

The Apple of Her Eye
by Havoc

“There once were pokémon that became very close to humans. There once were humans and pokémon that ate at the same table. It was a time when there existed no differences to distinguish the two.”

- Sinnoh folk tale

For as long as humans have existed, so too have pokémon. They have been a part of each other's lives. Many humans train pokémon as fighters, while some merely keep certain pokémon as pets. Of the trainers, most would consider their pokémon as trusted friends and companions. In the four major regions of the world, Kanto, Johto, Hoenn, and Sinnoh, pokémon make up the majority of the culture.

It is not altogether known how pokémon and humans became so entangled in the destinies of one another. Why, many researchers have asked, do we place so much importance upon these animals that inhabit the same world as us? Historical records offer little as to when human beings first began capturing pokémon. The only information which can be found to begin to answer the question of the origins of the relationship between humans and pokémon is in the mythology of the Sinnoh region. According to ancient legends and tales, people and pokémon once shared a relationship very different from the one they have today. Some scholars theorize that humans and pokémon were, at one time, as equals to one another. These scholars also assert that humans and pokémon lived together, peacefully, in civilizations that may have spanned across the globe. Unfortunately, little archaeological evidence exists to support this theory. However, there are still those who believe in it.

Prominent in this civilization, according to believers, was a village that today is known as the city of Eterna. Located in the western half of Sinnoh, Eterna City is thought to be one of the oldest cities in the region, second perhaps only to Celestic Town in the east. In this village, known as Fleur, pokémon and humans worked together and gave their offerings to Dialga, the creator of time.

Seven hundred years prior to Dialga's re-awakening...

The village of Fleur was bustling with activity. Always busy in the early afternoon, things had been especially hectic ever since the construction of the statue had begun. Proposed by the village heads, the statue would be a perfect bronze image of the creator of time, Dialga. Ore from the nearby Mt. Coronet was being mined by the mountain pokémon which lived in the village, and human smiths were at work smelting and shaping the components of the statue, with the help of the fire pokémon. The sounds from the work rang out continually, contributing to the overall noise of the market and the village itself. At times, the noise could reach near unbearable levels.

That was why Kayla, a young human woman, preferred to spend a lot of her time in the nearby Eterna Forest. She disliked the noise in her village, and would walk around in the forest from late morning to sunset, where it was nice and quiet. When the work ended for the day, she would return to Fleur to begin her job at the village tavern. She was a waitress, and every evening her long blonde hair and captivating green eyes drew many of the young (and old) men of the village to the tavern, hopeful of spending the night with the pretty girl who worked there. And she always smiled and said she was flattered, but not interested.

Today, Kayla was wandering around in the forest as usual, wearing her customary outfit of brown leggings and a loose laced shirt. She knew the sun was shining overhead, but almost none of it reached the forest floor; the tree cover overhead was too dense. The forest was dim, creating a sort of twilight feel that Kayla found very relaxing.

She made her way deep into the forest, away from Fleur. Presently, she began to hear the trickling of the stream which flowed through the woods. Soon the trees parted, revealing the stream and the other side of the water flow. The sunlight streamed down, making the surface of the water shimmer and sparkle like so many diamonds. Kayla squinted her eyes as she adjusted to the sudden light. She sat down at the water's edge and sighed happily, taking a moment to rest and enjoy the afternoon. Before long, she could feel, she would have to dig into the knapsack slung over her back for her lunch.

A noise from behind her made her turn her head. It sounded as though someone was struggling in the forest. Curious, Kayla stood up.

“What could that be?” she wondered to herself. She hitched her bag up on her

shoulders and started back into the woods. The sounds grew louder as she drew closer to the source. Finally, she came to the edge of a clearing. In the clearing stood two pokémon, a female Lucario and a male Machoke.

Kayla knew the Machoke quite well. His name was Trory, and he had lived in Fleur for as long as she could remember. Trory was not well-liked in the village. He was loud, boorish, and obnoxious, and was always trying to mate with the female pokémon. He was often successful until the females realized what a jerk he was. Trory thought himself something of a ladies man.

The Lucario, however, Kayla did not know, at least not by name. She had arrived in Fleur several weeks ago, and she thought she remembered seeing the pokémon heading to the mountains on several occasions with the miners. The pokémon was dressed in a black karategi with the arms cut off and the legs rolled up to her knees.

At first, Kayla thought that Trory and the Lucario were sparring. They had thrown several attacks at each other while she was watching. But when she saw Trory slip a punch in that knocked the Lucario to the ground, she realized that something else was going on. Before the Lucario could recover, Trory had pinned her arms to the ground and was straddling her body.

“You’re a feisty little one,” Kayla heard the Machoke say. “But you’ll warm up to me sooner or later. They always do.”

“Go to the Reverse World!” the Lucario spat. “Get off of me, filth!” She made a biting movement, nearly catching Trory’s face.

Trory brutally backhanded her for her troubles. “Now, now. Play nice. It’ll make this much easier on you, and I promise you’ll enjoy it in the end.” He reached down, fumbling for the belt which kept the female pokémon’s gi closed.

