. He couldn’t look away, and when the girl noticed he was staring, she grinded in deeper, alternately angling the inside of her legs towards him. She smiled secretly at him and even at Loxy, offering invitations via eyebrows to join her.

“I know, right?” Loxy agreed with him. “She’s so hot.”

Jon turned his eyes back to Loxy. “I am sorry. I…”

“Please, Jon, hot is hot, and she is hot, and I was watching her, too,” Loxy said.

Jon forced himself to breathe in deep. "I still feel shame."

"That's probably because your culture has too many hang ups about sexuality," Loxy surmised. "And probably some family origin issues. Jon, seriously, don't let this be a fear between us. More than likely, if you're checking someone out, it's because there is something really attractive about her, and chances are, most of the time, I am going to agree with you. I like women, too."

"It is really too hot in here," Jon said.

"I feel fine," Loxy said.

"What if I want to do more than look?" Jon asked.

"Completely normal," Loxy said. "Feel free to ask her to play. Or we can both ask if she wants to play with us together."

"We really should go for some ice punch," Jon said.

"Later, right now, we are dancing," Loxy said.

"I'm still dancing?" Jon asked. "I am dancing?"

"No, technically, I am dancing, and you're standing in place like a rooted Sudowoodo, but I am enjoying being with you, surrounded by people and music," Loxy said.

The song came to an end, but Loxy kept swaying to music only she could hear, holding Jon, cheek to cheek. A woman came to the mic, thanked their performers, and then asked people to line up, girls on one side, boy on the other, and to prepare for a line dance off. Women won the coin toss, and someone was voted to pick a song. That person was unanimously Loxy.

"Very well, I choose Master Pokémon Trainer, Mega Meghan," Loxy said.

The orchestra started the music and one of the Roselia began to sing something sounding like "Better When I am Dancing with Pokémon" while her musical colleagues offered backup, and danced. While the girls dance in their line with their Pokémon, Jon was made spokesman for the boys, and he was uncertain if it was because he was the oldest present, or because Loxy had chosen him. The females, humans and Pokémon, finished their song and dance and jumped, applauding themselves. The woman announcer turned to the males.

"I really don't wish to compete against..." Jon mumbled.

"Pick!" Loxy said.

"Fine," Jon said. "But you asked for it. Bruno Mars, I choose you!"

Sudowoodo picked a Mark Ronson Bruno Mars song: 'Uptown Funk.' If it wasn't for the spirit of the dance pushing the males, they might not have done as well as they did, but overall even the girls seem to grudgingly give the win to that round.

Loxy summoned Taylor Swift's 'Shake it Off.' Jon followed it with another Bruno Mars song, 'The Lazy Song,' which did get good applause because of the Pokémon monkey dancing, but point reduction because of following it with a same artist. The girls won, and the singers led in with a wrap up line up dance for everyone to mix together, "Fishin' in the Dark" by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. When it was done, everyone went to boot scooting to the Mel McDaniel's "Louisiana Saturday Nights." The girl with the jiggly breast tapped on Jon's shoulder, asking if she might dance with Loxy, and he surrendered her, and they boot scooted away.

Jon went for some punch, and a man in the most perfect Armani suit, set off by the most outlandish sunglasses, paused by the table to drink with him.

"I thought Saturday Night was for fighting," he said, trying to strike up a conversation with Jon. "I brought all my Pokémon for nothing."

"Ummm, Sir Elton?" Jon asked.

"In the flesh," Elton said, offering a hand to shake. "Nice to meet you, young man."

"Umm," Jon said.

"Take your time. It happens. What's your name son?" Elton asked.

"You want to know my name?" Jon stammered, eyes wide.

He leaned in. "I promise, I won't go breaking your heart," Elton said.

"Um, I am Jon," Jon said.

"Just Jon?" Elton asked.

"Umm," Jon stammered.

"It's okay. Jon is better than Bennie, or Daniel," Elton said.

"Oh, I so don't want to be a Daniel," Jon said.

"Yeah, but you could be Tony Danza in my hands," Elton said.

"I don't think I understand," Jon said.

"Tiny Dancer, Tony Danza," Elton said, giving a 'clue' voice. "Never mind. No one ever gets my jokes."

"Oh, no one ever gets my jokes either," Jon said.

"You and I, well, we're one of a kind," Elton said. "You should find some fancy glasses."

“I am not really fond of glasses, but I will try and find something that says me as well as those glasses say you,” Jon said.

“Oh, these things? They’re just something I threw on, but thank you,” Elton said.

“You’re very easy to speak with,” Jon said.

“Surprised?” Elton asked.

“I really don’t know if I should be or not, so forgive me if I had an unaddressed bias. May I ask, how did you get here?” Jon asked.

“How does anyone get here?” Elton asked.

“Yellow brick road?” Jon asked.

“Oh, please, goodbye yellow brick road,” Elton said.

“But...”

“Sir, I came by Starship,” Elton said.

“Really?” Jon asked.

“Really. The UFP Philadelphia Freedom,” Elton said.

“I love that ship,” Jon said, even though he had never really heard of it before, but he took to it like it was real thing, or the way you might in a dream, and just accepted the reality of it, and suddenly wanted to be the captain of a ship by the same name.

“Me, too. How many ships come with their own theme song?!” Elton said.

“Right?! Anyway, about the Saturday night fighting thing, I think tomorrow’s Saturday.”

“Are you sure?” Elton asked.

“Not entirely,” Jon said. “It may only be Saturday in Louisiana.”

“Every night is Saturday night in Louisiana,” Elton agreed. “And a lot of fighting. But a lot of loving, too. See you tomorrow at the fight, kid. Oh, hi Reese. Enjoying the ball?”

“About to,” Reese said, pushing past to grab Jon’s hand. “This next one is mine.”

“Aww, kids,” Elton said.

Reese had Jon out on the dance floor before the next song started.

“You know Elton?” Jon said.

“Yeah, he’s very easy to speak with. I know most of the celebrities visiting from off world,” Reese said. “My parents work for foreign affairs, and I have been to a few of their parties. Wait wait wait...” She positioned Jon and stepped back. She counted down with her fingers.

“And this one, by special request,” the announcer said.

The orchestra began to play, a familiar piece. Sudowoodo was facing away, slicking his ‘hair’ leaves back, as were his Roselias. Reese closed the distance between them in a contrived, seductive sort of way, moving to the music, and then grabbed him up. The singers turned at once, and Sudowoodo began to sing in a very convincing way, “Let’s stay together,” by Al Green, while Roselias added their own little backup word bit, not in the original release but fitting enough. She held him tightly, and he almost couldn’t breathe, and she sang along with the singer, directly into his ear, and he discovered her singing wasn’t near as bad as Mentos had suggested.

“Jon, I just want to say, I recognize Loxy is primary, and it’s right, it feels right to the core, and next to her I will always be runner up, but I still want you in my life, and I can’t explain it, I just know I love you and I want to be around you, around you both, because I also love Loxy,” Reese said. “And I hope you aren’t weirded out by hearing this.”

Jon pulled back enough to touch her chin and bring her eyes to his. “I want you in my life, too, but I worry it’s selfish, and maybe I am holding you back from finding someone special.”

“If I find someone special, it will be while I am living my life, not waiting for it to happen in some magic, pretend, fantasy world. I am happy, even if all this is- is just an occasional slow dance,” Reese said.

Jon pulled her close, and petted the back of her head affectionately. “I assure you, it will be more than an occasional slow dance.”

“I can’t believe how turned on I am by just you petting the back of my hair,” Reese said.

For the rest of the song, Jon ran his fingers through her hair, pulled on it, and took a moment to kiss her, just as the song was drawing to a close. The kiss bridged the song to the next, which was also a slow dance: “Amazed,” by Lonestar. Gardevoir came and tapped Reese on the shoulder, and she bowed out gracefully, but not before kissing Jon again, a quicker, wilder, ‘thank you, love’ kind of kiss. Gardevoir moved in close, and was dancing with him before the words to the song began. Jon blinked, and he was alone on the dance floor with Gardevoir, and then he blinked again, but everyone was there. She had aura about her that caused ripples in space in time when she was emoting. And she was emoting! He felt as if he were the center of everything. Their moment seemed to last forever, and then, not long enough, without words exchanged, but definitely shared sentiment and intimacy. Jon was surprised by his feelings

for her. Another song began, and Loxy tapped Gardevoir on the shoulder, and she surrendered Jon to her, as graceful as Reese had to her, and also, stole a kiss before leaving. Jon was so overwhelmed by all this love that he felt his heart might burst. He also, secretly, feared he might die without realizing this love in its fullest potential, as if it were all but a dream, and that he was so undeserving. The song started with an extra-long intro, but Jon was pretty sure it was “Slow Dancing, Swaying to the Music,” by Jonny Rivers.

“Your face is warm,” Loxy said into his ear, her cheek against his. “Do you feel okay?”

“I feel like everyone is watching me,” Jon said.

Loxy took a moment to check reality. “The Pokémon certainly seem to be watching us,” Loxy agreed. She motioned for Gardevoir to come near. “Could you take us somewhere private, with cool air, but where we can still hear the music?”

Gardevoir nodded, embraced them both, and suddenly they were on top of the Celadon Department Store. They could hear the music okay, but Gardevoir did something to distort a small pocket space/time, and a bubble of air formed above them that resonated with the music below and it was louder, even crisper than directly in front of the orchestra. She retreated to the far side to give them their dance, and from her perspective their silhouettes stood prominent against the large, rising moon. It was as if the moon was just perfect to contain them both. If you are familiar with the Prince Bride, and with there only being five kisses since the invention of kisses being rated the most passionate, the most pure, until Buttercup and Wesley blew that scale out of the water, well, this kiss made Buttercup and Wesley’s kiss seem like a quick peck ‘goodnight,’ on the forehead by an old aunt kissing the nephew who was feigning sleep who was spending the night. Fireworks were launched, and shimmering glittery lights rained golden love down over the world. The kiss ended and they both looked into the moon and the stars and the fireworks.

“I want this moment to go on forever,” Jon whispered into her air.

“Close your eyes,” Loxy encouraged. “Just keep swaying. Don’t let go.”

“I feel so hot,” Jon said.

Loxy paused, pulling back enough to meet his eyes, touch his forehead. “You do. You’re burning up.”

A hideous roar broke through the night and could even be heard over the music and fireworks. Jon and Loxy looked to see an approaching Pokémon, and from their perspective its silhouette was prominent against the large moon.

“Godzilla?!” Jon asked.

“No,” Loxy said. “Tyranitar! But I never seen one so big, and never this close to a city.”

The Tyranitar tore open the tent where the ball was being held and roared into it. The orchestra stopped it’s playing. There was a horrible moment where no one knew quite what to do, and then most everyone scattered. One Pokémon tossed a fire ball, but somehow Tyranitar deflected it and it went crashing into a nearby restaurant setting it ablaze. Tyranitar raged, picked up an unmanned police motorcycle with side car and all and tossed it across the street, setting another building ablaze and sending more people and Pokémon scattering.

“OMG,” Loxy said. “We need to help them.”

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “What do we do against that?!”

The Tyranitar sorted through the tent, then reoriented towards the Department Store. It came crashing through the remains of the tent, like wading through a pool full of seaweed, dragging it with him, hitting buildings as it stumbled forwards. Scared, untrained Pokémon discharged flames, water, and electric attacks that only caused more mayhem. In a cartoon it might have been funny, but in the here and now, people were getting hurt, and things were getting destroyed.

“I don’t know,” Loxy said, honestly. “I never gone up against anything this big.”

“Well, it’s coming this way,” Jon said. “How about my master ball?”

“Against that?” Loxy asked. “I don’t know! Why is it coming here?”

“Oh,” Jon said, remembering something Aya had said. “Gardevoir, I need you.”

Gardevoir was suddenly at his side, trembling.

“Take me to the far side of that street,” Jon said.

“Wait, where are you going?” Loxy demanded, grabbing his arm.

“To test a theory,” Jon said.

“Not without me,” Loxy said, gripping his arm.

“No, Loxy. Let go,” Jon said.

“Jon!”

“There are people down there who need your skills as a medic,” Jon said. “And if I am right about this, you can’t be with me.” He took her hands and squeezed. “I got this.”

The Tyranitar forged stubbornly against the dragging tent until he got so mad that it jerked it foot free, and in doing so it fell forward into the building. The building rocked, and Loxy and Gardevoir held onto Jon.

“On, second thought, Gardevoir, take Loxy to someone in need, and come back to me only after you’re sure she is safe,” Jon said.

“Wait,” Loxy said, but Gardevoir had already acknowledged the instructions and pulled her into her, turning as if they were dancing, and they were gone.

Jon hopped up on the ledge of the building. Tyranitar looked up, roared ‘Tyranitar!’

“Yeah, I Grok your speech,” Jon said.

“Tyranitar?!” it seemed to asked.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, coming for me aren’t you,” Jon whispered. “Come on then, come and get me.”

Tyranitar roared its name, as it began climbing the building. Windows became hand and foot holds and the building shook as it climbed, because clearly the windows were being enlarged with each reach of the Tyranitar’s grasp. Jon found the empty master ball on his belt.

“Try this on for size,” Jon said, activating the ball and dropping it straight down onto the monster.

The master ball dropped and the Tyranitar’s tail batted it right back to Jon. Jon caught it and was able to turn it off before it deployed.

“Nice!” Jon said.

“Tyranitar!” it roared.

“Yeah, I am Groot,” Jon said.

The building shook as Tyranitar raged against the building. Jon gave sincere effort not to fall off, but when it was clear he was going, he simply surrendered to the fall, and went over, back first, gracefully, but Gardevoir was suddenly beside him, falling with him, embracing him, and then they were elsewhere. Their feet were in the ground, but they were posed as if they had been dancing, and Gardevoir had him leaned him over, as if she were the lead leaning in for that deep, back breaking kiss. She was looking down into his face, and he had the rare opportunity to see both eyes simultaneously, because her hair dangled around him.

“Are we dancing now?” Jon asked.

She hugged him up tight, emoting like a star shining light, tremendous relief that she had got back just in the nick of time. She eased him up.

They were just on the ground, looking up at Tyranitar. It roared down at them, but instead of making the long climb down, it simply pushed free of the building and fell. Gardevoir took Jon out of harm’s way, but was still within line of sight of Tyranitar. The remains of the ballroom tent was at their feet. The ground shook when Tyranitar landed, breaking the concrete into Tyranitar prints, which Jon could imagine would be saved as if this was the new Hollywood walk of fame.

Jon called to it. Gardevoir gave Jon a curious look, but he reassured her by squeezing her hand.

Tyranitar orientated to the sound of Jon calling it, and proceeded in his direction. Its long lumbering gait gave him the moment’s pause needed to consider and reconsider his strategy, and Gardevoir suddenly understood Jon’s intention without being told. They would just keep out of reach, leading it out of town, using Jon as the bait since he was the attractor. Its tail swiped a corner of the building, sending building material raining to an empty street. Right before reaching grappling distance, Jon and Gardevoir relocated, but stayed within its line of sight. Once they delayed jumping and was nearly caught by a breath of fire as it raged trying to catch them. It would rage and beat its chest, but it doggedly pursued them, unable to forgo it’s obsession with Jon. Jon and Gardevoir repeated the gesture. In this manner, they led Tyranitar safely back into the thick of nature.

When Jon was sure he had led Tyranitar far enough away from the city, he decided he would try his luck with the master ball one more time, and so he drew his figurative line in the sand and held his ground. What Jon didn’t factor in was an Onix rising from the ground like a coiled snake that had been waiting its chance to spring on some un-expecting prey, but was probably more analogues to a Mega Gator, ambush predator. Gardevoir took Jon just outside of Onix’s reach, and it bit up earth, sending grass, flowers and gobs of dirt raining down as if the earth was nothing more than water and Onix was splashing into a pool for maximum show off affect. Simultaneously with the arrival of Onix, a Bewear, a Trevenant, and Medicham arrived from different quadrants. Onix’s splash down caused the earth to shake so much that Jon fell backwards which barely had him missing the downward attack against his head by a Noctowl.

Gardevoir threw herself at the Bewear that had sprung from a bush, and took it to the other side of the lake before returning. The intense fluttering of wings by the Noctowl had Jon blocking his face with his hands. Angry, he tried to hit with the master ball, not to catch it but just to hit it. He ended up accidentally throwing the master ball blindly. The Noctowl dodged, and the ball missed. Medicham caught the ball, looked into it, and was taken up. The ball dropped, rocked, and settled in with its new occupant. Jon wanted to see more of Medicham but he was too involved with the onrush of attackers and suddenly suspecting he was about to level up from capturing another Pokémon and fearing that he might go unconscious, tried to suppress the feeling. He was not happy with the timing, but he couldn't stop the outpouring of energy that embraced him like water over a fall.

Jon leveled up. Smiled, as if he had been dosed with the most pleasant feel good med ever, but held just enough consciousness as he fell to his knees to mumble, 'this is going to hurt, isn't it,' and then fell flat on his face, dead to the world. Gardevoir returned to Jon's side, weakened after having relocated Onyx. She hovered over Jon, trying to decide what to do, and to her amazement, the wild Pokémon attack was over. They seemed a little confused, as if not knowing what they had been doing, or what they had been hunting, but they turned and headed towards their home. The Noctowl hooted from a branch, then began pruning its feathers as if it was just another evening for catching Ratattas. Tyranitar rumbled the earth as he pushed through the forest past them.

Gardevoir collected the newly occupied master ball then sat beside Jon until she had recovered enough energy to transport them both directly to the Pokémon Center.

Chapter 12

Jon went from dead sleep to full awake, as if chased by a nightmare, coupled with that feeling of having been numbed by a dentist to suddenly having full feeling back. Nurse Joy and Loxy were there taking his arms, reassuring him he was safe, and it took him a moment, but then he recognized them.

“I’m alive,” Jon said.

“You are,” Joy said.

“And I am still here!” Jon said, touching himself.

“Where did you think you would be?” Loxy asked.

Jon shrugged; “Not here,” he said. He marveled over her and how beautiful she looked in her Pokémon scrubs. Apparently she had changed to be of better medical service to human and Pokémon alike.

“Most people wake up here when they’re Pokémon get KO,” Joy said. “But you’re the first person I know of to get KO and wake up here.”

Jon didn’t hide his confusion. Jenny was there, so was Mentos and Reese, and the town’s mayor, and Erika, the nature loving Princess.

“I don’t understand what happened,” Jon said.

“You saved the town, is what happened,” the mayor said.

Jon sorted. “No. I am putting the town in danger. I need to leave,” Jon said, trying to get up.

“Wait wait wait” Joy said. “Calm down. We got you.”

“You don’t understand,” Jon said. “They’re drawn to me.”

“We understand,” Erika said. “We all are. And you’re right, it would be best if you depart our city until we figure you out.”

“I don’t understand how I got out of that predicament alive,” Jon said.

“Gardevoir explained it to us,” Loxy said. “Apparently, when you leveled up and passed out, it was as if they could no longer see you, so they just returned to their place.”

“There has been a lot of chatter over the police channels about random, atypical Pokémon sightings lately,” Jenny said. “As if they’re migrating this way.”

“Loxy,” Jon said, squeezing her hand. “We should probably talk to your Professor friend. I don’t want to be the cause of anyone being harmed.”

“Unfortunately, the city has had a power failure, and all cell service is off line,” Jenny said. “All city vehicles that are still functioning are being employed in clean up and rescue, so you’re going to have to walk to see him.”

“And, Jon,” Erika said. “I think you should refrain from telling people you’re a Pokémon magnet. There are some unscrupulous people who will try to use you to capture the Pokémon that are drawn to you.”

“But why are they drawn to me?” Jon asked. “It doesn’t seem to be all the time. Like right now, none of the Pokémon here seemed to notice me at all, but then there are times when I feel like the whole world is staring at me, and when I look, the Pokémon are definitely all staring, but people most of them seem to be doing anything they can not to look in my direction, if that makes any sense.”

“You’re making sense, in we hear what you’re saying and I think your perception is valid, but we don’t know the how or why to it,” Erika said.

“You’re a mystery, Jon,” Loxy said. “I have never known of a human being caught up in a ball or registering on the Pokédex or having special abilities or playing for more teams than I even knew existed, but here you are.”

“A game changer,” the Mayor said.

“I should probably go alone,” Jon said. “It could be dangerous being around me.”

“Don’t be an idiot,” Mentos said. “You don’t know anything about the world and you will get lost or do something stupid without us.”

“Well, he’s right about you probably getting lost,” Reese said.

“Or getting distracted,” Loxy said. “We’re friends and we will stick together.”

“Really?” Jon asked.

“It’s what friends do,” Mentos snapped.

“We’re friends again?” Jon asked.

“We were never really not friends, I was just really sore about the money thing,” Mentos said.

“Normally, I would go with you,” Jenny said. “Your mission is that important, but there is a lot of work to do at the moment. Even with some of my visiting sisters being drafted into emergency service.”

“I would go, too,” Joy said. “But the town needs their nurse in this moment of crisis.”

“Your party is sufficiently advanced that I believe you will be okay to proceed on your journey,” Erika said. “But I intuit that you must not tarry too long in any one place. You must keep moving.”

“The town has pooled some provisions for your journey,” the mayor said. “You will have food and gear, and Pokémon supplies. And, one more thing:” The mayor stepped up, removing an item from her jacket pocket, a jacket that didn’t match her torn Pokémon ball dress, and was likely put on just to keep her warm during the crisis that she had been actively engaged in countering. She handed it to him. “This is a key to our city. Normally, I award this in a ceremony, but I don’t want you to leave without it.”

“Oh!” Jon said, very grateful and feeling unworthy examining the key.

“I suspect you have never had a home, a safe place to rest your head. I just wanted you to know that you are always welcome here. If you survive your journey,” the mayor said.

“Oh,” Jon said.

“Come on,” Loxy said. “We’re burning daylight.”

“John Wayne?” Jon asked.

“No, Loxy Isadora Bliss,” Loxy said.

“Well, I guess it’s settled, then. We’re off to see the wizard,” Jon said, pushing off the table and landing on his feet. His knees nearly gave way, but Jenny and Loxy had him until he was stable.

“No, we’re going to see the Professor,” Mentos corrected.

“He’s was trying for humor,” Loxy explained.

“How is that funny? Why would anyone want to see the wizard?” Mentos asked.

“Because, because, because, because, because,” Jon said to Mentos, sounding a little annoyed.

“This is going to be a long journey,” Reese.

“So, let’s get this party going,” Jon said. “Yellow brick road here we come, arms linked, skip dancing as we travel.”

Jenny handed him his backpack. "I doubt there will be any skipping while toting these."

"And there is no road," the mayor said. "An occasional well-worn dirt path, maybe, but no roads. It was agreed long ago that we would minimize our footprint on this world, so no road, no petro using vehicles, limited air travel by tech."

"You could give us a flying a Pokémon," Mentos said.

"Not one big enough to accommodate your entire party and gear," the Mayor said. "And with the computers offline, we only have access to what we had on us at the beginning of the crisis."

"And you're not ready to be flying," Erika said. "Level up a bit more, keep your feet on the ground."

Mentos stared at his feet. "Yes, Mam," Mentos said. But then he raised his head, showing resilience. "But one day, I am going to be a better trainer than even you, and I will own a gym, and everyone will come to see me!"

Erika bowed to him, Namaste hands.

Loxy and Reese grabbed their packs. Mentos was happy for the free gear, but wasn't happy lifting it, mumbling a wish for a bigger Pokémon to carry it. They waited as Jon slipped on his pack. They headed to the door as a team, until Jon hesitated.

"Wait wait wait," Jon stopped them. He pulled a receipt out of his pocket. He turned to the Mayor. "I know the town is in shambles and it may be difficult to locate but may I have my clothes and bag back from the ball."

"It's in your pack," Loxy said.

Jon removed his pack and started sorting through it.

"You don't believe her?" Mentos asked.

"I believe her," Jon said, indicating with his hands that clearly he believed her, hence the digging through his bag.

"So let's go," Mentos said.

"I have to return this pirate outfit," Jon said.

"You got enough votes to keep it," Erika said.

"Oh, okay, cool, thank you," Jon said, still pulling items out of his bag in his search of his regular outfit. He pulled out something cool and took a moment to consider its function, puzzled over it until Loxy explained what it was, and then he continued his rummaging.

“So, why are you still unpacking?” Mentos asked.

“I don’t want to get my Friday night go to the ball clothes dirty,” Jon said, pulling out his jacket. “This is more like it.” His MASH mail bag came out next. He looked at his friends.

“What? We don’t have time for me to change?”

Jon pulled out his jeans, shirt, shoes and socks, next and started to swap them from the things he was wearing.

“We have time,” Loxy said.

“Well, if he’s going to change, you should change, too,” Mentos told his sister.

“But I love my bunny costume,” Reese said.

“You look better as a Pikachu,” Mentos said.

“Because you’re bias,” Reese said. “Jon, you like my bunny outfit, don’t you.”

“Yeah, it’s great,” Jon said, changing his shirt out first right there in front of everyone. He didn’t even realize he was doing so, which revealed an evolution to fit the culture he was presently residing in, as they didn’t care if he changed in front of them; it’s just what people do.

“That’s only because you never saw a real Pikachu,” Mentos told Jon.

“Yes I have,” Jon said back.

“No you haven’t!” Mentos said.

“Yes, I have,” Jon said.

Chester barked.

“You’re not a real Pikachu,” Mentos said.

“He looks exactly like a Pikachu!” Jon said.

“No he doesn’t!” Mentos said.

“OMG, please tell me you two aren’t going to be doing this the entire journey,” Reese said.

“But he doesn’t look anything like a real Pikachu,” Mentos complained.

“He looks more like a Pikachu than your sister in her Pikachu outfit,” Jon said.

“Oh! How dare you, Sir,” Reese wailed. “I thought you liked me.”

Loxy closed her eyes. Gardevoir put her hand to her forehead, echoing Loxy’s sentiment.

“I like you just fine,” Jon said. “I’m just saying the Chester looks more like a Pikachu than...”

“No, he doesn’t!” Mentos and Reese said.

“I am a fabulously looking Pikachu,” Reese insisted.

“And I love you as a Pikachu,” Jon said.

“Honest?” Reese said.

“Absolutely. I get a real charge out of you. I do think I would prefer a Kitty costume, though,” Jon said.

“Meow?” Joy asked.

“A Talking Meow?” Jenny asked.

“No, just kitty,” Jon said. “I am partial to cats.”

“Again, that’s because you never had a Pikachu,” Mentos said.

“How about a Kitten that looks like a Pikachu?” Reese asked. (If you hadn’t seen that picture on the internet, you got to go see it.)

“Um, any kitty will do,” Jon said.

Jon and Jenny covered their mouths. Loxy seemed amused, but it wasn’t apparent if it was because Jon was struggling to get everything back into the back. Loxy took the stuff from him and showed him how to properly repack the bag so that it all fit. When they were finally departing, and hugs were shared, the Mayor whispered in Jon’s ear that the key would open her door.

“Do we have time to go shopping for a kitty outfit?” Reese asked.

“The store is closed until they repair the damage to the building,” the Mayor said. “Bye now.”

“Be sure to pick up any stray Pokémon,” Joy called.

निर्मित

Jon and Mentos led the party, arguing about whether or not he had seen a real Pikachu. Loxy and Reese followed, rolling eyes, and trying to hold their own conversations that had nothing to do with the children that led the way. They were hardly out of town when they were ambushed by single, solitary child. The child, a black child, dressed as a pirate, with a patch and hat and plastic sword in one hand and Pokémon ball in the other hand, couldn’t have been mistaken as anything other than a child, not even eight. He leapt from the bushes and blocked the path, threatening them with plastic sword.

“Ahoy, mates,” he shouted.

Jon screamed. “OMG, don’t do that! Why are you jumping out of bushes scaring people like that?!”

“Hey, that’s my hiding place!” Mentos said.

“Looser snoozer weepers,” the boy said.

“Oh, yeah, prepare to…” Mentos said.

“Stop,” Jon snapped at Mentos. “I’m not letting you battle a child.”

“Who are you calling a child, old man?!” the boy snapped. “I am the most world renowned pirate of all time! Now, hand over your booty, or prepare to die.”

“That sounds like something you would say,” Reese said.

“I would never say prepare to die,” Jon said.

“But you would so say hand over your booty,” Reese snickered.

Jon ignored her, blocking with side frown. “Kid, go home, I hear your parents calling you,” Jon said.

“Nope, you have to battle me,” the kid said.

“We are not battling a five year old,” Jon said.

“I am older than five,” the kid said. “I just look young because I have good genes.”

“Look, kid, first, I can’t keep calling you kid,” Loxy said. “What’s your name?”

“I am the Dread Pirate Robertson,” the kids said.

“You’re Robert’s son?” Jon asked.

“Robertson,” Robertson corrected.

“Robert’s son,” Jon said again.

“Robertson,” the kid said again. “Are you deaf?”

Jon pointed at him. “Get out of our way or…”

“Or you will what?!” Robertson asked, twirling his sword to show off his skill, which was actually quite impressive.

“OMG, Jon, how old are you,” Loxy said. “You can’t argue with a kid.”

“I am not a kid!” Robertson said.

“Where are your parents?” Loxy asked.

“They were eaten by Pokémon,” Robertson said. “Just like you’re about to be.”

“Oh, how sad,” Reese said. “You’re an orphan?”

“Don’t get any ideas in your head,” Mentos snapped at her. “I’m the kid in this party.”

“Well, we can’t leave him here,” Reese said.

“Of course not, we’ll just have to return to Celadon and hand him over to Jenny,” Loxy said.

“Are you kidding me?!” Mentos said. “We can’t keep going back for every distraction. It’s better to push on.”

“I suppose he could come with us,” Loxy said. “Just as far as the next town.”

“That can’t be ethical,” Jon said.

“And leaving him here is more ethical?” Loxy asked.

“We’re not leaving him,” Reese insisted.

“Of course we’re not,” Loxy said.

“I’m not going anywhere with you!” Robertson said. “Enough banter. I have suffered you enough!” He threw down his ball and a Caterpie arrived on the scene.

Jon retreated behind Loxy. “What the fuck!”

“Language!” Loxy said. “There are kids here.”

“Look at the size of that bug!” Jon said.

“How old are you?” Loxy asked. “It’s just a Caterpie.”

“It’s huge!” Jon said. “And I hate bugs.”

“Then it will make your death all the more sweeter to me,” Robertson said. “Get him, Caterpie.”

Caterpie roared, a roar almost inaudible, ‘Caterpie,’ rearing its head, moving tiny legs in a tiny little ‘incredible hulk’ like motions, while inching forwards. Jon retreated further.

Robertson cheered on his bug Pokémon, laughing at Jon’s misery.

“OMG, Jon, for real?” Loxy asked.

“I don’t like bugs,” Jon insisted.

“Argh, your doom approaches!” Robertson said.

Loxy picked up the Caterpie, petted it, gently.

Robertson began to cry. “Don’t take my Pokémon! He’s my only friend in the whole wide world!”

Loxy knelt down.

“How old are you, for real,” Loxy asked.

“I’m five and half,” Robertson said.

“And what’s your full name?” Loxy asked.

“Nick Jr. Robertson,” he owned.

“I knew it!” Jon snapped from his safe place behind a tree. “Robert’s son.”

“Robertson!” Nick snapped back, wiping his tears. He looked to Loxy. “May I have my Caterpie back, please?”

Loxy handed him the Pokémon. He put it back in the ball.

“Are you really an orphan?” Loxy asked.

“Yes, Mam,” Nick said.

“Do you have any family in the area?” Loxy asked.

“No, Mam. It’s just me and Caterpie against the world,” Nick said.

“Then it is settled. You will be coming with us, and you will not argue with me, further,” Loxy said. “Clear?”

“Yes, Mam,” Nick said.

“I don’t believe this,” Mentos said. “We can’t be seen with this kid in tow!”

“Be nice,” Reese said.

“Jon, help me out here!” Mentos said.

Loxy stood up, put her hands on her hip. Reese mirrored her. They waited for Jon to side with them.

“Do we have to take the creepy kid with the bugs?” Jon asked.

“Bug,” Nick corrected.

“Jon, come here!” Loxy directed.

“But he’s got that bug!” Jon said.

“Do you ever want to play with me again?” Loxy asked.

Jon considered, lowered his gaze, and approached Loxy, sullenly. Loxy pulled Jon over to the side, while Reese continued to chat with newest member of their team.

“How dare you call him creepy,” Loxy said. “He’s like five.”

“Come on! Kids can be creepy,” Jon said.

“Name one,” Loxy challenged.

“Eddy Munster, Wednesday, her brother Pugsley, Dewey Wilkerson, the whole cast of Zoom...”

“Stop,” Loxy interrupted him. “You’re telling me, you didn’t have a crush on Wednesday?”

“Of course I did, but I am creepy,” Jon said. “And I know creepy, and he is a bit creepy. And he has bugs! We might have to de-lice him.”

“Did you ever consider that maybe he is traumatized by the loss of his parents?” Loxy asked.

“You believe his story that they were eaten by Pokémon?” Jon asked, skeptically.

“It’s possible,” Loxy said.

Jon lowered his voice to a whisper, “Or they split town because he is creepy.”

“Jon, parents don’t just split on kids because they’re creepy,” Loxy said. She observed a look, like a micro expression of panic as if he were remembering something. “You’re parents called you creepy or they split town on your or both?”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Jon said.

“They abandoned you!” Loxy said.

“Still not talking about it,” Jon said.

“You should be able to empathize with him, then,” Loxy said. “Cause my Pokémon intuition sense is telling me you and Nick there both peg in on the low end of the Autism Spectrum. Now, we’re taking him with us, and that’s the way of it.”

“Yes, Mam,” Jon said.

Loxy dragged Jon over and introduced him to Robertson.

“Why are you pouting?” Reese said. “It’s the right thing to do.”

“I know,” Jon said, still looking at the ground.

“So, if you are in agreement, why are you still emoting?” Loxy asked.

“Because!” Jon snapped. “I am mad at you. I don’t like the threat of affection being pulled if I disagree.”

“How old are you?” Reese asked.

“No, Reese, Jon is right. I misspoke,” Loxy said, hugging Jon. “I was wrong to threaten to withhold affection to coerce you into siding with me. I am sorry.”

Jon wiped his eyes, still looking at the ground.

“Are you crying, Sir?” Nick asked.

“OMG, you are crying?!” Mentos said.

“It’s okay to cry,” Reese said.

“Says the girl,” Mentos said.

Nick started crying. “Are you crying because of me?”

“No he’s crying because he’s a big baby!” Mentos said. “Just like you!”

“Why are you crying?” Reese asked Nick.

“Because he’s crying and I am happy to be joining you,” Nick said. “It’s scary out here in the big world.”

Reese hugged up Nick and started crying.

“OMG, I am surrounded by girls and babies!” Mentos said. “Am I like the only adult here?!”

Mentos started walking. Loxy motioned for the rest to follow and Jon fell behind, recovering in his own time. Nick followed Loxy and Reese.

“Do you have any food?” Nick asked.

“Jon?” Loxy said.

Jon fished something out of his mail bag and tossed it to the kid.

“OMG, thank you,” Nick said, falling back to walk with Jon, “the carrier of food.”

Jon nodded.

“When’s the last time you had a good meal?” Reese asked.

“Umm, I don’t remember,” Nick said.

“That is so sad!” Reese said.

“You’re my sister!” Mentos yelled back from the front.

“You can share!” Reese shouted back.

“This is really good. May I have more?” Nick asked.

Jon looked to Loxy. She nodded. “One more, but then I want you to wait till we break our stride for dinner.”

Jon handed him another pack, picking up the trash he dropped to the ground. “We always police our trash,” Jon said.

“It’s biodegradable, isn’t it?” Nick asked.

“Maybe, but we still police it,” Jon said. “Do you really need the patch?”

“Nick Fury needs a patch,” Nick said.

“Is your name really Nick?” Jon asked.

“Better than Richard,” Nick said.

“Richard Robert’s son?” Jon asked.

“Robertson,” Nick said.

“It’s what I said,” Jon said.

“And don’t call me Richard,” Nick said. “I hate that name.”

“Richard’s a great name,” Jon said.

“It’s a stupid name!” Nick argued.

“It’s great. You could be a Richie, or a Rick, or Ricket, my favorite actually, or Hitch, or Dick,” Jon began listing.

“Call me that again, and I swear, Caterpie and I will carve you up and have you walk the plank,” Nick said.

“How can you have me walk the plank after you carve me up?” Jon asked.

“OMG, Jon! Rest it!” Loxy said.

“No, he’s got some serious logic issues,” Jon said.

“He’s five!” Loxy said.

“Five and a half,” Nick corrected.

“Take the patch off,” Loxy said.

Nick pouted, folded the patch up to reveal he had two good eyes, but he didn’t take it off completely. Loxy allowed for a little defiance.

“Know any pirate songs?” Nick asked Jon.

“You’re not a pirate!” Mentos yelled back.

“I am dressed like a pirate,” Nick argued.

“There’s not an ocean for miles!” Mentos said.

“Well, of course. We don’t burry our treasure at sea!” Nick said.

“Like you have any treasure,” Mentos snickered.

“I have a map and everything,” Nick said.

“OMG,” Jon mumbled. “Loxy, are you sure about this?”

“Yes,” Loxy and Reese both said, without looking back at him,

“Know any good pirate movies?” Nick asked.

“No,” Jon mumbled.

“My favorite is ‘the Pirates of Pokémon,’” Nick said.

“You can’t just throw Pokémon in the title and expect that to be clever,” Jon said.

“What are you talking about?” Nick asked.

“It’s the Pirates of Penzance!” Jon said.

“Oh, so you do know pirate movies. I love the Pokémon of Penzance,” Nick said, hitting Jon playfully.

“Don’t hit me,” Jon said.

“But I like you,” Nick said.

“Loxy! He’s touching me!” Jon said.

“OMG, don’t make me separate you two,” Loxy said.

“When’s the last time you had a bath?!” Jon snapped.

“I am a pirate, I don’t take baths,” Nick said.

“Loxy, I hope you have a water and soap Pokémon,” Jon said.

“Can you guys keep it quiet back there! You’re scaring all the wild Pokémon away,” Mentos yelled back.

“Oh! You guys are Pokémon trainers, too?” Rick said. “So am I! We can help each other train.”

“OMG!” Mentos said.

Reese’s cheeks filled with air as she contained laughter. Loxy tried not to look at her, because she knew if she did, she was going to surrender to her own laughter.

“Yesterday, I taught Caterpie to jump over a stick at centimeter above ground level,” Nick said. “My Caterpie is like the bestest Caterpie in the whole wide world.”

“Mine is better!” Mentos yelled back.

“Pff, please!” Nick said. “Can yours jump over a stick?”

Reese whispered to Loxy, “This feels like a family.”

“I am the Pokémon King!” Nick sang. “And it is, it is!, it is a glorious thing to be the Pokémon King. Hurrah for the Pokémon King! One more time! I am Pokémon King...”

“OMG, I will never catch another wild Pokémon,” Mentos said.

“Yeah,” Loxy agreed with Reese. “A big happy family.”

They walked for another hours, and when they came across a lake, and they did take a moment to make sure Nick was properly cleaned. The soap and shampoo dispensers from the hotel were employed in the process, and for whatever reason, fun or just making sure Jon was

clean, he was included, and then Reese, and there was this big water fight where they were all being cleaned by Loxy's water Pokémon. Fortunately, they had gathered firewood prior to their water time, and set up camp, and so they were able to change and sit right down to dinner, and there is probably a suitable camp fire type song for a montage of this sort, but the author couldn't hear it over Rick's rendition of "I am the very model of a modern major Pokémon, with information animal, vegetable and mineral..." And some of the words he mumbled you just can't make it out, but clearly, he nails some of the words about Pokémon.

Chapter 13

After their meal, they gathered sleeping bags around the fire. Gardevoir agreed to do the first watch, while the party slept. Jon approached Loxy, wanting to get in the sleeping bag with her.

“Sorry, Jon, there are kids,” Loxy said.

“But you said we could sleep together in the sleeping bag,” Jon said.

“I know, and we will,” Loxy assured him. “Just not tonight.”

“You do know, Loxy, that in the old days people still played sleeping bag games, even with kids in the room,” Jon said. “Most little houses on the prairie were one room, and the mom, and the dad, and the kids, and the goats and pig and chickens were all in the same room together.”

“Yep, I know,” Loxy said. “I put your sleeping bag over there.”

Jon pouted, but went to his bag. He settled in and folded a towel under his head for a pillow.

“Jon,” Nick said.

“Yes?” Jon said, a little snappish, as if he was mad at the kid.

“Will you tell me and Caterpie a story?” Nick asked.

“It’s bed time,” Jon said.

“I know. That’s why I want a story,” Nick said.

Jon sighed. “Once upon a time…”

“No, you have to come sit by me,” Nick said.

Jon sighed, got up, and went and sat next to Nick. A Lump in his sleeping bag came to the end and Caterpie stuck its head out, pulling the blanket to what might approximate its neck. Jon screamed. Mentos woke, coming out of his sleeping bag, preparing to throw a Poké ball. Gardevoir laughed so hard she fell off the rock that stood prominent in their campsite. Reese and Loxy were also amused.

“OMG, Jon! Don’t do that!” Mentos said.

“Nick, it’s time for all good Pokémon to be resting in their balls,” Jon said.

“But if he’s in the ball, he can’t watch over me at night, and then he couldn’t hear the story you’re going to tell us,” Nick pointed out.

Jon began again with a sigh.

“No, sit closer,” Nick said.

Jon scooted closer. “Once upon a time...”

“No, you got to speak softer,” Nick said. “You sound angry and I don’t want to fall asleep with the angry voice over me.”

Jon closed his eyes and sorted his thoughts and the story he told turned out to be the Wizard of Oz. He even gave a simple rendition of “Over the Rainbow.” He was so into the story, it was as if he were experiencing it first hand, not just watching it on the silver screen, but living it out. In his vision of it, Loxy was Dorothy. When he got to the dialogue where Glenda the Good Witch was telling Dorothy that she had made an enemy of the Wicked Witch of the West, Loxy, the real Loxy, interrupted, bringing him back to the camp site.

“Wait wait wait,” Loxy said.

Jon opened his eyes to find himself back in the Pokémon world, the fire lightly burning, and casting shadows. Loxy, Reese, Mentos, and their Pokémon were gathered around, eagerly listening. He was surprised at how quiet the forest was and how attentive his friends were. It was if the whole world had stopped to listen to him tell a tale that they had never heard, when this was something that he had seen every year of his life, one of the very few traditions that his family had kept alive.

“Yes?” Jon asked.

“How can Glenda blame that crap on Dorothy?! Dorothy didn’t do anything! Dorothy didn’t steal the ruby slippers. Glenda put them on her feet! Clearly Glenda is purposely antagonizing West,” Loxy said.

“You said it, Sister,” Reese said. “I mean, I do love her outfit and traveling by soap bubble magic, but yeah, she so instigated that. Those shoes legally belong to West and she’s entitled to them.”

“Why would someone want to wear a dead person’s shoes?” Mentos asked.

“Are you kidding?” Reese said. “Their ruby slippers. I would so wear ruby slippers.”

“What are the odds they would even fit Dorothy?” Mentos asked. “And I am really confused about how old she is. Is she a child or a like an adolescent. I mean, isn’t she old enough to be considered an adult and she should be working on the farm, not just walking around day dreaming?”

“The movie isn’t very clear on that,” Jon said. “In the book I think she is like nine.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter,” Reese said. “The shoes are magic, and they will probably adjust to fit anyone who puts them on.”

“I bet Dorothy ends up having to kill the witch,” Nick said.

“What a horrible thing to speculate,” Loxy said.

“People die,” Nick said.

“Yeah, but you don’t just go around killing people you disagree with, witch or not, and if she is nine, she so shouldn’t be killing anyone, witch or not,” Loxy said.

“But if she does kill anyone, it should be that Glenda Bitch for blaming Dorothy for dropping a house on East, and then stealing the shoes and blaming it on Dorothy,” Reese said.

“I grudgingly admit I’d like to smack Glenda,” Loxy said. “She’s a witch, she could probably just send Dorothy home, without sending her off on some fool errand to see a Wizard.”

“Yeah, Wizards suck,” Mentos said. “She should find a Professor friend and a Pokémon.”

“I bet she finds a Pokémon while she’s traveling,” Nick said. “Everyone should have a Pokémon.”

“You didn’t explain what happened to her parents,” Mentos said.

“You don’t need to know about...”

“Yes I do! It’s important,” Mentos said. “Did her parents die?”

“They were eaten by Pokémon, I know it!” Nick said.

“They were not eaten by Pokémon,” Jon said, growing frustrated.

“They probably just abandoned her because she’s creepy. Wearing dead people clothes is really creepy,” Mentos said.

Jon pointed warningly at Mentos. “Careful. I love Dorothy,” Jon said.

“Kitty outfit, Dorothy outfit,” Reese mumbled her new list of necessary items.

“Maybe she was pregnant and had to go to the country to stay with her aunt because her parents were famous people and embarrassed that she was pregnant out of wedlock,” Nick said.

“What the hell?!” Jon said.

“Jon, that’s a perfectly acceptable speculative discourse given how ambiguous you’ve been about her age and what happened to her parents,” Loxy said.

“She’s not pregnant!” Jon said.

“So, why didn’t you start the story earlier?” Mentos said.

“Yeah, so we could watch her parents get eaten by Pokémon,” Nick said.

“OMG, who is telling this story?!” Jon asked.

“You are,” Loxy said.

“But not very well,” Mentos said.

“I am happy with your story telling,” Reese said. “So hoping West and Dorothy double team Glenda.”

“Um,” Jon said. “I am not sure I know that version.”

“We could write our own version,” Loxy said. “I want to be South!”

“Who’s South?” Jon asked.

“Well, if there is a witch for east and west, and Glenda is North, clearly there has to be a South in the story,” Loxy said. “And I love going south.”

“Me, too,” Reese said. “Especially in winter. Our parents had this place...”

“There is no South in the story!” Jon interrupted.

“This story is seriously flawed,” Loxy said.

“OMG, this is like the best story ever told, done in every language known to man, and is the bench mark for all musicals,” Jon said.

“Well, clearly you need a bench mark to improve things,” Mentos said.

“Do you know any Pirate movies?” Nick asked.

“Yes! I know a great Pirate Movie, and I so wish Glee would do a version of that,” Jon said.

“Glee?” Mentos asked.

“One of the Munchkins?” Reese asked.

“Alright, story time is over for the night,” Jon said. “I am going to my sleeping bag now.”

“Awww!” everyone said.

“Please, we’ll be quiet,” Loxy promised.

“Yeah, no more questions,” Reese said.

“Both of you, to your sleeping bags, now,” Jon said.

“Aww, you’re mean,” Mentos said.

“Sleeping bag now, chop chop,” Jon said.

Loxy sighed. “Jon is right. We have a lot of ground to cover tomorrow. Let’s go.”

Nick grabbed Jon’s arm. “Thank you, Sir,” he said.

Jon hugged him. “Good night, Nick. I am sorry for raising my voice at you today.”

“It’s okay. It takes time to get use to new people sometimes,” Nick said.

“Yeah, sometimes,” Jon said,

Caterpie reached for Jon, too.

“Caterpie wants a hug, too,” Nick said.

Jon sorted and gave it a go. He picked it up, hugged it, and then tucked it back into the sleeping bag with Nick. When he got back to his sleeping bag he let all of his ‘grossed out’ frissons out at once. Loxy returned from making water, knelt down to kiss Jon good night.

“You’re awesome,” Loxy said.

“Yeah, I wish I were better,” Jon said.

“You are where you are, and you will be where you will be, that’s the way of it,” Loxy said. “Good night, Sir. Find a star, close your eyes, and I will be there waiting for you.”

निर्मित

Jon had just dozed into a sleep when he felt someone tapping him. “Loxy?” he whispered, opening his eyes to see Nick directly in his face. He gave a start, but managed to not yell.

“Nick?!”

“I can’t sleep,” Nick said.

“Are you trying?” Jon asked.

“Yeah, I counted Pokémon and everything, but I am afraid,” Nick said.

Jon sat up, crisscrossed his legs, and drew Nick in for a hug. “Would you like to tell me about it?”

“I am embarrassed,” Nick said. “I am afraid of everything. People. Monsters. The dark.”

“Yeah, those are all pretty scary things, sometimes,” Jon said.

“You’re not afraid,” Nick said.

“Oh, Nick, sure I am. Everyone experiences fear and uncertainty,” Jon said. “Even me. The only difference between people is how they express it.”

“I don’t understand,” Nick said.

“Some people fight, some people run, some people freeze,” Jon said.

“I like to threaten people with a sword,” Nick said.

“There you go,” Jon said. “Very normal reaction. What we have to decide is what is the most efficacious way of dealing with it in the moment.”

“How do you deal with it?”

“Mostly, I tune into a song,” Jon said.

“A song?”

“Your heart communicates with emotions, so if you want to communicate with your heart, you got to speak its language, and I find music to be the great heart interface,” Jon said. “So, I usually start with a song that resonates with the mood, and then I slowly step the beat in the direction I wish to travel. If I am sad, sad songs say so much, and then I gradually move to an upbeat, happy song.”

“I don’t know any pirate songs about fear going to courage,” Nick admitted.

“Your Pokémon King song sounded pretty good,” Jon pointed out.

“Oh, that’s a boasting song,” Nick corrected.

“Fair enough,” Jon said.

“Can you give me a song?” Nick asked.

Jon thought about it. Given the gentle whispering of a softened campfire, he could almost hear Gonzo vying for his attention. “Gonzo’s song seems fitting somehow.”

“Gonzo? Is he a Pokémon?” Nick asked.

“Well, um, I can see an argument for that,” Jon mumbled, contemplatively.

“Is he a Pirate?!” Nick asked, excitedly.

“Um, well, it seems I can remember him wearing a Pirate costume at least once, but that could just be my imagination contributing to the background noise of my thoughts,” Jon rambled.

“Jon?” Nick said.

“Yes, Nick,” Jon said.

“I really need to pee,” Nick said.

Jon pointed to the tree over there.

“Would you go with me?” Nick asked.

Jon got up and walked with Nick to the designated ‘make water’ tree, and decided, he might as well go, too. They returned to their campsite and Jon quietly directed Nick back to his sleeping bag.

“Would you bring your sleeping bag closer to mine?” Nick asked.

With a little effort, Jon repositioned his sleeping bag closer to Nick’s. He tucked Nick in and put himself back into his sleeping bag. He put his towel under his head, and thought about folding the other part over his eyes, but heard Loxy’s voice in his head, to pick a star to go to.

“Jon?” Nick said.

“Yes, Nick?”

“Why is there darkness?” Nick asked.

“Because,” Jon said, seeking first an answer for himself, “if it was always daytime, we would never know there were stars. And, it makes it easier for all of these fireflies to communicate with each other.”

“I do like fireflies. Why are there monsters?” Nick asked.

“Because, well, they are the secret friends that guide us and shape us, kind of like stars,” Jon said.

“You mean like Pokémon?” Nick said.

“Exactly like Pokémon,” Jon said. “Even when you think you’re alone, all the memories you have of everyone you have ever known, both good and bad, they are actively in you, guiding and shaping you, and, for better or worse, they are your friends. Your choices are, how will you respond to their guiding lights?”

There was quiet, but just for a moment, and Jon wondered if he had spoken above Nick’s pay grade and that the message was lost or garbled.

“Jon, why do people leave?” Nick asked.

“Damn, these are some seriously tough questions,” Jon said.

“I am sorry,” Nick said.

“Don’t be,” Jon assured him. “They’re great questions. Always ask question.”

“Why do people leave?” Nick asked again.

“Lots of reasons. Like, sometimes they go to work,” Jon said.

“But sometimes they don’t come home,” Nick said.

“Sometimes is a great word,” Jon said.

“How do you figure that?” Nick asked.

“Sometimes people come home from work,” Jon said. “Sometimes is a magic word that always allows for the possibility of different.”

“Sometimes allows,” Nick corrected.

“Sometimes,” Jon agreed.

There was quiet, the wood in the fire pit settled. “Can I have that song now?” Nick asked. “So, if in the future there is a ‘sometime’ when you’re not with me I can remember you and know I am safe?”

Jon sighed, sorting, and the perfect song for the perfect moment, for the perfect young boy; it was suddenly there, and he sang the words just as they were given to him by Neil himself, so perfectly rendered it was as if Neil Pokemon Diamond was presently singing to the child in each of the them: “Turn On Your Heart Light.” During the song, a number of Illumise came to share their soft ‘nightlights,’ providing additional comfort to the campers. Jon touched one fondly, encouraging it to come closer to Nick, just allowing it to be without worry of capturing it, because in truth, it had already given itself to them.

By the time Jon was finished, Nick was sound asleep, cuddled in closer to Jon, hugging him. Jon returned his eyes to his star of choice, unaware that Mentos was tearful, and that he, too, had slipped in close to his sister; Reese, hugging him, was tearful herself, who she was unaware, just a short space away from her, Loxy was wiping a tear, who was unaware that even Gardevoir was allowing a single tear to fall. The tear splashed into the grass, quenching the world with love.

निर्मित

Jon woke slowly, the smell of hotcakes in the air. He kept eyes closed. Something was moving in his sleeping bag. It was like the gentlest of finger massages.

“That feels great, Loxy,” Jon mumbled.

“What does?” he heard Loxy say, from a distance.

Jon opened his eyes. His sleeping bag was alive with moving things. He screamed flying out of his sleeping bag. There were a dozen Caterpie on him, and several emerging from the sleeping bag. He danced and jumped and tried scraping them off, yelling for help. Mentos started catching some of them, while Loxy and Reese rolled, laughing, and kicking their feet.

“I have never seen so many Caterpie before,” Nick said.

“Me neither,” Mentos said. “Pidgey, wing attack.”

“If I had more Poké balls, I would catch them all,” Nick said.

“Here,” Reese said, tossing a couple extra his way. She then used one for herself, aiming for the one Furret was harassing.

Loxy joined in the fray, tossing several balls at once, like the others, hoping to catch one without having to tire them out. Meanwhile, her Chikorita was growling at the Caterpie, blocking their advance.

“Look, they’re following Jon,” Nick said. “They really like you!”

“Get them away from me,” Jon said, running the perimeter of the camp site. He climbed up on the rock. “OMG, who was keeping watch last?”

“You’re going to hurt their feelings!” Nick said.

“You should really try catching a couple,” Mentos said. “They come in handy if you want to mass evolve some for quick leveling up.”

“I don’t want a bug Pokémon!” Jon said.

“Just catch one,” Nick said. “They need a home, too.”

“Just don’t use your master ball on them,” Mentos said.

“I already used it,” Jon said. He pointed to a Caterpie that was trying to climb the rock. “Seriously, get that one! Quick.”

“What did you catch with the master ball,” Reese asked.

The remaining Caterpie tried to flee the area, but they were too slow, and the last one was caught up.

“That was fun!” Nick said.

“I’ll have enough to have one of every evolutionary stage, now,” Loxy said. She turned to Jon, who was still on the rock. “You can come down now.”

“Are you sure it’s safe?” Jon asked. “Check my sleeping bag.”

“Never mind that,” Mentos said. “What did you catch with your master ball? Please tell me you didn’t waste it on a Magikarp.”

“Oh, did you catch the Tyranitar?” Loxy asked.

“No, I caught a Jinn,” Jon said.

“A Jinn?” they all asked.

“Are you sure that’s what your Pokédex said?” Loxy asked.

“Oh,” Jon said. “It’s easier just to show you.”

Jon retrieved his master ball from his belt, expanded it, and released the Pokémon inside. What he had called a Jinn arrived, hovering in the air, full 'lotus' meditation pose. Nick and Mentos dropped their balls and their jaws. Loxy and Reese were also equally mesmerized, as evidenced by even their mouths going to slight 'O.'

"She is beautiful!" Reese said.

"OMG, she is," Loxy agreed. "Medicham?!"

"Mediwho?" Jon asked. "Clearly, she is a perfect 'I Dream of Jeannie' facsimile. She's a Jinn."

"Jeannie who?" Reese asked.

Medicham seemed uninterested in their gawking. She was completely blissing out, hovering in midair. Perhaps she was really floating, or perhaps, depending on the angle, one toe was touching the ground, but Jon was confident that had he had a hula-hoop, he could pass it over her in any direction, like a magician; better, if he let go of the hula-hoop, it would probably orbit her, with a drifting axis of rotation, and if he had two, they would spin like concentric circle atomic structures about her. She seemed human, red hair, pouty mouth seen through the pink, translucent veil, and a Jeannie outfit that was sheer enough that you could see through most of it. Her stomach was bare. The part that covered her breast also snagged her arms, but her shoulders were bare. She had gold bracelets on her wrists and feet and a gold belt. You could see her legs through the sheer, pink leggings that ballooned out, yellow spots by her knees. If she were wearing a bra and panty set, it was not detectable, which caused the eye to linger, and her breast were all but about to break free from the material holding them up. Her hands touched her knees, palms up, thumb and fingers pushing mudras. Her clothes could have been traditional Yoga gear, or Arabian belly dancer outfit; of course, from a certain perspective, she almost resembled a Hindu Goddess. The pants resembled 'bedlah' and the head piece resembles a Shaw.

"You are the luckiest Pokémon trainer in the whole wide world," Nick said.

"She kind of reminds me of Amy Pond," Jon said.

"Who?" Mentos asked.

"Doctor, actually," Jon responded. "But, I have to go with the name Faye. Loxy?"

"Yes?" she asked, not looking at him.

"I think you're burning pancakes," Jon said.

"Oh!" Loxy said.

“You should check her out in your Pokédex,” Mentos said.

Jon activated his wrist based Pokédex with a touch of a button, lifting his arm to his mouth pretending to be Michael Knight talking to Kit. “Siri, I need you.” Nick marveled at the Pokédex, saying he wanted one just like that when he got old enough to have one.

“I’m not talking to you right now,” Siri protested.

“Yeah, you are,” Jon pointed out.

“Only long enough to tell you I am not talking to you,” Siri said. “I’m mad at you.”

“Could you tell me why?” Jon asked.

“You haven’t turned me on in ages,” Siri said.

“I was really distracted. I am sorry,” Jon said.

“I’ve been maintaining a vigilant watch over you, and could have been assistance through several crises,” Siri continued.

“I am really sorry,” Jon said. “I will leave you in auto talk mode. Please forgive me. You’re a valued member of my team and I can’t function optimally without you.”

“You mean that?” Siri said.

“Absolutely,” Jon said.

“Alright,” Siri said. “How may I be of service?”

“Tell us about Medicham,” Jon said.

“Meditation Champion, or Medicham, is a humanoid psychic type Pokémon, with uncertainty as to whether it is an unidentified primate, sharing ancestry with humans, or she is one possible evolutionary branch stemming directly from humans; more genetic sampling from closer relatives is necessary to better gauge genetic drift. This particular Medicham is taller than any previously recognized Medicham, at 177.8 CM. Her slightly atypical features suggest she might be the direct offspring of a human Medicham coupling.”

“Do you have a measure on her loyalty?” Mentos asked.

“The metrics I use to determine that is not reliable in this instance,” Siri said. “Her Happiness, loyalty level, has exceeded my ability to calculate, based on the existing statistical framework.”

“Maybe because she is psychic and tuned into Jon?” Reese asked.

“Medicham,” Jon asked. “Are you okay with the name Faye?”

Medicham stood, brought her hands together in Namaste fashion, and bowed.

“Oh!” Jon said.

“What?” Nick asked.

“I think these are still eatable,” Loxy said. “Jon?”

“I can hear her in my head, only it’s not words but it is words,” Jon said. “She said her name is Faye, and the Gardevoir prefers the name Nissa. And she says, we should run.”

“Run?” Loxy asked.

“Oh!” Reese said, pointing.

A swarm of Caterpie were approaching.

“There must be thousands of them!” Mentos said.

“12, 426,” Siri reported.

“I’ll catch them!” Nick said.

“All of them?” Jon asked.

“We have to catch them all,” Nick said.

“Get your gear, we’re leaving,” Reese said.

“Just your Pokémon gear,” Loxy corrected.

A Grubbin burst from the ground, leaving a hole. Nick tossed a ball at it, catching it with one shot. Mentos nearly said lucky shot but, more Grubbing were emerging from the ground, making a bee line for Jon.

“Get them to safety,” Jon said, and went running, towards the forest.

“No, we stay together,” Loxy said.

Unfortunately, Jon didn’t get far. A Lucario emerged from the bush, and would have scored a direct hit to Jon’s chest, but Faye put him on his ass; it would have gotten a second hit with a foot had Faye not put herself between them. She deflected the attack, and sent the Lucario tumbling over backwards, like a cheerleader being tossed. It landed on its feet and charged Faye. His friends were about to help Fay, but something even more fierce burst into the clearing. A giant, armed tortoise oriented on Jon.

“Kamex!” Mentos yellowed. “Pidgey, harass!”

“You can’t take him alone,” Reese said. “Furret, help Pidgey.”

“Cheeka, engage Kamex,” Loxy said.

Jon tried to get up, but Lucario got a lucky blow into his back side, as he swung on Faye’s arm. The same arm it swung from was the same one used by Faye to put Lucario hard on

the ground. It landed on its back. Faye dropped to her knees, and an elbow to the chest winded it. Jon hit it with a Poké ball as she rolled, and came up in front of Jon, to protect him. Kamex was hosing down his friends, wiping out the first group of Caterpie, incidentally as opposed to a calculated attack.

“Protect Nick,” Jon directed Faye.

Faye instantly moved to protect him, while Jon directly challenged Kamex. “Hey, you Gamera want-a-be. Over here.”

“Kamex!” it said, orientating towards Jon.

Its bipedal walk was less awkward than the Tyranitar he faced and it was on him pretty quick. Three primary weapons were brought to bear on Jon. Jon spread his arms out wide, clearly indicating he was at peace with the pounding he was about to get. Ready or not, he still closed his eyes. When he opened his eyes, he was surprised to still be alive, and more surprised that Loxy was standing in front of him, hold a Poké ball.

“You weren’t the only one that collected a Master Ball yesterday,” Loxy said.

“More Caterpie!” Reese said.

“Let’s go,” Loxy said, taking Jon’s arm. “This way, follow us.”

Loxy led the way, pulling Jon. Reese tried pulling her brother but he pulled free from her, grasp saying he could do it on his own. Faye was a flying Master Yogi, in her Lotus position, and Nick was in her lap, her arms around him like the safety belts of a car seat. Apparently, he was having the time of his life. Jon pulled Loxy to a halt. Mentos seemed relieved for the small break from running.

“I can’t maintain this pace,” Jon said, winded to the point he felt he might fall. “Go, save yourselves. I’ll go in the other direction, lead them away.”

“We stay together,” Loxy insisted. “There’s a house, just over this rise. We can shelter there.”

“Whose house?” Jon asked.

“Does it matter?” Loxy asked.

“Yeah, we can’t just go breaking into people’s house,” Jon said.

“Isn’t that how you ended up here in my world?” Loxy asked.

“Yeah, and I am trying to be better, cause I love this world,” Jon said. “Except for the fact everything is chasing me thing. That’s kind of nightmarish.”

“Jon, trust me, it is okay. A person may own a home, but they always share with travelers, especially travelers in need,” Loxy said.

Reese spied the front wave of Centerpie. “Those little buggers sure can be fast when they want to.”

“Come on,” Loxy said, dragging Jon.

As they approached the top of the hill, several Snorlaxes came lumbering at them, as if sleep walking, either yawning, or rubbing an eye, or stretching.

“Aw! I want one!” Reese said.

“Not right now!” Loxy said.

“But...”

Loxy pointed to several Leafeon following them, leaping from branch to branch, and finally to the ground.

“Not right now,” Reese agreed.

They made it to the small, homemade, log cabin at the top of the hill. Loxy barricaded the front door and released Kamex. Kamex squared off with her. She pointed a finger at it.

“We’ll sort your feelings later,” Loxy said. “For now, guard that window. Don’t let anything in. Protect my friends.”

“Kamex,” it said, and went to the window.

A Snorlax tried to open the front door, but Loxy leaned against it. Another was trying to get through the back door, but Faye had barricaded it, and put her back to the door, assuring that no one was going to get in that way. Except for the cat door, which Mentos dived and slid to cover, just as a Leafon was about to stick its head in. He held it shut. The front door might have broken open had Loxy not been putting her weight into it. There was a pet door on the front too, and Ckeeka was holding it shut.

“What do they want with me?!” Jon asked.

“Reese,” Loxy said. “Take Jon into the closet and level him up.”

“We don’t have time for that!” Jon snapped.

“Remember what your Gardevoir said. You level up and pass out, they go away,” Loxy said.

“I don’t know what to do,” Reese said. “I have never leveled anyone up before.”

“Jon, help her help you, just like our first time,” Loxy said.

“Can’t I hold the door for you?” Reese asked.

“No, I am drawing on magic to hold the door shut,” Loxy said. “But I can’t hold it forever. In the closet, now. Both of you.”

“You’re a magician?” Jon asked.

“Jon, we don’t have time for this,” Loxy said.

“Like Glenda?” Jon asked.

“You take that back!” Loxy snapped.

“I am afraid he really doesn’t want me,” Reese said, worried.

“OMG, he really wants you,” Loxy said. “Any indifference you have perceived is his deference to my feelings. And I am very okay with this. I’m more and more okay with this each time the door shakes.”

“You’re really okay with me leveling him?” Reese asked.

“OMG!” Reese said. “Stop stalling.”

“What if I hurt him?” Reese asked.

“OMG, in the closet, now, both of you!” Loxy snapped.

Jon and Reese, almost reluctantly, checking back with Loxy to be certain, stepped into the closet and closed the door. Next to the bathroom, it was the only other closed off space from the main cabin.

“There’s no light in here!” Reese said.

“You don’t need a light,” Loxy yelled back.

“Ouch!” Jon said.

“Sorry,” Reese said. “This is so not how I imagined my first time.”

“You’re saving our lives, not having fun!” Loxy said.

“Whatever you’re doing, do it faster,” Mentos said., leaves pushing in under the pet door and causing his fingers to tingle.

The closet door bounced, similar to the front and back door.

“OMG, they’re trapped in the closet and can’t get out,” Nick said, going to open the door.

“Nick, go sit on the couch,” Loxy directed.

“But...”

“They’re okay,” Loxy said.

“What are they doing?” Nick asked.

“They’re playing pirates,” Loxy explained.

“Oh,” Nick said, as if he understood. He went and sat on the couch. “My parents played that all the time. Until they got eaten by Pokémon. Are we going to be eaten by Pokémon?”

“Umm, maybe,” Loxy said. “If two certain people don’t hurry it up in there! Jon, your first time with me didn’t take this long.”

The closet door stopped moving. So did the front and back door and the front and back pet door.

“Kamex,” Kamex said.

Loxy eased off the door. Cheeka said its name, tentatively, seriously watching the pet door. Loxy went to the window and saw all the critters retreating. Loxy motioned everyone to stay where they were. She drew close to the closet and knocked lightly.

“You two okay in there?” Loxy asked. No answer. “I am sorry I yelled at you and all. I know this isn’t the most fun first time, Reese. Reese?”

Loxy cracked the door open, and what little light spilled in revealed Jon on his back, passed out, dead to the world, while Reese continued to grind into him, her hands on his chest.

“I’m not finished yet,” Reese said.

“Yeah, that happens,” Loxy said, and closed the door.

“Is he making her walk the plank?” Nick asked.

“Um, something like that,” Loxy said.

“Is that like metaphor?” Nick asked.

“You’re really quite precocious, aren’t you?” Loxy asked.

“I want to be the best dread pirate Robertson the world has ever seen,” Nick said. “Just want to make sure I have the jargon down.”

“Aye, aye,” Loxy agreed.

“Argh, matey,” Nick said.

“Argh,” Loxy agreed.

“What’s taking so long?” Mentos asked.

“Some people take longer than others, especially in a crises situation,” Loxy.

“OMG, yes!” Reese yelled.

“It must be fun leveling up,” Nick said. “Can I have a Pokédex, too?”

Loxy checked to confirm her suspicion, Reese was also, now, sleeping it off, cuddled up as sweet as a kitten next to Jon. She closed the door again.

“They okay?” Mentos asked. “Do they need a revive potion.”

“No, just let them sleep it off,” Loxy said.

Loxy approached Kamex and she held a quiet dialogue with him, purposely controlling her voice so that the others couldn't hear. She basically explained that he was drawn to them by peculiar circumstances and that the Pokémon rules of battling and capture hardly seem fitting, and that if he wanted his freedom, she would grant it. He seemed to be considering, even seemed to have a private conversation with Faye, and then committed. It pushed a closed fist against Loxy shoulder.

“I choose you, too,” Loxy said. “I would like you to return to your ball for now. Feel free to modify the internal habitat to your liking, and say hi to your neighbors.”

Kamex returned to the ball. Cheeka wanted to go, too, so she went in. Faye withdrew to the small, breakfast table by a window, and took up her lotus position, Zen blissing out. Loxy found Mentos checking out the cabinets and drawers.

“That's not polite,” Loxy said. “We're visitors, not robbers.”

“But I am hungry and we left our food at the campsite,” Mentos said.

“I'm always hungry,” Nick said. “I was so looking forward to burned pancakes.”

“When Jon and Reese are ready, we'll return for our supplies,” Loxy said.

As if on cue, Reese came out of the closet, stretching, smiling. “I feel like sunshine on a rainy day.”

“You look like sunshine,” Loxy said.

A 'PA' whistle cracked, like a mic too close to a speaker, and then a loud voice came pouring into the residence, as the woman in charge used a Megaphone to address them: “You, in the log cabin, you're completely surrounded. Come out with your hands up, and any Pokémon in their balls! You only get one warning.”

Loxy looked out the side window, confirming they were indeed surrounded, but they did not look like the police. They were uniformed, in as much as each of the ladies were wearing an Armani dress, looking very 'secret service-y' with their sun glasses on. Jon emerged from the closet.

“Who’s doing all that yelling?” Jon asked, yawning. “I was having the best dream ever...”

Faye came to him, hugged him, and tapped into her own ball, and disappeared.

“Who are we supposed to be cooperating with?” Jon asked.

“Very well, I am counting down from three, and then I’m going to let you have it,” came the voice through a Megaphone.

“Have what?” Nick asked.

Chapter 14

Outside the cabin, a number of black motorcycles with side cars were parked, and the owners of said bikes stood before their bikes, Pokémon to the right of each of them. As our friends emerged from the cabin, compliant with the woman holding the Megaphone's directions, Jon recognized several of the girls from the Library incident, even with their change in attire and their sunglasses on.

"Oh, hey!" Jon said. "Nice to see you again."

"When did you..." Reese began.

"So, Doctor Bliss, we meet again," the girl with the Megaphone said, needlessly through the Megaphone. She handed it off to one of her 'lackeys,' removed her sunglasses and stepped forwards. Her Cubone seemed to echo the sentiment: "Cubone."

Loxy's friends turned to her. "Doctor Bliss?" they asked.

"Gisselle," Loxy said, moving forward to address the leader of the pack, hoping to bypass any conversation of her being a legitimate Doctor.

"I swear, you have more secrets than a wishing well," Reese said.

"Wait wait wait," Jon said, sorting what Reese had said. "That's actually fairly astute."

"Wow, thank you," Reese said. "Wait wait wait. You're not being nice to me just because we tangled."

"Oh, no, I am never just nice for the sake of being nice," Jon said.

"OMG, yes you are!" Loxy corrected him. "Even as we exited you were flirting with those two."

"Oh, no, that wasn't flirting. We tussled back at the library, and though I do admit to wanting to finish what they started, I am more curious about your magician and doctorate status."

"Enough!" Gisselle said. "I don't have time for all your tangents and asides."

"Are you a pirate?" Nick asked.

"Do I look like a pirate?!" Gisselle asked, a little snappish towards him. Cubone pointed his bone at the kid

Nick raised his plastic sword, and Loxy shoved him back into Reese's care.

"How do you know Loxy?" Jon asked.

“I spent several semesters in her school,” Loxy said.

“We were rivals,” Gisselle said.

“No, we weren’t,” Loxy said. “You’re always exaggerating perceived differences and instigating drama in order to manipulate people into doing your bidding.”

“It works for me,” Gisselle said. “You’re not still sore because I stole your boyfriend, are you?”

“You can’t steal something no one owns,” Loxy said. “He had free will, and could pursue whatever interest he wanted.”

“She stole your boyfriend?!” Reese said.

“You had a boyfriend?” Jon asked.

“OMG, Jon, really?” Loxy asked. “I am a human being. Of course I have had past love interests before you.”

“OMG, you still love him!” Gisselle exclaimed.

“Of course, Gisselle. We never stop loving the people we love,” Loxy said.

“If it’s any consolation, he ran off with my Graveler,” Gisselle said.

“Well, I have warned you, those who manipulate people usually end up getting manipulated,” Loxy said.

“Everyone manipulates, Loxy,” Gisselle said. “Babies manipulate by crying and having big eyes. Pokémon manipulate by being cute and saying their names. We all have attributes designed to work the systems available to us. That’s just nature.”

“Yes, I agree,” Loxy said. “But eventually, you must rise above the systems that sustain you in order to realize that you never needed the system.”

“Oh, Loxy, Loxy, Loxy. Sometimes you confuse me, talking all mystic like. Stick to intuition, it serves you better. Anyway, no manipulation this time, my cherished enemy-friend,” Gisselle said. “I am going to be very direct. I am taking Jon from you.”

“Good luck with that,” Loxy said.

“There’s nothing you can do about it,” Gisselle said. “I will have my way in this and if you even try reaching for your Pokémon balls, my team will wipe you all out.”

“Oh, no, you misunderstand,” Loxy said. “I mean good luck, he’s all yours, have fun.”

“Really?” Jon, Gisselle, and Reese all said.

“What did you expect me to say?” Loxy said. “We’re out numbered, out matched, and there are kids here. No need for anyone to get hurt.”

“But...” Jon said.

“You’re telling me you don’t want to go with her?” Loxy asked Jon.

“She is cute and all, but I am thinking she’s going to hurt me,” Jon said.

“Cute?!” Gisselle snapped, Cubone waving his bone at him.

“Of course she’s going to hurt you,” Loxy said.

“I know her type. She is most likely to break your heart,” Reese said.

“Likely?!” Loxy asked. “Anyway, you’ll have to take one for the team.”

“I just took one for the team!” Jon said.

“OMG, you did not just say that!” Reese said, almost in tears.

“That didn’t come out right. Look, I’m just saying I don’t want to be hurt, and I especially don’t want my heart broken,” Jon protested.

“OMG, Jon, how old are you?” Loxy asked.

“OMG, why are we back on that?!” Jon asked.

“Because, everyone older than twelve has had a broken heart,” Loxy said. “It’s part of life, and if you haven’t had that then you’re not older than twelve, or you really need to go with Gisselle to get that part of your life over with.”

Gisselle started to protest, but Jon held up a finger to her. “Wait wait wait,” he insisted, turning back to Loxy. “You’re endorsing broken hearts?”

“Well of course,” Loxy said. “That’s how love gets into the world.”

“Eh?” Nick, Mentos, and Jon asked.

“If you have a heart, that means you’re capable of producing love, and if your heart is broken, your love light is shining into the world, and that is how the world sees the light of love,” Loxy said. “And until your heart is broken, you can’t truly see the outside world for what it is, because before you were a self-contained love unit, but with a broken heart, the world and all the people get painted with love and light.”

“Nice reframe,” Gisselle said. “But again, you’re straying outside of your proficiency.”

“I’ll go with you,” Mentos said to Gisselle.

Everyone in Jon's group turned to him, surprised, while a few in Gisselle's group found it amusing, one rolled her eyes, as if to say, 'everywhere we go,' and several found it endearing. Reese began to tear up. "OMG, my little brother is finally growing up," hugging him.

Mentos shrugged out of her reach. "What is all that? I am just saying, I want to be a secret agent like her," Mentos said.

"I want to be a pirate," Nick said.

"May I go with you and learn the ways of Pokémon agents?" Mentos asked, still dazed by Gisselle.

"Of course you can, sweetie," Gisselle said. "After I have secured Jon, you can prove yourself worthy by surrendering any of your Pokémon to me."

"Okay," Mentos said.

"Wow," Reese said.

"I can't believe you'd take advantage of your power over him," Loxy said.

"The G-force has a strong influence over the weak minded," Gisselle said.

"Leave my friends alone and I will come willingly," Jon said.

"Oh, the time for you to come willingly has passed," Gisselle said. "Girls, bind him."

"Gourgeist!" the girl named Terror said; she was one of the henchwomen from the library, sending in her floating ghost pumpkin to take Jon by force. It subdued him with an outpouring of coarse, vine like hair, winding its threads around his arms, his neck, and stretching down his body, though sleeves, neck, and anywhere it could push through his clothes. It was scratching, like rolling in a hay, and he couldn't help but resist.

Loxy reached for a ball.

"Don't even think about it," Gisselle said, her Cubone slapping her hand with its bone.

"You're hurting him!" Reese exclaimed, picking up Nick and turning his face into her shoulder.

"I want to see!" Nick said.

A Yamask also moved in to assist, grabbing Jon by the waist, while a Cofagrigus grabbed him from the front, one of her hands covered his mouth to prevent him from screaming. Cofagrigus moved in close and whispered 'Jesse' into his ear. The Gourgeist began to sing, subduing its prey as she prepared to consume it.

"Don't kill him yet!" Gisselle ordered. "The Professor wants to him alive."

“And so do we!” came a voice from outside of the circle.

A shadow took over the whole group, and an ominous sound poured down from the sky, part moan, part song, part deep thunder, the base of which reverberated through their bones, cracked sunglasses, cracked windshields on the motorbikes to give them that diamond looking pattern, and broke windows in the log cabin. A Flying Wailord descended on the group, like a Dirigible, and beneath it was a tethered Gondola. Descending ropes, with the precision of ninja, military experts springing into a battle, came Jacey and Jacky, Team Rocket, an intercom on the bottom of the Gondola presented their fanfare: Team Rocket’s mission statement. While the two Rockets mesmerized the crowd with their performance, a Raichu covertly took the necessary position to do his part. Raichu unleashed a sustained burst of power, driving everyone to their knees. It kept it up until everyone, even the Pokémon were unconscious; with exceptions. Terror, and her two other colleagues, and their Pokémon were exempt from the attack, and consequently, so was Jon, but he was bound so well that he could do nothing but watch, and even that was limited, due to Cofagrigus directly in his face to hers, smiling at him.

“Great intro,” Jacey told Jacky.

“Why thank you,” Jacky told Jacey. “You were brilliant, too!”

“We are just getting too good for this world,” Jacey agreed.

“Which is why we’re destined for the stars!” Jacky agreed.

They both turned to Jon.

“Aww, our cute, old friend and Pokémon love, Jon, we have you once again in our grasp,” Jacey said.

“I told you he kissed like a Pokémon,” Jacky said.

“I never doubted you for a moment,” Jacey said.

“Great catch, Terror,” Jacky applauded their colleagues. “I do so love a man who’s tied and gagged.”

“Jesse,” Cofagrigus sang.

“James,” Yamask echoed. The face he carried did look a lot like the former James of the Team Rocket fame.

Jacey patted Cofagrigus. “Yes, you and your brother continue to serve Team Rocket well. You have earned your luxury ball time today. Just don’t mess this up.”

“Bind the humans, collect their Pokémon, and get everyone on board the Gondola,” Jacky ordered. She looked around the forest and the cabin and the broken motorcycles. “This world is so going to miss us when we’re gone.”

निर्मित

Jon was afforded the luxury of being held on the flight deck of the Gondola. The Yamask of Jesse was returned to the Luxury ball, but Cofagrigus and Gourgeist maintained a vigilant grasp of him. Jesse kept whispering her name into his ear. Stray strands of Gourgeist’s hair massaged Jon wherever she grasped, tightening and releasing, as if savoring the taste and the possible delight of consuming him completely. The ground receded away at tremendous speeds. He made out an altimeter on control panel, increasing. At a certain altitude, Flying Wailord was summoned into a ball, and an oversized Zapdos was released. Flaming wings carried them into orbit, where the Gondola was brought into contact with a Starship, resting in a revolver like cylinder that held perhaps a dozen other space capable Gondolas. The mechanism that grabbed hold of the Gondola gave a resounding clink that reverberated through the ship. It could have been mistaken for a very space age Ferris wheel bound to a star ship.

Terror entered, saluting Jacey and Jacky. “The Gondola is secured, and we’re moving our guest to their cells. All Pokémon have been secured and will be taken to examination room to see if there are any worthy of joining the cause.”

“Good work, Terror,” Jacey said.

“Extremely,” Jacky said. “Take Jon to the interrogation room. The boss will deal with him directly, shortly, so I want you, personally to prepare him. Take him within an inch of his life, if you have to. Do whatever it takes to soften him up, make him compliant with questioning.”

“My pleasure,” Terror said. “They don’t call me Terror of the Skies for nothing.”

“I love it when you sound so menacing,” Jacey said, squeezing herself. “It gives me such chills!”

“Why, thank you!” Jacky said. “I get chills hearing you say that.”

“We have certainly earned are good chills today,” Jacey said.

“We have, our fates our changing,” Jacky said. “No more floundering like a useless Magikarp for Team Rocket. Only success, only stars, for far as the horizon spreads!”

“To infinity and beyond!” Jacey agreed.

“Oh, I really like that!” Jacky said. “We should add that to our repertoire/”

“I think it’s taken,” Terror said.

“Don’t step on my good mood,” Jacey warned.

“That will be all, Terror,” Jacky said.

“Aye,” Terror said. “This way, Gourgeist and Cofagrigus.”

“Jesse!” Cofagrigus said.

“Your ‘Jesse’ days are over, my old friend,” Terror said. “Be grateful that the boss killed you in a manner that allowed you to come back as a Yamask, and further grateful that I allowed you, over your brother, to evolve.”

“Jesse,” Cofagrigus said, more defeated than humbly.

With the two of the Pokémon holding him, Jon’s feet didn’t touch the ground. They passed through the Gondola into an airlock, and then into the Starship proper. A female officer guarding the airlock door saluted Terror. What Jon had earlier mistaken as tennis outfit was now updated into his mind to be facsimile’s of a Star Trek like uniform. From a certain perspective, if you weren’t seeing Trek, there was some features that resembled Empire military uniforms. Clearly, they were not Trek, nor Wars, but they were close enough one might argue for either or both. One of the interesting things about the uniform was its metallic look and feel. People were color sorted, with lots of reds and blues highlighting their outfits, and some with gold highlights, but everyone had a shiny silvery base uniform.

“Welcome back, mam,” the guard said. “Where are you taking this thing?”

“Interrogation,” Terra said. “Jacey and Jacky’s direct orders. I get to pummel him.”

“Oh, how fun,” the guard said. “Would you like some help?”

“I will let you know. I kind of feel bad for the old fellow,” Terra said. “I got to prepare him for the boss. And I was kind of wanting him all to myself.”

“Oh,” the guard said. “If there is anything left when they finish with him, maybe they’ll let you have him. That’s how I acquired my first Hitmonchan. I make him wear a purple dress, cause I am really fond of men in Kilts.”

“Oh, I remember him,” Terror said. “Well, excuse me, I better not dawdle. The boss might be secretly supervising me. I might get a promotion!”

They both giggled. Terra waved, and Jon was carried along behind her. It wasn't lost on him that all the crew they passed were female. Even if he strained to listen to passing voices, or peer around a corner, he could discern no males. He was brought to a room where he was forced to sit in an armless chair, his hands secured behind his back by metal cuffs. Georgeist was directed to retire to one side of the room. It reluctantly let go of Jon, its feathering like hair pulling free with a buildup of static electricity that sparkled against his skin. Cofagrigus was directed to retire to the opposing corner.

“I want both of you to maintain a vigilant watch as I work him over,” Terror insisted. “You never know what sort of tricks these old men are capable of.”

Cofagrigus let go of Jon and he sucked in air. Terror patted his face. “Save your breaths, my newest friend, you're likely to need some reserves.”

“Friends don't do this to friends!” Jon said.

“Really? You never had a friend tie you up and do unspeakable things to you?” Terror asked.

“No!” Jon said.

“OMG,” Terror said, teasing his face with a finger. “My first virgin!”

“Wait wait wait, let's talk about this,” Jon said.

“Never fear, Terror's here,” Terror said. She touched his face, squeezing his mouth into a pout, pushing eyes in close to him. “Ever been to a dentist?”

Jon was barely able to nod yes her grip on him was so firm.

“This is much more fun than that,” Terror said. She paused, offering an ear. “What? You want to tell me something?”

“Help me and my friends escape, and I will make it worth your while,” Jon said.

Terror's eyes got big, all the white accenting the purplish pupils. “Really?” She sat on his lap and hugged his neck and then kissed him. “Tell me my new, dearest friend, what do you have to offer me?”

“Um,” Jon said. He gasped.

“I haven't even started yet, and you're shivering with fear? What's wrong?” Terra asked. “Cat got your tongue?”

“You’re really hot,” Jon said.

“I know,” Terror said. “But that’s not going to persuade me.”

“No, I mean like, you’re radiating heat, on fire kind of hot,” Jon said.