Kayla couldn’t watch anymore. The Lucario looked liked she was slipping in and out of consciousness. She looked down at the ground around her feet, finding a good, fist-sized rock. She hefted it in her hand for a moment, and then threw it as hard as she could at Trory’s head. The rock connected with a dull thud, catching him off guard and making him turn his head this way and that, searching for the source.

He caught sight of her. “Kayla, you bitch!” he snarled. “This is none of your concern. Get out of here!”

“Leave her alone, Trory!” Kayla shouted back. “She hasn’t done anything to hurt you!”

“I said leave! Do it now and I’ll forget you threw that rock!”

While Trory was distracted with Kayla, the Lucario had recovered her senses. With one arm free while the Machoke was trying to disrobe her, she drew her hand back and delivered a punishing blow to the side of his head. The male pokémon reeled back on his heels, stunned. The Lucario took the chance to get back on her feet.

“Now you’re in for it!” she said. She held both of her hands in front of her, making a ball of light and energy. When the ball was almost too intense to look at, she launched it at Trory. The blast hit him at full force, sending him flying nearly twenty feet. He smacked against a tree trunk and slid to the ground. There he lay for several seconds before he shakily made it to his feet. “Turn tail and run before I decide to rid this world of you!”

Trory looked furious, but obviously did not want to face the Lucario now that she was prepared to defend herself against him. “I’ll get you for this,” he said to Kayla. He looked back to the Lucario. “And I’ll take care of you, later.” The Lucario made a move as if to attack again, and he quickly beat a retreat into the woods, heading in the direction of Fleur.

Once he was gone, Kayla strode into the clearing. “Are you alright?” she asked.

The Lucario wiped away some of the blood that was dripping from her nose. “I’ll be fine,” she said. She straightened her clothes. “That bastard told me he needed help bringing wood back to the village for the metalworkers’ fires. Then he hit me when I had my back to him.” She turned to Kayla. “You helped me.”

“That’s right,” Kayla said. “I couldn’t just let that big lug do...that to you.” She extended a hand. “I’m Kayla.”

The Lucario took it. “My name is Xiu Juan.”

“Nice to meet you, Xiu Juan.” Kayla took another look at the pokémon. She had a pretty face, although now it was slightly bruised and bloodied. Her body looked very strong, but it was hard to tell for certain through the bulky martial arts outfit she was wearing. Her blue fur looked very well groomed even though she worked in the mines. “You’re new in the village, aren’t you? What brings you to Fleur?”

“Work,” Xiu Juan said. “I come from a place far west of here called Iron Island. I worked in the mines there, but I heard from some travelers that there was better work here in Fleur. So I packed up and moved.” She looked behind her, back towards the village. “Speaking of work, I should probably head back before I lose my job.”

“Do you want me to go with you?” Kayla offered. “Trory might be waiting for you.”

Xiu Juan shook her head. “He won’t be.” She turned around and began to walk. “Nobody ever tries again after I’ve had at them.” She glanced back over her shoulder just before passing out of the clearing. “Thank you for your help.” The Lucario strode into the trees and was gone.

Kayla kept watching, even after the pokémon passed out of sight. *Xiu Juan...* She nodded once to herself. “I’ll have to remember her.”

Later that evening, Kayla was rushing from table to table inside the village tavern, refilling drinks, taking orders, and chatting with the customers, who were mostly male and mostly people who had been working in the mines and in the metal shops. And, as usual, she had to constantly decline requests for companionship from the human patrons. Thankfully, the male pokémon were never interested in any of the village women.

Towards midnight, Kayla’s shift ended and she returned to the bar to hang up her apron. She exchanged evening greetings with Siran, the Lopunny who usually took the shift after her. On her way back around the bar, she spied a familiar face at the end, away from the rest of the bar customers. It was Xiu Juan. Kayla went down to where she was seated and took the stool next to her.

“Hello, there,” she said, cheerfully. “Fancy seeing you again.”

Xiu Juan started and looked up. “Oh, hello,” she said. “Kayla, wasn’t it?”

“That’s right!” Kayla smiled at her. “What are you doing over here all by yourself? You should be making friends and having a good time.”

Xiu Juan gave a sort of half-smile and looked down at her drink, which was larger than what most women had when they were in the tavern. “I’m not much of a talker,” she said. “I like to spend time alone.”

“Well, that’s no good!” Kayla waved to Siran, and the Lopunny came over. “Can I

get a pint of the spiced ale that we brewed last week?" Siran brought it over. Kayla took a long, slow pull at the ale. The flavor was wonderful, and she felt herself begin to unwind from the long night of work. "You're new in town. You shouldn't spend time alone in Fleur."

"You're one to talk. You were alone in the woods earlier today."

"Well...I suppose you have a point," Kayla said, laughing.

"And I was watching you a bit tonight," the Lucario confessed. "You kept saying no to all of those males who wanted to mate with you."

Kayla felt her face warm a little. "That's not because I don't like to be around people." She took another swig of her drink. "I'm just...not all that interested in men is all." The last bit came out as a bit of a rush.