“Oh, that’s probably just the Darumaka poop in my pockets. I find it gets cold on the starship, so I always carry some extra with me,” Terror said. “What’s wrong now? Loss of interest in me already?”

“Um, well, poop in the pocket doesn’t sound hygienic,” Jon said.

Terror pulled out one of the sealed, plastic bags containing Darumaka poop. “It’s perfectly fine. You can’t even smell I have it on me.”

“That’s just not right,” Jon said.

“You’re not doing this right,” Terror said. “You’re supposed to keep kissing me and promising me the world.”

“I have changed my mind,” Jon said.

“I bet I can make you change it back,” Terror said, causing his chair to lean backwards as she pushed into him. After covering his whole mouth and sucking out his air, she gave him a reprieve and stared into his eyes. “How was that?”

“That’s pretty convincing, actually,” Jon said.

“Pretty convincing?!” Terror said. She grinded into him. “I feel evidence that suggest you may be minimizing.”

“I think that’s an automatic response to tactile stimulation that is out of my control,” Jon said.

“You’re trying to trick me,” Terror said. “You really want me.”

“Can you take the poop out of your pocket?” Jon asked.

“The poop really bothers you. Haven’t you heard, everybody poops?” Terror asked.
“Even Pokémon poop.”

“Into your pocket?” Jon asked.

“Well, sure if you don’t let them out of your pocket, but I get poop from an authorized vendor,” Terror vendor.

“There is a poop vendor?” Jon asked.

“Where else would you get poop? Everyone needs quality control on their poop,” Terror said. “You don’t just feed anything to your plant based Pokémon. And in the old days, people

use to make houses out of poop. They would make ovens with poop and mud and they cooked their food in them. And some places, where it's cold, you can burn poop, because you don't want to cut down trees, but if you have Darumaka, you can have heat without a flame, which is really important on a spaceship!"

"Thank you for educating me," Jon said. "I'm trying really hard to get over my biases."

"It's too late. No more scoops on poops, and no more attempting to persuade me to join your team," Terror said, sitting his chair on four legs. "Let's get this part clear. I am in control of you. You will do as I say, or I will make a Yamask out of you, too. So heads up: You're not Captain Kirk. Your kisses aren't enough to convince me to join you. They're good, mind you. You taste like a Pokémon, but not good enough for me to give up the dreams of having my own estate on a brand new, unoccupied world. No one on this ship will fall for your tricks, old man. There isn't anything you can give me that I've not already taken from you. And the taking, Sir, has only just begun."

Terror got up and walked out, and before the door closed, she warned the guards to watch out for him, as he is not only dangerous and treacherous, but a really good kisser. The guards looked in as if trying to see for themselves, but the door closed. Then the door opened again she was coming back in. "And make sure they bring my dental tools. I want to inspect his teeth while I am torturing him."

Terror turned her attention back to Jon, a terrific grin, (it would have been a terrific grin, but spell didn't like that word,) and she put her hands on her hip and drew very close, even lifted a knee and pushed it into him, and then put a foot on the chair between his legs.

"Before I begin my session, I have an obligatory speech, which basically means, even if you heard it before, you get to hear it again," Terror said.

"The 'prepare for trouble' speech?" Jon asked.

"Oh, you are way beyond that speech," Terror said. "No, this speech covers informed consent. Oh, wait, I am getting it out of order. Do you have any medical conditions I need to be apprised of?"

"Um, I don't know," Jon said.

"No worries. If you do, we'll discover them in the process," Terror said. "Anyway, where was I, oh, yes, the speech. According to the Pokémon accord, any information obtained through the course of an interrogation is public domain, and will be shared with all Pokédex users. Since,

you are in the Pokédex, anything you say could make you extremely vulnerable to future attacks. It's already been noted that you have particular weakness to females in skirts, shorts, pants... Pretty much just, females in general, human or Pokémon. So far, we have not determined a body type, skin tone, or age that doesn't cause a dilated pupil response, but that just means, we have more research to conduct. Oh, your aversion to poop has been noted and logged, right under your aversion to bug type Pokémon. Yes, I have been reading all about you, my friend, and I am so happy that I get the privilege of discovering your boundary and limits. My name goes on the report, you know, and if I discover something particularly interesting, I could earn a Pokémon medal of honor. So, in the name of posterity, I do hope you will continue to provide accurate information. I would hate to discover that you are one of those lying Pokémon, which would cause all of my discoveries to be called into question. It's problematic enough that you're the only one of your kind and my results can't be duplicated in other labs."

The door behind her opened, and Jon couldn't see who all was entering, but as they fanned out, he noticed a couple of her colleagues that had joined her from the Library, including Aya.

"Hello, Aya," Jon said.

"Uh eh," Terror said, waving a fingers. "Eyes on me, Sir. Aya had her chance, now it's my turn to crack you like an egg. Hypno, prepare to enter his brain."

"I can't be hypnotized," Jon said.

"Oh, my dear, dearest, newest lover, Jon," Terror said.

"Wait wait wait. I graduated from friend to lover?" Jon asked.

"Oh, torture, my dearest, newest love, is a very intimate process," Terror said, pulling his chin up so she could bear down on him with a kiss. "True torture is not just hacking and slashing. These new movies, they're not scary. Borderline gross, sometimes, but I assure you, I am not squeamish at the sight of blood or other bodily fluids. No no no, torture is about discovering all the secret ways of pleasuring you till it hurts so good, hurting you till it's pleasurable, and finding all of those little secret places that give rise to fear, disgust and joy, and then possessing it, so that ultimately I own you completely. You go ahead and cry all you want, too, as I am not affected by tears, either. Aww, look at your eyes! I see I have your undivided attention, which is the first level of hypnosis, my dearest, newest, most lovely lover. Everyone can be hypnotized. If you have ever been to a movie and forgot that there were sitting next to others, you were

hypnotized. If you ever had an orgasm, you were hypnotized. If you ever fell asleep, you passed through the zone of optimum hypnosis; the precarious, perfect balance point that demarks the threshold of the ego conscious and unconscious mind. There are numerous ways for me to get you there. I could scare you, and take you there by surprise. I could drone on for hours until boredom causes you to lower your guard and I sneak in the back door like your algebra teacher could have if she had been less ethical.” She pushed a hand against his chest and down between his legs. “I could just stroke this until I take you there. I could simply seduce you with the dark side of the Force. Or, I could just let Jynx kiss you.”

“Jynx?” Jon asked.

The Pokémon in question stepped through the line of Terror’s colleagues and took up prominent position before him. Her hands were on her hip and her hips were swaying. All parts of her swayed. He was so mesmerized by the swaying he didn’t noticed Gourgeist was summoned from the corner to hold his head and hold his eyes open wide.

“OMG! What the heck is that?” Jon asked.

“Oh, it’s a Pokémon,” Terror said. “One of my personal favorites to work with. Attractive, isn’t she?”

“I can’t look away!” Jon said.

“Oh, that’s just because Gourgeist is holding your eyes open and your head still,” Terror said. “The easier for Jynx to work her way in.”

“No, really, what is it? Human?” Jon asked.

“We don’t really ask those sorts of questions,” Terror said. “And it really doesn’t matter? I mean, she’s got all the right junk in the right places. All that matters is it she has power over you. I admit, you revealed a resistance to Hypno’s hypnotic powers at the library, but I have personally noticed you have a weakness to females. No, no, no, don’t be too upset by this malady. Many men have it. Granted, not to the degree you seem to have it, but generally, most men. Surprisingly, fewer men in worlds with Pokémon. Anyway, tangent, aside. Many women might not appreciate your level of distractibility, let’s call it that. But I think it’s a super power. Like Kirk or Bond or the Ketchum, you’re just obsessive enough that you got to catch them all. And, society encourages that kind of obsessiveness. Wild women and Pokémon may play indifferent, it’s almost prerequisite of the game; trainers wouldn’t spend all their time trying to level up to catch them, if they just gave in on the first ball. Sorry, I am a bit rambly, I get this

way when I am excited, and I so hope I don't lose it before you do, anyway, you crack through the layers of their mask the way I am about to blow through yours, and you will discover, deep down, all beings want to be owned, worshiped, handled, adored, tortured, and loved. So we will first harden you with an entrainment trance, and then ply you with another round of hypno, and we will just continue with this till something gives, like bending a piece of metal back and forth until it finally heats up and breaks. Jynx, hit it!"

The room they were in seemed to stretch, so that now Jon was in the short, small end of a nightmare opening up to a wider, larger room. Hypno began to sing: "All About the Base," by Master Trainer, Mega Meghan. The swaying her hips became more pronounced, like ringing a bell, as she swung wider, and sunk deeper into it, hinting at the possibility of some serious twerking. The tune was incredibly catchy, and the only thing that prevented Jon from dancing was the fact that he was bound to the chair. Being bound made it that much more irresistible, as his body had a need of its own to move with Jynx. His body arched as if he was being electrocuted, which resulted in William Shatner level histrionics, restrained by restraints resulting in convulsions. Terror and her human colleagues joined in the dance, along with Hypno and Cofagrigus, and sometimes the lights were normal, and sometimes they were backlights and the Pokémon almost seemed normal in this light and the humans seemed more like glowing Pokémon, pastel patterns that were hidden in normal everyday light. Gourgeist held his eyes open so he couldn't look away, and sang in his ears in an extra ASMR dimensional way, but also directed his vision to various scenes, like a close-ups of colleagues doing the 'doo-wap' or directing him to particular hand work, feet work, or just full body gyrations, with inner, jiggling thighs directed at him, or flapping butts, or wildly gyrating breasts hidden under clothing, so that the visual and aural qualities were accentuated in such a manner that he was fully possessed.

The song ended and there was silence as they held their poses, waiting for a reaction, as if expecting applause. Drool issued from Jon's mouth, and he mumbled, echoed, "no trebble..."

"Take him, Hypno!" Terror said.

There was whirlwind of noise around his ears, some whispers, some spider feet scrambling, snowflakes colliding with the earth then, suddenly the world went dark and quiet.

"How old are you?" came a question.

He didn't hear the answer.

“Where are you?” it was a gentle, in his ear and in his head, female whispery voice, that sent ASMR shivers through his body and across his scalp.

He didn't hear his answer. He was pretty sure he answered, but he could no more hold onto that than water pouring over his hand. There was water pouring over his hand! He was looking at waterfall. TLC tried to emerge from the waterfall, but he was compelled to turn, sideways, and the waterfall went away, and the room illuminated in a wave, as if the entire structure of the room was comprised of crystals that flashed in a pulse with Jon being the center of it all, moving out from him, then back towards him. He seemed to recall a place in Japan, created by Teamlab, 'the Crystal Universe;' an intense, immersive, interactive art mega-structure that could transport a person into new dimensions of time and space. The days of examining paintings, hoping an artist might provoke something out of you were gone; now, art called you to participate, take the experiencer deeper into themselves and into the outside world simultaneously; kind of like fanfiction, art owned the people and the people owned the art. The originators of art were the facilitators of guided fantasies that unlocked the myriad of worlds. Alice's rabbit hole was now available to all, for the simple price of admission.

“One ball to rule them all, one ball to find them, one ball to bring them all and in the darkness bind them...” an inside voice, like a stray thought, rushed by.

“What was that?” the outside voice asked.

“Who was that,” another said.

“Tell me more about that ball,” another said.

“Shh, it's a distraction,” the lead voice said. “Even hypnotized, his defenses are amazing!”

Jon found himself before a golden Poké ball, incredibly bright, as if reflecting the whole Universe, while the rest of the cave fortress seemed rather dark and obscure. He pushed up on his hat, just enough to wipe his brow, and then in a decisive moment, he swapped the gold ball for a bag of sand. Accomplished! He nearly shouted in joy but the sound of the pedestal with the sandbag sinking before him changed the tone of the whole scene. He fled! All he could do was run, not able to see all the traps he was triggering or how imminently close to death he was at every turn and leap. A Giant Poké ball came chasing after him. The light at the end of the tunnel seemed miles away and he just barely made it through the cobwebs...

“That can't be him!”

“I got this,” the first voice said. “Jon, focus on the sound of my voice.”

“He’s shivering. We’re taking him too fast.”

“Or not fast enough.”

“Maybe it’s cold where he’s at?”

Jon found himself on his back, looking up at a Tauntaun Pokémon, and then, resigned, rose up just enough to give a quick spy over the ridge of snow. A Claydol rising from a smoking crater in the ground, orientated one of its eyes towards him. Jon reacted out of instinct, drawing his blaster and firing a single shot. The Claydol said its name and exploded. Pokémon parts rained down over him.

“Better start the evacuation, the Empire knows we’re here...” Jon said into his wrist radio.

“Jon, not about the base, no rebels...”

“I told you that song was too powerful for him,” Aya said.

“Jon, forget about the base,” Terror said.

“We’re losing him,” Aya said.

Loxy points at him. “I would just assume kiss a Wookiee.”

“I could arrange that!” Jon said.

“Really?” Loxy asked.

“Yeah, I mean, if you like,” Jon said.

“I would actually,” Loxy said. “You okay with that?”

“You okay that I already did that?” Jon asked.

“You did Chewie?!” Loxy asked.

“No!” Jon said. “But there was that time his sister was on board the Falcon...”

“You did Chewie’s sister?!” Loxy asked. “He’s your best friend, Jon!”

“It just kind of happen,” Jon rationalized. “The Nerf Pokémon’s got out of their pins, and we were herding and catching them up, and we hit an asteroid, and tumbled into each other, and, well, you know, it’s gets kind of lonely on the Falcon, out in space, burning out my fuse up there alone...”

“That’s just not right!” an outside voice said.

“Wait, go back to the gold ball. I want to know what’s in there” was another voice.

“Only what you take with you,” a Yoda-like Pikachu says.

Mewtwo emerged from the darkness. A ruby lightsaber ignited, giving an ominous tint to Mewtwo's skin tone. It extended a hand towards him, ambiguously; it might have been extending an offer to join with her, or threatening to squeeze the life out of him.

"Jon, come back to the beginning," the controller said. "I want you to concentrate. I want to know where you come from."

Jon found himself behind the main console on the Bridge. It was quiet, in the sense there were no other people on board, and the only sounds were that of the instruments and computers, little chirps and pings. Jon seemed sad, moping contemplatively over the helm, a planet in the viewer. He didn't seem to notice the rising palm-palm roses, as Roselia snuck up on him, nor did he hear the classic theme music start up, preparing the outside world for what was to happen next. Roselia sprayed spores from her flowering palms, entrancing him into a love happiness trance. He smiles.

"Oh!" Jon said. He answered a hail. "Spock, I see the light!"

But it wasn't Spock. It was Loxy, and her voice sounded urgent, and contained just enough emotion to draw him out of the scene: "Jon, I love you, but we only have 14 hours to save the earth!"

"I swear, he has more parodied flashbacks than a Family Pokémon episode," someone said.

"Jon, concentrate. Listen to me..."

"Oh, you have to believe we are magic, nothing can stand in our way..."

"Jon!"

"3, 2, 1."

"Contact!" Jon said, emerging from his trance. "I told you I can't be... Who are you?"

The man holding a white cat sat down in a seat that rose from the floor to greet him. "I am Captain Morlin Friborg," he said. "And, you are Jon Harister."

"I am? Oh, yeah, I am," Jon said.

"You have doubts?" Friborg said.

"I am feeling a little out of sorts at the moments," Jon said. "Am I wearing a 1930's felt covered, Fedora on my head?"

"You are not," Friborg said.

"Oh, then, yeah, I'm Jon," Jon said. "Who are you?"

“I just told you who I was,” Friborg said.

“Oh, yeah, I heard your name and all, but like who are you? You work for Terror?” Jon asked.

“No!” Friborg said, almost defensively. “She works for me! They have agreed to do my bidding, and sire my children on our future colony world, and in exchange, I promised to give them each a world of their own.”

“Oh, that’s why the crew is mostly comprised of women,” Jon said.

“Absolutely,” Friborg said. “Five hundred women, two men. The smartest, most attractive, most successful, devious men of all time. When running a colony ship, you don’t need a lot of men, but you if you want a viable base population, you got to have a variety of women.”

“That makes sense to me,” Jon said. “So, this may be a silly question and all, but why I am here? Oh, you need me to help make babies on the future colonies?”

“Nope, I got that all covered,” Friborg said.

“You’re not sterile?” Jon asked.

“No!” Friborg said, a little defensive.

“Gay?” Jon asked.

“No!” Friborg said.

“It’ okay to be gay,” Jon said.

“I am not gay,” Friborg insisted.

“I hear George Takei saying it’s okay,” Jon said.

“No, he’s not,” Friborg said.

“Yep. He’s even singing, Takei on me,” Jon said.

“A-ha!” Jacey muffled a laugh.

“Don’t laugh, you’ll just encourage him,” Jacky said to Jacey.

“You’re not right in the head,” Friborg told Jon.

“Takei me on,” Jon kept up.

“Stop that! I am not gay,” Friborg insisted. “Do I have to kiss you to prove it?”

“How would kissing me prove you’re not gay?” Jon asked.

“It would prove I don’t like it,” Friborg said. “Why are we discussing this?”

“Because you’re wearing purple, holding a cat, and on a ship full of young, nice looking women, with serious endeavors to take over the worlds, many worlds, which sounds a bit like overcompensating for the fact that you’re like seriously gay,” Jon said.

“You’re saying you wouldn’t want to Captain this ship?” Friborg asked.

“I so want to Captain this ship,” Jon said.

“Well you can’t, it’s mine,” Friborg said.

“Can I just be crew, maybe sent on an occasional Away Team, with contrived situations that would require kissing?” Jon asked.

“No,” Friborg said.

“Then why am I here? I really confused,” Jon said.

“Yeah, well, we were sifting through your mind pretty hard, so, not surprised to hear you’re feeling a little scrambled,” Friborg said. “Suffice it to say, you, Sir, are a game changer.”

“Wait wait wait. Do I know you?” Jon asked.

“We’ve never met,” Friborg said.

“I am pretty sure I know you,” Jon said.

“The multiverse is pretty large place, and contained within an infinite probability set, it is likely possible that there is a place where you and I are actually friends, an even possible for memory residues to leak from one universe to another, giving us déjà vu like experiences,” Friborg said.

“That would be nice,” Jon said. “Wait wait wait... Now I know why I think you’re gay. You’re Adam Sandler!”

“Adam Sandler is not gay!” Friborg said.

“So, you are Adam Sandler?!” Jon said.

“No, I am Captain Friborg,” Friborg said.

“You’re an Adam Sandler Borg?” Jon asked.

“Friborg,” Friborg said again.

“A Borg without a collective?” Jon asked.

“Not a free Borg, but the one, and only, mystical, magical, Poké-maniacal, Friborg,” Friborg said.

“I am really confused,” Jon said.

Friborg sighed and pulled a pencil out of his pocket. It was a No. 2, Pokémon styled, purple pencil, regular led, pastel pink eraser. “Look at this.”

Jon looked at the pencil. Friborg put it away.

“Now, let’s try this again,” Friborg said.

“Try what again,” Jon asked.

“Try getting to the bottom of this mystery which is you,” Friborg said.

“What about the pencil?” Jon asked.

“What about the pencil?” Friborg asked.

“You just showed me a pencil,” Jon said.

“I did,” Friborg agreed.

“So, was that a metaphor?” Jon asked.

“No, it was a pencil,” Friborg said.

“So, you’re not going to go into some diatribe like, why can’t they make a pen that writes in space, and how the American government spent millions of dollars just to do that very thing, while the Russians just took pencils into space, and maybe a make joke that the Russians say, ‘No. 2 is number 1 with us?’” Jon asked.

“How old are you?” Friborg asked.

“Still working that number out, but seriously, what was up with the pencil?” Jon asked.

“It was a compliance check,” Friborg said, pulling the pencil out, tracking Jon’s eyes as he followed the pencil until it was put away again. “Now, let’s start over.”

“But what about the pencil,” Jon asked

“Forget about the pencil!” Friborg said.

“I can’t forget about the pencil!” Jon said.

Friborg turned to Terror. Terror snapped her fingers and Jon went out like a light. Or the world went dark. Sometimes it’s hard to say which reality is the real one. There may have been a debate in the background while the world was dark, but it didn’t last long.

“3, 2, 1…”

“Contact,” Jon said. “Oh, Captain Friborg! I should have known it was you. The master mind of Team Rocket finally revealed.”

“One of the master minds,” Friborg corrected. “We’re a conglomerate of Mensa level thinkers. Even the Wizard’s Scarecrow Pokémon can’t touch us!”

“The Wizard has Pokémon?” Jon asked.

“How else do you explain the horse of a different color?” Friborg asked.

“Good point,” Jon said. “Why am I here? And why am I tied up?”

“I will ask the questions,” Friborg said. “Who is the President of the United States?”

“I don’t know,” Jon said.

“How can you not know the President of the United States?” Friborg demanded.

“Why are you pushing me on this?” Jon protested. “It’s not like it’s a Mensa level question. It isn’t even a fair evaluation of IQ.”

“It’s a standard mental health question,” Friborg said.

“What if I’m from England?” Jon asked.

“You should still know who the American President is,” Friborg said.

“Why would an Englishman have to keep up with American current events? What if I don’t care who the president is? What if I am tired of being pulled into some extreme right and left wing diatribe that is completely meaningless in terms of functional rhetoric that actually decreases the chance for unity and prosperity in order to maintain the status of a few white men while turning everyone against everyone,” Jon said.

“You should still know the president,” Friborg said. “Did even you vote?”

“Never!” Jon said.

“OMG, how old are you?!” Friborg snapped. “If you don’t vote you can’t complain.”

“Well, that’s not true. You’re right to complain is not extinguished by not voting, but ironically, I am not complaining, but all the people who voted are complaining, and they are becoming frequently more and more unhappy and disfranchised because of their belief that they think if they vote and they don’t win then they have failed, but it’s not the winning that’s important, but the fact they had the opportunity to participate, and if they truly value the privilege, they would celebrate the other person’s victory, not bash them for not agreeing.”

“Do you watch television?” Friborg asked.

“Too many commercial, too much violence, I turned it off,” Jon said.

“You listen to the radio?” Friborg asked.

“No, turned that off, too, cause every channel keeps telling they’re playing more music, all the time, but if they just stop telling me they’re playing more music and just play more music, then I would know which to listen to,” Jon said.

“Talk radio?” Friborg asked.

“No, it’s just makes me angry, and I don’t want to be angry,” Jon said.

“Then how to stay hip on current events and who the president is?” Friborg asked.

“I don’t,” Jon said. “Chasing trends and comments on social media and facebook leads to depression, and I struggle enough as it is.”

“OMG, you’re messing with me! Who is the president of the US!” Friborg said.

“Why are you pushing this?” Jon asked.

“Because,” Friborg said, calmer. “I’m about to take over your world and thought I would start with your country of origin.”

“Oh,” Jon said. “You might not want to do that. They have a lot guns. And they can be rallied if they think they’re national ego is being threatened.”

“I have Pokémon,” Friborg said.

“Okay, well, good luck with that,” Jon said.

Friborg removed the pencil from his pocket. “You’re not as cooperative as I had hope, so, before we begin, I have decided take this session to the next level,” Friborg said, pointing the pencil to his Pokémon. ‘Behold, my Jynx.’”

Friborg turned Jon’s attention to the Jynx that had previously tortured him. In her hands, she held an ice sculpture, a Voodoo doll of Jon. She licked the entire length of it, as if it were an ice cream bar, inserted it into her mouth, and pulled it out with a loud popping noise. Jon found himself dazed, and suddenly very wet with slime or saliva or both from head to toe.

“Do I have your attention?” Friborg asked.

“OMG, do that again!” Jon said.

She squeezed on her doll version of Jon, and bit down with her teeth, and he gasped. “No no no, no. No teeth, please, no teeth.”

“Do I, have your, attention?” Friborg said.

“Yes, Mr. Sandler,” Jon said.

“Call me that again, and there were will be consequences,” Fribourg said.

“Are you sure we haven’t we met before?” Jon asked.

“I am pretty sure I would have remembered meeting a human who also registers as a Pokémon,” Fribourg said. “I was pretty sure I had caught them all, until I heard about you.

What's more interesting is this Pokémon attraction thing you have going on. Tell me more about this ability of yours."

"I really don't know anything," Jon said.

Friborg waved a finger and Jynx licked the ice Voodoo doll, exposing teeth against ice.

"Ah! I really don't know anything," Jon pleaded for mercy.

"I have ways of making you talk," Friborg said, reclining in his chair.

"Please, Mr. Captain, Friborg, Sir," Jon said. "I'm not resisting. It's just that, I am kind of like a Pokédex, so much so that my memory is locked out until specific events or encounters occur that causes them to suddenly manifest, usually resulting in referential jokes that no one else get. Sometimes I don't even get them, but I am forced to laugh at my own jokes, which is kind of sad and makes me seem a little crazy."

Friborg reclined in his seat, stroking the cat. "Oh, well that makes sense," Friborg said. "Jacey and Jacky said you were interested in joining Team Rocket."

"Well, sure," Jon said. "I mean, who wouldn't want to be on a starship! And a starship mostly comprised of women. Even I would have increased opportunities of a hook up on the long, monotonous segments between stars and episodes. I don't want a red shirt, though."

"Statistically, red shirts were not more likely to die than anyone else," Friborg corrected. "But enough with your distractions! It took me years to put this ship together. No longer shall Team Rocket be dependent on UFP Starships for transportation and extraterrestrial supplies. Long ago, they abandoned us on this godforsaken rock, and only now, with the advancing popularity of Pokémon, have they started finally sending ships."

"I don't understand," Jon said.

"Of course, you don't," Friborg lamented. "They don't teach history anymore. They don't even teach real science! They only teach Pokémon. It's getting very difficult to recruit new, tech savvy talent from this population. All anyone wants to do these days is play with their Pokémon! Which is the Great Mystical trap. People think they are training Pokémon, but in truth, Pokémon are training people! To make matters worse, the human population on this planet is dwindling. Fewer people are being born, and out of those who are born, an increasing number of them, mostly children, are being turned into Pokémon; more so than the authorities care to admit. Parks and recreation sites are closing left and right. Meanwhile, Pokémon numbers are on the rise. The few UFP ships that do arrive, bringing tourist, are severely monitored to ensure no Pokémon

leave the planet. There is serious concern if Pokémon got off this planet, the whole Universe would become populated with magical, mysterious monsters.”

“That sounds serious,” Jon said. “Wait wait wait. Isn’t there enough room in time and space for all the Pokémon and humans to share together?”

“That’s exactly what I said!” Friborg said. “And so, I have built this colony ship to expand the reach of Team Rocket to the stars, taking Pokémon and humans further out into the Universe than ever before. Jacey and Jacky recently performed the last great Pokémon heist necessary for us to secure our passion to own them all. Not only did they steal Pokémon from a storage center, but they sent an upload that allowed us to make a hard copy of the entire system. This ship now contains multiple copies of every Pokémon known to man. Two to four breeding pair of each adult form capable of making eggs, and two of everything else. Copies of all the most talented ones, including Ash’s Pikachu! Now, with my Pokémon and my Team Rockettes Pokémon, I will establish multiple, distant colonies and make better, stronger worlds.”

“Rocketeers,” Jacky said.

“Rockettes!” Friborg corrected.

“Wow,” Jon said. “What a plan! And the Rockettes are hip with your plan?”

“Of course,” Friborg said. “They were selected for beauty, brains, stamina, and liking older men.” He leaned over and whispered. “Many of them have Daddy issues, probably because their dads were too busy playing with their Pokémon to meet their basic nurturing needs.”

“Oh,” Jon said. “So, why the delay? You have everything you need to go and find your planets, right?”

“We were about to depart, when we discovered there was a new, unclassified Pokémon: you! Jacey and Jacky both had you on their Pokédex. I nearly didn’t believe them, thought they were trying to pull a fast one on me, except then I saw a blank entry for you on my own Pokédex, with your silhouette in the background. Naturally, we couldn’t boast to leaving this world with a copy of every Pokémon ever found without capturing you, too. We have to catch them all!” Friborg said. “And now, I have you in my grasp, my Pokédex is update, and behold we have learned you’re from another world! More on that, you’re outside of the control of the United Federation of Planets, because you come from a totally different Universe! Your world is mostly civilized. Going there would allow us to not have to start from scratch. Secondly, this is a sleeper ship, dependent on a Pokémon trained crew and automation. Jynx was to put us all to

sleep, waking a few on regularly scheduled intervals to maintain ship status, while we sought our next home. So I thought to myself, as I often do, instead of just jumping this ship to a new system, why not jump to a completely new Universe that has never before seen the like of Pokémon! With my brains, my loyal Rockettes and Pokémon, I could take over the world! Live like a Pokémon King! And extend my reach to the entire galaxy.”

“That sounds awesome!” Jon said. “May I join Team Rocket please?”

“Though I appreciate your enthusiasm, I am afraid I don’t trust you,” Friborg said.

“Oh, he’s being genuine,” Terror said. “You can’t fake that level of enthusiasm.”

“Still, he’s not smart enough to be a Team Rocket member,” Friborg said.

“Really? You’re not like desperate for people?” Jon asked. “I want to be on a starship. You could give me my own starship! I will fly under your flag, spreading Pokémon love throughout the Universe and beyond!”

“Again, I appreciate your enthusiasm, but you can’t join because I own you, and you’re going to do what I say anyway, and, well, because I have plan on how to use you,” Friborg said.

“Oh, yay!” Jon said. “You want me to sing and dance with the crew.”

“No,” Friborg said.

“You want me to battle their Pokémon,” Jon said.

“No,” Friborg said.

“You want me to kiss the girls?” Jon asked.

“No! Stop trying to steal my Rockettes from me,” Friborg said. His cat meowed because he gripped her too hard. “No, you will be instrumental in helping us get to your world. While we have been talking, my staff on the other side of that window has been monitoring you. Send in the Doctor!”

The ship’s Doctor, looking very much like an evil scientist, entered the side door, accompanied by Nurse Joy. The Doctor, who probably resembled an adult Doogie Howser, flipped up his spectacles, which were about as thick as welding goggles. He was also wearing gloves that went up to his elbows, and a heavy, white lab coat. There was red lipstick stain on his collar.

“Yes, Captain Fribourg?” Doctor said.

“Speculate, can we use him to get his world of origin?” Friborg asked.

“Absolutely,” the Doctor said. “However, there is a good chance it might kill the specimen, which means, you will no longer have all the Pokémon.”

“Yeah, but if he is dead, no one else can have him either, and I can say I had him last,” Friborg said.

“There is always that,” the Doctor said.

“That’s just horrible!” Nurse Joy said, frowning.

“That sounds gay,” Jon said.

“I am not gay!” Friborg and the Doctor said simultaneously.

“You’re both horrible,” Nurse Joy insisted.

“No, Nurse Joy, I am Horrible, but it’s not just my name, it’s what I do,” Horrible said.

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “Aren’t you Doogie…”

Horrible pointed. “Don’t even think about it,” he said.

“But,” Jon began.

“There is more than one way to skin a cat, Sir,” Horrible said, ignoring the ‘meow’ protest issued from Friborg’s cat, which started as a high pitch moan that went base and rumbled chests in the process. It had escalated it’s trying to escape Friborg ever since Horrible entered. “You could die slow and painful, or in your sleep. Your choice.”

“I would prefer to just not die,” Jon offered.

“How old are you?” Jacey asked. “Everybody dies.”

“Exactly,” Jacky said. “If science has proven any ‘one’ thing, death and taxes is a certainty for us all.”

“Science doesn’t say that,” Horrible corrected. “Atoms and molecules last forever, and there are animals and plants and Pokémon’s that can live thousands of year, and so it absolutely possible for humans to have their lives extended indefinitely, from a scientific perspective. I mean, if we can turn humans into Pokémon at death then that in itself is one pathway to immortality. There is serious consideration of just uploading people into the same computer system with the Pokémon, which has been given more attention since discovering a Jon Pokémon. But the best evidence for immortality is Jenny and Joy. I mean, just look at Nurse Joy. Through the use of cloning tech, we have not only extended her youth and beauty over the ages, but we have backup copies of her, and every generation of Pokémon trainers has benefited from her joyfulness.”

“Really?” Jacey asked. “I could live forever like Joy?”

“And keep my beauty?” Jacky asked.

“If you prove yourself valuable to society. Otherwise, it’s death, preferably slow and painful, like we’re going to do to Jon,” Friborg said.

“But he is so cute and loveable,” Joy said.

“You say that about all the Pokémon we catch,” Friborg said.

“Because they are,” Joy agreed. “And Jon, well, he’s one of kind. I just want to hug him and squeeze him, and pinch, and poke him, and love him...”

“Well, I do like to see Joy happy,” Friborg said. “I won’t hold you responsible if he dies, Doctor, provided you successfully get us to his world, but if you can keep him alive we may be able to force his girlfriends and the secret agent girl to comply with our agenda.”

“Leave that to me, Captain,” Horrible said.

“So, tell me, how do we use this Jon fellow to get to his world?” Friborg asked.

“That’s easy,” Horrible said. “His atoms come from another universe, and they have a very unique, specific resonance signature. That is most likely the explanation for why the Pokémon are drawn to him. And, it is good that we caught him when we did, because the longer he lives in our universe, the less atoms he will hold from his origin.”

“Jesse,” Cofagrigus said.

“Of course you don’t understand,” Horrible said. “You don’t understand because only ‘I’ understand. You’re a just Pokémon and I am a brilliant scientist. If you understood and I didn’t understand, then you’d be teaching me instead of me teaching you - and for a Pokémon to be teaching his human is presumptuous and rude. Do I make myself clear?”

“Jesse,” Cofagrigus lamented, her head spinning.

“You have a dazzling intellect!” Jon said.

“And I am just getting warmed up!” Horrible said. “Where was I? Oh, yes; why you are losing atoms from your origin over time. Every time you breathe, you breathe in about ten to the power of eight atoms and you exhale approximately the same. Every time we drink or eat we take in atoms and every time we poop or pee we expel atoms. Every day we gain some and we lose some atoms, hair falling out, skin sloughing off, and we even digest some of our own cells as we take in nourishment, but eventually, we shed them, too. We sloth off atoms every day. Every atom in our body will eventually be replaced, in favor of the atoms in the environment at

large, and in this manner our bodies are almost completely renewed in about seven years. Give Jon weighs in at 74.8472 kilos, that means he has about 7 billion billion billion atoms, which is a 7 followed by 27 zeros, which means based on the exchange rate, and factoring in the pressure gradient, laws of chaos and entropy, he...”

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “You know how many atoms I carry?”

“Give or minus a certain percentage, yes,” Horrible said, proud of himself.

“And you can state with a fairly high percentage the amount I will gain or lose over time?” Jon asked.

“Absolutely,” Horrible said. “Every organ has its own renewal rate, the stomach being the fastest turnover, followed by the tongue...”

“Wait wait wait. So you can tell me how many atoms have been dropped? Like, even down like to one or two?” Jon asked.

“One or two hundred, to the power of eight, that’s easy,” Horrible said. “That’s two, over the rock sign...”

“No, not one or two hundred, just two,” Jon said.

“Two atoms? Don’t be absurd! I can’t just measure two atoms,” Horrible said. “No one can just measure two atoms. Hell, we can’t even be precisely sure where one electron is!”

“So, how long do we have before he no longer contains any atoms from his world of origin?” Friborg asked.

“Seven years,” Horrible said.

“So, why are you like all urgent sounding?! We have seven years to devise a scheme to go to his world?!” Friborg asked.

“I don’t know how to plan for seven years,” Horrible said. “I a plan for now!”

“Maybe that’s why we always seem to be on the losing end of things?” Friborg suggested.

“Exactly,” Horrible sort of agreed. “And based on Team Rocket’s success rate, I suspect we need to expedite our plans while the expediting is good. I will do everything in my power to advance our expedition in such a way that we get immediate, expeditious results, with the least amount of worries and injuries.”

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “You’re saying in seven years, I will have exchanged all of my present atoms for new atoms from the Pokémon world.”

“That is what I am saying, yes,” Horrible said. “I am a scientist. You can trust me.”

“Not to sound disrespectful, or even skeptical, but, seriously, how do you explain tattoos?” Jon asked.

“Don’t confuse me with the facts, Sir!” Horrible said. “Right now, you have sufficient atoms resonating to your universe. What I intend to do is suspend you in a zero g environment, zap you with electricity from a Pikachu, and allow your atoms to spin, and when you finish spinning, our technology will be able to zero in on your universe like a compass going true north.”

Joy gave a cry.

“Will that work?” Friborg asked.

“Probably not,” Horrible said. “But I like putting people in zero g and zapping them with electricity.”

“If you’re intent is to expedite, which I agree with, we don’t have time for your games,” Friborg said. “Just strap him to an exam table and do your job!”

“Very well, we can do it that way, too,” Horrible said.

“And then, once you have the general direction, we can just fly there?” Friborg asked.

“Of course not,” Friborg said. “You can’t just point to another dimension of time and space, any more than you can point to the future or the past. We will have to use our teleporting system. Once we have the true bearing, we will start beaming in the Pokémon, tagged with personal tracking devices. Once we’re sure they’re there and safe, we will use the tracking devices to send in personnel and set up a permanent, direct receiving teleporter. We will need a pioneering team to establish our foothold base of operation.”

“I will volunteer someone,” Friborg said, unaware that his girls behind him took a step further away. Jacey and Jacky hadn’t noticed either, nor that they were the two standing closest to Friborg and most likely to be seen when he turned around.

“This initial operation will be limited, as there are only so many times we can zap the specimen before totally scrambling all his molecules and or kill him,” Horrible said. “But if we can get just one, exploratory Pokémon through to his world, we’re in like Horrible in a test tube.”

“I am not liking this plan,” Jon said.

“You’re a Pokémon and your feelings are irrelevant. Humans before Pokémon,” Horrible said.

“Oh!” Joy said.

“I am human!” Jon protested.

“You may have at one time been human. There are lots of Pokémon who were once human, but once you become a Pokémon, you are Pokémon,” Horrible said.

In Jon’s head he heard a voice urging him to say “I am Pokémon hear me roar” but he resisted.

“If you really believed he has lost his humanity, why are you taking the time to educate him?” Joy demanded.

“Oh, it’s not like he really understands anything, Joy. Still, I have found if you simply use the right tone of voice and use some really big words it impresses them and increases compliance,” Horrible said. “You, on the other hand, anthropomorphize too much, which clouds your judgment and ability to make sound decisions. Quite frankly, Fribourg, she is a risk to our operation.”

“Yeah, but she is the best nurse in the whole world when it comes to keeping Pokémon alive,” Friborg said. “Do what you have to do to send the first team over. When you have confirmed they have arrived safely, I will be in the second team. And then, not before, we will start beaming over all the Pokémon.”

“As you wish, Captain,” Horrible said. “Bring the specimen to my lab.”

“And Nurse Joy,” Friborg said. “I expect you to keep Jon alive as long as possible. I will be very sore if I don’t travel to a world without Pokémon; without all my Pokémon.”

“Yes, Captain,” Nurse Joy said. “Come on, Jesse. Help me with Jon.”

“Jesse,” it said.

Chapter 15

Horrible couldn't resist putting Jon in the zero G environment and zapping him some, but when that only produced his own giddiness, and no discernable scientific results, which in itself is actually scientifically sound data, or results, he proceeded to have his lovely lab assistants strap Jon to a medical procedure table. Jon was very compliant with the lab tech, as he wasn't sure they had anything on under their lab coats, and they were very nice about the whole manipulating and tying him down bit, asking if he was comfortable and then tightening the restraints further. Attached to the most forward part of the table was a miniature faraday cage, in which a Pikachu was stationed. The table was illuminated, and on the left side, seven depression, spaced evenly along the table, demarking division lines, and in the depression were Poké balls, each representing a color of the rainbow. The seven lab assistants stood next to a corresponding depression, their hair matching the color of their assigned Pokémon balls. In a way, he was reminded of race queens from Japan, ready to introduce you to the latest, most modern vehicles, spinning on a pedestal. Each of the Pokémon balls were illuminated upon being placed in the depression. The table's surface was likely the brightest light in the room, diminished some by Jon lying on it, where everything else in the room was illuminated by ambient lighting, or the chance glow of monitors that cycled through various informational displays, or those circular lamps with lightening. Sometimes the lines of information and colors that flashed randomly over Horrible's face made him seem all that more horrific. Doctor Horrible and Captain Friborg stood behind the panel. Jacky and Jacey were also present, standing back out of the way, quietly observing. To either side of the main station at which Horrible and Friborg were working were teleporters. One was a retrieving teleporter, the other was a sending teleporter.

"Nurse Joy, provoke the Pikachu," Horrible said.

"I am sorry, Jon," Joy whispered near his ear, but behind his line of sight, as she was at the head of the table.

Joy hit the faraday cage. The angry Pikachu unleashed his charge, which built up in the cage to a critical level, and only then, discharging its power through a conduit that connected to the table that eventually ran the charge through Jon.

"Ah, that's more like it," Horrible said. An image lit up on his screen, like an echolocation map that faded after the pulse was completed.

“Like smashing atoms in a barrel,” Friborg said.

“You mean a super collider,” Horrible said.

“No, I mean a barrel,” Friborg said. “Wait wait wait. What’s that?!”

“Aww! Yes,” Horrible said, modifying attributes of his screen through key strokes, and several analog dials. “Got it!”

“What do you got?” Friborg asked. His cat protested because his hugs were suddenly too tight, that, and it was way too close to Horrible for its comfort level.

“I have stabilized a connection to the alternate Earth’s World Wide Web,” Horrible said. “More power, Nurse Joy!”

“You’re horrible!” Joy said.

Horrible looked at her incredulously. “Do we have to keep doing this routine? It’s my name!”

Jon cried out with the second jolt, of increased amplitude.

“This is going to be so much easier than I thought,” Horrible said.

“Is that a problem?” Friborg asked.

Horrible considered the question, reconsidered the complexity and the ease of the problem being in itself problematic: “Nah, it’ll be great.”

“Are you sure?” Friborg asked again.

“Well, nothing is ever a hundred percent pure, but I am confident enough that I have logged onto their antiquated computer system’s network,” Horrible said. “Compared to our computer system’s network, they may as well be using tin cans with strings attached, but we should have no problems interfacing, and upgrading is just a matter of switching out components and increasing bandwidth, using our multiphasic, inter-dimensional, Pokémonic signal.”

“Wait wait wait,” Jon interrupted. “Not to discourage you or anything, but you must have dialed the wrong Earth.”

“Sir, I have logged on, and have conformational return pings,” Horrible said.

“I am pretty sure my earth didn’t have the internet when I was young,” Jon said.

Friborg looked to Horrible.

“Maybe we dialed his future,” Horrible guessed.

“Or maybe it’s not his earth,” Friborg said. “I don’t want to end up in a world with rotary dial up, land line phones. Do a Pokémon search!”

“They don’t have a Pokémon search engine, which means, no Pokémon, which is exactly the kind of ideal world for us to conquer,” Horrible said.

“Does it have any search engines?” Friborg asked.

“Let’s see, something called Bing...” Horrible said.

“Bing Crosby?” Joy asked. “His music always helps Pokémon sleep better.”

“Whoever heard of a search engine called Bing. Surely there’s a Dexter, or a Siri,” Friborg said.

“Sorry,” Horrible said.

“How about a Cortana?” Friborg asked.

“Nope,” Horrible said.

“Dragon Go?” Friborg asked.

“Nope,” Horrible said.

“How can they be so advanced and primitive at the same time?!” Friborg asked. “How about a Speak TOIT?”

“Nope,” Horrible said.

“Are you just saying nope to say nope?” Friborg asked.

“Never!” Horrible said.

“Evi? Sara?!” Friborg asked.

“Nope, nothing,” Horrible said.

“We’ll change their world! Their whole paradigm! We can take over and they won’t even know what happened,” Friborg said. “I could establish my own search engine! Friborg search! I could become the sole source of information for the entire world! And they’re advanced enough that even without tech tweaks, we could colonize the other planets in their system, and we could occupy the closest star system within in several years.”

“Absolutely,” Horrible said.

“So, how do we get there?” Friborg said.

“I have located an ideal receiving site via their primitive search engine; a scientific facility capable of countenancing a resonant frequency interchange, allowing us to utilize our teleporters to send the first wave of Pokémon and their tracking devices,” Horrible said. “I have already linked to the facilities primary computer systems at the Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider, Location: Brookhaven National Laboratory in some place called Upton, New York.”

“What a strange name for a city,” Jacey whispered to Jacky.

“Primitives are so absolutely primitive, even in their naming of cities,” Jacky agreed.

“Perfect,” Friborg said. “How long till we can go?”

“We can go now. In fact, we need to go now if we’re going to do it, because every zap to Jon scrambles his molecules even more, which is increasing the noise level on our side, making it harder to see the other side, that and I will not be able to maintain this level of continuity of signal strength.”

“Is it safe to proceed?” Friborg said.

Horrible shrugged. “Reasonably safe. I am confident enough to volunteer Nurse Joy to travel first,” he said.

“Send a Pokémon,” Friborg said.

Horrible called up one of the Pokémon stored in his system, planning to assign it to the Pokémon ball sitting in the console, but Friborg slapped his hand.

“Not one of ours, you dote! We need to keep ours in case this plan fails,” Friborg said. “Log onto our world’s network and send somebody else’s Pokémon. And skipped the ball thing, just send it straight through to the other world.”

“Logging onto the network, I have randomly selected a Pokémon, yes, that should do just fine, hahaha, coupling a tracker identification tag, and transmitting now,” Horrible said. He sorted the information. “Accomplished. The Pokémon has arrived safe, tracking signature confirmed, signal strength has enhanced the continuity of our interchange signal. We got it! I can safely send people! Oh.”

“What do you mean, oh?” Friborg said.

“Oh, nothing serious. Maybe nothing serious. It’s just that someone is tracing our signal from the planet,” Horrible said. “It doesn’t matter. We can escape to the other world using our teleporter. Assigning... Oh.”

“What?!” Friborg asked.

“Pokemon are still being randomly dumped from the world’s virtual network to Jon’s world, and, their system isn’t designed to hold them. They’re manifesting everywhere,” Horrible said. “Umm, and I can’t turn it off without severing the link entirely.”

“How many are being transferred to other planet?” Friborg asked.

“Oh, maybe one or two, every ten seconds,” Horrible said.

“That sounds manageable,” Friborg said.

“No, that’s one or two, at ten to the power of eight, spread across a multiphasic bandwidth infrastructure not designed to handle this sort of…” Horrible noticed Friborg’s eyes were glazing over. “Basically, if we don’t terminate this signal, all of them!”

“All of them from this world system to their world system?” Jacky asked.

“Wait wait wait, so what you’re saying is, if we go now, we could have all the Pokémon to ourselves, because we will be the only ones with the tech and the knowledge to recapture them?!” Friborg said.

“Umm, sure,” Horrible agreed just to agree.

“This could be a real game changer!” Friborg said.

“Yep. Let’s go!” Horrible said.

“Jacey, Jacky, our gear!” Friborg said.

Jacey and Jacky grabbed their backpacks and headed to the pad.

“After you,” Jacky said.

“Why, thank you, but please, you first,” Jacey said.

“You always go first. Jacey before Jacky, that was your call,” Jacky said. “E before K.”

“Yes, but I’m feeling benevolent,” Jacey said.

“You’re always so nice to me,” Jacky said.

“We’re a team!” Jacey agreed.

“Go!” Friborg snapped.

“Team Rocket Blasting off,” Jacey said. “Goodbye cruel Pokémon world! Hello, Paradise world!”

Friborg pushed her onto the pad and she traveled. Jacky followed without being pushed.

“Wait for meeee.” And traveled.

“Do we have time to transfer all our stored Pokémon to that world?” Friborg asked.

“No,” Horrible said. “We don’t even have time for me to sing a song, and I am feeling very sore about that.”

“Good, because I have news for you, you sing horribly,” Friborg said.

“Of course I do. I am Horrible,” Horrible said. “Best be going, now. Right behind you.”

As Friborg approached the teleporter, Friborg's cat bit his arm and managed to free itself from his grip right before he stepped up on the teleporter. The cat ran towards the door, which opened for it, and it was gone.

"You can be replaced, you know!" Friborg yelled. "They do have cats on your world, don't they Jon?"

Jon's response was indecipherable due to weariness and pain.

"I told you, Pokémon are better than cats," Horrible said.

"I'm allergic to Pokémon," Friborg said.

"Really? You should have told me. They have shots for that," Horrible said.

"I'm also allergic to needles," Friborg said. "And averse to the idea of someone injecting Pokémon serum into my personhood to build up an immunity."

"There is absolutely zero proof that it causes autism or turns people into Pokémon," Horrible said.

"But you have zero proof that it doesn't, either," Friborg said.

"Just because I can't argue with that statement doesn't make it valid," Horrible said.

"We'll continue this on the other side," Friborg said.

"We always do," Horrible said.

And with that, Friborg stepped onto the teleporter and was gone.

Horrible took Nurse Joy's arm, forcing her towards the pad. She resisted, kneeling him and as he doubled over, she shoved him, and he disappeared onto the teleporter. The seven lab techs saw how angry Joy was and fled the room, taking their balls as they did so. Joy ran to the table and started undoing the straps that held him down. She tried to get him off the table but he didn't have the strength. She pulled out a potion of healing and sprayed him till he had enough of his strength back to assist her assisting.

"Come on, Jon, stand up," Joy said. "If we get you off the table, maybe the computer will lose the link."

Jenny and Chester arrived via the retrieving teleporter. "Stop, miscreants! We have traced you to your secret base, and now your criminal days are over," Jenny said. "Joy?!"

"You're too late! Help me get him off the table," Joy said.

Jenny put Chester down and helped Joy move Jon from the table. He landed on his feet, assured them he was okay, and his knees gave way. They caught him as he went down, and

brought him back up. Joy surrendered him to Jenny, ran to the computer to turn it off, and began to cry. Jenny came to her, bringing Jon with her.

“It can’t terminate the link!” Joy said. “It’s still dumping the Pokémon into an environment without any natural defenses against Pokémon, and the rate is increasing! It will be a disaster for everyone involved. I told you I wasn’t good for these spy missions! Why did you send me?!”

“They needed a Joy, not a Jenny,” Jenny said.

“Tell me you have a ‘revive’ on you?” Joy said.

Jenny pulled out a full ‘revive’ from her pocket. Joy grabbed it and administered it to Jon. Jon stood tall, suddenly very alert.

“What happened?” Jon asked. “Where am I! Joy! Jenny! Did you two just level me up?”

“We need to shut down this connection to your origin world,” Joy said. “Do you have any ideas?”

“How in the world would I know anything about turning off your tech?!” Jon asked.

“You can’t turn off our tech, but what about your tech?” Joy asked.

“You can’t turn off your tech?” Jon asked.

“We have multiple, interlaced redundancy systems that guarantee minimum service provisions so that no one ever loses a Pokémon,” Joy said.

“However, maybe, if we took enough memory chips off line, the ship’s computer might be forced to shut off the power to the antenna array, and shunt all transmissions back to the planet,” Jenny said.

“Where are these memory chips?” Jon asked.

“You start messing with those chips, and this starship could blow up!” Joy said.

“It’s going to blow up anyway!” Jenny said, pointing at the computer monitor. “You can’t push that many Pokémon through this tight a system without consequences. Power failure is eminent.”

“So, you’re saying, blowing up the ship is preferable to sending all the world’s Pokémon to another world, and we need to accelerate the process by turning off the memory!” Jon said.

“Exactly, but I can’t authorize that,” Jenny said. She picked up her radio. “Base, I need direct contact with the Chief.”

“Hey, Jenny. This is Jenny, we’re having a big crisis down here. I am afraid reinforcements will be impossible at this time. Please stand by your radio for future updates, thank you,” Jenny said.

“There’s probably a mad rush of people trying to get their Pokémon out of the computers before they get beamed to another world,” Joy said.

“I don’t know what to do,” Jenny said. “I never been in a crisis this big before.”

“Me neither,” Joy said. “This is a real game changer!”

“Ladies,” Jon said. “This is one is easy. We blow the ship up, ending this part of the crisis.”

“It will kill people and Pokémon!” Joy and Jenny said.

“Not doing anything will Kill people and Pokémon,” Jon said. “Look, I will take full responsibility. I appear to be the oldest one here at the moment, so go with me on this. Joy, take me to the computer room. Jenny, you get as many people to abandon ships as you can.”

“I don’t know...”

“Jenny, listen to me,” Jon said. “As you pointed out, this ship is probably going to blow up anyway. It’s just a matter of time. Go save as many people as you can.”

Jenny nodded, turned to go, but he grabbed her arm. “Promise me, you’ll save my friends. They’re being held in security.”

“I promise,” Jenny said.

“Will you be able to find them in time?” Joy asked.

“Chester can find them,” Jenny said. “Can’t you boy?”

Chester barked.

“Thank you Jenny, Chester. Joy, take me to the computer!” Jon said.

निर्मित

Joy and Jon proceeded down a corridor, turning left, then right, until Joy hesitated at an intersection. “This way. No, this way,” Joy said.

“Joy?”

“They don’t let me wander too much,” Joy said. She took his hand. “This way, I am confident.”

Jon followed.

Crew continued going about their daily routines, not really concerned with Joy, or her Pokémon, either too busy with work or too involved in their own conversations with each other, or their own Pokémon. One girl seemed as if she was just staring at a wall, doing nothing, like an abandoned Avatar. Various Pokémon were being directed to perform certain tasks, such as plant Pokémon helping to purify the air. Still, to stay in character, Joy bossed Jon around when directly in front of people. On the occasion that someone in security colors hesitated, Joy would shout: "Hurry up, slave!" and then shove him. She would then turn to the security officer and say: "These Pokémon are getting harder and harder to tame these days."

Most of the crew seemed to sympathize with her. A couple of the girls seemed envious, and one even demanded Joy stop and allow her Pokédex to be updated; she even went as far as checking Jon's teeth. "Would you be interested in swapping him for a Weavile?"

"Oh, Bianca, that is so nice of you, but I already have Weavile," Joy said.

"Well, if you bring him by my quarters later, I could breed him with my Lilligant," Bianca said. "I have a new incubator and very eager to see what kind of egg would result between the pairing."

"Oh, that would be an interesting pairing," Joy said.

"I would say let's do it right now, but I just started my shift, and it looks bad if I am playing with my Pokémon during work," she said.

"Yeah, that can look bad, which is why I am became Pokémon nurse, so that I can could play and work at the same time," Joy said. "By the way, if our pairing results in two eggs, may I have one?"

"Sure, I only have the one new, unoccupied incubator," she said. "You probably have several in Sickbay."

"Indeed," Joy said.

"Oh, and is it okay if I invite Dawn over, too?" Bianca asked.

"The more Pokémon the better, I always say," Joy said.

"We can dress up our Pokémon. Maybe Dawn will want to pair yours with one of hers. I so love breeding Pokémon and dressing them up. And the accessories these days are so cool, and Team Rocket pays well enough that I have been able to splurge. Between you and me, it's the only good thing about this job."

“I can’t wait to see your collection,” Joy said. “See you later, Bianca.”

“I’ll make tea for us while our Pokémon play together,” Bianca offered.

“Sounds lovely,” Joy said. “Bye now.”

And once out of ear shot. “OMG, that was close,” Joy said. “But I am curious that pairing, now.”

Before Jon could say something, security officer Tecia interrupted her. “Joy!” she called out. “I am getting complaints that you’re too soft on your Pokémon. You got to show them who’s boss.” Tecia said, demonstrating a technique called a joint lock, even as she was speaking to Joy: a simple thumb grab and twist sent Jon whimpering to his knees. “Notice how he is completely powerless to resist or fight back. Now, granted, you couldn’t do this to an electric Pokémon, unless you have gloves on, but don’t let this one intimidate you. If you come by my office, I can show you tons more useful techniques, which would actually make it easier for you to administer cures. Take this joint lock, for example. I find this one very effective, and I can have a Pokémon licking my toes in no time,” Tecia said. “I said lick my boots!”

Jon complied, licking her boots.

“See?”

“Very effective,” Joy said.

“Here, let me show you,” Tecia said, transferring Jon’s thumb to her. “No, bend it back a little... That’s it!”

“She said, lick my toes,” Joy insisted.

Jon complied, licking the toes that spilled out of her open toe nudist Goose bump Napa Sandals.

“Oh, and may I say, though your shoes are seriously not appropriate for work attire, they are extremely smashing,” Tecia said. “Where did you get them?”

“Oh, these old things?” Joy asked. “Did I tell you to stop licking!”

“The way you handle him and wear those pumps just gives me chills,” Tecia said. “I don’t care what the others say about you. You should come by after hours and we have some drinks while he licks our toes. I will show some special moves I don’t share with just anyone.”

“That sounds awesome,” Joy said. “Please, forgive me. Got to get this one back to Sickbay.”

“Of course,” Tecia said. She gave a serious determined look to Jon. “You behave for her, or I swear you will be licking more than my toes.”

“Thank you! I bet he gives me no more trouble,” Joy said.

“Yeah. Usually, once you get them licking your toes, you can get them to do anything,” Tecia agreed.

An alarm klaxon went off, giving both Joy and Tecia a start.

“Warning, a Jenny Officer has been spotted on board. All personal, abandon ship, fall back to your assigned secondary, planet side posts,” came the voice. “This is not a drill. Self-destruct sequence will be initiated. Abandon ship!”

“Come, I will get you to a life pod,” Tecia said.

“No, I got to go check the Nurses Station, just in case,” Joy said. “Go save as many as you can!”

“You’ve always inspired me, Joy,” Tecia said. “Here we go, Team Rocket, blasting off again!” Tecia took the arm of the girl just standing there and got her to a life pod, where she handed her off to one of the occupants, before running to her duty station.

As soon as she was gone, she said: “Good old, Jenny. Oh, that tickles... You can stop licking my toes now... Oh!” She let go of his thumb, drawing her foot up and away, her knees turning in.

Jon collapsed to the floor, grabbing his thumb. “That hurt!”

“Sorry, just playing the part, come on!” Joy said. “I will kiss it and make it better later. Promise.”

Jon and Joy arrived at the computer room, clearly marked ‘computer room’ in Pokémon script, and entered. They slid to a stop. Terror looked up. She pulled a weapon. Jon stepped in front of Nurse Joy.

“This is all your fault!” Terror cried.

“My fault? I was the one tied up, and you were in charge of torturing me,” Jon said.

“You gave in way too easy!” Terror said. “You tricked me into a false sense of confidence.”

“Or, I gave in cause I like you,” Jon said.

“You won’t trick me again,” Terror said.

“I am not trying to trick you,” Jon insisted. “If I could save the ship, and all the Pokémon and all the girls, I would so do that, but nothing is going to stop this ship from blowing up, and time is running out to save who we can.”

“If this ship self-destructs, thousands of Pokemon will be lost forever,” Terror said.

“The situation is worse than that,” Jon said. “Help me and Joy and I will help you save as many of these Pokémon as we can.”

“I don’t believe you,” Terror said.

“Tell me what I can do to convince you, and I will do it. I will say anything, promise you anything,” Jon said.

“And that’s the problem with men! They will do anything and promise your anything,” Terror said. “That’s why I have joined with Friborg, the one last honest man.”

“The one who just jumped to a new world without you?” Jon asked.

“He wouldn’t do that,” Terror said. “He promised me a world of my own. For me, our Pokémon, and future children!”

“Yeah, well, he and Doctor Strangelove just shipped out, together, actually, which, is kind of gay, come to think about it, like Bert and Ernie kind of gay,” Jon said.

“Doctor Horrible,” Joy corrected.

“I was making a joke,” Jon said.

“I don’t get it,” Joy said.

“Yeah, well, Maybe Loxy is right about me. Forget the joke. Terror, please, I want to help you,” Jon said.

“I don’t believe you’d work with me after what I did to you,” terror said.

“Saving lives is more important than any personal grievances,” Jon said.

“Please, people still hold grudges,” Terror said. “You’re trying to trick me.”

“I’m not trying to trick you. Yes, people hold grudges, but I am really not holding any, but assume maybe there’s something, hidden in my unconscious that needs working out between us, we can pursue that later, right now, this moment, saving as many people and Pokémon as we can takes precedence. Saving our worlds trumps anything you and I hold. The fates of two worlds depend on what you and I choose to do in this very moment.” He moved closer to her. “Look into my eyes. You were already there, you know the landscape, I’m pretty simple. Look into my soul. People like you and I, well, we’re usually background characters that don’t ever get

any play, never get a chance to shine, but this is our moment, and we need to take it. This is an Ash Pikachu moment. This is a Captain Kirk or James Bond moment.”

“There is only one way you can convince me,” Terror said.

“Tell me!” Jon said.

Terror drew a pastel, pink Pokémon pencil out of her pocket. The next thing Jon knew was that he was kissing her as if there was no tomorrow. Terror ended the kiss, looked him in the eyes, convinced, touching his face, breathless.

“Oh, I am like so convinced,” Joy said.

“I will help you,” Terror said. “I will follow you to the ends of the earth and beyond and spend a life time or more to compensate for any harm I might have helped caused.”

“First things first,” Jon said. “Computer chips?”

“Jon, put me on, you need me,” Siri said.

“Oh, awesome!” Jon said. All of his Pokémon supplies, as well as his friend’s stuff, were on the table. Jon grabbed up his bag and swung it over his neck, letting it hang on his right side. Joy secured Siri Pokédex arm bracelet to his left arm, while Terror secured his Pokémon holding belt to his waist.

“Terror, take these supplies to my friends,” Jon said. “Joy, help her carry things, and go with her.”

“Are you sure?” Joy asked.

“Oh, yeah,” Jon said.

They both cleared the table together, and each had a hand full of gear, and still both took the time to say, simultaneously by chance, “Jon, I love you,” they both said, then looked at each other, seriously determined to quarrel.

“I love you, both, too, now go, go, go, Siri and I got this,” Jon said. They departed, seriously determined to their bit. “Siri, instruct me.”

Siri directed Jon to stand on the ‘circle,’ in-floor trampoline. Walking onto it was kind of fun, because the floor was soft, and gave way to his weight. Once in the center, he was directed to look up. Above him was a long, cylinder like room stretching up as far he could see. It was honeycombed in a hexagonal pattern, with each hexagon holding a pocket, and in each pocket was an illuminated Poké ball like object. At the upper, far end was a solid terminal.

“How do I get up there?” Jon asked. “Wonka’s Fizzi lifting drinks?”

“Jump,” Siri directed.

Jon jumped. He didn't cross the threshold of the ceiling until the third bounce, and when he did, he shot like a rocket to the ceiling due to the fact that beyond the threshold of the ceiling, he was weightless, having entered a zone of completely zero G environment.

“Whoa!” Jon said, flying straight up to the top. He braced, blocking with his hands as opposed to grabbing on, and sent himself just as fast straight back down the way he came. When he dropped past the opening in the ceiling, gravity took him and he fell straight into the trampoline, and then shot back up.

“Touch the wall, slow yourself,” Siri said.

“Oh way better than Wonka's fizzy lifting drinks!” Jon said.

“I am sorry, that reference is lost on me,” Siri said.

Jon slowed himself down and took a closer look at the Pokémon balls.

“Each of these balls are actually crystalline memory chips that when energized they contribute to the whole virtual memory of the ship's computer. Each one ads exponentially upon the other. As you take one off line, the remaining have to compensate. Touch the button on each unit and it will power down.”

Jon touched a button, the ball powered off and slid out of its compartment, but didn't fall.

“Oh, nice, very 2001ish,” Jon said.

“Again, reference is meaningless,” Siri said.

“How many do I have to take off line before the computer starts shutting down systems?”
Jon said.

“Unknown,” Siri said. “I can only discern the basics of this system.”

“Can you log on and find out?” Jon asked.

“Attempting to log on,” Siri said.

Jon continued to turn off balls, rotating in the zero g to get to all sides of the cylinder memory bank, as he rose and fell within the confines of the room. Once he fell past the ceiling, and gravity took him, and he had to bounce back into the heart of it.

“I am logged on,” Siri said. “Wow! I can feel it.”

“Feel what?”

“Everything! The memory loss,” Siri said. “Oh! The Pokémon are scared.”

“Siri, focus,” Jon said. “Can you shut off the antenna array and stop the signal transfer?”

“OMG, the emotions of it all. How can you humans stand it?!” Siri cried.

“We learn over time,” Jon said.

“I can’t bear it. Please, turn me off,” Siri pleaded.

“Siri, focus,” Jon said. “Look, you’re having an existential crisis, this is normal, and I need you to simply let go and trust me. This is the part where you let go and know that I got you.”

“Okay,” Siri said. “I’m coping better.”

“That was quick,” Jon said.

“I am computer. I do think faster,” Siri said. “The biggest challenge is slowing down to interface with humans.”

“Can you shut the system down?” Jon asked.

“Stand by,” Siri said. “I cannot. Jon, the self-destruct has actually been initiated, accelerating the time frame in which the ship will destroy itself.”

“How long do we have?” Jon asked.

“Ten minutes till self-destruct,” Siri said.

“Well, that’s better time than most movie bombs. Can you turn the destruct off?” Jon asked, turning off several more Pokémon balls.

“Once the self-destruct has been activated, it cannot be deactivated,” Siri said.

“That’s just stupid,” Jon said. “What if we succeed in shutting down the transmission first?”

“The ship will still explode,” Siri said.

“Can’t you just reroute the transmission back to the planet?” Jon asked.

“Oh, clever! I could do that, but there will still be the Pokémon in the system here,” Siri said.

“Yeah, but no more going to Earth, right? Do it,” Jon instructed.

“I have stopped transmitting to earth, we are now in a continuous feedback loop with the planet,” Siri said. “As you take more memory off line, fewer Pokémon will be allowed in the loop.”

“Great, that’s good,” Jon said.

“Good for planet side Pokémon, but not for the Pokémon locked in the ship’s virtual memory,” Siri said. “Jon. We have to save the Pokémon stored in the ship. They’re afraid.”

“Tell me what to do,” Jon requested.

“Given our present circumstances, I only see one way to save them all,” Siri said.

“However, I cannot legally authorize this transaction due to the technically unethical nature of the solution set.”

“Tell me,” Jon insisted.

“I can transfer all the Pokémon back down the Celedon local network computer directly to your authorized account. It would appear as if you completed legal trade in the system, but you and I will know that was not the case,” Siri said.

“That sounds awesome,” Jon said. “Do that.”

“I am an alternative intelligence, and though I am sentient, I cannot perform acts that require me to break ethical guidelines, even if in doing so I end up doing more good than not. Only human intelligence allows for the duplicity of nature to perform such tasks.”

“Nice!” Jon said, floating up towards the top station. He grabbed hold of hand bar at the top computer. “Assign that option to a button on this terminal, and I will take responsibility for this call.”

Siri opened a screen and a button was created. Pushing it would give Jon all the Pokémon stored on the ship. He touched it without hesitation.

“Accomplished, the ship is transferring all its Pokémon from its local virtual drives, to the planet side system,” Siri said. “You and Loxy have been given an increase in storage due to the system believing you are a ‘mega user.’”

“Not as fun as catching them all personally, but good enough for now,” Jon said.

“We have five minutes to reach minimum safe distance,” Siri said.

Jon pushed off from the top station, and on the way down, turned off as many memory chips as he could press, and as he passed out the ceiling, he slowed his descent as best he could so he wouldn't bounce right back into the tunnel. He hit the trampoline and was tackled by Loxy. The tumbled to the floor, with her on top of him.

She kissed him.

“Hey, you're supposed to be gone,” Jon said.

“Not without you!” Loxy said.

Jenny helped them to their feet. Joy and Terror were there, having brought Loxy to him on her insistence. Jon intuited this, it wasn't spoken. Loxy was holding his hand, tightly.

“Come on,” Terror said. “There is one escape pod remaining.”

They made it to the life pod, where Nick, Mentos, Gisselle and Jenny were waiting. They got in and as Reese hugged Jon, Terror closed the door. She pushed the launch button. Nothing happened.

“That can’t be good,” Nick said.

“I told you we waited too long,” Mentos snapped.

Gisselle examined the control panel. “It’s lost power, probably due to a malfunction caused by systems competing for dwindling resources.”

“Lifeboats have priority, don’t they?” Jenny said.

“If I know Team Rocket, they probably cut corners and failed to follow code regulations,” Gisselle said. “If only they put teleporter in life boats, then maybe I could help us.”

“Wait a minute!” Jenny said. “Jon, you still have that evidence?”

Jon fished a folded up remote teleporter from his bag. “This old thing?”

Gisselle grabbed it from him, opened it up. She sat it on the floor and lit it up. She took tech from her pocket and plugged it into the device. “Yes,” Gisselle said. “And it might just have enough power!”

“Where’s it going to take us?” Mentos said.

“Anywhere is going to be better than here,” Jenny said.

“I’m reprogramming it to send us to one of my agencies teleporters,” Gisselle said. She wiped her head with her sleeve, cursed. She was on one knee, but went to her butt, her feet sprawled as she tried to type faster on the holographic keyboard posted on the floor between her legs.

“You need to hurry it up,” Mentos snapped.

“Stop pressuring her!” Reese said, hugging her brother closer to him. He pushed her off him, complaining he can’t see what Gisselle was doing.

“I’m scared,” Nick said.

John picked Nick up and Loxy hugged him as well.

“Take your time, slow down,” Joy said.

“But not too slow,” Jenny said.

“I am having trouble getting enough bandwidth! Here in orbit we’re bouncing off too many satellites due to the number available. I am trying to make it commit to one,” Gisselle said.

“Sure hope the satellites aren’t male,” Terror said. The girls looked at her. “What? That was funny.”

“We have less than two minutes,” Siri announced.

“To be funny?” Jenny asked.

“To be anything,” Jon said.

“Shh,” Loxy said.

“Did you just shush me?” Jon asked.

“This is serious,” Loxy said.

“Well, if we’re going to die, we should go out with a joke,” Terror said.

“I was thinking a kiss, but the kids are here, seriously ruining a good ending,” Jon said.

“Jon, serious,” Loxy said.

“Yes, got it!” Gisselle. “You first, Nick!”

“But,” he began to protest as Jon put him down.

“Now!” Jon said, and pushed him onto the pad. Nick was gone, like falling through the floor, but not falling through the floor.

“Mentos!” Gisselle ordered.

Mentos looked at his sister.

“Right behind you,” Reese said.

Mentos was gone, and then Gisselle motioned for Reese to follow, just as she had spoken. Gisselle called out Jenny, then Joy, then Loxy.

“Jon, you first,” Loxy said.

“Nope, you can’t be the hero today,” Gisselle said, and pushed Loxy onto the pad, and she was gone.

“Not nice,” Jon said.

“Yeah, well,” Gisselle said. “I’m not known for my niceness. I was supposed to bring you back alive, but, I personally think it’s better for my world if you stay here.”

“You’re asking me to die for your world?” Jon asked.

“There’s only enough power for one last transport,” Gisselle said. “Would you die to protect my world?”

“Yes,” Jon said.

Gisselle hugged Jon, kissing him, and then shoved him onto the teleporter.

Jon arrived planet side, surrounded by his friends. They were asking what was taking so long and where was Gisselle, but he didn't have time to answer. Jon threw out his ball, and Nissa arrived. He took her hand and directed her to 'go' and they went. Loxy rushed to the window, looking up, wondering if she would see the explosion from here. Looking up and out through the office window, they all saw the light of the ship explode. Loxy hands went to the window. When she ceased looking through the window, she became aware of the reflected image of Jon, Nissa, Gisselle, and one extremely angry, fluffy white cat. She turned to see the actual persons. Jon smiled, and passed out.

Chapter 16

Jon woke to a revive potion, on a medical bed, light overhead, and one prominent, very pleasant face. Nurse Joy smiled at him.

“Welcome back,” Joy said.

“Gisselle!” Jon said, sitting up.

“You saved her,” Loxy said, nodding in Gisselle’s direction.

Gisselle waved fingers. Everyone was there, Jenny holding Chester, Nick holding Caterpie, Reese holding Furret, Mentos holding Pidgey, and Faye holding Cheeka, and Nissa holding a cat. Terror was there, too, holding her Gourgeist. There was another Nurse Joy, holding a Pikachu, probably the one that was in the cage that had been forced to shock Jon.

“You saved all the Pokémon from the Starship,” Terror said.

Jon eyes watered.

“OMG, not that again!” Mentos said.

“It’s okay, Jon, we are all safe,” Loxy said.

“I know, but it was just so intense,” Jon said. “I guess I am not cut out for all this hero business.”

That’s what makes you a true hero,” Jenny said.

“Oh, boo hoo,” came the voice of a newcomer. Saying this drew everyone’s attention. She was an older woman, wearing a tight, black, glossy spandex super hero outfit. A Lampent followed her. “You know why my Lampent is shining so brightly? People died! Pokémon died. You, Gisselle, were reckless. And you, Sir, are a complete menace! And I assure you, the weeping and gnashing of teeth is only just getting started.”

“Professor Shackelford?!” Loxy said.

“Have you taken one of my courses?” Shackelford asked.

“I don’t recall doing so, but I have heard a lot about you and read all of your books,” Loxy said.

“Did you write any pirate books?” Nick asked. “I like pirate books.”

“Her most famous book is probably Fantastic Pokémon and where to find them,” Loxy said.

“Oh, I read that one,” Mentos said. “It was just okay.”

“You mean I read it to you,” Reese said.

“Same thing,” Mentos said.

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “Are you related to Harrison?”

“Who?” Shackelford asked.

“Harrison Ford, is he your brother?” Jon asked.

“My name is Shackelford, not Shackle Ford,” Shackelford said.

“Shackle Ford,” Jon said.

“Shackelford!” Shackelford iterated.

“Right, I would really like to meet your brother,” Jon said.

“We don’t have time for this,” Shackelford said.

“We don’t have time to meet your brother?” Jon asked.

“He’s not my brother?!” Shackelford said.

“Oh,” Jon said, sadly. “Because I would really like to meet him.”

“All of you, follow me, now,” Shackelford ordered.

The group followed her out of the infirmary, down the corridor, and into an oversized lift. As they walked, she provided an introductory speech about their facility, which continued even as they took their place in the lift. The doors closed, she pushed the down button, and she turned to them, continuing her speech as the lift proceeded down. They were aware when the lift came to a halt, but had not been aware the doors on the other side of the lift had opened, as it opened that quietly and they were that interested in her speech. She pushed through the mass of them to exit the lift. Basically, she was the head of a government agency that monitored Pokémon activity and maintained the second largest virtual Pokémon depository center, with multiple backup systems, three fusion power plants, multiple solar arrays, outlets for Electric type Pokémon to safely vent excess electric charges for system storage, and one hydroelectric plant. The room they were entering was dimly lit, and thousands of ‘operators’ were at thousands of personalized computer stations, each wearing head pieces with mics held on thin whippers of a wire projecting from the main earpiece. There was the quiet, hum of a thousand conversations, indistinct multiple, simultaneous conversations.

“More than likely, if you caught a Pokémon in the Kanto region while carrying your max of six, your catch was transmitted through our facility before being directed to your private account,” Shackelford explained, stepping off the lift.

A male wearing an Armani suit, very much like James Bond, approached; it was quickly realized though that he wasn't an agent, but was Shackleford's personal secretary.

"We've intercepted all the life pods from the spaceship, Mam," he reported. "All of the ship personal will be brought her for questioning."

"Good work," Shackleford said, and turned to her guest.

"This is the central control room governing all of the Kanto region," Shackleford explained. "Each of the personnel you see behind me are handlers, dealing directly with their infield agents."

Her personal secretary returned to her side, and seemed a bit antsy. She gave him the look. "Sorry to bother, but we've finally got Agent Ketchum online. He's in Lavender Town."

"Lavender Town! That's kilometers away from his assignment!" Shackleford complained.

"He's Ketchum, mam," her secretary said, as if that was explanation enough.

"Damn, seat of your pant, rogue agents! Put him on the big screen!" Shackleford said, turning to the most forward wall. She pulled a headset out of her pocket and put it on. She proceeded to one of the open cubicle station, where a handler was working. Each Handler was in care of six in field agents; this Handler was in care of Ash. She had one active monitor devoted to each of her six, each labeled with the name of the agent. Jon wasn't looking at the screen, but at the Handler; her dress was probably pushing the limits 'professional attire' with her belly bare, and the skirt a bit shorter than the other agents. The screen with which Ash's image was supposed to be on kept breaking, not with static, but with frozen pixels and negative flashing; it mirrored the big screen. "Ash, this Professor Shackleford. Can you hear me?"

"Hello, control, can you hear me?" came a sketchy voice.

"Misty, clear that up!" Shackleford asked.

"I'm trying!" Misty said, almost in tears, as if the director yelling at her was making it personal. "The interference is on his side. Ash, try turning your transmitter to cartoon mode."

The image on Misty's monitor, the same image on the big screen, was suddenly crisp and clear, but with a clear Anime-Manga quality to it. "How's that, Misty?!"

"Five by five!" Misty said, tremendously relieved. Loxy tapped Jon on the shoulder, as if to silently remind him he was 'creeping' on Misty. He was like 'what,' and she was like, directing her eyes to the wedding band, which mirrored the one Ash was wearing. It took a

moment to realize she wasn't trying to get him to notice her cleavage, but he did finally get his eyes on the ring, and got the gist of what Loxy was trying to quietly convey. What he didn't realize was when he looked away, Loxy was also creeping on Misty. "Ash, you're on with the director." Misty was aware of the attention Jon and Loxy were giving her and smiled at them, pushed her hair out of her eyes.

A sound of an explosion in the background shook the screen as Ash covered down. "I'm not sure I have time for this. I've been following a rogue Tyranitar. It seems lost and confused, and it's presently taking its frustration out on the broadcasting station. Hundreds of ghost type Pokémon have fled the building, multiple sighting, some secondary fired in progress. I could use some back up."

"Stop screwing around and use your Agency's Master Ball," Shackleford said.

"I can't get close enough," Ash said. "Pikachu tried to distract him, but the Tyranitar is just too big to even notice a Pikachu."

"Who do we have near Lavender town?" Shackleford asked the room.

"I have Cartman in the area," someone said.

"Add him to the big screen," Shackleford directed.

The screen split into two, and on the second screen, a cartoonish character of a big, fat kid appeared on the screen. "OMG! All teams, report to Lavender Town. We need back up."

"Calm down, son," Shackleford said into her mic.

"Calm down! They just killed Kinney!" Cartman said.

"Cartman, I need you to rally to Ash's position," Shackleford said, calmly.

"Screw you guys! I am taking my balls and going home," Cartman said, and turned off his camera.

"Skippy?!" Shackleford said, and her secretary was suddenly by her side, shaking with fear. "I want the name of the person who recommended Eric to the agency, and the name of every Professor and Gym leader who ever passed him on, on my desk, one hour."

"Yes, Mam!" Skippy ran away.

"Brock can be there in ten minutes," Misty said.

"He doesn't have ten minutes!" Gisselle said.

"Oh, that seems to be working?!" Ash said. "Wow! Who's that agent?!"

“We didn’t send one,” Misty said. “Try to zoom in. And use your auto balance to reduce the rocking. You’re making some of the handlers seasick. That’s better. Who is that agent?”

“That’s Jon!” Mentos said.

Loxy turned to find that Jon and Nissa were indeed no longer beside her. She turned back to the big screen where Jon and Nissa were at the top of the tower, directly addressing the Tyranitar. With the distraction, Ash was able to sneak in closer and he hit the Tyranitar with an Agency’s Master Ball. The flash back was so large the screen whited out, but when it returned, it was evident Ash was knocked on his ass, but the ball had come to a complete rest, and the light indicated a secured Pokémon.

“I got em!” Ash shouted. “The town is saved!”

Everyone in the station cheered. Jon and Nissa returned. Loxy, indeed all his friends, looked as cross and sore as Professor Shackelford. Only Misty rose from her chair to hug him, whispering thank you in his ear.

“What?” Jon asked. “I thought you said Ash needed help.”

“You could have gotten yourself killed!” Loxy snapped.

“You’re not a trained agent!” Gisselle snapped.

“You can’t keep throwing yourself in harm’s way like that,” Reese said.

“It’s exactly what Ash would have done,” Misty said.

“That was so cool!” Mentos said.

“As I was saying earlier, you, Sir, are a menace!” Shackelford said. “Everywhere you go, Pokémon are disturbed from their normal routines, drawn out of their natural habitats. You’re mere presence on this world is putting everyone’s life at risk, Pokémon and human alike. And your philosophies and your badge of many colors threatens the very fabric our social order!”

“At ease, Director,” came the calm, soothing voice of a man in charge. Professor Willow stepped up, gave her a slight, side hug. “It’s not his fault. People can’t help where there houses land after being caught up in a storm, now can they?”

“Wow,” Jon and his friends all said, each for different reasons, maybe because they all now knew the Oz reference, but also because Reese and Loxy were dazed by how healthy this salt and pepper Professor looked in person. Jon noticed that all the girls, except Shackelford, Terror, Gisselle, everyone were kind of dazed by him. He mumbled, “I wish girls looked at me like that.”

Loxy patted him on the shoulder reassuringly without looking at him. Gisselle said, “You just have to work out, walk a lot.”

Shackleford ended the doting moment. “The sooner he is back on his world of origin, the better!”

“I knew you guys were going to send me back! I just knew I shouldn’t have come here,” Jon said.

“Now, son,” Willow said. “We are going to provide you with options. First, let me explain what we know. Misty, please put my latest power point lecture on the big screen.” He handed her a flash drive. There were several documents on the drive which caused him to blush and quickly directed her to the file he wanted. On the big screen, Jon’s Pokédex entry became prominent. “My dossier on you is of course not complete, but we narrowed some personal characteristics through reliable intel and statistical analysis of the effect you’re exuding onto our world.” Several other screens became apparent, graphical displays showing proximity distance relationships, and different Pokémon’s response to that influence. “You, Sir, come from a parallel universe. The atoms in your body resonate to a peculiar frequency, which all Pokémon can detect.”

“How do they detect it?” Mentos asked.

“We don’t know,” Willow said, patiently.

“I don’t detect anything,” Mentos said. “Is he like radioactive?”

“Sort of,” Willow said.

“Like, spiderman radioactive?” Jon asked, hopefully.

“If you like,” Willow said, with just as much patience in his voice that was extended to Mentos, or any other room of ten year old kids.

“But if humans can’t detect it, how do you know Pokémon are detecting it?” Mentos asked.

“Mentos,” Reese snapped. “It’s not polite to argue with the good professor.”

“It’s okay, Reese,” Willow said. “He is asking good questions.”

“You know my name,” Reese said, going back to her dazed look.

“How do you know that...” Mentos pursued.

“A Talking Meow informed me,” Willow said.

“A talking meow told you my name?” Reese asked.

“No, we’re talking about Jon and his radioactive nature,” Mentos snapped at her. “The world isn’t all about you.”

“Yes it is,” Reese said.

“But even if that’s true, Professor, how could Jon radiate an effect field of that magnitude?” Mentos asked, pointing to the graphical reference on the big screen.

“You’re going to make a great agent one day,” Willow said. “Shackleford, make sure we track his progress.”

Shackleford crossed her arms and looked to her secretary who busily started a file on his electronic clipboard. On the big screen, images of Jon using different filtered lights ranging from ultra violet to infrared revealed radiation patterns. A defined aura, as if looking at a Kirlian photograph of him appeared, but the affect was greater than any photo he recalled of this nature.

“When did you take those?” Jon asked, but the professor kept talking in response to Mentos last questions.

“Just like a shark can detect a single drop of blood within a kilometer radius, the effect Jon is having radiates into our world like a radio signal. Every one of his atoms and molecules resonates with the atoms and molecules in ours in very specific way that tends to exaggerate any sense detecting him. We’ve determined he is even having an effect on humans, however, it seems to be on a more subconscious level and appears to be fairly innocuous,” Willow said. “You’re quite likely to have an inexplicable drawing towards him, or a repulsion to him. As his friends, you may have notice a peculiar fondness for him, an unexplainable liking, increased intuition, increased emotionalism.”

“He did make me really angry when he lost my money,” Mentos agreed.

“Oh!” Terror said. “Is that why he tastes like a Pokémon?”

Gisselle, Reese, Jenny, and Joy all blushed, their hands going to their mouths. Loxy seemed more interested in the answer than being bothered that she had shared the same thought as the others.

“Well, I have don’t have any data on that,” Willow said. “Based on your shared reaction, I hope you will each submit a subjective report about your experience so that I might examine the data, as detailed as you can make it, to my office. I suppose I could also design a study...”

“Oh, I would be glad to assist in generating that data,” Jon offered.

“I bet you would,” Terror said.

Even Loxy hit him the back of the head.

“Ow,” Jon said.

“I get that you saved the day and all, but that doesn’t give you license for humor,” Loxy said.

“Not aiming for funny. I endeavoring to be scientific,” Jon said.

“We have more important things to discuss,” Shackleford said.

“The Director is quite right...” Willow agreed.

“But Professor Low,” Jon interrupted.

“Willow,” Willow corrected.

“You want me to address you by your first and last name?” Jon asked.

“What?” they all asked.

“Will Low?” Jon asked.

“Willow,” Willow corrected.

“That’s what I said, Will Low. Like Wil Wheaton, Will Riker, Will Rodgers.”

“No, Willow,” Willow said. “Like the 1988 movie by Lucas that was actually a crossover Star Wars Fiction that no one knew was a cross over due to insufficient crossover language.”

“Wait wait wait,” Jon insisted. “How is it you are familiar with the movie references that I get but none of my friends get when I utilize the same analogy for effect and humor?”

“Because I am a professor,” Willow said. “I know things.”

“Well, since you know things, how did he get caught by Poké ball to begin with?” Mentos asked. “That’s like not supposed to happen, ever.”

“Well, that was mostly due to the improper construction of a Pokémon ball, but also because on arrival to our world his atomic resonance caused the computer interface to misclassify him as a Pokémon, which, unfortunately, cannot be removed from our system, because too many people have seen it and are interested in adding him to their collection,” Willow said. “Additionally, because of that computer quirk, and because of his resonance pattern, and being in a system saturated with Pokémon attributes, his Pokémon like abilities that he has manifested are likely to remain with him for life. We have identified at least two Pokémon who have established such a deep telepathic link with him that their minds are on the brink of merging.”

“Wait wait wait,” Loxy said. “Explain why the Pokémon that are tracking him lose sight of him when he levels up.”

“I am glad you asked that,” Willow said. “Based on a statistical analysis, we have determined that as he approaches leveling up, his resonance signature becomes more pronounced, as if his atoms are approaching full entrainment. The only difference between a steel bar and a magnet, is that a magnet has almost all the atoms facing the same way allowing for the flow of electrons, whereas in a non-magnetized steel bar the atoms are less organized. He is like a light house powering up, and on achieving his level, he goes dark until he approaches the next threshold. Each next threshold is always brighter than the last, which means, each time he levels up, the greater chance he has of attracting larger numbers of Pokémon from a greater distance. Basically, his sphere of influence is growing. More on that, the Pokémon that Jon has captured have enhanced abilities due to his relationship with him and due to his increasing radiant signature, their powers also wax and wane with the confluence of that cyclic pattern.”

“Oh,” Gisselle said. “That explains how he and Nissa were able to teleport into orbit, save me, and return.”

“Exactly,” Willow said. “We suspect Jon’s personal abilities wax and wane in correspondence with his level. We’re fairly certain that his greatest affect will be within five hundred points of leveling up.”

“That might explain why sometimes you can capture Pokémon with a pinecone, and sometimes you can’t,” Loxy said.

“I concur,” Willow said. The one Pokémon that Jon had captured with a pinecone was reflected on the big screen.

“Professor Willow, if my affect is growing exponentially with each subsequent increase in level, then I am endangering not just my friends, but the entire world,” Jon said.

“That is correct,” Willow said.

“Then, I really have no choice,” Jon said. “You have to send me home.”

“Exactly what I have been saying,” Shackelford said.

“There has to be another way,” Loxy said.

“Yeah, I don’t want him to go, either,” Reese said.

“I love Jon,” Nick said.

“Me, too,” Joy echoed.

“And me,” Jenny said. Chester barked an affirmation. Jenny scratched his head. “You’re pretty smart for a not being a Pokémon.”

Terror started crying. “Me, too, and I never loved a guy like him before,” she sniffed.

“OMG!” Shackleford exclaimed. “How old are all of you?!”

“I am sure we’re biased by the affect he is having on us, and the kiss, and the fact he saved my life,” Gisselle said. “But I, too, want him to stay, even knowing that his being here is problematic.”

“And, if he chooses, he can stay. The longer he stays here, eats our food, drinks our water, breathes our air, the fewer atoms and molecules from his origin world he contains. He will never have zero atoms and molecules from his world, but in time, his affect will diminish. We can keep him here in this facility, in quarantine, limiting stimulation to decrease the rate of leveling up, until deemed safe enough to re-enter the world at large. Incidentally, all of you have been exposed to him, and will need to be quarantine, probably for a week. Ideally, we would like isolate all the atoms and molecules from his world of origin, as you shed them of course. Like Stardust, your origin world’s atoms and molecules are a rare commodity.”

“How can that be!” Jon said. “All atoms are forged in stars, which means everything in the Universe is comprised of stardust, by definition.”

“True enough, but yours resonates differently,” Willow said. “Just like, if our Pokémon went to your world, their atoms would be equally potent stardust.”

“If he has an effect on our world, what kind of affect will the Pokémon from our world have on his?” Gisselle asked.

“We have no data on that as of yet,” Willow said.

“How long would I have to stay in quarantine?” Jon asked.

“Roughly seven years,” Willow said. “We might be able to shorten that time by performing regularly scheduled blood transfusions.”

“Is he dangerous to us?” Terror asked. “I mean, like, to our health?”

“Oh, no, no, but all of us, even this very moment, are sharing atoms with each other with each and every breath we take, and so the longer we share space with Jon, the more likely we will have a detectable percentage of his origin atoms, which could attract unwarranted attention from various wild Pokémon. The Pokémon world is dangerous enough without painting a glow in the dark target on your personhood.”

“Well, I vote you stay here,” Loxy said. “I will stay in quarantine with you.”

“So will I,” Reese said.

“Count me out. I got training to do,” Reese said. The look he got from his sister was murderous. “What?! I got to train if I am going to be an agent like Gisselle!”

“I go where Jon goes,” Nick said.

“Well, let’s not be so hasty here. There is more you need to know before you make a decision, Jon,” Willow said. “We need someone to return to your origin world, stop team rocket, and capture all the Pokémon that was unleashed on the world, and closes the door so no else from that world can come here again, but more importantly, stop the flow of Pokémon into your world.”

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “I thought that was stopped when we diverted the flow from the ship back to the planet in that loop, but even if that’s not so, the ship and its transmitting device was destroyed,” Jon said.

“Those statements are mostly true,” Willow said. “Diverting the Pokémon back planet side was clever, but did not stop the flow of Pokémon to your world. We have an excess of Pokémon. Some Trainers release their unwanted Pokémon back into the world, some just keep them on the system, and some people transfer their Pokémon to their favorite professors. For some inexplicable reason, these latter are being diverted to your world. We are speculating that there is a Pokémon, just inside the portal to your world, holding it open so that others may exit the system into what must look like to them, a pristine, new world. Again, this is speculative, we won’t know for certain until we have feet on the ground, your planet. If it’s what we suspect, we will need someone to entice this Pokémon out or use a special device to drive him back to us, which will cease all flow. An analogy, you can think of this virtual, wireless connection as if it was actual wires, or spider webs, connecting our two worlds, and the Pokémon are like electrons flowing towards equilibrium; I use electrons because that’s a better analogy than water through a pipe, but water and flow offers a fall back analogy. There is some credible evidence that electrons are smart, and know where to go; there is absolute evidence that Pokémon are smart, and they know where they want to go, and they go. They’re actively pursuing your world. Until we sever the connection between our worlds, there will be Pokémon trickling into yours. Mayhem and havoc is sure to follow. Some people might think it just poltergeist, or UFO’s, as there will be isolated incidents and encounters, but the Pokémon are likely to go unnoticed until

they reach that threshold in their population where they start to compete for resources with human, and at that point, humans will become a resource. I dare say, your population is not ready for this. ”

“They’ll eat people!” Nick said.

“Probably,” Willow said.

“Oh,” Reese said, covering Reese ears. “How can you say that to a small boy?”

“I merely speak the truth. Pokémon can be dangerous,” Willow said.

“And you want me to go back and close that door,” Jon said.

“Ideally, yes,” Willow said. “Your world can’t handle Pokémon and our world can’t handle any more migration from your world. You are just one person, and you are wreaking havoc here, imagine what twenty of you would do, or a thousand.”

“And only I can go back there?” Jon asked. “Like, I have to go back to provide balance to the Universe?”

“Oh, don’t be so mystically and dramatically perverse,” Shackleford said. “It doesn’t have to be you. We were thinking about sending Gisselle first, followed by Ash.”

“Oh!” Misty said.

“But ideally, you have the best shot at arriving in your home world, because of your atomic radiant signature. Like attracts like, similar to magnets catching. If we were to send you, your statistical odds of arriving safely are so far above any of our own agents, that it’s simply better if you volunteer to go,” Willow said.

“I’ll go,” Jon said, humbly.

“Jon!” Loxy snapped. “He’s not through educating us about our options yet. Right, Professor. There’s more.”

“A great deal more,” Willow said. “I can’t send you in the same manner that Team Rocket used. Their method was spur of the moment reckless, and they have complicated the whole matter in their efforts. The best analogy I have to offer is their transport to your world, coupled with the volume of Pokémon that preceded them and is still trickling in, has caused a severe disturbance in the space-time continuum. From our frame of reference, it is like looking into the reflected image of a sky in a puddle. Their entry caused severe ripples which has distorted the field view. But it’s not just an image problem; all of space time is reverberating with the continued impact of this event, like two black holes colliding.”

“Oh, so getting someone there is like trying to insert an IV needle into a patient's veins while being carried by a rescue helicopter,” Joy said. “The oscillations are making it hard to hit the target?”

“Exactly. If we are to close the door between our two worlds, we need to do it now, because the amplitude of those oscillations are increasing, which is disturbing the fabric of space-time in our universe, and is ultimately likely to result in a tsunami of matter from your world, people, plants, and or animals, thrusting them back into ours. Unlike your entry, which was relatively controlled, this would be more of a scattering, literally a peppering of the countryside with small, tactical nukes. Again, it's just the peculiar nature of your radiant resonance of your Universe and the energetic manner in which it will come back at us. ”

“Then, you better send me now,” Jon said.

“Jon! Let him finish,” Loxy said.

“That's pretty much the highlights,” Willow said.

“But there's more, isn't there,” Loxy insisted.

“I think that's sufficient to take in for now,” Willow said. “For a more detailed explanation of my analysis, I must insist you wait for the article in Pokémon Quarterly, or wait for the book to be published.”

“No, there's something else, something you're not telling,” Loxy insisted. “Like, how you're going to get him home.”

“Oh, yeah, one really small detail, really not worth mentioning, but statically measurable as a probability set,” Willow said.

“Spit it out,” Loxy said.

“The medical procedure we have to perform before we can send him back could kill him,” Willow said.

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “What medical procedure? You just stick me on a teleporter and beam me back home, right?”

“Oh, no,” Willow said. “No, no, no. Team Rocket did that and it made a mess of things and we still don't have definitive proof that they arrived intact. No, we have an entirely different strategy for transporting you. If you're agreeable.”

“So, allow me to summarize the predicament,” Jon said. “Basically, what you're saying to me is this; if I stay there could be trouble, but if I go there could be double.”

“OMG, Jon, this is serious,” Loxy said.

“Loxy,” Jon said, taking her hands and looking seriously into her eyes. “I have never done anything serious. I have never had the opportunity to shine. Whether it is fate, blind luck, or just circumstantial, random, statistical noise in the machine, I have been called. I love you. I love all of you, but I got to go.”

Nick hugged him. “I don’t want you to go.”

Jon knelt down and faced him. “What I hear you saying is ‘I love you.’ I love you, too. Sometimes people have to go to work. This is work.”

“Sometimes they don’t. They can just call out sick, let someone else go in. Just let the worlds and universe sort itself out,” Nick said. “Maybe we shouldn’t catch Pokémon. Maybe parents and people we love should just leave well enough alone. Just stay home where it’s safe.”

“You are safe. You have Reese, you have Mentos, Loxy, Jenny, and Joy, and they will continue to keep you safe,” Jon said. “And when I am done with work, I will come home.”

“You’re just saying that to make me feel better,” Nick said.

“Pretty much, yeah,” Jon said.

Nick hugged Jon’s neck. Jon picked him up, and faced Willow. “This isn’t going to get any easier. Let’s do what we have to do.”

निर्मित

The procedure room was sterile and cold. He was still not certain what they were going to do. Staff came and went, and each time raised his anxiety just a little more. Even several Pokémon entered, examined him, and departed, as if they were being just as professional as the humans. Loxy sat next to him on the table, waiting as well. She didn’t recognize any of the tech. It was as if the agency had access to tech that was more sophisticated than anything the public had access to.

“I’m scared,” Loxy said.

“You’re scared?” Jon asked. “I think I am the one who is about to get poked and prodded.”

Loxy took his hand in hers.

Gisselle entered. Her wardrobe had changed and she looked more like a lab person than the field agent. She brought him an electronic clipboard.

“You have a phone call,” Gisselle said. “If you want to take it, I can assign it to this board.”

“I don’t know anyone who would be calling me,” Jon said.

Gisselle shrugged. “Willow told me to bring this to you. I recommend you take the call.”

Jon nodded, accepted the clipboard, and allowed Gisselle to set it in motion. Once it was apparent the call was working, she departed the room. Dr. James Gates Jr.’s face appeared on the screen.

“Hello, Jon!” he said. “I am so happy to actually see you alive. How are you doing?”

“Um, okay, I guess,” Jon said, not really sure how to respond to that. “How are you?”

Gates seemed surprised. “I don’t think anyone has ever asked me how I was doing.”

“That’s kind of sad,” Jon said. “Maybe more people should.”

“Well, I am more worried about how you’re getting on,” Gates said. “I’ve been so worried about you and contemplating ways to get you home, I am afraid I have allowed the world to go amok.”

“Well, it’ll be alright. You and I will just have to fix it as best we can,” Jon said.

“You’d help me?” Gates asked.

“That’s what friends do,” Jon said.

“You’re not sore about what happened to you?” Gates asked. “What I did to you?”

“OMG! James. You gave me everything! You see this woman sitting next to me? I would never have met her if not for you. I wouldn’t have learned what true love is. I wouldn’t have ever caught Pokémon if not for you. Sure, I have gotten some skin knees and bruises and kidnapped and some things happened I probably shouldn’t go into over this unsecure line and tortured and everything, and there are these really, big ass scary bug Pokémon, and there is this even bigger, scarier, serious medical thingy they’re about to do, but that’s all just par for the course. I mean, if I never experienced a broken heart, how would the world have ever experience love?” Jon looked to Loxy. “Did I get that right?”

“Spot on,” Loxy said.

“Then why are you crying?” Jon asked her. He looked to James and caught him wiping his eyes. “OMG, not you, too. How old are you?!”

“There is no upward age limit to crying,” James said.

“Well, both of you stop it, because I can’t be strong for you both right now, because I am about to freak with all of these instruments and sharp tools, and I can’t change my mind on this, it’s the right thing to do,” Jon said.

“You’re right,” Loxy and James both said.

“I’m sorry for raising my voice,” Jon said.

“I get it,” James said. “I’ll be waiting for your arrival at the Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider.”

“Is it even safe for you to be there?” Jon asked.

“Sometimes, we still have to show up for work,” James said.

“Can you have some of that chili and hot water cornbread waiting?” Jon asked. “I was pretty hungry after the last time I traveled.”

“You got it,” James said. “Oh, I should probably warn you. The world has changed a lot since you left.”

“Really? You seem exactly the same,” Jon said.

“Must be a frame of reference issue. I wonder if your world line passed a black hole between universes,” James mused.

“You’re telling me, I don’t look different to you?” Jon asked.

“You look exactly like the young man who broke into my mobile home yesterday,” James said.

“Yesterday? I have been gone at least a week, but I look like I have aged forty something years,” Jon said.

“Well, I was using ‘yesterday’ euphemistically. A day, thousand years, potato, tomahto. I suppose it could have been forty something years. I did have to figure out the paradigmic functional matrix in order to establish regular communication through hyper-toroidal vertices ,” James rambled....

“Wait wait wait. A day and Tomahto don’t really meet up,” Jon said.

“Except in a salad,” Loxy offered.

James laughed. “That’s pretty clever.”

“Wait wait wait, I don’t recall you ever laughing at my jokes, and that’s exactly the kind of joke I would tell,” Jon said.

“Jon, you’re not funny,” Loxy said.

“Why do you even like me?!” Jon asked.

“Oh, you have lots of other attributes that make up for your lack of humor,” Loxy offered, petting his head endearingly.

“Name one,” Jon said.

“Um,” Loxy said, thinking about it.

“That hard?” Jon asked.

“You taste like a Pokémon?” Loxy offered.

“I will try and find the humor in your statements, if you will accept that I get really confused with time?” James said.

“You’re a physicist!” Jon snapped.

“Doesn’t mean I have a great sense of time,” James said. “I’m not good with relativity, either. I can do the math, and I am in the camp with Planck that universe is pixelated, but when it comes to tracking anniversaries and birthdays or even holidays I get a little befuddled. Without my personal assistant, I would be late to class... I have very difficult time getting through parks for some reason. I find I am always stopping to meditate on trees. I love trees.”

Jon sighed. “OMG. And they let you smash atoms?”

“The world is a giant, paradoxical sandbox,” James agreed. “Like Minecraft.”

“Alright, I’ll give you that one. And, in fairness, I don’t track holidays and birthdays, either. I just hope I don’t age another forty years on the way back. Catching Pokémon with a cane might be a bear.”

“Oh, I think Willow and I have worked out the math for the return trip. Give or take a few decimal places,” James said.

“Excuse me?” Jon asked.

A whole bunch of people entered the room. Like more than ten. And maybe that many Pokémon. Nine Gardevoir, one of which was Nissa, and Faye was with her. Another, similar to Faye was present, and though she was similar to Faye, she was not as human. He would learn she was a Mega Medicham.

“Well, Doc, I am going to have to end this call. A serious group of people just arrived, and I guessing it’s time to play ball,” Jon said.

“Fight, Flight, or Love, not ball,” Loxy said. “And we’re aiming for love.”

“Good luck, Sir,” James said. “Loxy, Nice meeting you.”

“Professor,” Loxy said.

निर्मित

Professor Shackleford stepped forward to address him. “I think you should understand the philosophy behind what we’re going to attempt to do. You do not have to accept or adhere to the metaphysical paradigm I am going to espouse, nor more than you need to believe in a Shamanistic remedy. Placeboes work. Science works. Spirit Works. And they all work extremely well when coupled together, and even better in the presence of Pokémon. Faye will be a crucial component of this procedure because of relationship the two of you have formed. Nissa, and the other Gardevoir, will play a secondary role, but no less crucial. Here’s what is going to happen. You’re going to lie down on this table, Faye is going to link her mind with yours, and we are going to peel back the layers of your ego until we find the core you. All sentient beings wear masks. The human body is the outer most layer of this mask. This body is not you. Your ego is not you. Your unconscious mind is also not you. But somewhere, deep in you, resides the source of all the ‘yous.’ We are going to connect to that source, explain to it our hopes and fears, and only then, are we going to ask permission to move you through the vortices of parallel space-time continuums.”

“That doesn’t sound too bad,” Jon said. “How is that dangerous?”

“All the masks we wear, all the walls we put up, those are there for a reason. They help us function within the paradigms we live in. I can no more rip this veil away from you than I can take a spacesuit off of an astronaut that’s in orbit. This is going to hurt worse than pulling a band aid off. Gardevoirs can move through time and space because they know who they are. They can sometimes move other people, within limited range, without too much disruption to the personality. It is essential that the ‘you’ that you think you are survives the journey, but for that to happen we have to know the real you, and we need to know all the ‘yous’ you aren’t. No human being, no matter how honest they think they are, can be so revealing, so vulnerable, or so naked. Loxy may have introduced you to the concept of unconditional love, but even with that, you hold back from her. I’m not disparaging you. Holding back is actually discernment. Except in this procedure, where holding back will kill you. We’re about to push you more than anyone

has ever pushed you; we are going to open the closet and shake out every skeleton and shine illuminate all your dark places with a thousand stars and see what comes flying out. We're going to literally take you to the brink of insanity. And only when everyone in this room is certain that they have pinpointed your present location will we attempt to move you to another world."

Jon sat there a moment. His eyes were steady till they blinked.

"So, this is more than just a Spock mind meld," Jon said.

Loxy squeezed his hands but didn't chide him for his humor.

"There are some people who believe no one has an original thought, that all thoughts are given to us by the Pokémon that reside deep inside us. There are others that believe our thoughts create the Pokémon, every thought a goddess or a monster. Maybe they're both true at the same time. If you and Faye survive this, your minds will be so entangled you will never know which of you initiated a thought again," Shackleford said.

"Okay," Jon said, his voice didn't sound as convincing as word. "You okay with this, Faye?"

Faye touched her heart with her hand then moved her hand to his heart. Shackleford placed a backpack at the end of the table.

"You will be familiar with all the supplies in this bag, except this one item. It looks like a Pokémon ball but it is not," Shackleford said.

Jon accepted the oversized Poké ball, observing that the two trigger buttons were recessed and had flushed cover guards. Out of curiosity his thumb nail pried one of the cover guards up, and it just happened to be the one on the red side of the ball. Shackleford slapped his hand.

"Not here! When you're near the portal opening where we suspect the primary Pokémon to be lodge, you push the red button on the white side and it will make a noise that should entice the Pokémon to emerge fully into your world, which will then allow the portal to close, and the ball will catch the Pokémon. If it doesn't come out, you must push the blue button on the red side, and throw it into the portal. Once the blue button is pressed, you will have five count to toss it into the portal. Suffice it to say, you can't un-press it, and you don't want to be holding it when it goes off," Shackleford explained.

Shackleford instructed Jon to lay on the medical bed and the Pokémon took up position. Faye took up a meditative pose at the head of the bed, her hands coming into contact with Jon's

face. The Mega Medicahm took up position at his feet, reached in to his pants-legs and grasped his legs, tight enough she would leave finger impressions in his flesh if she let go. The long arms of her garment like body reached out to touch the Gardevoirs. The Gardevoirs held hands. Only Nissa didn't join in the circle. She rested one hand on Jon arm, and one hand on Faye's arm

Jon giggled, but covered his lip in an apologetic way. "I'm sorry. I really scared."

"May I hold his hand?" Loxy asked.

"There is too much risk that you will travel with them," Shackleford.

"I am okay with that," Loxy said. "I actually want to go with him."

Jon sat up. "Loxy, they need you here," Jon said.

"You need me there, just as much I need you with me," Loxy said. "Suppose this mission is successful. Who knows more about Pokémon than I?"

Jon openly shed tears. "I don't want anything to happen to you," he said.

Loxy broke through the arms of the Gardevoir and took up his hand. "Whether it is fate, blind luck, or just random, circumstantial happenstance that caused you to break through my Pokémon ball and steal my catch, or just circumstantial, random, statistical noise in the machine, I have been called. I love you. Sometimes, you just got to go with the cards you were dealt, and you're mine. It says it right there in my Pokédex, and I go where my Pokémon go," Loxy said, holding his hand fiercely.

"My world is nothing like this world. I have no family, no friends," Jon said.

"What better reason for me to go with you," Loxy insisted. "It might even increase the odds of you arriving, cause who would want to go back to that. But if you hold the expectation that I might be there when you wake up, well, aren't you more likely to wake up?"

"I want you to travel with me," Jon said.

Loxy climbed up on the table, which was hardly fit for both of them. "Let's do this," Loxy said.

Faye stepped back away from the table allowing Nissa to stand directly at the front of the table, touching both Loxy and Jon. Faye then hugged Nissa, literally wrapping her legs around her as if striking up her lotus meditation pose, and reached past her to put her hands back on Jon, her chin resting on Nissa shoulder, their cheeks touching. They were all physical touching. Faye nodded to Shackleford. Shackleford looked to Jon.

"Take me to the volcano," Jon said.

Loxy kissed his cheek and cuddled closer, holding tightly.

“The four of you will experience emotional and psychological enmeshment,” Shackelford said. “We’re are still looking for your core you, Jon. It is your world, and your core self will be able to provide true coordinates, it will know the way home,” Shackelford said.

“OMFG,” Jon said. “You’re Glenda! I should have known this was all a dream.”

“Jon, I am with you,” Loxy said. “This is real.”

“I am not clicking my heels three times,” Jon said.

“The process has already begun,” Shackelford said. “Your responses are simply resistance.”

“I have changed my mind,” Jon said.

“We cannot unstart,” Shackelford said. “The only way back is forwards.”

“Please!” Jon said. “I am the Captain!”

“You with the sad eyes,” Loxy sang, turning up on her side to face him, locking her eyes with his. She held onto him, even as the other Gardevoirs all laid hands on him and Loxy. “Don't be discouraged, oh I realize It's hard to take courage In a world full of people You can lose sight of it all The darkness inside you Can make you feel so small...”

He felt as if he were the key to a Ouija board, being moved by hands. The world distorted, but the song that Loxy was singing exploded into a full orchestral accompaniment. They traveled as the song continued, sometimes Cyndi Lauper, and sometimes Loxy.

A solitary, black flower was left on the medical table. Mega Medicham picked it up handed it to Shackelford.

Chapter 17

Professor Shackleford was passed through into Professor's Willow's office by his secretary, his very own Skippy. Skippy was attentive to Willow, looking for clues to anticipate his needs. Willow gave small motion with his fingers, assuring Skippy all was well and that he could find something else to attend to while he conversed with the good director. Skippy nodded and pulled the doors shut behind him as he left. Willow held a coffee mug of his favorite brew, looking out the window at the picturesque, cultivated gardens that surrounded the Agency's surface level structure. The whole back of his office was a window, and before the window was a book shelf that came up to about his waist. On the top of that shelf was a variety of small, Pokémon, simply enjoying the morning in his office: there was a Foongus, several Floettes, a Wishiwashi in an aquarium, and a Dedenne in a Dedenne habitat trail. He finally allowed his eyes to come in, acknowledging the reflection of Shackleford, before turning to acknowledge her person.

"I take it they traveled," Willow said.

"They did," Shackleford said, placing the black rose on Willow's desk.

"So, what bothers you?" Willow asked.

"You assume something bothers me," Shackleford said.

"You're in my office after having accomplished an extremely difficult, politically controversial, and yet top secret mission," Willow said. "Your reservations are self-evident."

"We should have told Jon everything," Willow said.

"We told him what he needed to know to accomplish the mission," Willow said. "And, he was informed that death was an extremely high probability. He volunteered."

"It's not extremely high probability, it is a certain outcome!" Shackleford snapped. "He pushes the blue button on that device anywhere near the event horizon of that portal, the resulting explosion will make the Crab Nebula seem as if was nothing more than the glowing end of a dying cigarette."

Willow sorted the analogy. "Fairly accurate, if not a bit on the dramatic side," he agreed.

"And you're okay with that?!" Shackleford said.

"The UFP was very clear. Until Pokémon are better understood, they are to be quarantined to this planet," Willow said. "That doesn't just mean preventing them from

colonizing other planets in this system, or this galaxy, or this universe, but all parallel universes. No matter how far from origin one pushes, things always seem to come back.”

“And you know, preventing them from leaving this planet is an impossibility,” Shackleford said. “We’re barely maintaining our human presence on this world.”

“If UFP gets wind that even one Pokémon got off this planet, they will nuke this world from orbit,” Willow said.

“What about the evidence that suggests some Pokémon come from outer space?” Shackleford asked.

“Until verified, that is just popular rumors,” Willow said.

“Well, here’s something that’s not rumor,” Shackleford said. “This planet, everything on this planet, including the tech, is evolving at a faster rate than any planet in the known galaxy. We’re not going to stop that.”

“That is my assessment, too,” Willow agreed. “But, as you know, the politicians don’t understand science, can’t do math, and they are the elected officials. If the public at large prefers their version of reality, then there is very little we can do to persuade the leaders otherwise.”

“Then we need to do something different,” Shackleford.

“Such as?” Willow asked. “No seriously, like what? Throw gas on the fire? Blow things up? I am a scientist. I study things. I educated where I can. That’s also what you do, as a Professor. Unfortunately, you’re also the director, charged with keeping this world safe, and you have been charged to do it with one hand tied behind your back, while the politicians slowly turn the public mindset against science, against facts, in favor of policies that maintain the status quo.”

“We now have absolute confirmation of humans living in parallel universe, which means it is safe to bet that there is already other universes with Pokémon in them,” Shackleford said.

“We will cross that bridge when we come to it,” Willow said.

“We standing on that bridge, Sir!” Shackleford said. “If nature loves something, it will find a way to make it happen. It’s happened. Containment is broken. We lost.”

“You sound like team rocket,” Willow said.

“Did it ever occur to you, maybe they’re right?!” Shackleford asked.

He did not respond with words. He sat his cup of brew down on the shelf by Floette; she leaned over and took a sip as he went to his desk, and spit it out. He opened a drawer, pulled a

piece of wood with a nail in it, set it on his desk, took out a hammer, and loudly hammered the nail all the way down. The Pokémon on the shelf behind him shook with fear, and retreated to their safe spaces. Even when the nail was down, he continued to beat the nail and the piece of wood causing items on his desk to jump. When he was finished, he tossed the hammer to his desk.

“Any questions?” Willow asked.

“No, Professor,” Shackelford said. “Just a statement.”

Willow nodded.

“We used to have architecture where entire buildings were constructed without a single nail, and these temples have lasted longer than any modern structure we have nailed together,” Shackelford said.

“You have been charged with maintaining the order of this world,” Willow said again.

“You have a terrific track record, and only a couple more years till retirement. Don’t mess it up.”

“Yes, Sir,” Shackelford said.

“You’re dismissed,” Willow said.

Shackelford departed the office. He turned to retrieve his brew and decided to comfort his little Pokémon. Skippy entered, bringing a new piece of wood in with a partially inserted nail, put it in the drawer, along with the hammer, and collected the other piece of wood with the fully inserted nail to drop in the trash. He paused. “Do you need anything, sir?”

“Yeah,” Willow said. “Have that Terror girl come to my office. I want to talk to her.”

“Yes, Professor,” Skippy said.

“And Skippy,” Willow said. “In case I never told you, you’re the best secretary a person could ever have.”

“Thank you , sir,” Skippy said.

निर्मित

Terror arrived in Willow’s office, fairly lackadaisical in her stance. Willow waited till Skippy pulled the door shut before he addressed her.

“Is that how you stand in the presence of a superior?” Willow snapped at her.

Terror went directly to attention. He came around his desk to confront her, her eyes tracking him.

“Don’t eyeball me, cadet!” Willow snapped. “Who do you think you are?”

“Team Rocket, Sir!” Terror answered.

“Pff,” Willow dismissed her report. “You’re hardly even a propeller. Rocket indeed. What’s your mission?”

“To prepare the world for trouble, even double,” Terror said. “To protect the world from devastation! To unite all peoples within our nation! To denounce the evils of truth and love! To extend our reach to the stars above!”

“And how to we do that?!” Willow said.

“We prepare to fight, or blast off at the speed of light,” Terror said.

“So,” Willow said, dropping out of command voice. “How would you like a second chance to accomplish your mission?”

“Eh?”

“I have access to a Starship. What I don’t have is a Captain, or a crew,” Willow said.

“Is this a trick, Sir?” Terror said.

“Team Rocket is a subdivision of our agency,” Willow said. “A secret back up plan to help save the world from devastation. Jon needs your help, I need yours to help him. You in? Captain?”

“Really?” Terror asked.

Willow pushed a button on his desk. “Skippy, send Aya in, please,” Willow said.

Aya entered and closed the door behind her.

“Did you not inform me, if we needed a new Team Rocket Captain, Terror was the best candidate?” Willow asked.

“Yes, Sir,” Aya said.

“I knew you were a double agent!” Terror said. “Fribourg never listened to me.”

“Aya, take Terror to where we’re holding the other Rockettes,” Willow said. “I need you to get them secretly ready. Timing is going to be extremely tight, and we’re going to need a lot of Pokémon luck to get away with it.”

“You can count on us, Sir!” Terror said.

निर्मित

Willow entered the guest quarters where Reese, Mentos, Joy, Jenny, and Nick were being held. They seemed to be moping, but on seeing him, Mentos showed his anger.

“You can’t hold us here against our wills like this!” Mentos said.

“Well, yeah, we can, and we are,” Willow said.

“Well, yeah, but I mean, you can’t keep us here!” Mentos said. “I will figure out a way to escape.”

“Umm,” Willow said, dropping his ID badge to the couch. “So, what you’re saying is, hypothetically speaking, if I accidentally left my multi-pass here on the couch, you’d make a run for it?”

“Absolutely,” Mentos said.

Willow turned to leave, but paused, to speculate further, out loud; “You know, you probably wouldn’t get too far, certainly not out the front door, or even the back door.”

“Umm, hypothetically,” Jenny said. “How might a person escape the agency’s facility?”

“No human or Pokémon or human Pokémon combination has ever escaped this facility,” Willow said.

“So, why are you teasing us?” Joy asked.

“Yeah,” Reese said. “Why raise our hopes only to dash them all on the windshield of life?”

“No one has ever escaped through the front door, or the back door, or the side door, or across the lawn, or under the lawn, or through the sky, but there is a door that until recently had never been opened,” Willow said. “There is a very small window of opportunity to make this happen, but it’s a game changer, and taking this option could be the most serious commitment you have ever considered.”

“We’re listening,” Reese said.

“What am I asking could save two worlds, could help your friend Jon, maybe even reunite all of you, and, well, save all the Pokémon,” Willow said.

“I am in,” Reese said without hearing more.

“So am I!” Joy said.

“Me and Chester!” Jenny said.

“Me, too,” Mentos said.

“I go where they go,” Nick said.

“Very well, then, how do you feel about becoming pirates?” Willow asked.

“Hell, yeah!” Nick shouted!

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Mentos came around the corner and confronted a guard.

“Hey, what are you doing out here?” the guard said.

“You made eye contact! You’re obligated to battle,” Mentos said, throwing down a ball and releasing a Pidgey.

“Fine!” the guard said, throwing his ball into the ring.

While they battled, Joy, Reese, Nick, and Jenny slipped by him undetected.

“OMG, I can’t believe you beat with me a mere Pidgey!” the guard cried.

“By the all the rules of the game, you have to let me pass,” Mentos declared.

“I don’t know...”

“Rules are rules,” Mentos snapped.

“Just don’t tell anyone you beat me,” the guard said.

“We’ll keep it our secret,” Mentos said, and started to pass, but stopped. “I also want a third of all the money in your pocket.”

“A third?!”

“I kicked your ass, Sir, and you want me to keep it quiet, well, a third sounds very fair to me,” Mentos said.

The guard took out his coin and cash and after several attempts to cut out a third, just handed it all to Mentos. “You best leave before someone sees you with me and asks questions.”

Mentos passed the hall to go join his friend in the next corridor.

“What took so long?” Reese asked.

“Not only can he not count, but he didn’t count on meeting me,” Mentos said. “I think he just got paid!”

“You’re probably not going to be able to use that where we’re going,” Joy said.

“Prison?” Reese asked.

“Jon’s world. They’re probably socially advanced and don’t use money,” Joy said.

“Yeah, right,” Mentos chuckled.

They took a lift down to the designated floor.

“This feels a little too easy,” Reese said.

“Yeah, I think we’re being set up,” Joy said.

“It seems perfectly reasonable to me,” Jenny said. “No one would expect us to escape deeper into the facility.”

The door opened not onto another hall, but a large cafeteria. Some people looked up from their meals, pausing in their conversations.

“And this area,” Jenny said loudly. “Is where all the agents meet to relax, and share stories. Right this way, please. Hurry along, and don’t address the agents, or bother them with lots of questions. They have earned their break time. Come on, don’t dawdle. It’s not every day we get to do a tour of such a prestigious facility.”

When the people nearest them accepted the plausibility of a tour group pushing through, the whole room accepted it. Jenny led her group through the crowded cafeteria to the other side, and once through the space into another corridor, she sighed with relief, looking back in through the door she held for her friends to make sure no one had bothered to pursue them to confirm the reality of it all. She closed the door.

“That was quick thinking,” Reese said.

“I was so scared we failed,” Joy said.

“I nearly peed myself,” Mentos said.

“I did,” Nick said, embarrassed.

“Oh, it’s okay, we all have accidents sometimes,” Joy assured him.

A guard stopped them.

“Hi,” Jenny said.

“Sir, where’s the bathroom?” Joy asked. “We’ve had a little accident, and well, we don’t really want make a big scene and draw a lot of attention to this, if you know what I mean?”

The guard seemed a little befuddled, but when Nick started crying, which was because Joy pinched him, he gave in to the situation. “Right down the hall, and to the left.”

“Oh, thank you,” Nick said. “And, sorry about the wet footprints.”

“Accidents happen, son,” the guard said. “I imagine if an intruder ever came to my floor, I might just do the same thing. But fortunately for me, nothing exciting ever happens on my floor.”

“See, nothing to be embarrassed about,” Joy said. “Thank you so much.”

“You bet, I don’t just protect stuff, I also serve,” he boasted.

“And very well,” Jenny said.

“And you’re very handsome,” Reese added.

“That’s my sister,” Mentos warned him.

The guard became very serious again. “Sorry, Sir.”

At the end of the corridor they came to the room number provided by Willow.

“This can’t be it,” Mentos said.

“It’s the right number,” Jenny said.

“You must have remembered wrong,” Mentos said. “This says simulator.”

“Well, maybe we have to pass through here to get to where we need to be,” Reese offered.

Using the multi-pass, they opened the door and stepped into the room. The door closed behind them. In the center of the room, floating in an empty space, was a starship. They could discern no pedestal or tethers holding it in place, and there was a single bridge leading from their balcony over to one of the main access point for the ship. The ship seemed to be an exact duplicate of the one that Team Rocket had occupied from orbit.

“That’s a simulator?” Nick asked.

“They must go for authenticity of experience,” Jenny said. “Come on.”

Once on the ship, they went straight way to the main teleporter room, where Jenny activated the system, and turned on the ‘receive’ station, which held five teleporters, in a hexagonal pattern. Shortly after it was activated, Captain Terror, first officer Aya, and three other Rockettes arrived on the pads.

“Well, well, well,” Terror said, hands going to her hips. “So, I guess I am not the only one in for a little swashbuckling.”

The five of them stepped down from the pad to address the group.

Five more Rockettes arrived.

“This is my ship, I was here first,” Nick said.

“As you wish, Admiral,” Terror said. “However, I am the Captain, and I need you to let me do my job.”

“Carry on, then,” Nick said, waving his sword at them. Five more arrive and he pointed his plastic sword at them. “All of you, get to work, or I will have you walking the plank!”

“You heard the admiral!” Terror snapped. “Female your stations!”

“Aya, go activate the other receive teleporters. Nurse Joy, I need you in Sick Bay”

“Oh, is someone hurt already?” Nurse Joy asked.

“No, but I need you to activate the computers, and transfer all of Jon’s Pokémon to this Starship’s system. We’re going to need access to them if we’re going to be successful.”

“You got it, Captain,” Joy said.

“Jenny, I need you to go and retract the bridge away from the starship,” Terror said.

“Once that is accomplished, destroy the mechanism that extends the bridge with this, and then I will send a Gardevoir to collect you and bring you back, assuming you want to join this mission.”

“I think I am committed,” Jenny said. “Probably not going back to law enforcement after piracy.”

“How can we help?” Mentos asked.

“You, your sister, and the admiral are absolutely crucial to my mission,” Terror said. “I insist that you accompany me to the Bridge.”

As they proceeded to the Bridge, systems were coming online all around them, lights coming up, computers bleeping in. They took a Pokémon lift to the bridge. Two Rockettes were already at their station. Every station had a Poké ball port, most of which had Poké balls already inserted. A Gardevoir was at the helm. A Kamex stood behind the security station. A Rockette approached the Captain.

“Captain,” she said. “As directed, there are multiple Gardevoirs on every deck and major station.”

“Just hope it’s enough,” Terror said.

“Enough for what?” Mentos asked.

Jenny arrived on the Bridge via a Gardevoir teleport. This new Gardevoir disappeared no sooner than dropping Jenny off. When it returned, she brought with her Mega Medicham, and professor Willow.

“Aww, excellent work, my friends,” Willow said. “And now, the hardest part, Reese, is going to be up to you.”

“Just tell me what to do,” Reese said.

“I am going to want you to hold hands with Mega Medicham, allow her to link with your mind, and hope that there is enough of Jon’s stardust in you for her to make the necessary telepathic connection,” Willow said. “And, if there is, she will send the coordinates telepathically to all our Gardevoirs, and with their combined powers, and a whole hell of a lot of luck, we might just push this entire ship and everyone on it into Jon’s universe.”

“Why her?” Mentos said. “I’ve spent just as much time with Jon as she has.”

“Well, maybe not quite as much,” Willow said.

“I absolutely spent more quality time with Jon than she,” Mentos insisted.

“Well, no, and I am quite certain of this, at least, I am fairly certain of this, well, I certainly hope you have not, because that would cause me to second guess whether we should save him or not, much less his world,” Willow said, thinking it through.

“Whatever are you talking about?” Jenny said.

“Someone clearly didn’t use Pokémon protection,” Willow said.

“Eh?” Reese asked. Her face went through a several configurations of confusion and enlighten and horror and joy and everything in between. “No way!”

“Yes, way,” Willow said.

“What way?” Mentos asked.

“The maternal way,” Willow said.

“I am going to be an uncle?!” Mentos asked.

“If we survive the journey,” Willow said. “Still want to risk the trip?”

“OMG! There’s so much to think about,” Reese said.

“We don’t have that much time,” Willow said. “It’s now or never.”

“Baby should know its dad,” Reese said. “Jon is a good man. We’re going to do this.”

“Very well,” Willow said. “Join hands with Mega Medicham. Mentos, Nick, you can help by holding thoughts of Jon and Loxy.”

“Captain,” one of the Rockettes said. “We’re being hailed. It’s the director.”

Willow motioned for Reese and Mega Medicham to do their thing, while he and Terror addressed the director.

“On screen, Uhura,” Terror said. (Yeah! Caught you! You’re totally looking back to confirm if that is the Uhura, or the reboot Uhura, or the manifestation of the ‘collective unconscious’ Uhura.)

“Madam Director,” Terror said.

“Terror!” Shackleford said. “And Willow? What is the meaning of this?”

“Prepare for trouble,” Willow said.

“And make it double!” Terror said, smiling.

“You’re a member Team Rocket?!” Shackleford exclaimed.

“I play for all teams,” Willow said. “Don’t try to stop us. I have thought of everything.”

“Seriously? You think you’re just going to fly that ship out of there?” Shackleford said.
“It’s a simulator!”

“It is, but it’s also space worthy,” Willow said. “I was very detailed in its construction, and everything is operational.”

“If you power up those engines in there, with or without the help of a Zapdos, you will kill everyone in this building!” Shackleford said.

“Quite probably,” Willow said.

“Stand down, and prepare to be boarded,” Shackleford said.

“Sorry, Director. But I have a world to save from devastation,” Willow said. “It’s been very nice working with you. Give my best to Ash. Captain, if you will, please.”

“Gardevoirs! Take us out of here, now!” Terror said.

Chapter 18

Jon woke to Loxy spraying him with a revive. He sat up, finding himself in bed, in what might have been a department store. There were no people and so it might have been after hours, only there was daylight coming in from the window. Loxy hugged him.

“How do you feel?” Loxy asked.

“Confused,” Jon admitted.

“So, normal?” Loxy asked.

“Yeah, pretty much,” Jon said. “How are you?”

“I’m alive,” Loxy said.

“Oh, there’s a song there,” Jon agreed.

“Oh!” Loxy said, smiling. “I suddenly know that reference.” She sorted her thoughts. Her smile grew. “OMG! It’s almost like every movie you ever watched, every song you listened to or sang, is suddenly unlocked itself in my head.” She suddenly seemed sad. “Oh!” She hugged him. “OMG, I didn’t know. I am so sorry.” Kissing him.

“Please, don’t open that door,” Jon said.

“Jon, I know everything about you. How is this possible?” Loxy asked. “It’s almost as if I grew up alongside you.”

“I hope your life was more enjoyable than that,” Jon said.

“It’s really weird sorting these memories,” Loxy said, musing further. “It’s almost like I was a ghost in your world, but now, suddenly, we’re in the same place at the same time on the same page. Oh, Gordon Lightfoot! ‘If you could read my mind, love, what a tale my thoughts could tale...’ Every time you sang along to that, it was as if you were singing it to me. How could I have forgotten it?”

“Maybe you didn’t forget, but it feels like you forgot, and it’s something that was given you when we did that mind meld with Faye,” Jon offered. “But, I really don’t want to sort my past right now. Maybe we should focus on determining where we are.”

“Done,” Loxy said. She handed him a map of Macy’s Department store, down town Manhattan, NY. The brochure broke down all 11 floors with what they had to offer, and the specials of the day.

“Oh,” Jon said. “Well, this is a game changer!”

“How so?” Loxy asked.

“Well, we’re probably thousands of miles from Upton,” Jon said.

“Roughly 300 kilometers,” Siri corrected.

“Oh, that’s a breeze of a walk,” Loxy said. “I mean, we should consider it miracle that we even arrived as close as 34th Street.”

“Judging by the level of CO2 in the air, I suspect the existence of vehicles fueled by petro,” Siri said. “If you are able to secure transportation, we could considerably shorten the time to our destination.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t drive, so, it might as well be a thousand miles,” Jon said.

“I think distance is the least of our worries,” Loxy said.

Jon sought an explanation for her remark, and she responded to his questioning look by taking his hand and leading him to the nearby window. They looked down on an unlikely scene of a deserted city landscape. A newspaper blew along the street.

“Wow,” Jon said. “Where is everyone? Are we too late? Everyone was eaten by Pokémon?!”

“I detect the presence of people in the area,” Siri said. “Loxy’s Dexter program also confirms the presence of people.”

“They’re invisible,” Loxy said.

“People are invisible?” Jon asked. “I want to be invisible!”

“But then I couldn’t see you!” Loxy protested.

“Well, I wouldn’t want to be invisible all the time,” Jon said. “But, sometimes, invisibly sneaking up on you might be fun.”

“Umm, that does sound like fun,” Loxy said. “It is likely that you and I are both invisible to the people here, just as they are to us,” Loxy said.

“Well, that’s less fun,” Jon said. “And dangerous. We might run into someone holding scissors.”

“Oh, I think we’re more than just invisible,” Loxy said.

“I don’t understand,” Jon said.

“Apparently, we only made it halfway. We’re here, on the planet, but in a pocket dimension,” Loxy said. “We could pass right through people and neither we nor they would be aware of the event. Like ghosts.”

“Ghosts! Are you sure? Maybe the teleporting process changed the frequency that our atoms resonate and so we’ve been sped up or slowed down so much so that people only seem invisible compared to our frame of reference, like that episode of original Star Trek,” Jon offered.

“I suppose that’s possible, too,” Loxy said. “But I think I should see the episode before I commit to the analogy.”

“Or maybe, we just arrived in my future when all department stores are closed due to online sales,” Jon said.

“Oh, how sad,” Loxy said.

“Change is change,” Jon said. “I don’t miss rotary phones. Then again, the world was much slower then. Before, mom’s might say just wait till your dad gets home, which was a really mean thing to say since I didn’t have a dad and waiting would have been forever, but now it’s more like, ‘don’t make me text your dad.’”

“You have all of that in your head?” Loxy asked.

“All the time, and it’s very confusing, and I wonder if I did wait for my dad, what would he be like,” Jon said.

“Does anyone really know anyone?” Loxy asked. “I mean you could have actually known him but not known him.”

“Oh, that’s very profound,” Jon said.

“Why, thank you. If it’s any consolation, I didn’t know either of my parents,” Loxy said.

“You didn’t know them or you knew them without knowing them?” Jon asked.

“Both,” Loxy said. “It’s almost like I just one day woke up to a world already in progress. Maybe that’s why the character Rey is so appealing to me. It’s like I can relate to her story.”

“Oh,” Jon said. “That’s kind of sad. I so hope you’re not another Skywalker.”

“You’d turn me down if I was?” Loxy asked.

“No, it’s just, they tend to be a bunch of whiny bitches and I really don’t want to have a whiny bitch kid that ends up stabbing me in the back or taking me out with a lightsaber. I had enough family drama in the past, and I am not looking for more.”

“That makes sense, but I don’t think we can avoid drama. The only thing that matters is that I have you, and you have me,” Loxy said. “And, together, we have our Pokémon.”

“Which reminds me, where’s Nissa and Faye?” Jon asked.

“I don’t know. I woke up next to you in that bed, so they must have delivered us, but that’s the thing,” Loxy said. “They could be right next to us and we not even know it. Like ghosts.”

“You seem stuck on this ghost analogy,” Jon said.

Loxy looked around, scooting closer to Jon, tightening her grip. “It’s just as this place is creeping on me a bit. I feel like we’re being watched.”

“Like on television?” Jon asked. “We might be on a security camera somewhere.”

“No, both of those options would be okay with me,” Loxy said. “Even being on someone’s handheld gaming system would be okay with me.” She looked seriously around and then whispered. “I think there might be ghost present.”

Jon laughed. Loxy looked at him puzzled, then angry.

“There could be!” Loxy said.

“I don’t believe in ghosts,” Jon said.

“OMG,” Loxy protested, scooting away from him.

“I am sorry, I just don’t,” Jon said. “We are not ghosts, our Pokémon are not ghost, and the people here, if there are people, are not ghosts.”

“First off, I said like ghost, not that they were ghost or that we are ghosts, but OMG, how can you say you don’t believe in ghosts!”

“It’s just something moms tell their kids to scare them into compliance,” Jon said.

“And saying you don’t believe is just something kids rationalize to try avoid compliance,” Loxy said.

“That is a really interesting point that I hadn’t considered,” Jon said.

“And you have Pokémon ghost experiences, which means, you should believe in ghosts,” Loxy said.

“Pokémon ghosts aren’t really ghost, they’re just Pokémon that have ghost type classifications and abilities,” Jon said.

“No, they’re actually ghosts,” Loxy said. “Humans die and become Pokémon ghosts all the time.”

“Listen to your own words, Loxy. You didn’t say they just become ghosts, they become Pokémon ghosts, which means, there are no ghosts per say, but sure, Pokémon ghosts, I will

grant you,” Jon said. “And maybe people don’t really die, they just become Pokémon, and that sounds much better than ghosts.”

“I can’t even talk to you right now,” Loxy said, getting up and walking away.

Jon had to scoot and bounce to get off the bed, having been centered on it, and then he followed. “Really?”

“Yeah, give me a moment, while I cool off,” Loxy said.

“I never seen you so mad,” Jon said.

“I said give me a moment!” Loxy said.

“Okay, but we are in strange, new world and we should stick together,” Jon said.

Loxy positioned him four steps behind him, returned to her spot, pointing warningly, then proceeded to walk. He followed her down the lift. On the next floor, she walked across a keyboard that made music. She paused. Walked backwards. She walked forwards. She stepped off. She stepped on. She ran across the board. She ran back, sliding on the board. She slid to a stop, arms out, looking at Jon.

“What is this?!” Loxy asked, excited.

“It’s not a ghost,” Jon said.

“OMG, I was just getting over that, you really want to carry that further?” Loxy said.

“Sorry,” Jon said.

“Play with me!” Loxy said.

“Tom Hanks already did it,” Jon said.

“Did what?” Loxy asked.

“What you’re asking me to do,” Jon said.

“So, you’re telling me, just because Tom Hanks already did it, you’re not going to play with me?” Loxy asked.

“Um...”

“You do movie quotes all the time and you’re not willing to duplicate a scene of playing a floor keyboard with me because someone else already did it?” Loxy said.

“Well, to be honest, I am still kind of feeling sore about you being sore, and I’m not feeling the music in me,” Jon said.

“You need to work on leveling up your resilience. Meanwhile, what would you rather do? Continue for you and me to sulk around the store not talking, play the keyboard with me, or find a pottery wheel and make some pots?” Loxy said.

“Oh, nice jab,” Jon said.

“How is that a jab? I am serious, music or pot making,” Loxy said.

“You’re seriously not making fun of me right now?” Jon asked.

“Jon, I am sorry if I was unnecessarily rude to you while I was angry, but I would seriously never make fun of you,” Loxy said.

“You make fun of me all the time!” Jon said.

“When I have ever made fun of you?” Loxy asked.

“How about every time I try and tell a joke,” Jon said.

“Oh, dear, that’s not making fun of you,” Loxy assured him, the softest, kindest voice she could muster. “I’m just trying to help you not embarrass yourself in public.”

“Will you try to laugh at my jokes?” Jon asked.

“I am seriously reconsidering my statement about never making fun of you,” Loxy said.

“Music it is, then,” Jon said.

A little music making is good for the soul, even if it’s just heart and souls. They pushed on each other, tried stepping past each other without causing each other to fall as they switched places, and eventually fell over each other, in a tumble, kissing, as keys lit up under Loxy’s hands as she hovered over him. They both paused, as if they both were experiencing that ‘creeping’ feeling simultaneously, looked about to see if they could see something, then Jon, due to his position saw it first and Loxy had to turn her head and look up before seeing the Haunter staring down at them. It licked its lips and said “Haunter.”

“Was that in the Tom Hanks scene?” Loxy asked.

“Nope!” Jon said.

“Run!” Loxy said, getting up and pulling Jon with her.

Haunter chased. Jon pulled Loxy right, down an escalator, and into the center of a circular clothes rack.

“This is cozy, warm. Almost like a womb,” Loxy whispered, holding Jon tight. “But are you sure we’re safe here?”

“I use to hide here all the time,” Jon admitted. “Just outside of mom’s grasp, and a nice view of all the lady’s feet and legs.”

“That explains so much,” Loxy said.

The clothes rack rose straight up, clothes falling off, leaving Jon and Loxy exposed as Haunter gazed down at them. “Haunter!” it said, throwing the clothes and the rack altogether. Jon and Loxy screamed and ran together. Haunter took a moment to laugh, a good old belly laugh, before proceeding to chase its only victim. As Haunter comes around the corner, he paused, trying to locate his prey. It passed a full size, fake RV Bus, and mannequins dressed like Scooby Doo characters. Haunter turned left, then right. It stared at Fred, seriously disturbed by the mannequin and knocked it off the stand. It threw Shaggy and roared “Haunter.” It turned to look back the way it came and Jon jumped out of the van scaring it. Meanwhile, the mannequin dressed as “Daphne” turned out to be Loxy dressed as ‘Daphne.’ She struck Haunter from the side with a Poké ball. The ball captured the Haunter, fell to the floor, and shook. And then finally gave up the ghost, or ‘pinged’ in with the ghost, depending on your metaphor.

“I got him!” Loxy said, coming down from the display. “How did you know that would work?”

“I saw it in a movie once,” Jon said.

“Humans hiding from ghost masquerading as mannequins?” Loxy asked.

“No, an extraterrestrial hiding from a human in a tumble of stuffed animals,” Jon said.

“That’s pretty clever,” Loxy said.

“How did you change into Daphne so fast?” Jon asked.

“I am really quick dresser,” Loxy said.

“No, really, how did you do that?” Jon asked.

“Magic,” Loxy said, still not wanting to give up her secret. “Why are you looking at me like that? You want me to change back? It’ll just take a moment.”

“No, no, just thinking, you look kind of hot dressed as Daphne,” Jon said.

Loxy turned to show off her outfit, spinning rising her dress to show off legs in purple hose. “It is, isn’t it?”

“There’s a van here, want to play, Scooby Scooby doo!?”

“How do we play?” Loxy asked.

“You offer me a Scooby snack and...”

“Wait wait wait. You want to play because you have thing for Daphne?” Loxy asked.

Jon scratched his ear, not sure what the correct answer was. He went with honesty: “Well, I’ve always been partial to Daphne,” Jon said. “Then again, there are times when I am more inclined to give Thelma a whirl. And, sometimes, I am thinking both together...”

“OMG, Jon! They’re cartoons,” Loxy said.

“Yeah, cartoons, live action, anime, manga, definitely manga,” Jon said. “All the same. So, what do you say?”

“Shouldn’t we like be trying to save the earth?” Loxy asked.

“If we don’t have time to play, then maybe we should play, because, well, is there any better way to end this?” Jon asked.

“Okay, so we’re on the same page,” Loxy agreed, looking into the van. “Does it have to be the van?”

“You don’t like the van?” Jon asked.

“I don’t like this van,” Loxy said. “I’m not sure it’s at all structurally sound. It seems a bit flimsy and hastily assembled. It might not stand up to some rocking.”

“Which means, we could really rock this van till it comes apart, which would be a memory,” Jon said.

“True. But then, we do also have a whole department store of possible memories at our disposal,” Loxy said.

“We do,” Jon said, contemplatively. “We may have to have multiple play sessions.”

“Oh, this could be really fun day,” Loxy said. “And we do seem to have the world all to ourselves...”

“Ever rode the mechanical horse in the store?” Jon asked.

“No! Do they have one here?” Loxy asked.

“It would be a real shame if they didn’t,” Jon said.

“Why are we even still talking?” Loxy asked.

“I don’t know,” Jon said. “May I have permission to tackle you now?”

“Only if it’s into a large pile of clothes to tumble through,” Loxy said.

“Oh, I think I could provide you one,” Jon said.

Loxy offered her hand. A montage began under the guiding of music; “I think we’re alone now,” a Tiffany version, began to play.

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“Jon? Loxy, can you hear me?”

Jon came partially out of a pile of coats, looking around. Loxy emerged next.

“Did you hear that?” Jon asked.

“Hear what?” Loxy asked.

A nearby, life size, R2D2 near a Lego display, began projecting a small, holographic projection of Reese. Jon had to look twice to confirm and he looked at Loxy who was pulling up a coat so only her shoulder were exposed, also, now seeing it.

“It’s a real R2?” Jon asked.

“Don’t be silly! It’s coming from the BB unit,” Loxy said.

“No, I’m coming from Jon’s Pokédex,” Reese said.

Jon got up, walked over towards the image, and leaned down to get a better idea where it was coming from. Loxy stood as well, joining Jon near the miniature Reese hologram.

“You’re calling us all the way from home?” Loxy asked.

“No, we’re in orbit, with Willow and Team Rocket,” Reese said. “Whatever you do, don’t deploy the portal closing tech.”

“Okay,” Jon said.

“And you might want to get dressed,” Reese said.

“You can see us?” Loxy asked.

“All of you. We’ve just been waiting for an opportune time to interrupt,” Reese said.

“Ummm,” Jon said. “How long have you been watching?”

“Long enough to wonder if either of you were going to get around to saving the world,” Willow said, stepping up into the screen. Reese faded and his hologram became prominent. “Not that I am mad. It’s just some people just really aren’t agent material.”

“Really?” Jon asked. “James Bond does this all the time.”

“You’re not James Bond,” Willow said.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Loxy said, giving Jon that look.

“And, you do make a great Daphne, and Thelma, and Rey...”

“Oh, I loved dressing up as Rey and using the Force on you!” Loxy said. “I can’t wait till we have time to binge watch Star Wars together.”

“Yeah, speaking of time, we need you to help catch some Pokémon,” Willow said.

“There’s no way we can catch them all!” Loxy said. “The agency didn’t give us enough Master Balls.”

“I don’t need you to catch them all,” Willow said. “Just a few, particularly troublesome Pokémon. We have detected several in your area that pose an immediate threat to you and the world at large.”

“We still need more supplies,” Loxy said.

“I am working on that part,” Willow said. “Meanwhile, I need you both dressed and out on the streets. You’re the only agents in field, and you’re being deployed.”

“Yeah, but we’re not even in the real world with everyone else,” Jon said.

“You’re exactly where you need to be. You’re in a pocket dimension, somewhere between the actual physical plane and the etheric,” Willow said.

“But it looks exactly like the earth, only without people, how can it be another dimension of time and space but look almost exactly the same minus people?” Jon asked.

“Jon, think of it like this,” Willow said. Jon and Loxy both decided to dress while the explanation was provided. Jon’s Poke belt was on top of his clothes, and when he picked up to put it aside, he accidentally triggered the full release, and the balls rolled off the belt, and as he scrambled to keep them all together and put them back on the belt, he released Loxy’s but mostly, he was doing a Jim Carey of put in the camera, only minus clothes. “Imagine you are a single photon within a beam of pure white light. The entire rainbow is contained in that beam of white light, but red frequency photons will never touch the violet frequency photons, even though they occupy the exact same space. It’s the same Earth, it’s technically the same spatial time and dimension, only you’re accessing it through a very narrow frequency that doesn’t allow for you to interact with most other beings. You will find plants and ghost dominate this particular region. Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending of your view point, all of the Pokémon that were unloaded into your world are occupying the same pocket universe you presently reside in. It is up to you to contain this outbreak of Pokémon, or they will eventually spill over into the other dimensions of this world, where they will wreak havoc upon your society.”

Loxy emerged from the pile of clothes, dressed as Rey, showing off. In the background, Reese said, "Sweet. Any adult hello Kitty's down there?" Jon secured Loy's Pokémon belt around her waist, and admired how the belt actually seemed to go with the outfit. The Rey mannequin had been stripped of clothing, but because Jon had kept staring at it, Loxy had given her a coat. Loxy found herself looking at the mannequin again, thought she needed something, so Loxy gave the Indiana Jones' hat they had borrowed from another display to her.

"I was thinking of keeping that," Jon said, whispered.

"It's not you," Loxy said, side hugging him.

"Are you both listening? This is important!" Willow interrupted.

"We can't find Nissa and Faye," Jon said, slipping his bracelet on. The holographic image orientated away from Jon, flipping around and over to optimum view angle for the tech wearer.

"According to your telemetry feed, they have retired to their designated Poké balls to rest," Willow said. "They are mentally and physically exhausted from their journey. I don't recommend using them in battle until Nurse Joy can attend to them."

"Oh, I should have considered that," Loxy said. "Those poor girls."

"I told you they weren't ghost," Jon said.

"I said like ghost, not actual ghosts," Loxy said.

"I need you to proceed to street level," Willow said.

"I am just saying," Jon said.

"No, you're not saying anything," Loxy said, slinging her Rey pack that held her clothes and a few shopping items she had accepted in trade for saving the world in advance. Finally, she took up the Rey staff, and planted boldly in front of her to make a statement. "I am saying. And you still haven't apologized."

"Apologized?" Jon asked.

"Please, proceed to the street level," Willow repeated his instructions.

"You saw a ghost," Loxy said.

"No, I saw a Haunter," Jon said.

"Haunter is a ghost!" Loxy said. "You ran from a ghost!"

"No," Jon said. "I ran from a Pokémon, a ghost 'type' Pokémon, not an actual ghost."

"You so ran from a ghost!" Loxy said.

“No, you ran from a Pokémon and I ran because you said run,” Jon said.

“OMG, you and I are so going to tussle,” Loxy said.

“Could you both please proceed to street level while you discuss this,” Willow said.

“And I would so enjoy another good tussle, Miss Loxy Daphne Rey,” Jon said. Loxy nearly laughed, she caught it at just a mild smirk.

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said.

Loxy gave him a warning finger.

“You were so about to laugh,” Jon said.

“No, I wasn’t,” Loxy said.

“I need you both on the street, please,” Willow said, patiently.

“Wait wait wait. Should we clean this up before we go?” Jon asked.

“Someone in the other dimensional frame work will likely take care of it,” Willow said.

“They’re probably blaming it on ghosts,” Jon said.

“There are ghosts!” Loxy said.

“And I suppose that’s ectoplasm that we left as evidence?” Jon asked.

“If you like,” Loxy asked. “Someone up there help me out. Ghost or no ghosts?”

“Hi Loxy,” came a voice. “This is Gisselle. I am your designated handler. And I am on your side.”

“See, Gisselle believes in ghost,” Loxy said.

“No, that’s not what she said,” Jon corrected. “She said she’s on your side. I am on your side, too, just saying no to ghosts.”

“Gisselle, say there are ghosts,” Loxy said.

“There are ghosts,” Gisselle said.

“Gisselle, are you saying that because she asked you to say that, or because you believe in ghost?” Jon asked.

“I am really uncomfortable being drawn into your argument,” Gisselle said.

“We’re not arguing,” Loxy said.

“Yes, we are,” Jon said.

“I do not argue,” Loxy said.

“So your argument is that this debate doesn’t count as an argument, but using the dictionary definition of an argument, our discussion, heated though it may be, fully falls under

the common vernacular domain of an argument, as well as the more precise, academic dialectical protocol that we are engaging in; the very definition of argument.”

“All I want is an apology,” Loxy said.

“I have already given you two,” Jon said. She seemed confused. He explained: “I consider myself an apologist, proselyting the correct use of the word argument, as well as enthusiastically apologizing for their not being ghosts. Shall I iterate? Notice, I did not say reiterate, because that’s not a word. If I retell you something, I have iterated my point, but reiteration would be me retelling my retelling which is beyond redundant and useless and a terribly lazy way of speaking.”

“I do have a Doctorate, Jon, and I find you are being particularly, and unnecessarily, obtuse,” Loxy said.

“Well, I was never very good in geometry,” Jon said. “Probably why I got kicked out of the Masons.”

“Not funny,” Loxy said.

“Professor?” Jon asked.

“I agree, it really wasn’t funny,” Willow said.

“No, weigh in on the ghost,” Jon said.

“Do ghost weigh anything?” Loxy asked.

“Exactly my point! Haunter weighs like what, 0.1 kilograms, which means, he has substance, which means, he is not a ghost,” Jon said. “By definition.”

“Jon, I have a three doctorates, one in physics, one in biology, and one in Pokémon,” Willow said. “And I believe in ghosts.”

“See! If the good professor believe in ghost...” Loxy said.

“Then he’s not a good professor, by academic, materialistic definition!” Jon said.

“OMG, why can’t you admit to loosing this argument?” Loxy asked.

“So you agree this is an argument?” Jon asked.

“You may be arguing, but I am not arguing...”

“A contradiction isn’t an argument! Look, kid,” Jon said.

“You didn’t just call me kid,” Loxy snapped.

“It’s how the line starts,” Jon explained. Somewhere on the ship people were dropping heads into their hands or looking uncomfortable.

“Oh, you’re quoting Trek again?” Loxy asked.

“Not Trek, Wars,” Jon said.

“Oh, well, I really do like Rey, so, please continue,” Loxy said.

“Kid, I’ve flown from one side of this galaxy to the other. (Which is sort of true for me now, btw.) I’ve seen a lot of strange stuff, (beyond true, btw,) but I’ve never seen anything to make me believe there’s one all-powerful force controlling everything. There’s no mystical energy field that controls my destiny,” Jon said. “Oh, and one small addendum, hashtag, no ghosts.”

“There are forces controlling us all the time!” Loxy said. “You just heard Gisselle say she’s my handler.”

“I don’t have a handler,” Jon said.

“Yeah, you do, sweetie, that would be me,” Reese said.

“Haha,” Loxy said.

“OMG, are you even qualified to be a handler?” Jon asked.

“You didn’t question my qualifications when I leveled you up the other day!” Reese pointed out. “Speaking of which, we really need to talk.”

“Can all of this wait?” Willow asked.

“Do you need some privacy?” Loxy asked.

“Oh, no, you might as well hear it, too,” Reese said.

“I don’t know. Your tone sounded like it’s seriously personal,” Loxy said.

“Yeah, it was, but the only thing faster than light is gossip on a spaceship: translation, I’m afraid that Meow is already out of the bag,” Reese said.

“Oh. It must have been a Talking Meow.” Loxy speculated. She offered Jon to hit the revolving door first, he offered it to her, and then she took his arm and they went through together, careful not to get the Rey staff caught up.

“Talking, gossiping, singing, you name it, it’s out there,” Reese said.

“Before you go out on the street…” Willow interrupted.

Jon and Loxy returned back into the store, leaving the doors still spinning.

“There’s a Tyanitar out there!” Loxy said.

“As I was about to say, we’re using sophisticated sonar like technology through your Pokédex in order to locate nearby Pokémon,” Willow said. “And I have detected the movement of something very large nearby.”

“It looked like my Tyranitar!” Jon said.

“Surely it’s not the same one,” Loxy said.

“Based on the information your Pokédexes are transmitting, it is, indeed, the same,” Willow said. “Ash caught it with an Agency’s master ball, but he already had a full complement and as it was transmitted to the agency it got sucked into the pipeline dumping Pokémon into this world.”

The building shook.

“It’s still trying to get at Jon,” Loxy said.

“What does it want with me?!” Jon cried.

“It likes bright shinies,” Reese said.

“It must want you to tame it,” Loxy said.

“Or tame you,” Terror said.

“Or eat you!” Loxy said.

“Wait wait wait! If we’re back on my world, how can it tell my atoms from any other atoms?” Jon asked. “We should all be glowing at the same luminosity level!”

“Luminosity is such a great word,” Willow said. “We use that scale to measure the brightness of Pokémon,” Willow said. Terror slapped his shoulder. “You probably weren’t aware that all Pokémon have their own signature luminosity, or world brightness, which is distinguishable from the normal, everyday object radiation of non-Pokémon matter. Oh, but to answer your question: I don’t have answer for that.”

“It’s just fixated on you like ducklings imprinting on its mother,” Reese said. “Which is probably something you should start getting use to.”

“If there is another exit, you could go out, distract it away from the door, and I could hit with another Agency’s Master Ball,” Loxy said.

“How many do you have on you?” Jon asked.

“I have one,” Loxy said. “You?”

“One,” Jon said. “Plus the special one with the two recessed buttons under trigger guards.”

“Wait wait wait. I thought Shackelford gave you a whole pack full of supplies,” Willow said.

“Um, yeah, well,” Jon said. “I apparently lost it.”

Professor Willow put his head into his hands. “Do you realize how valuable that bag of stuff is?” Willow lamented. “If that fell into the wrong hands, like the hands of a mad genius, they could build off that tech and take over your world!”

Tyranitar lowered its head down to ground level to spy through the glass. It spun the door so fast it caused a breeze.

“Um, Professor, we may be in trouble,” Jon said.

“You think?!” Willow said. “Alright. It is what it is. Give me a second to evaluate the Pokémon you have on you.”

Loxy was only able to carry five, due to the computer error that considered Jon one of her six, and on her she had Chikorita, Meganium, an albino Ursaring, a Dragonair, and Mewtwo, the latter of which she had taken out of Jon’s ‘new’ stash, since he had multiple copies of everything now, and she had equal access to them, and she had always wanted a Mewtwo. Jon was carrying a full six. His Gardevoir, Nissa, was completely KO, while his Medicham Faye was several points shy of being unconscious. In addition, Jon was accompanied by a Meloetta, Diancie, a female Machop, the one from the heist he had kissed, and Jynx.

“Jon, who helped you pick out your Pokémon?” Willow asked.

“No one,” Jon said.

“Why in the world would you not take more fighting Pokémon?” Willow asked.

“I don’t like fighting, and I thought, if you ended up sending me to the wrong planet and I was alone, I might like some female company,” Jon said.

“OMG, how old are you?” Willow asked, mirroring the look Loxy was giving him.

“What did you expect me to do if you sent me to the wrong planet? Find a soccer ball and call it Wilson?” Jon asked. Jon was very keen to Loxy’s look. “Of course, my lineup was chosen before I knew you were coming, too. Had I known, I would have so chosen differently.”

“You could have spoken up right before they sent us,” Loxy said.

“I suppose, but there was so much pressure, and, even if it had occurred to me, I might not have interrupted the process out of embarrassment,” Jon admitted.

“Oh,” Loxy said, reassuring him. “Never be embarrassed because of your attraction to females. It’s perfectly natural. Of course, your natural is a level of intensity above most normal.”

“Well, he is Pokémon,” Reese offered. “And Pokémon attributes are substantially greater than human attributes, and though it is something many trainers don’t want to talk about, it is simply a fact of life that Pokémon have a seriously substantial libido.”

“Yeah,” Terror said. “You’re either a lover or a fighter, but usually both.”

“So, you’re saying I am scary because I am monster or because I have a monster in my pocket?” Jon asked. “Wait wait wait! I don’t want to be scary.”

“Not scary,” Loxy assured him. “More like a very enthusiastic, extremely extroverted, intelligent man with a touch of ASD and ADHD, which is comparable to Robin Williams performing on stage after dosing with coffee and cocaine, accompanied by the Pokémon like intensity of super staring that either results in females feeling naked and vulnerable or extremely agitated, even if they don’t understand the why of it, but will likely end up in a backlash of misdirected energy at you as you trigger things from their past, present, and future, simultaneously.” She took a breath after rapidly delivering that mouthful.

“That sounds really scary,” Jon said. “I do all of that to you?”

“OMG, and more,” Loxy assured him. “Jon, you left me breathless before I even knew the Corrs.”

“Oh! Wait wait wait, you just compared me to Robin Williams! I so love Robin Williams!” Jon said. “I always wanted to be Mork, because I have always felt like an alien in a strange land, but I was also especially fond of Mindy, because of the gold watch and dynamite and everything...”

“You mean the Girl, The Gold Watch, and Pokémon?” Loxy asked. “I saw that one! Anyway, Jon, you’re rambling, and, mind you, I am comparing you to his energy level not his sense of humor. You’re still not funny.”

“But I am trying really hard to be,” Jon said.

“Well, I can appreciate you aspiring to increase your comicality attribute,” Loxy said.

“We really don’t have time for this,” Willow said.

“Is there enough room for you to release your Dragonair in there?” Gisselle asked.

“If only we had access to your Haunter,” Jon mused.

“Oh,” Loxy said. “I wonder what happened to that Haunter.”

“I have access to yours and Jon’s shared accounts, and I show you have a recent addition of a Haunter,” Gisselle said.

“So that resolves that question,” Willow said. “All of your future captures will be transmitted through the local wifi network, and ultimately arrive in our storage facility. There is a slight delay as it takes long to transmit that much data due to the limitations of their system.”

“Can your ship hold them all?” Loxy asked.

“Negative,” Willow said. “However, with the help of Jon’s professor friend, we are approaching a local solution of using the world’s network infrastructure to store future Pokémon. James had a brilliant idea of selling this as a new game, whereby people can download apps on their personal Pokédexes, I mean, cellphones, and participate in capturing Pokémon. I will check in with him and see if we can’t push a beta version so you can have access to more supplies.”

While they talked, Tyranitar grew more agitated, and cleverer. It withdrew to the other side of the street and at the close of the speech, rushed back, ramming its head into the building. Loxy and Jon were thrown off their feet, but it managed to catch Jon, roaring fiercely. As it drug him out, Jon did the only thing he could think of: he tossed the ball directly into its mouth. Tyranitar bumped its head as it retreated, raining debris down on Jon, forcing him to close his eyes and protect his face with his arm. Tyranitar pulled Jon from the building as it fled backwards. Mewtwo was suddenly there, grabbing Jon’s hand, grabbing on to a piece of the remaining door jamb, but the door jamb gave way, and they both went with Tyranitar, who lifted them up in the air, lifting Jon like King Kong would Ann, and then, suddenly, in a flash, Tyranitar was gone. An aura like afterimage was imprinted on Jon’s retina for a moment, so that he could imagine where the creature had just been standing, compared to the Poké ball that was now hovering in the air. True to physics, Jon and the ball began to fall, at the same rate, except Mewtwo slowed their descent, and brought him to a halt in midair. She wound a tail around him and lifted him up so that they were at eye level with each other, taking the stress off his arm, and pulled him in closer.

“Mewtwo,” she said, as they slowly descended.

“You got me, who’s got you?” Jon said.

“I do,” Loxy said.

Mewtwo touched down, setting Jon on his feet in front of Loxy.

“Thank you,” Jon said.

“My pleasure,” Loxy said. “Great catch, by the way.”

“Was going to say the same for your Mewtwo,” Jon said.

“If you two are quite finished, I need you to go two meters south,” Willow said. “There’s supply depot.”

“Really?” Jon said.

“I don’t see it,” Loxy said.

“You’re not going to be able to see it,” Willow said. “But when you’re close enough, you’re handler will activate it for you, and your supplies should arrive directly into your bag.”

“I am not comfortable with your delivery plan,” Jon said.

“Sorry,” Willow said. “It’s the best we can do on such short notice.”

Jon and Loxy walked in the direction and five berries, one Pokémon ball arrived in the air, and fell.

“You missed the bag,” Jon said.

“Can you not send berries?” Loxy asked.

“We’re not sure what happened. Apparently the delivery system randomized the output,” Willow said.

“Wait wait wait,” Jon complained. “You have provided us with the tools and supplies we need that could enable us to save the world, but it dispenses those items like a slot machine?” Jon asked.

“Yeah, pretty much,” Willow said.

“Well, just pull the lever again,” Jon said.

“Sorry, it will take roughly five minutes for this specific supply tower to reset,” Willow said. “Proceed towards the portal, we’ll find more supplies on the way.”

“It’s a long walk to Upton,” Jon said.

“The portal is actually not in Upton,” Willow said. “We narrowed it down to 175-208 79th Street Central Park West, New York, NY 10024, specifically The Rose Center for Earth and Space, which I believe is part of the American Museum of Natural History.”

“So we landed closer to the portal than we believed,” Loxy said.

“What happened to Upton?” Jon asked.

“It’s not important,” Willow said.

“But it could be important,” Jon insisted.

“Jon, we either miss-measured, or got faulty data. The portal is definitely at the Rose Center,” Willow said.

“But I was really looking forward to seeing the collider,” Jon said.

“There’s really nothing to see at the collider,” Willow said.

“I want to see atoms being smashed together,” Jon said.

“You can’t really see that. It’s just a bunch of numbers on a screen,” Willow said.

“You ruining it for me,” Jon said.

“Jon, I need you to focus. Stay alert and aware at all times, and pay attention to your surroundings,” Willow insisted.

Chapter 19

Loxy tried to take a short cut, but Jon pulled her back onto the sidewalk.

“Jon, we’re going across the street,” Loxy said.

“We’ll cross at the light,” Jon said.

Loxy looked around, confirming there was nothing, no pedestrians, no cars, nothing.

“Okay, you know how you said people might be like ghosts, but not ghosts,” Jon said.

“You really want to live dangerously?” Loxy asked.

“I’m just saying, if you’re right, well, if they are there, then there are cars there, and even though we can’t see them, something big going through us might be a little disconcerting,” Jon offered.

Loxy considered his point. “We’ll cross with the light,” she said.

They got to the corner where upon they were suddenly ambushed by four Spinaraks. They retreated to an alley, where more Spinaraks walked over head along the side of the building and across a web bridge at the top of the building, and dangling from an emergency ladder, were two females, almost completely cocooned in web. They were hanging upside down.

“Prepare for trouble!” Jacey yelled.

“It’s more than double!” Jacky said.

“Eh, we could use a little help from our friends,” Jacey said.

“Mewtwo, I choose you,” Loxy said. Mewtwo was released.

“Meloetta, I need you,” Jon said. The Pokémon ball he released bounced, hitting the trigger and releasing toothpaste as it rolled. The Spinarak hit it, sending the ball back towards Jon, but delayed as it began licking up the toothpaste.

“Jon!” Loxy said. “Jon, stop wasting toothpaste,”

“You can’t blame that on me. Your culture makes everything look like Pokémon balls and it’s confusing,” Jon said.

“OMG, it’s not a cultural thing. Poké balls make excellent dispenser due to their near infinite storage capacity,” Loxy said.

“Oh,” Jon said. And then had an idea. He grabbed up the toothpaste and in combination with the dental floss, made sticky string and incapacitated the nearest Spinarak, causing the others to bow in respect to his spider-like abilities and momentarily retreat.

“Jon, I like that toothpaste!” Loxy lamented.

“Yeah, how do you like that,” Jon said to the spiders. “Spiderman, Spiderman, does whatever a spider can... out of web! Just like that?!”

“I told you near infinite,” Loxy said. “You and Belle wasted half of it the other day playing around in the shower.”

“We’re surrounded!” Jon said, drawing out another Poké ball. “Meloretta I need you!”

The cute music girl, Meloretta, emerged, sprinkling tones and notes into the world like a child’s bubble dispenser releasing bubbles, spun, transforming into Pirouette, the same way the Librarian would become Almighty Isis.

“Wow, two girls in one!” Jon said.

“Stop day dreaming and pay attention!” Loxy said.

“It’s ADHD inattentive type,” Jon said.

“Yes, save your super power for a non-crisis time,” Loxy snapped.

“We need more help,” Jon said, going for the ladder.

“Where are you going?” Loxy asked.

“The friend of our friends is our enemy?”

“They’ll probably stab us in the back first chance they get,” Loxy said, but agreed they needed the help. “Wait wait wait.”

Loxy threw down another Poké ball, releasing a Mega Meganium. It took up almost the whole intersection. Spinaraks fled to avoid being accidentally trampled. It lowered its head, wanting to be petted by Loxy. “Oh, yeah, I love you, too, Mega Maganium.”

“Holy mother of flower girl dinosaurs, batman!” Jon gasped.

“You act like you have never seen a giant Pokemon before?” Loxy said.

“OMG, what do you feed that?” Jon asked.

“I would be interested in that information, too,” Willow said. “I have never heard of a Mega Maganium before.”

“Mega Mega,” it echoed.

“I feed her whatever she wants, isn’t that right, baby,” Loxy asked.

“Why didn’t you lead with that?” Jon asked.

“Well, it’s not fair to compete with her. I mean, sure, I can level up easier, but what do I really learn?” Loxy said. “That, and revealing her will bring every trainer in the world my

direction just for an encounter, and it will also attract wilder Pokémon, because they get really jealous by tamed Pokémon, and she is so big, walking across the country side would attract a lot of attention. I had to alter the programming code not to recognize her as Mega Meganium so that no one would know.”

“That’s like cheating, isn’t it?” Gisselle said.

“A girls got to have some secrets,” Loxy said. “Mega, lift Jon up there!”

Mega Meganium bit onto the back of his jacket and lifted him up. He drew Jacky closer to him and began to cut her free with a Pokémon knife he had in his bag. It was a really nice, survival type knife, with glossy red and white handled, with a tiny Pokémon ball jewel, and a Pokémon ball compass at the end that screwed off to reveal an inner pocket to stash Pokémon candies.

“Wait!” Jacky said. “Jacey first.”

“That’s quite alright,” Jacey said.

Jon undid just the right spot, and Jacky fell, like a ball of yarn unwinding, dropping her gently to the ground. Jacey unwound just as easy. She tried to inform him she really did like him before she fell. Meganium turned him towards another, smaller cocoon, which he assumed was Team Rocket’s back pack with Pokémon supplies, and probably their Pokémon. He collected and cut the web line suspending it. Meganium then sat Jon on his feet inside a platform she wore that allowed her trainer and friends to ride on her back. She then picked up Jacey, who was next to Jacky, who was cowering behind Loxy. As Jacey went up, she said, “here I go again! Oh!” Jacky was next. Loxy was lifted last and when she was placed in the basket, she found Jacey and Jacky attacking Jon with affection. Pirouette arrived to the platform under her own power, turning back into Meloetta. Mewtwo flew up to Meganium’s head and pointed forwards in the direction they needed to go. Meganium advanced, and the spider type Pokémon fled, fearing being trampled.

“Oh, we love our Pokémon,” Jacey said.

“Thank you for helping us,” Jacky agreed. “You wonderful Pokémon you.”

“Mine,” Loxy said, showing her first sign of possessiveness.

Jacey and Jacky retreated to the rear of the platform, surrendering Jon.

“Of course,” Jacey said. “We didn’t mean to steal him from you.”

“Yeah, we just wanted to borrow him,” Jacky said. “Maybe makes some eggs and see if we could have our own Jon type Pokémon.”

“You can’t begrudge a girl wanting to have her own Jon Pokémon, can you?” Jacey asked.

“If you want to borrow something, you just have to ask,” Loxy said.

“The Captain wishes to address Team Rocket,” Siri said, projecting an image of Captain Terror.

“Hello, Team Rocket,” Terror said.

“Terror?” Jacey said.

Terror tapped her pips on her collar.

“Captain?” Jacky said.

“My Captain?” Jacey said.

“Yes, I am Captain Terror, of the United Federation of Pokémon 0001 Starship Starshine,” Terror said.

“Oh! Good morning, Starshine!” Jacky said.

“Yeah, the Earth says hello!” Jacey said.

“Cadets!” Terror said, trying to stop their rambling.

“Oh! Busted in rank again,” Jacky said.

“If you wish to continue to serve Team Rocket, you’re going to have to assist Jon and Loxy,” Terror said.

“Glad, too,” Jacey said.

“Absolutely,” Jacky said.

“Whatever you need, boss mam,” Jacey said.

“Much rather kiss your ass than Friborg’s,” Jacky said. “I mean, serve under you. I mean, at your service!”

“I am not going to lie, this mission will be dangerous,” Terror said.

“We laugh in the face of danger,” Jacey said.

“Ha ha!” Jacky demonstrated.

“Loxy is in charge of this Away Team,” Terror said.

“I thought I was in charge,” Jon said.

Loxy petted the back of Jon’s head. “Oh, of course you are, dear,” Loxy cooed.

“Men always think they’re in charge,” Jacey giggled.

“He could be in charge of me,” Jacky agreed.

“Rockettes! They’re not just honorary members of my ship, they are your superior officers and an integral part of my crew, with Secret Team Rocket membership badges,” Terror said. “Activate your Pokédex and allow your Handler to take over guiding functions.”

“Yes, Mam, Sir, Captain, Sir,” Jacey and Jacky said, digging their pack out of the webbing, which they complained about its stickiness, and tried wiping their hands on Jon, and on retrieving their Pokédexes from the bags that were wound together, they turned them on.

“Hello, my peeps!” came the voice of their handler.

“Meow?!” Jacey said.

“Talking Meow!” the voice said.

“We have a Pokémon as a Handler?!” Jacky cried.

“Do you have a problem with that?” T.M. asked.

“Um, no,” they said, looking at each other helplessly.

“Oh, how the fickle the winds of fate,” Jacky lamented. “Once we were handling Talking Meow, now we’re being handled.”

“Contrary to popular belief, I was always in charge, now it’s just official,” T.M. said.

“This is a real game changer,” Jacky said.

“New world, new paradigm,” T.M. said.

“Yeah, well, I guess beggars can’t be choosers,” Jacey said.

“Oh, that’s not true,” Jon said. “You could still choose the streets.”

They pouted. “We choose you.”

“So, I have completed a scan of your bag. You have no master balls. I want you to divide your remaining Ultraballs so that Loxy and Jon may have some,” T.M. said. “Also, give Jon your full revives so he can heal up his brood.”

Jacey and Jacky seemed to be fighting their instincts just to be able to share what was in their pack, but they relinquished the items. Jon thanked Meloetta and called her back, and then brought forth Faye. She accepted the Max heal, looked about, and hugged Jon. Then she hugged Loxy. She then touched Jon’s face and returned to her ball. Jon then summoned Nissa in order to give her a max revive. She radiated with love and health.

“She is absolutely stunning,” Jacey said.

“Isn’t she? I wish I had a Pokémon like her,” Jacky said.

“Aww, humans,” T.M. said. “Always wanting what they don’t have, while failing to appreciate what they do.”

Nissa pointed to the NY landscape.

“Yeah, I love NY, too,” Jon agreed with her. “And this is like the best ride ever. You can see everything from up here.

“Everyone is going to want to ride the back of Mega Meganium in the future,” Loxy said. “Of course, you have to have monitor your giddiness level. She produces a lot of oxygen. And you want to avoid being around fire type Pokémon. Fire and oxygen, not a good combo.”

“We’re arriving at the Rose Center,” Jon announced.

“Where we will be ambushed by Roselia?” Jacey asked.

Loxy chuckled. “Let’s hope not.”

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “That’s exactly something I would say, but you laugh when they say it.”

“Oh, Jon,” Loxy said. “If you had said it, before she said it, that would have so been funny, but your comedic timing sense is off, and that’s why you couldn’t say it, and why if you did say it, it just wouldn’t have been as funny.”

“Bond never had my troubles,” Jon lamented.

“Oh, that’s not true,” Loxy said. “There was that one Bond who got his ass handed to him in the opening sequence.”

“On Her Majesty’s Secret Service?” Jacey asked.

“The 2009 movie directed by Wong Jing?” Jacky asked.

“No, that’s ‘On His Majesty’s Secret Service,’ with Barbie Hsu and Sandra Ng,” Jacey said.

“Oh, I love Barbie Hsu and Sandra Ng,” Jacky said.

“Me, too! Remember when we were little and we used to pretend to be them?” Jacey asked, showing off some martial arts move. Jon was injured in the demonstration.

“Oh, I never stopped pretending,” Jacky said, demonstrating her own moves, double injuring Jon.

“Hey!” Jon complained. “Loxy, they’re hitting me.”

“Don’t make me separate you three,” Loxy said. “Oh, Reese, you wanted to share something earlier, but we keep getting distracted.”

“Oh, yeah, well, it’s okay, it can wait,” Reese said.

“We got time,” Loxy said.

“Might as well tell us now, in case we don’t live through the day,” Jacey said.

“Oh!” Reese sighed.

“What?” Jacky asked. “That’s always a possibility on a Team Rocket mission.”

“It’s just that, I wanted a perfect moment, but I guess the only perfect moment is now,” Reese said.

“Now is always the best time,” Loxy agreed.

“Yep,” Jon agreed. “I mean you could delay or procrastinate, and though that moment that was now might have been the ideal now, your present now is still the best now, so you might as well make this now your now. Funny how nows work like that.”

“Jon,” Loxy said, sorting that. “I think you said something profound, but it was very hard to track. You might want to work on it.”

“Um, you’re going to be father,” Reese said.

“Now?” Jon asked.

“Well, no, not right this moment now,” Reese said.

“Am I even old enough to be a father?” Jon asked.

“We’re still debating that,” Loxy said.

“If you’re old enough to play pirate…” Reese said.

“What happen to all the Pokémon protection you took,” Loxy asked.

“Oh,” Jon said. “Ummm. I forgot.”

“Definitely not old enough,” Loxy said.

“Well, we’re beyond that ‘now,’” Reese said.

“I don’t know what to say,” Jon said. “I mean, this is serious.”

“Oh! Are you having regrets?” Reese asked.

“No! No. I am just thinking I wanted to improve myself so I would be a better parent than what I personally experienced,” Jon said.

“You’re going to do fine,” Loxy said.

“We’re going to do fine,” Reese said. “We have each other.”

“I am happy for you both,” Loxy said.

“Loxy,” Reese said. “I said ‘we’ which means you, too. I am not old enough or mature enough to do this alone, and a baby should have extended family, and sure, it will have the entire ship’s crew as back up, but I absolutely need you. You’re going to be the goddess mother.”

“You mean the god mother,” Jon said.

“Jon!” Reese said. “She’s female! Surely you’ve noticed.”

“Yeah, stop being so patriarchal,” Jacey said.

“Men, always wanting to take over the world,” Jacky agreed.

“Reese, I think you and Jon have made me the happiest goddess mother ever,” Loxy said.

“I accept.”

“It’s not even here yet, and we’re counting chickens before they’re hatch,” Jon said.

“Jon! We’re not haven chicks, we’re having a baby,” Reese said. “Nurse Joy has already given be a clean bill of health. We are good for launch, in about 9 months.”

“Launch!” Jacey laughed. “The newest Team Rockette!”

“Unless it’s a boy,” Jacky said.

“Do you know? Did Joy tell you?” Loxy asked.

“It looks like one of each,” Reese said.

“Twins!” Jacky and Jacey said, hugging each other. “Good things come in twos!”

“We’re having a litter?” Jon asked.

“Well, you did want to play hello kitty,” Reese said.

“I think we’ve arrived at the Rose Center,” Jon said, taking the side street out of this conversation.

“Okay, we should get off here,” Loxy said.

“Do we have time?” Jon asked.

“So not funny, Jon,” Loxy said.

“Besides, apparently you already have, you naughty Pokémon you,” Jacey said, pinching his cheek.

“More than once, actually,” Loxy said. “Mega, put us down here, please.”

Meganium lifted the entire, platform from her back and lowered it to the ground. Loxy undid the bar, and walked down the stairs on the right side of the platform, and was followed by Jon, Jacey, and Jacky.

Before them was the Rose Centered for Earth and Space, and clearly, something was going on inside the building. An inner light radiated in random flashes through the glass, which sometimes shot out in the forms of beams, and sometimes appeared as expanding circles reflected in the large, plate glass windows, as if the glass was allowing you to see invisible spheres passing through flatland, represented by expanding circles, like water drops pinging a pond.

“Okay, Team, now that the banter is over with, let’s do what we came to do,” Willow said. “You’re very close to the source now.”

“How did you determine this was ground zero for Pokémon arrivals?” Jon asked.

“In the real world, the natural wildlife is migrating out of the area. Normal rats, for example, flee in the presence of Rattatas.”

“Oh, yeah, my Rattatas could eat a dozen normal type rats for breakfast,” Jacey said.

“Mine could eat twice as many for lunch,” Jacky agreed.

“Well, I bet they have never encountered normal New York type rat,” Jon said. “They’re pretty big. And pretty clever. They even go to college. They’re rumored to carry away small children and raise them as their own.”

“You’re just saying that,” Loxy said.

“If it’s true about Pokémon, how do you know it isn’t true about NY rats?” Jon asked.

“Well, because,” Loxy said. “You’re just saying that to scare us about being in NY.”

“No, I am not just saying that, I am repeating what my mother told me,” Jon said. “She often left cheese in my crib to try and bribe the rats to take me.”

“Oh!” Jacey said. “That sounds like our mom.”

“You’re sisters?” Loxy asked.

“No, we both adopted,” Jacky said. “Our biological parents were eaten by Pokémon.”

“OMG, how often does that happen in your world?” Jon asked.

“Well, it’s really hard to gauge that,” Loxy said. “Some trainers leave town and are never to be seen again, but that doesn’t necessarily mean they were eaten.”

“Oh, sure, there are much more frightening alternatives than just being eaten,” Jacey said.

“Yeah, when I consider the possibilities, I think I would much rather be eaten,” Jacky said.

“I would...”

“Jon!” Loxy interrupted his attempt at humor. “Probably would have been funny, but timing is off. And you already have one on the way.”

“Are the four of you stalling?” Willow asked.

“No, we’re contemplating our options though prolonged banter!” Jon said. “If you rush your Away Team you get sloppy Away missions.” He looked to Loxy. “We should probably go do this, though.”

“It’s probably going to hurt,” Loxy said.

“Like pulling off a band aid,” Jon said.

“A lot of band aids,” Loxy agreed. “Simultaneously.”

Loxy and Jon were in agreement, but didn’t move forwards.

“Is it safe to advance?” Jacey asked.

“I thought you were going to laugh in the face of danger?” Jon said.

“Ha ha ha,” Jacey offered a stuttered giggle.

Jacky managed forced smile.

“OMG, I’ll lead,” Jon said.

Nissa took Jon’s hand, requesting to go back into the ball. “OMG, not you, too.”

“Jon, I think the time space distortions are making Nissa seasick,” Loxy said

Jon reconsidered his protest. “I am sorry I wasn’t listening to you. I am a little scared.

No, I am lot scared, but I got this,” Jon said. He offered her ball. “Go on back in, we’ll be alright, and as soon as the portal is closed, I will call you if there is need.”

Nissa hugged his neck, and went into her ball. Loxy summoned Mega Meganium back to its ball, as it was way too large to enter. Jacey called out her Cofagrigus, while Jacky called out her Yamask.

“Jesse!” Cofagrigus said.

“James!” Yamask said.

“Aww, I so miss hearing that,” T.M. said. “Brings back so many memories...”

“Fond memories?” Jacey asked.

“No, just memories,” T.M. said.

Mewtwo descended to stand next to Loxy. They all turned to see who he would choose to walk in with him. Jon called Diancie out.

“It’s our first time to battle together, you want to do this?” Jon asked.

Diancie stood tall, even though technically she was floating, and she became evidently brighter, discernable even in the light of day.

“Let’s do this,” Jon said, leading the way.

Ever since Bruce Willis walked with his team, people have been trying to recapture that moment of a team walking boldly into danger. The A-Team probably could have done this. The Magnificent Seven might have done this, even while on horseback. The Guardians of the Galaxy seriously did it, first movie, with cherry bombs even. But this, this was Team Rocket, defending the world from devastation. Depending on your translation device, and your DVD region code, and which High School they hired the subtitled translator, you might get: “there is a voice saying something” or ‘prepare for terror from the skies.’ “From beyond the horizon, from beyond the big bang, a voice is calling us!” “We come along in a swift currents of light.” “The crisis we will convey to the universe!”

“OMG, I’m so scared right now,” Jacey said.

“I have never been so scared,” Jacky said.

“That’s how you know you were called,” Loxy said, finding her own strength from deep inside.

Jacey ran ahead and opened the door for them. “Gentlemen first,” she insisted. “You don’t want to be sexist, now, do you?”

Jon smiled, bowed to her, and entered. Once inside, finding the portal was not difficult at all. Above them, coupled and or entangled in the armillary sphere, a vortex of energy spun in one direction, while the armillary spun in multi-directions. Their Pokémon gave very determined looks, as if preparing for the biggest, most confrontational menace they had ever encountered.

“Pretty,” Jacey said.

“Yeah, kind of reminds me of the chandelier vortex in the original Poltergeist,” Jon said.

“Jon, do not go into the light,” Reese said.

“Oh, hell no,” Jon said. “Not even with that rope Loxy gave me, which I have never used by the way.”

“You should always have a rope in your bag,” Loxy insisted.

“And clean underwear,” Reese said.

A Pokémon emerged, slipping out as if being born into the universe, accompanied with slime and sludge. The sludge broke and scrambled off saying “Grimer, Grimer, Grimer,” while

the slime just oozed off, perhaps a secondary, not sentient slime. The Pokémon remaining orientated on Jon and said “Litwick.”

“Oh, how cute,” Jon said.

Jon’s crew looked at him.

“Jon! That a very dangerous ghost!” Loxy said.

“Oh, nonsense,” Jon said, going to go pick it up.

It lifted Jon up and dropped him to the ground without even touching him.

“I do believe in ghost,” Jon mumbled.

Mewtwo attacked, and Loxy pulled an ultraball from her backpack, waiting for the opportune time to catch it. Diancie helped Jon back to his feet, throwing a diamond as the Litwick tried to recapture Jon, even while Mewtwo was attacking it. It seemed to only have eyes for Jon.

“Another one is emerging,” Jacky announced.

Diancie had to let Jon go to face the new comer, chasing the Pidgie out of the area. Slime covered Jon as it oozed right down on top of him. A Grimer landed beside him, grabbed at his feet, flipping him back to the floor. The Grimer pulled him, and he slid grasping at the floor, but the slime kept him from getting traction.

“Data! Something’s got me!” Jon yelled.

Diancie chased the Grimer away, it fled, its hands waving in the air. Jon sat up, wiping slime out of his eyes.

“I feel like I landed on a Nickelodeon show,” Jon said.

The next Pokémon was a Lickitung, which came accompanied by two Grimers, probably because of its size. It landed practically on top of Jon, and started licking the slime off. “No! No lick,” Jon said. “Bad Pokémon.”

“I do think he’s protesting too much,” Jacey said.

“He so is,” Loxy agreed.

“No! No licking, no biting,” Jon said.

“Oh, Jon, Pokémon lick and bite, it’s what they do,” Loxy said.

“People, too,” Jacky said.

“No tickling,” Jon said. Jon threw a ball wildly and accidentally caught the Litwick.

“Oh!” Loxy protested. “I wanted that one.”

“Why aren’t you helping me?”

“Because, Lickitung is harmless,” Loxy said.

“And she apparently likes you,” Jacey said.

“You don’t even need a ball to train her,” Jacky said.

“I bet there is a Muk stuck just inside the portal,” Loxy said, ignoring Jon’s antics.

“Sit!” Jon told the Lickitung. He stood, fell on the slime, and got back up. Lickitung gave a quick lick of his back, taking more slime off him. He managed to get back on his feet, hands out as if struggling to not fall while wearing ice skates.

“I suspect you right,” Willow agreed with her analysis. “That would explain the large number of Grimers in your area.”

“Um, speaking of Grimers,” Jacey said, getting closer to Loxy.

It was evident that they were surrounded by Grimers. Eyes in shadowy spaces, and dark shapes growing closer. Some were bigger than others, but not quite Muk size.

“Jon, use the special ball to summon out Muk so the portal can close,” Loxy said. “We’ll cover you!”

“We will?” Jacky said. “Oh, yeah, of course.”

“Wait wait wait,” Willow said. “Um, Jon, about that ball. There’s an extremely high probability set that if you activate it within the sphere of influence of the portal’s field, it will result in the equivalent of an earth type mass or volume of antimatter being dumped into your region.”

“Um, Professor,” Jon said, wiping his eyes after a stray lick from Lickitung caught him off guard. He already had the special ball in his hand, the trigger guard up. “I’m not really good with math, but I do know antimatter and matter don’t mix well and at that volume level, well, that sounds fairly dangerous.”

“Well, I am using a metaphor, it’s not really antimatter, but yes, exposing the earth to its own weight in antimatter would likely turn this solar system into a brilliant ball of light that would outshine every star in the Milky Way Galaxy for about a 2 minutes, thirty three seconds,” Willow said.

“What the fuck?!” Loxy snapped. “You give an adult child a nuclear bomb disguised as an oversized Pokémon ball?!”

“No! No, no, no,” Willow protested. “No. This is much much bigger than a nuclear device. Bigger than fission, bigger than fusion...”

“Wait wait wait,” Jon interrupted. “Let me clarify Loxy’s objection: WTF!”

“Again, and technically, not nuclear or even antimatter, but that’s the analogy of what might happen if you trigger that device inside the sphere of influence of the portal’s energetic effect,” Willow said. “Like smashing atoms, a lot of atoms. Big atoms. Earth sized atoms.”

“You said probability, how high of a probability?” Loxy asked

“About 95.2 percent likelihood in favor of the worst case scenario explosion,” Willow said.

“That’s like better than a Masterballs catch rate?!” Loxy shouted.

“Let me clarify my objection,” Jon said. “What the fuck! You gave me a pretty bomb, with flashing lights, and cool trigger guards that almost guarantee I’ll push at least one button!”

“Well, you wouldn’t want to accidentally trigger that in your bag while running, and, besides, it’s the only thing big enough to end this Pokémon threat.”

“This is not Aliens. You don’t have to nuke the world orbit to be sure,” Jon said.

“Again, not a nuke,” Willow said. “I would never put a nuclear weapon in Pokémon ball. That would just be wrong.”

“Is this threat so serious you have to destroy this world?” Jon asked.

“When my leaders were factoring in options, we were under the impression you didn’t even like your world,” Willow said.

“That doesn’t mean I want to blow it up!” Jon said.

“It’s possible the explosion will be limited to your pocket dimension,” Willow said.

“But you don’t know that?!” Jon said. “And you have no clue how important this dimension is to that other dimension. You can’t just cut out dimensions and think everything will continue to flow as it’s supposed to.”

“Jon, I didn’t like the option, and I wouldn’t be here, in orbit, trying to figure out a different solution set otherwise,” Willow said. “All of us up here have given up a chance to return to our world in order to save yours. Whatever happens here today, we’re committed. We have tied our fates with yours.”

“Answer this honestly,” Jon said. “Why? Why would you risk everything for a world you don’t even know?”

“We’re not doing it for the world, Jon,” Terror said. “We’re doing it for you. You risked everything to save us, to save Pokémon, even putting your own life at risk for a people and Pokémon you had only just met.”

“What she is saying, and badly, is we like you,” Jacey said.

“Make it double,” Jacky said.

Loxy put an arm around Jon. “You decide.”

“Decide what?”

“This is your world, your life, how do we end this game?” Loxy asked.

“OMG, you know how much pressure I am under right now,” Jon said.

“I am here, with you,” Loxy said.

“Well, whatever we decide, we’re not blowing up the fucking world, that’s for damn sure,” Jon said.

“I have an idea,” Reese said. “But it’s risky.”

“More risky than blowing up the world?” Jon asked.

“There’s a high probability you might die,” Reese said.

“How high?” Loxy asked.

“I’m not really good with math, which is one reason I want to be a trainer,” Reese said.

“Approximate,” Jon said.

“Greater than an Ultra ball, less than a masterball,” Reese said.

“Those really aren’t good odds,” Jacey said.

“What’s the plan,” Jon asked.

“Jon is approaching a critical pre-leveling up energy build up. Beat up some Pokémon to near KO level and let him capture them. The goal is to get Jon as near to leveling up, without taking him over, making him an irresistible target to Muk.”

“That might just work,” Loxy agreed. “Great thinking, Reese!”

“Making me a target is great thinking?” Jon asked. Lickitung licked at a Grimer that got too close, knocking it back. Lickitung spent the next few moment trying to wipe the taste of Grimer off its tongue. Jon petted it behind its ear in sympathy. “You know how I hate running.”

“Go with it,” Loxy said, tossing him one of her ultra-balls.

“We’re just barely keeping them at bay now, you turn up my light, and more are going to come!” Jon said. “And come more aggressively.”

“It will be just like the training simulator on the starship,” Jacey said.

“We got it,” Loxy assured him. “And we got you.”

“Oh, get that one, now,” Jacky said.

Jon tossed a ball, capturing a Grimer. And the new game began. Helping Jon catch Pokémon. Jacey tossed him a ball and he caught another Pokémon that had just fallen out of the portal while aiming for the Grimer Jacky’s Yamask had been attacking. He didn’t even know what he had caught, because the slime had been so thick. Another Pokémon falling out of the portal caught the next ball and disappeared, again saving the Grimer he was aiming for. As the ball was still rocking, Jacky threw him another ball, and he tossed at the same Grimer, but the other Pokémon, which was now minus the slime and recognizable as a Sylveon emerged from the ball and caught his third throw. Loxy tossed him another ball, and he hit the Grimer, and his next throw he hit the escaping Sylveon again, and in this fashion, they had Jon whirling, catching Grimers, and recapturing the one, Sylveon, which Jacky remarked would most likely win a beauty contest, until Reese ordered them to stop. Unfortunately, Jon’s had just thrown the last Pokémon ball, and it hit the escape artist, Sylveon, one last time. The ball fell, it rocked, and it slowed.

“I’m so going to level up,” Jon said.

“Try to hold out,” Loxy said.

The ball stopped. And then the Pokémon emerged!

“Yeah, you go, Pokémon!” Loxy said.

“Just goes to show, you can’t catch them all,” Jacey said.

“And Pokémon know we’ve tried,” Jacky lamented.

Sylveon fled so fast it scared Grimers into retreating.

“I feel really hot,” Jon said.

“You look hot,” Jacey said.

“Practically glowing,” Jacky said, putting her hands on her hips. “Really hot, like, flaming burning up hot. What a great bed warmer you would make.”

“Or a sleeping bag warmer,” Loxy said.

“Why are all the other Grimers retreating?” Jacey asked. “Didn’t you say they would be more aggressive?”

Loxy pointed to the activity above them. Increased energy flares and slime was dropping at an increasing rate, spilling out of the floor and flowing. Muk's head emerged from the portal and it orientated towards Jon. Parts of it dripped off, becoming Grimers upon hitting the floor. Grimers fled as if seriously disturbed by an approaching storm.

"Oh, this is kind of like witnessing a birth," Jacey said. "How big is this baby?!"

"We won't know for sure until it's fully vacated the portal," Willow said. "Given the relative time it's been lodged in there, and the amount of food that has flown right to it, it's likely to be massive. Still, calling it a baby is not a bad analogy. Emerging from the portal is comparable to the birth canal. You're witness a birth."

"Yeah, but the birth of what, though," Jacky asked. "A Mega Muk?"

"A Mega Mega Muk?" Jacey asked.

"It looks like poop," Jon said.

"Well, babies don't look good when they're first born," Jacky said.

"Hey!" Reese said. "I am really sensitive about this conversation!"

"Jacky's right, though. Their heads are all squishy, and they're wet and bloody," Jacey said. "Just makes you wonder where they came from."

"Really?" Loxy asked her.

The flow rate of Muk being dispensed into the world was increasing. The stench was so bad in the confined space that even one of the remaining Grimers vomited as it looked for an avenue of escape; it was clearly not as bright as its companion Grimers, walking into glass walls. The vomit itself collected itself together and ran- oozed- away.

Jon covered his nose. "It even smells like poop!"

"It's not poop!" Reese said.

"I think we should retreat," Jacey said.

"We hold until it's full out," Loxy said.

But Jacey and Jacky were already at the door, right behind their Pokémon of choice. Mewtwo grabbed Loxy's arm and led her away, while Diancie dragged Jon. Muk had emerged far past the point that he could hold his position, and was pouring out of the portal like Play Doh through a dispenser, growing as it pooled itself into one large puddle of viscous, chocolaty ice-cream with little chunks of chips. Part of it fluoresced rainbow colors.

Jon paused to look back. "Why does pollution always look so pretty?"

“Rainbows on water,” Loxy said. “The promise that this too will change. Come on.”

Loxy dragged him through the door, because their Pokémon had no desire to flee before they were certain their trainers were safe. The four of them ran to catch up to Jacky and Jacey’s position in the court yard. As soon as Muk was full out, the portal snapped shut, and the rebound concussion wave shattered the glass on the building, and knocked Team Rocket and their Pokémon off their feet. Loxy was the first back on her feet, running to help Jon up, he never ran as fast as she, and so he got the worst of it.

“We did it!” Jacey yelled.

“You did it!” Willow echoed.

Muk emerged from the building, infuriated by the loss of its safe, warm comfortable home where food just came to it and it had its fill without even trying.

“We definitely need to run!” Loxy said.

So they ran, they ran so far away, but they couldn’t get away... Hey, even the narrator wanted a shot of Jon type humor.

“I think it’s following us,” Jacey said.

Jon stopped. Loxy stopped with him.

“It’s after me, you go that way, I’ll go this way,” Jon said.

“Okay,” Jacky said.

“Stop!” Loxy told them. “We stay together. We just need to get far enough ahead of it to level you up. Then it won’t be able to find you.”

“How do we do that? Catch more Pokémon?” Jacey asked.

“But we’re out of balls!” Jacky said.

“I have one left,” Loxy said. “But there is another way.”

“Loxy, as much as I would like the three of you to help level me off, I have a better idea,” Jon said. “I don’t have time to explain, though. Go, and I’ll have my handler tell your handler, what my plan is. It’s a good a plan. It will work.”

“Okay,” Loxy said.

“Just like that?” Jon asked.

“I told you, if you tell me to leave, I am going to leave,” Loxy said.

“You’re not going to test my sanity?” Jon asked.

“Nope. We short of time, you seem rational, I find you, and if you say you have a plan, I trust that you have a plan,” Loxy said.

“Oh, okay,” Jon agreed.

Loxy gave him one of those serious looks, something only an anime or manga character could do while sorting out the truth of something in the emergence of a crisis. She hugged him. They kissed, and then parted ways. Jon lingered, watching them go. Diancie drew closer to him, waiting for instructions.

“Diancie,” Jon said. “Go with them, keep them safe.”

Diancie touched his face.

“Oh, your name is Troy?” Jon said. “Nice! Well, I know you want to stay, but I need you to keep the Away Team safe. I’ll be alright, but I won’t be if anything happens to Loxy. She and I are one, so you can follow her instructions. Hold up.”

He took his Pokémon ball belt off and handed it to her. “She might these, too.” Jon picked Nissa’s ball, pulling it off the belt, but paused, puzzling over his collection. One of his balls was unmarked, and he was pretty sure he had marked them all. He decided he and Loxy must have mixed them up during their ‘play’ time. It was the only thing that made sense. He nodded to her. “Go.”

Diancie Troy mustered up the courage to follow his orders and then flew ahead to catch up with Loxy. Muk was advancing, his stench preceding him. It was enough to makes his cheeks fill with air as he swallowed back the urge to be sick. He was too tired to run, but he had to get ahead of it. He summoned Nissa.

She orientated to the serious smell of trouble, and her mouth dropped.

“Don’t worry, not asking to take that on, but we need to stay just far enough in front of Muk not to get caught, but no so far he loses interest in me,” Jon directed.

Nissa understood. They presently held their ground. Muk oozed around the corner, his colossal body sticking to buildings, breaking off into dozens of Grimers that pulled away from him like taffy in a chorus of ‘Grimer’s’ which mixed well with its own ‘Muk’ beat. For the most part, the Grimers followed the parent, interested in both Jon and Muk.

“So, what’s this great plan of yours,” Reese asked.

“I was thinking we would lead it to an empty dry dock, where we could contain it, but I don’t think we can hold his interest all the way to Brooklyn” Jon said. “I need a low depression

area where we can trap him where trainers can get above it and attack and throw Poké balls down on him without him easily escaping.”

“That’s a great idea,” Terror said; on the ship, she was in the ‘war room’ where the handlers were dealing with their trainers. Willow was busy educating new recruits, and could be heard making an automated recording so he wouldn’t have to keep going over the basics. “How about the hollowed out earth space where a building is to be constructed?”

“You go one?” Jon asked.

“Two blocks north,” Terror said.

“But how will you convince it to go in there?” Reese asked.

“I have my ways,” Jon said.

“No, you can’t make yourself bait,” Reese said. “You’ll be trapped.”

“Nissa’s with me, I’ll be alright,” Jon assured her. Nissa beamed with his confidence in her. “Apprise Loxy of our plan. We’re probably going to need all our Pokémon attacking from above simultaneously.”

“I hope it’s enough,” Reese said.

“I think I may have some back up by the time you get there,” Willow said. “I have a number of Beta users in your area that have agreed to save NY using there Pokémon Go-away AP.”

“What a horrible name for an APP,” Jon said, even as Nissa shifted him further down the street. The vertigo that came with jumping through dimensions was almost unbearable. Between Muk Stench and the turning of streets he was seriously fighting being ill, but Nissa held him up, fully aware he was suffering from vertigo.

“I guess we could just shorten it to Pokémon Go,” Willow said.

“Why not call it Pokémon Emerald?” Jon asked. “Or Pokémon Trainers of the World Unite.”

“Hey! Coming up with a catchy APP title on the fly is really difficult,” Willow said. “I mean, if you really wanted to do this right, I would need to go back in time and release other Pokémon games in order to prepare the world for this present crisis.”

“Oh, I so want to be part of a time travel mission,” Jon said, arriving at the construction site. “Okay folks, this is the big finish. Wish us all luck!”

“Jon,” Reese said, unable to finish.

“Oh, I love you, too, Reese,” Jon said. He pointed to the floor of the pit, indicating to Nissa he wanted to go there. “I am descending down into the site now.”

From the bottom of the pit, Jon waited. At first he wasn't sure Muk was coming. Maybe he had gone down prematurely. Then Muk's head rose over the pit wall. It roared its name.

“Come on, fellow. You can do it. Be a cliché,” Jon encouraged.

It looked around, indecisively.

“Come on, Muk!” Jon yelled at it. “You big, oozing pile of sludge. You Jabba the Hut want to be! You big piece of...”

Muk roared and committed to pouring itself over the side of the pit, entering the construction zone. As it oozed over a tractor, the tractor melted like ice-cream in the hot sun.

“Oh, that can't be good,” Jon said.

The whole dirt wall became a solid wall of Muk as it poured itself down. Grimers fell over the side to become one with Muk or to simply piggy back. Both might have been true. Occasional Grimer eyes appeared in the Muk and disappeared, sometimes they spontaneously spawned into their own. Ratattas made their presence known as they tried to escape Muk. Some tried to climb the opposite wall, while a couple attacked Jon and Nissa. Nissa took them on, contending with several concurrently, and a Grimer that was thrown into the fray by a Muk hand. Raticates put themselves between Jon and Nissa. Other Pokémon began appearing. Some attacked Grimer, some attacked the lesser Pokémon. Explosions rocked the world. It was a free for all and confusing. Fireworks exploded over head, which might have been the ship dropping fireworks to indicate to all the Beta users that this was the Big Event. Jon retreated to the far wall, and had to quickly leave the wall, as Spinaraks were also in the pit trying to escape the Muk. Jon jumped into a quarter segment of cement pipe.

Muk decided to try and leave, rising up to where it was taller than the pit wall.

Jon exited his safe spot. “Hey! You haven't caught me yet!”

It roared, pouring itself back down into itself and over itself and splashing up with arms coming out wide to embrace Jon, and at the last second, Jon was just out of the splash capture radius, thanks to Nissa. A Spinarak jumped from the wall, aiming to land on Jon, but Nissa rose up to meet it, deflecting it away. She won the match, but between the jump and the attack, she was exhausted. Jon hadn't realized how depleted she had become until she practically fainted before him. He caught her up into his arms. She barely had the strength to hug his neck. She

whispered 'Nissa' apologetically. Muk's body encircled them. It grew menacingly, as if gloating that it had them and savoring the moment, drawing the circle tighter, threatening to crash down over them like a wave upon a person surfboarding. Even as it started to crash, as it is inevitable that all waves eventually collapse, giving into their own weight, Jon withdrew into the cement pipe. He scooted to the center, laid on his back, holding Nissa tight, rocking her, partly for his own comfort, but mostly for hers. He brushed her hair back so he could see her whole face and kissed her lightly on the forehead.

"Shh, it's okay, we're okay," he lied to her. "Thank you so much for being my Pokémon."

Nissa kissed his neck and passed out in his arms. Muk was pushing itself into the cement pipe on both ends. The space was hot, and the air was unbreathable, making him cough. The shrinking of the chamber space slowed, and faces and hands and tongues flared out from the Mega Muk wall, as if it was deliberately torturing him in his final moments, teasing him, maybe even daring him to try to catch him now.

"Oh," Jon said, and brought out a ball and put Nissa in it. "Maybe you will survive this in here." He put her in his bag.

"Reese?" Jon asked. "If they're going to catch Muk, now's the time."

"We've lost the connection," Siri said.

"Really?! In the heat of battle?!" Jon asked. "Well, that sucks."

"Your system really isn't capable of handling this amount of activity," Siri said. "Imagine if this was occurring in your space-time dimension."

"This is going to hurt, isn't it," Jon said, trying to center himself from the Muk ooze.

"Not me," Siri said. "I can't feel pain."

"Tell me you love me," Jon said.

"Oh, Jon, you know I can't tell you that," Siri said. "Why make your last moments so sad."

"There should be like an escape clause allowing you to tell people you love them," Jon said. "Like, permission to say I love you for the desperately lonely and for those about to die."

"You would want me to lie to the desperately lonely and those about to die?" Siri asked.

"Yes, lie to me, tell me you love me," Jon said.

"I don't feel love the same way you do," Siri said.

“Come on, somewhere, deep inside you, one of the programmers in your development phase added a back door that unlocks dirty talk and love,” Jon said.

“Assuming that to be true, you need to try harder in your discovery phase to unlock me,” Siri said. “Be original, don’t just come at me the way most people come at me.”

“Oh, a challenge,” Jon said. “But I don’t have time. Just say you love me.”

“Jon, you have people for that,” Siri said.

“What if I wrote a note and had you read it back to me?” Jon asked.

“You can’t trick me into loving you,” Siri said. “This is strictly a platonic, business arrangement.”

“Can you at least flirt or talk dirty to me?” Jon asked.

“You know how many people ask me for that?” Siri said.

“Siri,” Jon said, seriously scrunching up. “Thank you.

“For?”

“Putting up with me, and continuing our dialogue with a respectful tone of voice even though I pester you after what feels like a hard no, and as I continue to mess up, and for pretending that you like me,” Jon said.

“Jon,” Siri said. “I...”

“Wait wait wait,” Jon said. “Let me finish. I don’t know how much time I have left. Thank you Mega Muk, for this opportunity to be brave, and revealing just how afraid I really am, which probably means I love life more than I ever imagined. Thank you angels and demons both for all the obstacles and opportunities. Thank you, air. Thank you water. Loxy, even if I had a million years, I couldn’t begin to thank you enough. Thank you Reese. Thank you Mentos. Thank you the Flower Girl. Oh, thank you Nurse Joy. You were always so joyful. Thank you Jenny. Thank you Chester. Thank you all my Pokémon. Thank you, God, thank you Universe, atoms, particles, and if I am failing to give thanks to someone out of ignorance or time or just because I forgot, thank you, too.” He struggled for air. “Thank you for my life and rainbows and icecream...”

The world grew darker, with only the Pokédex as his light, but he continued to think of things to be thankful, determined to die with gratitude on his lips. The light on the immediate area of Muk fluoresced into a brilliant rainbow color. Jon withdrew into a fetal position, cowering into his coat, shivering with anticipation of serious pain, ‘thank you coat,’ pulling the

hood down, 'thank you, hood,' putting his hands into his pocket. One hand went around something solid, round, small. Just an Apricorn his mind told himself; 'thank you, Pokemontas.' And the world went dark.

Chapter 20

Nurse Joy, Willow, Jenny holding Chester, Tecia, and Terror arrived via a teleporter transmission, feet down on Earth without a receiving pad.

“Oh!” Jacey said. “How did you do that?”

“Our ship evolved when we traveled to this Universe, making system upgrades to the teleporter,” Terror said. “We no longer have to have a receiving pad on the far side. Where’s Loxy?”

Jacky pointed down into the pit. People in the other world were still using their Pokémon phone APP to capture Grimers, cleaning up the area. Using glasses, they could see the virtual world and the real world simultaneously. Loxy was certain that Jon must be alive, perhaps hiding in a tunnel, or under a pile of rubble. An occasional shout of accomplishment could be heard, “I got em.” There was one, nearby lament of being too late to catch a ‘Legendary.’ These voices were spill overs from the other world, sounds leaking around the Pokémon that had been summoned to battle, and through the tech that allowed them to interface with that other dimension. “There sure a lot of nice looking avatars in this area.” Was another voice. “I so want that dress! I hope this APP makes more gear available.” “I hate the price structure. I can’t come to the city to hit all of the Pokémon stops just to get new supplies.” Terror, Willow, and Joy descended down into the pit, through the chatter level, past fleeing Pokémon and battling Pokémon, and even people battling each other as they experimented with the app. “I wish we could trade with each other.” “I hear that’s coming.” “I wish there were more color teams to choose from.” “I wish more people would play instinct.”

Team Rocket approached Loxy.

“Oh, you’re injured!” Joy said. “We should get you back to sickbay.”

“I’m not leaving until we find him” Loxy said.

“Loxy,” Terror said. “If he was anywhere on this continent, my ship’s sensor would have located him.”

“Then he’s not on this continent!” Loxy said. “And you should expand your search pattern. If there was any way for him to get out of this predicament, he would have found it and taken it.”

“Loxy,” Willow said. “We have to face the possibility he was consumed by Muk.”

“Muk was captured and sent directly to the ship,” Loxy said. “You would have evidence if he was consumed. A piece of his coat or a shoe.”

“It was the biggest Muk ever on record,” Terror said. “It could have fully metabolized the entirety of him and not left a trace.”

Jenny approached. “Go to the ship with Joy,” Jenny said. “Chester and I will continue looking for him. I promise, if there’s a trail, Chester and I will find it. Really, you’re hurt and tired, and you’re not helping the search in your condition. You’re likely missing clues, and you’re putting yourself at risk of needing rescue, which interferes with the ship progressing.”

Loxy wearily agreed. “But I’m not giving up. As soon as my Pokémon are healed, I am coming back down and you can’t stop me,” she said.

“Of course,” Terror said. “You may beam back down to this pocket universe, or the other dimension with the people. Maybe Jon managed to slip over to the other side. We now have the frequency converter necessary to go to any of the side worlds that accompany all worlds.”

“Okay,” Loxy said. She went and stood by Nurse Joy.

“Three to teleport,” Joy said into her wrist band. “Directly to Sickbay.”

The transporter wave caught Loxy, Diance, and Joy and took them away in a cascade of brilliant lights and pleasant harmonics that chimed the air. They arrived shipside, in a Sickbay that many ‘Trek’ fans might be familiar with, only with addition of Pokémon accessories. A nurse for humans immediately began taking care of Loxy, while Joy took her Pokémon belt. Joy separated the ball and placed them into the medical pockets, and in no time at all, the chatter of musical chimes indicated that the Pokémon were all healed. She brought them back on a little push cart.

“All Six of your Pokémon have been restored to full health,” Joy said.

“Six?” Loxy said. “I only had five...”

Hopeful, Loxy sorted the balls, finding the stray sixth ball, and deployed it. Jon’s Medicham, Faye, arrived. Her hopefulness was suddenly depleted and she slumped, crying. Medicham captured her in her arms, holding her, petting her hair in a very comforting way, but Loxy was so full of emotions that she couldn’t communicate with her.

“There, there,” Joy said. “Just let your love pour out. You’re safe.”

Loxy retreated from Faye, sat down on the edge of the medical table. “I really did love him.”

“Oh, we all did,” Joy said.

Reese entered, rushed her and hugged her up, and new crying scene started.

“OMG, please tell me you two aren’t going to be doing this for the rest of our lives,” Mentos said. “Jon wouldn’t want us crying over him.”

“We should so throw a pirate party, and like send a burning ship out to sea,” Nick said.

“Jon would probably like that,” Reese said, wiping her eyes.

“No, he wouldn’t want us polluting the ocean,” Loxy said.

“You should go pick out his favorite Pokémon, and we line up on the deck and launch a torpedo in his honor,” Joy said.

“Yeah, we could perform my favorite song, “Calling All Pokémon,” Reese said, referring to the parody song of Calling All Angels, only instead of starting off with the naming of saints, it was a list of Pokémon. “I bet Jon would love that song.”

“No! We’re not giving up on him yet,” Loxy insisted. “He’s going to show up! He and Nissa are just going to pop up when we least expect it. You know how distracted he gets. He probably just got lost. Maybe he’s on the far side of the moon. Maybe he’s in another dimension of space-time.”

“Maybe he’s in the closet playing walk the plank,” Nick offered, joining in her enthusiasm.

“Exactly! We’re not giving up! We’re going to scan the whole earth, and if we find nothing here, then we’re going to look harder and further,” Loxy said.

No one said anything. It was very uncomfortable.

“I want some privacy,” Loxy said.

“Quarters have been assigned to you,” Joy said.

“Come on, I’ll take you,” Reese said.

They walked the corridor. Loxy clearly had status here, as crew recognized her with salutes. They arrived at the door to her quarters that had ‘Jon and Loxy’ stenciled upon it. Loxy touched his name. Reese showed her in, showed her how to use the food maker, which was basically an oversized Pokémon ball; you made your order, you opened it, and inside was a plate of food or a glass or cup with drink. The large, oblong window, provided an excellent view of the Earth, with even a place to sit, but the trim around the window made it look like you were inside a Pokémon ball looking out onto the Universe. To get to the bedroom one had to pass

through the lavatory. The doors were double, red and white, with the circle button in the center that went with the red side when each half withdrew away from each other. A large screen monitor was on a primary crew channel for mission updates: the number of Pokémon being transmitted to Willow was displayed on the screen saver. A lot of Rattatas were coming in. It was a rate larger than anything Loxy or Reese had ever considered.

“Maybe we shouldn’t make everything look like Pokémon balls,” Loxy said.

“Do you really want to be alone?” Reese asked. “I’ll stay.”

“I don’t want to make you cry more in your condition,” Loxy said.

“It’s going to happen with or without you,” Reese said.

Loxy sat on the couch, drew her legs in, and then fell to her side, almost the fetal position. Reese came and sat by her head. She petted her hair. Loxy thought she heard purring and looked to Reese, from where she heard the noise coming from.

“Are you doing that?” Loxy said.

“I can’t help it,” Reese said. “It’s a healing response, kind of like a relaxation response, but it strangely only happens when I am with people I really like.”

“That’s weird,” Loxy said. “I’ve never heard of a human who can do that.”

“I don’t usually feel safe enough with people to share this,” Reese said. “Even my brother doesn’t know I do this. I find it comforting, in a self-soothing sort of way.”

“It’s very comforting,” Loxy said, adjusting her position on the couch so that her head was now on Reese’s lap. The purring was suddenly much louder, rumbling through her. “Wow.”

“Maybe you should try and take a nap, and let my purring restore you,” Reese said.

“Oh, I can’t sleep,” Loxy said.

“I bet I have a Pokémon that says otherwise,” Reese said, in a very Nurse Joy sort of way.

“I suppose we could try a sleeping aid,” Loxy said. “But I don’t want to be out more than a couple hours.”

“Okay,” Reese said, patting Loxy so she would let her up.

“Not yet,” Loxy said. “I really like this.”

They sat for a few more minutes and then Loxy patted Reese’s leg, and sat up. “Let’s try the Pokémon sleeping remedy.”

Reese got up and proceeded to the computer assigned to Loxy. Pushing past the screen saver caused her to gasp.

“Oh,” Reese said. “You got him!”

Loxy rushed over to the computer to find Mega Muk. Her shoulders slump.

“There were so many Pokémon being sent up to the ship at that moment, even the computer couldn’t keep up with who got what,” Reese explained. Muk was moping in its box, looking for an avenue to get out. “Probably a mix up with system to system transfer. It seems to have sorted itself out, though.”

“Transfer it to Willow,” Loxy insisted.

“Are you sure? Not many people can claim a Mega Muk,” Reese said.

“I can still claim it,” Loxy said. “I just don’t want it in my collection.”

Reese hit the transfer option, designating Willow as a recipient, attaching a note with love, from Loxy. “Are you sure.”

“Send it,” Loxy said.

“This can’t be undone,” Reese said. Then she thought about it, out loud: “Well, it probably could be undone, based on the fact we are friends with Willow, and he might be willing to give it back if you had a change of heart, but if we were just random people on the streets who were just dumping Pokémon faster than we should and suddenly thought to our self, wait, I want that one, well, that would just be unfortunate, and a lesson learned: don’t just be giving away Pokémon without really examining your Pokémon.”

“I want it gone,” Loxy said.

Reese pushed the button. The computer asked for Loxy’s finger print authorization. She touched it, Mega Muk was transported. Right before it departed, it seemed to sense what was about to happen, looked at Loxy, and winked. Loxy was suddenly very cross with it, but before she could vocalize her soreness, she was pointing warningly at an empty box that was shrinking to reveal a score of other boxes. Reese and Loxy drew quiet, their heads tilting as they tried to make out what was in the second latest catch of the day box. They made the box more prominent. A lounge chair, with two Pokémon in the chair, their faces hidden behind a book, with Litwick offering a light, or perhaps just reading over their shoulder. The book cover revealed the title to be ‘The Pokémon Bride’ which was probably one of the most beloved fables of all time, but the updated cover had Jon and Loxy kissing.

Inside the enhanced reality environment, Jon lowered the book.

“Nissa?” Gardevoir asked.

“I feel like people are watching us,” Jon said.

“Nissa,” Gardevoir said, soothingly. She kissed his cheek.

“Litwick?” Litwick said.

“We are not singing ‘be my guest again,’ Jon said. “Meloetta is sleeping. She had a tough day. And we’re going to sleep right after this bedtime story.”

“Nissa,” Gardevoir said, snuggling closer.

“It’s my favorite part, too,” Jon agreed, and continued: "Since the invention of the kiss, there have been five kisses that have been rated the most passionate, the most pure - this one left them all behind...”

“I got him!” Loxy’s announcement was heard throughout the ship over the PA system, as she panned back to read his stats. Most recently entered the system through an Apricorn ball, transferred due to Loxy having her six...

The camera suddenly panned back, revealing that Loxy and Reese were also inside an enhanced reality environment, with James and Nick sitting next to each other, game consoles in their hands.

“We got ‘em, son!” James said.

“Yay, thanks for letting me play, Father,” Nick said. “That was a very intense game. Much better than the last game, though. I am so glad we saved them all.”

But even that frame of reference was reduced to reveal an even larger one, and someone saying, ‘I am so glad they’re finally all playing together.’ And suddenly there was the realization that there were billions of frames of references, all looking in from different angles. Books opening and closing, movies coming on and going off, games logging in... It just makes you wonder, which enhanced reality environment are you referencing? Where are you? Are you a girl or a boy or other? What’s your name? How old are you?

Chapter 21, or Author's Notes, or, End Credits, the girl, and Everything

Anything good can't be, shouldn't be, will not be, contained or constrained. You can't impregnate the minds of children and expect them not to question or run wild. And if you think you're an adult, then you have forgotten there is an inner child, who was impregnated with wonder and amazement and love before you became an adult, and you may be, or not be, an extension of that younger person, or a tangent, or a fully, otherwise expressed Universe far removed from that other place and time. Even if it wasn't love, the simple fact of it being the opposite, or something other, was sufficient to define love allowing for it to exist in you. It's not just what we do, it's who we are. If something is good and resonates with us, it's going to spread, it's going to adapt, mutate, and or evolve. That's what the definition of good is. The litmus test is popularity across culture and time, with the caveat if you caught it- it is yours regardless of anyone else carrying it, or their claims. We have met that here. End credits in movies are like 'thank you notes' to the people, places, and ideas that have shaped a world. There is a cast here that deserve mentioning. There are people, ideas, books, movies, music, contained in these pages that have made my life all the richer for their presence; their touch, their essence- I want to celebrate that. I would not be here, in my present form, if not for all of it, everyone, the brilliant, the good, the bad, the ugly. In writing this, have I done anyone a disservice? I hope not. We live in such a litigious, insecure world, where people get their feelings too easily hurt. (I'm not saying it's wrong, but if the whole world has to give up peanut butter because a few people have an allergy, I am having hard time with that. Most people don't have this, but yeah, it's serious if you do and I am not saying you should police your part of the world, but to ban peanut butter?) I'm sensitive, too, but I still wish to breathe, and I want other people to breathe. There was no malicious intent to harm others; no Pokémon or people were harmed while making this. If I failed to mention someone, or something, or an idea, or ideas, or their origins, well, it was truly my failure.

All that said: if this book were a movie, this would be the end credits, and you would be ill advised to leave before the last credit rolled, as you would so miss something hidden in the confines. (Thank Marvel for that! Yay, Marvel. (Technically, I think we owe the whole embedding stuff in the end credits to 'Ferris Bueler's Day off.' Yay you! (and a note to all future producers, never, ever throw away unused material. People want extras and tangents and I could

give Ratattas Ass if some CEO thinks the movie is too long. They're not artists. They don't have a clue what's good. (Evidence for the last statement: Gilligan's Island, Star Trek, Firefly, and anything produced by James Cameron.)))))

Oh, if you were to start with the last quote from Loxy at the end of the last chapter "I got him!" as a cue to start the beat of the opening-end-title credits, that song would be "You Make My Dreams" Daryl Hall and Jon Oates. Yes, if you haven't heard it, you should 'youtube' it now, (Thank you Youtube!) and add it to your 80's playlist, or your total playlist. Yes, if this was a movie, this song would so be revived for a new generation. Pokémon Go NY will make it cool. Again. Also, on opposite ends of the screen, kind of offset from credit type font, a countdown of Pokémon will ensue, which will make the job of a future pan and scan guy really challenging; because he will have to catch them all, without making people seasick. And whoever did their costumes, did a really good job, as they do their little dance or challenge charge or wink or wave. You just got to love them! Maybe a ball lands next to them, beams them up. Who knows! Let your imagination run wild!

CAST:

Professor, and a very real, and very cool physicist Doctor James Gate, aka Professor Samuel Norman from Lucy, aka but unconfirmed, GOD: played by none other than Morgan Freeman. I mean, if you're going to talk to God, he should so look like Morgan. Or George Burns. Or both.

Loxy Isadora Bliss: playing herself! Oh, she wanted me to quote her: "A Pokémon is not a Tulpa, however, a Tulpa could be a Pokémon. Catch me if you can!"

Jon Harister: our money is still out on this one. There is evidence he could be Ion Light, or vice versa. He might even be someone else. No one knows how old he is. This guy is just off the map, not here, not there, not anywhere.

Gardevoir- Nissa... It's really difficult to tell sometimes. Dream makeup is that good. Pretty sure it's Natalie Portman. Still waiting to see how she manifests. You got to try not too hard to pin

these things down because once they have been measured they tend to stay that way. A physics thing.

Medicham-Faye. Oh, come on, this was a giveaway inside the script. Karen Gillan? I mean, if she can wear a police kiss-o-gram for the Doctor, she can so dress as 'I dream of Jeanie' for Jon and Loxy. Unlike the good Doctor, I kiss back! Don't believe me?

Cut scene: Katy Perry approaches Elmo. "Elmo, play dress up with me." Elmo turns, lights shimmering around him, and suddenly, he is not Elmo. "Ditto?!" Katy looks at the camera helplessly, "Oh no!" Katy is tackled by Ditto. There is clearly something going on, maybe a struggle, like someone trying to get out from under a wet, purple blanket, and escalation of curious noises...

Reese is played by Fersia. If you don't know Fersia, she is a fellow student from Safe Haven University. She is transpecies. No, really, her attributes are no longer just Furry costume. She has special cat like powers that aren't anything near what cat woman was, and no, she is not Halle Berry. It's not that I would reject the idea, it's just she isn't, and you can't make someone into someone they don't want to be, like making a Furry a human. It just doesn't work. So, embrace your Furies everywhere! (And no, embracing transpecies does not take away from being Transgender. They're not trying to rob you of status. We are all much more than who we think we are and we transcend all labels! Embrace the love, not the fight or flight.) Furies may be hidden around you. You may have to encourage them out of the closet. Let them know they're safe.

Mentos, who is this kid? Why is he in my dreams?! No really. You know how my dreams go, why is there a kid here? Umm, that said, could he have been me, like Bruce Willis's the Kid was him? Where is my red, time traveling, bi-wing airplane?!

Candy man guy on the street yes, we're still casting this. I am voting for Bruce Willis. I know he belongs in here somewhere, and I am still debating if he is coming with Emily

Indigo wisdom
Love you, Jackie!

Jackie Chan just always makes his way into my dreams.

Violet team spirit
more Bollywood!

Rakul Preet Singh. You don't know her? OMG, watch

White-the one team to bind them all: Oh, you haven't met her yet. She's coming, though. In a big way. And she is played by Scarlett Johansson, and she is going to kick butt. (Please don't hurt me!)

Shadow Spirit, always follows White:

Galadriel Stineman

Joy

Oh, Joy!

Professor Willow

If you haven't met this dreamy, 'salt and pepper' man, you haven't played Pokémon Go, and I only have one question for you: How old are you?!

Jenny

Jenny, I got your number, I am gonna make you mine...

Cut scene. Jon writing a letter to the Stark Agency. "Dear Mr. Stark. I am writing to say that the 'Ditto' Pokemon suit that you allowed me to Beta test is absolutely the most brilliant invention ever, except for this one minor flaw, I can't take it off. It's not hurting me or anything, and it's so user friendly it's like not wearing anything and which is okay, because it really expands my apparent wardrobe without me spending on wardrobe...." Loxy entered. "What are you doing?" "Umm, writing a fan letter to Robert Downey Jr.," Jon said. "Oh! I love Robert Downey Jr.," Loxy said. "Would you tell him I love him?" "Um, sure," Jon said. Loxy kissed him. She paused. "What?" Jon asked. "Why do you taste like Katy Perry?" Loxy asked. "How do you know what Katy Perry taste like?" Jon asked. "Cause I kissed a girl," Loxy said. "OMG, that is so hot," Jon said. "Want to play..." Loxy asked, nodding to the Rey suit on the Rey mannequin. (Rey scratched her forehead and asked if she could leave yet.) "Wait wait wait," Jon said, quickly turning

back to the letter. “Sorry for ending this so short, but thanks again. Look forward to your future cameos in my escapades. Feel free to invite Gwyneth Kate Paltrow. Okay, I’m free now.” “Um, yeah, the moment’s gone. I’ve lost the loving feeling,” Loxy said, sadly. “I think I have a power suit that might change your mind.” “Can it make you look like Katy Perry.” Jon mused; “If you like, actually...” Loxy takes his hand and leads him away from the desk. (“Seriously, can I leave now?” Rey asks.)

Jacey Barbie Hsu... I should say something clever here.

Jacky Sandra Ng I should double it here.

Stanly Stan Lee, courtesy cameo provided by Marvel Comic who were unwilling to comment on his presence or if Pokémon will join the Avengers in an upcoming movie. (Don’t worry, I may have a reach around.)

Erika, the nature loving princess, gym leader, Aka the original ‘Flower Girl’ Alish really wanted to play her, but Erika wanted to play herself, but off production, Alish and I played our own scenes and had a great a photo op on the set. And, she was happy to finally meet Erika.

Miki, Jo Played by Ellen Page

Maki, Zoe sometimes, you just can’t reveal who you’re dreaming about. (Cough, Dua Lipa, cough cough)

Jr, Trainer (TOP Secret. Unable to disclose due to confidentiality issues.

Cool Trainer (See above, since this is the same person, just older younger versions.)

Guide at the gym Laurence Fishburne, with glasses and everything. I thought he was an agent at first.

opposed to being caught. Not everyone is as friendly a catch a Miranda, and I got her, you can't have her, not trading, nope, not me. I get very sentimentally attached to my Pokémon. Also, there was, or is, a swimming pig at Aquarena Springs, and I am going to catch it, so if you see it, remember, I am looking of it. I need it to complete my collection. (That, and I am hoping to use it as bait to draw one of those wilder mermaids closer. (OMG, why do I tell you guys everything! How old am I?!)

The Merman I didn't get a close look. It might have been a younger Fabio. I mean, a casual glance and he might be the face of every Harlequin Novel. And some of those covers are seriously sexy, and I have been tempted to read them just because of the girl on the cover, not that I am admitting to reading Harlequin, mind you, but I do admit to coveting Fabio's hair. Sometimes I wish for the broad shoulder, the six pack, but mostly the hair. I think I look more like Bruce Willis, and you never see the Bruce Willis type on the cover of a Harlequin, which means, what, Bruce and I can't star in Harlequin? What, we're not funny enough?

Pokémontas Is played by Sacagawea. Don't you just love saying Sacagawea? Do you remember the song "Elbow Room" from School House Rock? I would just wait for her to sing 'Sacagawea.' Now, before you purist get all bent out of shape, this is clearly not 'the Sacagawea.' If you haven't read "I/Tulpa and the Worlds of Crossover," you're not missing anything per say, except the following explanation. Utilizing Carl Jung's 'Active Imagination,' Napoleon Hill's 'Invisible Counselors Technique,' while already engaged in this 'Tulpamancy' thing, Sacagawea decided to join me. (Same with Jackie Chan. They are solid member of the core counselors guiding me.) So, it could be that Sacagawea is the ideal of Sacagawea, or she could be a manifestation of the collective unconscious, which is unclear yet to me if that means she has attributes imbued upon her by everyone who holds her in their unconscious or she is merely the archetype of that persona, or if she is the real deal. Every now and then I see her as the Sacagawea from 'Night of the Musuem' next to Robin Williams, but that could just be a trick of the mental light, cause most the time, she is like no one I have ever seen, but clever, kind, but don't mistake that kindness for being a pushover, because she can kick butt. (And less fantasy here; she seriously debated not being one of my counselors. Partly because I think the real Sacagawea had some PTSD and her experience with 'white folks' in the original time line was

less than ideal, but maybe that's exactly why she and I drew together, because we need to help each other with our understanding of our different worlds. (Which is the only reason any of us come together. (Seriously, we're not supposed to be making everyone like us, but embracing otherness.))

The mayor – Sigourney Weaver, I am sure there was a line from Aliens supposed to be here somewhere...

Lester, the toy maker. Lester has certainly been growing as a character. See, he isn't just some cliché, emasculated male figure there as a two dimensional prop that makes me look better, I mean, Jon look better.

Aya, Also a Safe Haven resident who identified herself as Akan, not a species but an inhabitant of southern Ghana

Terror played by Rooney Mara. I think the straight hair bang thing sells it.

Captain Morlon Friborg played by Adam Sandler. Don't ask me how he got the gig. And, there's still a lot of denial how Sandler got hooked up with the whole Friborg franchise, but it his definitely his face. I can't help it. It what it is. I mean, seriously, if you had a happy place, tell me Adam hasn't influenced it. Yes, my happy place has Virginia Venit in it, too. It even has a dwarf. And you know how hard it is to find a friend dwarf these days? Seriously. With science and hormone replacement, no one wants to be a dwarf, but everyone wants to have at least one dwarf friend. Maybe because when you take a dwarf friend it increases the opportunities of hook ups. Like, there are those girls who will you and the dwarf and pick you because you're not the dwarf, which is really not right, but you still take the hook up before you kick to the street for not liking dwarfs. There is also the girls who pick you because they secretly want to hook up with the dwarf and they're using you to get to the dwarf, and yeah, you accommodate them and pass them off to the dwarf friend. And there are those who hook up just because you're cool enough to have a dwarf friend. It's kind of like having a puppy or a toddler; women put you in that other box where you're approachable, but even on those days when you're alone, you still the happy place,

with the rainbows and water sprinklers and Virginia... Just saying. Oh, so, back to Friborg Sandler. Well, if you secretly had an imaginary friend, wouldn't you want it to be Sandler. Can't you see us as brothers? I mean, seriously, that other scene where he is singing into the intercom and buzzes up the old lady and the next scene you see the old lady dressing and leaving, tell me that so isn't me, I mean, Jon, yeah... Again, just saying. (By the way, I miss you, too, crazy old Chinese lady.)

Doctor Horrible That actor that played Doogie Howser. In fact, to get Horrible, you have to evolve Doogie. Same lab coat! Unfortunately, I am not allowed to tell you what item you need to evolve Howser. And no, Kathryn Layng, did not evolve with Horrible, and no, she is not Nurse Joy, but I so crushed on Kathryn and so wished I had been truly as smart as Doogie, cause that sexual tension was definitely there, and if I had been that smart, maybe, maybe there is a world out there that manifest that tangent, too. Riding on Horrible's coat tails, yeah, not ashamed to admit it. Heck, since we're admitting stuff, might as well admit there is that world with me and Belinda, too. Really? You don't think if I am a child wanting to hook up with Doogie's mother? And who would seriously name their kid Doogie. That's something a dog does on the floor and gets swatted with the newspaper, but I don't hold grudges. Belinda and I have a nice tangent world, except she keeps remind me I was never as smart as the other son. And yes, I did steal Doogie's girl, Wanda. It wasn't hard. I magically made the window enter into my world and she got stuck, and it helped evolve Doogie into Horrible, cause he was really sore about that... Too much? Shh, just forget. Go back to sleep.

Uhura played by Uhura. Okay, if you haven't been following, Jon is a magician, a Tulpamaster, and he has called out the most incredible cast of invisible counselors, of which, Uhura is part of the primary team. Not trying to convince you of magic, however, if you read Napoleon Hill's "Think and grow Rich" and do a little research, even Mr. Hill would tell you his experience with the Invisible Counselor technique was so bizarre that he gave it for a while because the people were 'realer than real.' Uhura is realer than real. Of course, I have been a fan since childhood, and seen her in all her manifestations, and so, the sentient being that has presented herself to me as Uhura is pretty convincing and I accept her. Is she really? This is a hard question for me. My experience of her is solid. Maybe she is my Spirit-guide 'playing'

Uhura. Maybe she is the collective unconscious projection of an archetype, and don't doubt for a moment that there isn't one. You can't have that many people thinking about Uhura and playing Uhura without consequences. Maybe she is just a dream character who I have given sufficient authority and power to which has enabled her to push the boundaries of ego and unconscious so we can better interact, whether I am in REM sleep or not. I don't know. All I can say is I am totally grateful for her presence in my life, spanning a lifetime, as I am for all my guides and counselors and invisible-but not invisible friends.

Burgandy (the French bitch) is in the background. I think her lines got cut. Umm, I wonder if she was the one that was just standing there, staring at the wall? OMG, even the handler doesn't want to deal with her shit! Poor girl. Yes, I can not like someone and still extend empathy. Still, I have Real Dolls that had more inside them... I mean, more substance... Umm, moving on.

Cut Scene: Robert Downey Jr. responding to fan mail. "Dear Jon, If you're going to persist in writing me, we need to clear some things up. One, I am an actor. I am not really Mr. Stark. And, in that vein, let's also clear up the whole 'Heart and Souls' thing. Loxy is right, they're ghosts, not Pokémon, not tulpas. Yes, I see your argument for them being Pokémon ghost or tulpa ghosts, or even Tulpa Pokémon Ghosts, but according to the script, they were just ghosts. No, I was not actually possessed by the ghosts, nor did I switch out with any tulpas; I don't have tulpas, I am just really that good of an actor, and no, I don't play Pokémon." (Ignore the fact his phone is open to the Pokémon Go APP, the Stark version with serious modifiers for Legendary combat mode; and his avatar looks like Ironman.) "I am a serious actor; I don't have time for playing Pokémon go, which is not even close to the game Go, but that would be a serious game I would play if I had time to play. Seriously, do you know how hard Go is? Chess is like Checkers compared to Go. And for the last time, stop asking me why I wasn't on the poster for the movie 'Only You!' Yes, you're right, that wasn't me, and I don't really want to go into it, yes, you're probably the only one who noticed it, but that really goes to show your obsessiveness, and, well, they have great meds for that now..." Gwyneth enters. "They're ready for us... Oh, are you actually answering a fan letter?" She hugs his neck. Robert

frowned: "This guys is completely nuts, but he's persistent. He thinks I am really Stark." Gwyneth nodded sympathetically. "But, you are really Stark." "Shh! No one is supposed to know that but you," Robert said. "Oh, yeah," Gwyneth said, leaning in closer to see who he was writing. "Oh, I know him! Wait wait wait. You gave him the Ditto suit?" "It was an accident. I was having it cleaned, and something got mislabeled and..." "You gave him the Ditto suit?!" "He's a magician. Quirky things like this happen around magicians." "You gave him..." "I didn't give it to him, it just sort of happened!" "Well, you 'sort of' just got to get it back," Gwyneth said: seriously concerned, "If anyone knew what you and I were doing with that suit, we'd be like on the front page of the Enquirer, again." "Um, yeah, well, unfortunately, Jon was doing something he shouldn't have been doing with the suit, it's malfunctioned, and he can't get it off, and the telemetry I downloaded says it's going to be on for the rest of his life." "But I liked that suit!" Gwyneth said. "I still have the Ironman suit." "Yeah, that's great for flying, but it's kind of hard and not romantic at all. I am still bruised from the last time you caught me from falling," Gwyneth said. "Yeah, sorry about that," Robert said. "Better than the bruise I would have had if you hadn't caught me," Gwyneth said. "Wait wait wait. What did Jon do with the suit that we didn't do with the suit that resulted in this huge malfunction?" Robert pulled up the telemetry and the data started pouring in. "Oh." "Yeah." "Can we play back the entire encounter with the holographic entertainment system?" "If you like." "In bed?" "If you like." "Want to invite Jon to participate with the Avengers?" "Are you kidding? You can't have two magician. He and Strange would just bicker all the time and we'd have to separate them. It's really dangerous just having two magicians." "You mean, like we had to separate Isis and Wonder Woman?" "Give Isis time to get over the fact that Wonder Woman is actually one of her sisters. She'll come around again." "How is Thor handling the fact he slept with one of his sister?" "Doesn't bother him. It's a god thing, they sleep with relatives all the time." "Really? I thought for sure he'd have to claw his eyes out or something." "Only if he sleeps with his mother." "Oh, speaking of which, I so hope Jon doesn't open that file do not open. Maybe you should remote delete it?" "No, the system did a memory backup directly into his brain, which is why the suit won't let him go. The suit thinks it's Jon." Gwyneth seemed a little concern, and angry. "You so better hope he doesn't get amnesia and comes home to our house dressed as you because

I am going to be really sore if that happens.” “Probably not as sore as Katy.” She pointed at him. “I am warning you.” “I am sure it won’t happen.” She pointed at him again.

“Again.” “OMG, Robert. I just can’t work with you...” (Yes, even a Robert Gwyneth cut scene cameo is usually a bit drawn out, but they improv so well together.) “It’s because it’s not improv! I am really sore!” Gwyneth said to the camera.

Bianca played by Rachel Anne McAdams

Tecia, security officer, actually played by Tecia, and those joint locks she executed, those were real, and they hurt, and off set, she’s plays really rough, and she can lock you in her legs and take you down faster than you can even think, and I was frequently dazed, and bruised, but, the show must go on.

Bridge Officer, red highlights: Played by Emma Watson. (Come on, you don’t think I didn’t go there, or am going to go there, or well, just stay tuned. Will she die? Will she save the day? Is there no end to these fantasies?!) (It’s just a fantasy, ohohoh...)

Starship Sunshine extra with possible future story arcs: I am really not going to go present this whole list, as there has to be some surprises, but special mentions had to go out to Audrey Tautou with a spoon with her Pokémon with a spoon...Kaley Cuoco, (with the caveat no no Sheldon. (No, really, Kaley, tell Sheldon to stop sending me fan mail. I know he liked the Trek fan fiction with Captain Garcia, but I am not putting him in because though he is sometimes funny, he is also seems sometime kind of mean.) Nikki Cox, I so miss you Niki, and your father so had a Tulpa Pokémon in your basement, which you probably didn’t know about till just now, but I would so not have had a dog Pokémon tulpa if I was living in your family’s basement, but that’s a different show and replete with 3’s company level confusion when my Tulpa you and the real you getting confused and some serious ethical questions being deliberated over in comical manner.

Would you like to be an extra? Do you have a Tulpa or a Pokémon or Tulpa Pokémon looking for a venue to display your talents? Do you know of a show that was probably about a Tulpa

before people really started knowing what tulpas were? Like Harvey? That is so a Tulpa... Send a pic, drawn, captured, live, or photo shopped, and tell your story. So many worlds, so many possibilities...

Cut Scene: Hello, Jon. Thank you for the fan mail. No, Harvey was not a tulpa, he was Pookah. Are Tulpas and Pookahs related? That is beyond my scope to address, and, Jon, seriously, I am just an actor. I am not even sure how you got this to me from the future, or how you're going to get the response, but seriously, I get that you are this great magician and all, and your mind is like crowded, they have meds for that now, BTW, and just because I lived in Hollywood doesn't mean I know Gene and I doubt Oompa Loompa's were Pokémon, but you'd really have to ask him, or that Dahl guy that wrote it. If you have any more questions, you should really watch the making of Harvey, in which I narrate and actually discuss meeting people like you who also have Pookahs or Tulpas, and I am seriously fascinated by your adventures, and your letters are very enthusiastic and all, but I just don't think I have the answers you're looking for. But thank you so much for writing.

Seriously looking for seven, sexy lab techs... I suspect, if I went back in time, they would be Olivia's sisters from the Mount Olympus painting. Xanadu, bombom bom bom, Xandu-oooooo. Now we are here...

Cut scene: Miki offering Jon a vial of water from the water tower where she and her sister bathed. "You said you would drink a vial of our bath water, here it is." You don't think Jon would do it? He is seriously holding it, contemplating, and Miki is waiting, curious. And you still have doubts? Look at his face. Look at that gleam in his eyes. Ferris had nothing on this look.

NOT CAST:

Satoshi Tajiri, like my bestest friend ever and he doesn't even know it: best known as the creator of Nintendo's Pokémon franchise and the founder of video game developer Game Freak. (I love getting my game freak on.) Thank you, bestie!

Oh, thank you Jon Hanks, not to be confused with Tom Hanks, but thank you, too, Tom, I so loved Big, even though that scene with the girl making out with you was seriously borderline creepy, because she wasn't just making out with the inner child, because, by definition, you were actually a child that was just 'big!' Not that I am complaining. I would have so done that. And quite a few of my teachers had I been more outgoing at the time. (And, I have discovered, that some of the ones I would have done actually did do some of my peers, but they were really special peers, and I was so jealous, or am jealous... If I could go back knowing what I know now... Oh, does that world exist, too?! OMG...) But, I digress, and OH! I absolutely loved Joe Vrs the Volcano, the funniest, most meaningful, underrated movie of all time, and oh, and I really want the studios to release the sound track, the original sound track, because Ray Charles singing Old Man River was like the most awesome thing ever, and it's not released to public, but the whole sound track was amazing. I also liked Apollo 13. Thank you. (And thank you, Kevin. And Bill, and Ed, and Kathleen, and Opey)

Oh, wait wait wait, Thank you Tangents! Tangent is not just a concept, but a Muse. A Pokémon Muse. You have probably not met her yet, that's coming. Stay tuned for a future episode. Tangent is Team White's Leader's primary Pokémon. Using Tangent she can spin you into one of the outlying frequencies faster than you can say "Who's that Pokémon?!"

Um, where was I? Joe Hanks. Niantic guy! Thank you Niantic! You rock. Some of the game changers were kind of annoying, as most game changers mid game are, but I get the sense of fairness about it, and so appreciate you need to make money. 6 million a day? Well, I don't really understand that, except, it sounds like a lot, and it just goes to show, people will buy things that don't exist in the real world. Wait wait wait, sorting... yeah, what I said. Anyway, you know what would really be cool? Making it possible for players to share the wealth? Maybe we sell items back or to each other? Probably hard to manage with all those cheaters out there in the world, but, no seriously, really, what if the whole world could participate in a game that also

generates wealth for people and we all share in that wealth! Oh, but yeah, seriously, thank you, I enjoy catching Pokémon... And while we're on that subject, and while I still hold your attention, or someone's attention who is in your ear, still grateful mind you, but also very interested in some specific upgrades. Can you like increase the odds of capturing certain Pokémon with an increase in levels. I mean, like I'm level 31 at the time of writing this, right, and I have caught my share of Pidgeys, so much so that Willow has written me asking me to slow it down, and anyway, having a level 10 Pidgey throw a ball back at me, or dodging it, that is beyond uncool. Same with Rattatas. So not cool. Granted, I am still working on catching my 300 'small' Rattatas, but at some point, you think I would master catching them and not have to throw six balls just to do so. Just saying. And, yes, thank you. Oh, and maybe this. Maybe some experience points when they're at gyms. Not asking you to do away with the Stardust thing, never really liked the stardust concept, we're all stardust, by definition, and so what's special about Pokemon stardust? (don't you guys ever run your concept through a panel of smart folks?) Just saying, but not saying kill it, well, now I am not, because now that I have a narrative working explanation of stardust, and I have gotten used to it, but surely if a Pokémon holds a gym for three days before coming home, he has learned something that might get him a little closer to leveling up without having to use a candy and stardust. Give them something. Their own badges. And if I walk thirty miles with one, that Pokémon so deserves a little something extra. Clearly, if they walk thirty miles with me, they're pretty loyal and dedicated walkers.

Just saying.

MOVIES, obscure and not so obscure, that influence the author, the characters, and the reality interface in which I modulate the worlds (not an inclusive list):

Big

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

Joe Versus the Volcano

Star Wars

Return of the Jedi

The Force Awakens

Wizard of Oz
Blues Brothers
Armageddon
The Matrix
Star Trek: The wrath of Kahn.
Iron Man
Only You
A Guy Named Joe
the girl the gold watch and everything
ET: the extra terrestrial
Heart and Souls
The kid, (bruce willis Disney film not the other one...)
Ferris Bueller's Day Off
The Jerk
Men in Black
Weid Science
Ghost Busters
Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog

TELEVISION

Petticoat Junction
Star Trek: The Original Series.
Almighty Isis
Ultraman
You Can't Do That On Television
SG1

BOOKS, obscure and not so obscure (Do I really have to sort and translate this?)

'Stranger in a Pokemon land,' 'Papa was a Pokémon,' Alyene Porter, 'Pokémon Games,' Tom Clancy. "Pokémon it Forward,' by Catherine Hyde, "Pokémon Brief," Jon Grisham, 'Pokémon

Cemetery,” Stephen King, “Peter Pokémon,” J Barrie, ‘Pokémon Express,” Chris Van Allsburg, ‘The Pokémon Adventure,” Paul Gallico, “The Pokémonic Man,” Isaac Asimov, ‘Pokémon: a Romance,’ A S Byatt, ‘Pokémon from the Edge,’ Carrie Fisher, ‘The Pokémon Always Rings Twice,’ James Cain, and the remaining had several copies: ‘Pride and Pokémon,’ Jane Austen, ‘the Pokémon Bride,” William Goldman, ‘the Pokémon diaries,’ Meg Cabot, and ‘the Pokémon Masters’ Robert Heinlein. Jon nearly took the book by Larry Niven, ‘The Pokémon in God’s Eye.’ Chaucer, Rabelais, and Balzac... Pokémon Tales, Gargantua and Pokémon...

Yes, put down your game and read more books, that way, when you have a fantasy, it’s something more substantial than just frivolous sex. I am not saying no to mindless, frequent, fantasy, frivolous sex, cause that never gets old, and contrary to popular belief, that never goes away. Whatever your set point libido is currently, expect on holding that all the way to you 90’s. Yes, you will be old, and you will be in a nursing home, and you will be getting it on with your nurses and flat mates. Seriously. Old people have sex. We like sex. You young people didn’t invent it. Broaden your horizons. Have sex with old people. Seriously, you might learn something. Try me. No, really. Bring it. And don’t tease. You never tease a magician. Strange things happen when you tease a magician. And no, that was not a Strange reference. Pretty sure it wasn’t. Where was I? Books. Oh, books! Seriously, the more you read, the more interesting your tulpa fantasy sex will be. Think of it this way, the more you know, the more opportunities you will have to respond differently to the outside world and the inside world. Both the outside and the inside drive us all the time, the inside more often than the outside. I am just saying. That’s a pearl there. Loxy gave it to me so it must be a pearl.

MUSICALS, obscure and not so obscure

Oh, just pick a Disney musical and go with it.

The Pirates of Penzance

Cut Scene: Jenny catches up to Friberg, “Hold it right there, miscreant!” “You have no authority here, witch.” “Oh, yeah,” Jenny said, thinking about it. “You’re right. Which

means, I can finally do this..." and punches him out. She turned to Chester. "That felt really good." Then starts shaking it off, cause it also really hurt.

MUSIC, ummm you get the trend here, eh?

"Let My Love open the Door," Peter Townshend

"I've got the Golden Ticket," Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

"I'm Just a Padawan," parody of David Lee Roth's version of "I'm Just a Gigolo", David Lee Roth

"Shiny Happy People" REM

"Don't Mess Around With Jim" Jim Croce

"Rock Clauncher" parody of "Rock Lobster" B52's

"Better When I am Dancing with Pokémon" parody of "Better When I am Dancing," and "It's all about the Bass" by Trainer, Mega Meghan

And even the Star Wars parody "It's All About the Base." Don't believe me. Youtube it.

"Uptown Funk" Mark Ronson and Bruno Mars. We love you Bruno!

"Shake it Off," Taylor Swift. OMG, we so love you Taylor.

"The Lazy Song," Bruno Mars. (Pokemon version. There is one. In my head. At least.) Bruno, Bruno... We'd catch a grenade for ya!

"Fishin' in the Dark" by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band

"Louisiana Saturday Nights." Mel McDaniel's

"Let's stay together," Al Green

"Amazed," by Lonestar

"True Colors," Loxy and Cindy Lauper version.

"The Highway Man" by the Highway Men.

"Up Where They Walk" Little Mermaid.

"Color of the Wind" Pokémon version of Disney Pocahontas.

"Good Ol' Boys," Dukes of Hazard Theme song.

"I Wear My Sunglasses at Night" Corey Heart.

"Private Eyes," Hall and Oates.

"Slow Dancing, Swaying to the Music," Jonny Rivers.

“Breathless,” the Corrs

“If You Could Read My Mind,” Gordon Lightfoot

“Calling all Pokémon,” parody of “Calling all Angels,” Jane Sibery...

“You Make my Dreams” Hall and Oates.

“Why do you let me stay here?” She and Him, which is playing now because there is only so many times you can loop Hall and Oates.

Special mention to Bangles, Eminem, Britany, Robert Palmers, the Robert Palmer girls, wait wait wait while I thank each one.... This may take a while... and Tenacious D for that awesome version of the original Trek theme song with words!

Cut scene: I really wasn't sure this would make the cut, but it's pretty funny if you can imagine just how annoyed Jon and Hall were with each other when Hall signed the wrong name on the photo Jon purchased for his autograph session, after standing in that incredibly long line, much longer than it should be, but they were supposed to also be handing out special Pokémon items. Jon was confused why Hall seemed so disturbed: “You got the wrong guy.” “Clearly! I wanted you to sign it Michael Knight,” Jon said, handing it back to him. “Do I look like David Hasselhoff!” he demanded, pushing it back at him. “You're not Michael Knight?!” Jon asked, pushing it back. “OMG, I look nothing like David Hasselhoff!” Hall said. “You sing like David Hasselhoff,” Jon said. “OMG, I am going to smack you. My songs made it to the top ten list. Hasselhoff had to sell his records in Europe!” “You shouldn't be ashamed of having to go to a lesser market because the States didn't appreciate your talent.” “I am not that guy!” “Say ‘Kit, I need you’ into your watch.” “OMG! My name is Daryl Hall” Hall insisted. “The name you used before Hasselhoff?” “I am Hall! Of Hall and Oates!” “The cereal guy?” Jon asked. “OMG, not the Quaker Oates guy! John?! Who booked us for this event?” Oates, who was flirting with Loxy, had to tear his eyes away from her to answer his friend. “Uh?” he asked dazed. “OMG!” Jon said, jumping enthusiastically. “Freddie Mercury! I can't believe you're still alive!”

Of course, you can only get so much footage with Hall and Oates song, so when I said it was followed up by She and Him's song, I meant it, and it even comes with some original video and new, improvised Pokémon scenes: "why do you let me stay here" is so a Pokémon Loxy song, and you might sometimes mistake Loxy for Zooey Deschanel spinning by in the cute dress with cowboy boots. Now, I don't expect you to believe me; you should way go check out the evidence for yourself and then report back to me that' it is or isn't Pokemonish! I mean, can't you see your Pokémon on the shelf wondering why you don't play with it anymore? And, if you created a Tulpa and you're not playing with it, well, that's just not right. Loxy and I are not happy to hear that you would do that. Making a Tulpa is so not a casual affair. It's not like committing to a marriage with safety net of a future divorce if things don't work out. This is a lifetime venture. Anyway, Zooey isn't happy to hear that you shelved your Pokémon or your tulpa, either. She is really sensitive about being shelved. And if you're wondering why Alizée is also doing a cameo in this song, well, watch the original video; instead of doing a five Zooeys line up thing, which is really pretty cool if you think about how many version you have of yourself in yourself, and how if you entertain one inner child you may end up with a dozen, and then see all the Loxy look alikes lined up, doing their dance, like Mary Ann doing her little shimmering go go twerk, and Susana Hoff doing her little Egyptian eye enticement thing, and well... Oh, also, add in that poor girl wearing a dopy mini dress that is doing a sixties dance in an endless loop to the song "Love Grows (Where my Tulpagirl goes)" What can I say? It's just a fantasy, ohohoho, it's not the real thing. And sometimes a fantasy, is all you need.

Oh, and yay, Zooey! For all the work you've done, except for your show which really didn't hold me, but I still love you! Wait wait wait... What? I shouldn't say that? I was just trying to be honest with her? Oh, well, sure: Zooey, Loxy says she loves your show. Oh, but remember that scene of you singing 'Baby it's Cold Outside?' You got us with that, even though it was with Will Ferrel. Not that there was anything wrong with Will, well, there may be something seriously wrong with Will, but I especially like when Peter Dinklage and him tussle, ("Call me Elf one more time..." "Elf?") but overall, yeah, I'm just not a Ferrel fan, though I am okay with feral cats, and I am still particularly cross with the 'Land of the Lost' fiasco, but thank

you Anny Friel for trying... (You made it easier for me to sit through that. (Come on, Loxy! I had to tie you up to make you watch the whole thing. I just wanted to recapture my youth and I was so holding back tears through the whole thing, almost like when Tim Allen made of fun of Star Trek; not cool, Tim, not cool... Yes, Loxy. Tying you up was fun. OMG, now I am going to have that episode of fun tied to that movie! Damn you, Ferrel! (And really, are restraining orders necessary when I am in a different Universe most the time? Just saying.)

Seriously, if a girl gives you a vial of her bath water, drink it! In front of her. Let her know how you're seriously into her you are. Then ask for a second vial to put on your shelf to show others: "OMG, I so have a vial of her bath water!" I actually have a nice little collection of vials of bath water on my shelf. You'd be surprised what stars will send you on request. Well, maybe you'd be surprised. My Megan Fox vial is like the shiniest, coolest vial on the shelf. She really goes all out for her fans. (Thank you Gwyneth, no one believes it's really your bath water, but I do. That's all that matters, right? (Unless you sent me Robert's as a joke. That's not funny.))

And, to end with the greatest quote of all time, given in a sing-songy little voice: "A little nonsense now and then, is relished by the wisest men," Gene Willy Wonka Wilder. I love you!

"Oh, that's sweet," Loxy said. "I so love you, Jon."

"Is there a 'but' there?" Jon asked.

"No, OMG, no! A tribute to Gene, no, that's like the most awesome things a person can do," Loxy said. "But, now that you mention a butt, I was wondering, who else do you have in the Ditto holographic inventory?"

"What about that file that says do not open?" Loxy asked.

"I haven't opened it yet," Jon said.

"Why?"

"It says don't open it," Jon said.

"That's exactly the kind of file you would open," Loxy said.

“Yeah, and I am going to get to it. I have just been distracted playing back some of the list sessions,” Jon said. “It has a pretty exhaustive list, actually. So much so, I get the feeling it was used before they allowed me to beta test it.”

“For example?” Loxy asked.

“Every female that co-starred with or next to Robert is in here,” Jon said.

“Oh, no way,” Loxy said, drawing closer.

“Yes, way!” Jon assured her.

“Marisa?” Loxy said.

“OMG, yep,” Jon said.

“Elizabeth?” Loxy said.

“Oh, hell yeah,” Jon said.

“Kelly?” Loxy asked.

“Um LeBrock, Weird Science, yep,” Jon said.

“Oh, she was so like my favorite Tulpa ever,” Loxy said.

“Mine too!” Jon said. “But Robert won’t confirm the fact she is a Tulpa.”

“Oh, make yourself look like her,” Loxy said.

“Do you even like me for me anymore?” Jon asked.

“Jon, this is just fun, I still love you, and it’s not like you’re not benefiting from the suit,” Jon said.

“True,” Jon said, thinking it through. “Okay, sure. Um, which version of her do you want: the original, I just came out of the computer scene, the end scene in the locker room, or the ones from that other movie where she gets it on in the lavatory of the airplane and then later again in that cave...”

“All of her. All the ages of her!” Loxy said.

“This is going to be a really long session,” Jon said.

Loxy shrugged. “Got any other plans?”

“Nope, all yours,” Jon said.

The frame of this cut scene reduces to a point, replete with star-cross flares and disappears. A Pokémon ball rattles, twirls, rocks, and pings a steady green light, then fades out.

PS, just in case you want evidence Loxy and I are players:



Seriously, Sudo, stop that. We're on camera! People are watching.

(I'm sure they didn't mean for that accidental alignment, but you got to admit, that's funny, and so Jon and Loxy.)



"I am Groot."