"Oh? Not interested in males?"

"Not one bit." Kayla wasn't sure why she was telling someone she barely knew, in essence, that she was a lesbian. She just felt comfortable around Xiu Juan for some reason. Perhaps because of what had happened in the forest. "So what about you, Xiu Juan? Do you have anyone special?"

"Please call me just Xiu." Xiu Juan sipped at her mug. "And no, I have no mate either here or back on Iron Island. I was always too busy with work to bother with that kind of thing."

"I see." Kayla slipped a closer at Xiu Juan. Now that she was off of work, the Lucario was wearing nicer clothes. She had on a pair of close-fitting pants and a shirt which showed a considerable quantity of shoulder. They were black, just as her earlier clothing had been, but this time Kayla could get a better idea of Xiu Juan's body type. As she had guessed earlier, she was very fit. Her stomach looked nearly flat, and she had a narrow waist with wide hips that descended into a runner's legs. Not bad. If she had been human then Kayla would probably be buying Xiu Juan her next drink right about now.

"Kayla."

Kayla quickly snapped her eyes back up to Xiu Juan's. "Yes, Xiu?"

"I didn't properly thank you for earlier," Xiu Juan said. "I really appreciate what you did for me in the forest. I think that...creature might have gotten me if you hadn't shown up."

“Don’t mention it.” Kayla downed the rest of her drink. She was starting to feel a little sleepy. “Tell you what. If you really want to thank me, then how about joining me sometimes on my forest walks? It can get kind of lonely in Eterna Forest sometimes, and I could use a friend to keep me company.”

The Lucario smiled. “I’d like that, I think.”

Over the next several weeks, Kayla and Xiu Juan spent a lot of time together. Whenever Xiu Juan had a day off from the mines, they would spend it together in Eterna Forest. They became close friends after a short time. The pair spent long hours by the stream in the forest, just talking and enjoying the atmosphere of the woods. Xiu Juan began to open up about herself, telling Kayla all about her childhood growing up on Iron Island and what life was like back where she came from.

As they spent more and more time together, Kayla came to the slow realization that she was becoming attracted to her pokémon friend. Xiu Juan was smart, strong, and could even be funny on occasion. Not to mention that she was very beautiful. It was a new experience for Kayla. She was friendly with most of the female pokémon in the village, but she had never entertained such thoughts about any of them before. Why would she? Humans did not have relationships with pokémon, ever. She wrestled with the notion of making a move on Xiu Juan. But she did not know how her friend might react to that. She hadn’t seemed bothered when Kayla had expressed her sexual preference to her, but she might feel different if she knew of her attraction. Kayla did not want to ruin their friendship.

After all, Xiu Juan was becoming something of a celebrity among the single pokémon in Fleur. When she wasn’t with Kayla or in the mines, she was often seen being chatted up by male pokémon in the tavern, or in the market, or anywhere else she could be found by prospective mates. With all of the attention she was receiving from them, Kayla had to face the reality that she really had no chance with Xiu Juan.

One night when Kayla had the evening off from her job in the tavern, they were on a walk when the subject of mates came up. Xiu Juan complained about all of the males who were constantly trying to get her in bed.

“It’s just so frustrating,” the Lucario said, flopping down on the bank of the

stream. “I mean, there’s so many of them that I can’t even think about choosing one. Unless I’m out here with you or I’ve locked myself in my own home, I can’t get away from them. And of course, that slime Trory keeps coming on to me while we’re in the mines.”

“What?” Kayla asked. “You mean he’s got the gall to...”

“Yeah,” Xiu Juan grumbled. “Like he expects me to forget what he tried to do. He’s so full of himself.” She sighed.

Kayla smiled sympathetically. “Now you know what I go through every night, Xiu.” She lay down on the grass and looked up into the trees overhead. “So...” She tried to figure out the best way to phrase her question. “Are any of them...you know, your cup of tea?”

“What makes you ask that?”

“No reason,” Kayla said quickly. “Just curious, is all.”

Xiu Juan looked thoughtful for a moment. “Well...” She was cut off by the sound of running feet coming from the forest behind them. Whoever was nearing them sounded as though they were going as fast as they could.

A Lopunny, nearly out of breath, broke through the tree line and skidded to a halt beside them. It was Siran. “Kayla...Xiu Juan...,” she gasped. “Thank goodness I found you. I’ve been running all over the forest.”

“Slow down, Siran,” Kayla said. “What’s going on?”

Siran took a moment to collect herself. “The Elders have an announcement to make. They’re calling everyone back to the village. You’ve got to come right away!”

When Kayla, Xiu Juan, and Siran arrived back in Fleur, they found everyone gathered in the center of the village, where construction of the statue was taking place. On the raised platform where workers assembled the pieces before attaching them to the rest of the statue stood the village elders, Gerasim, an aged man, and Aldan, an even older Medicham. Most of the villagers were packed into the area, making it hard to see them. The three of them shouldered their way through the crowd to the front. They made it just as Gerasim began to speak.

“People of Fleur,” the man began, his voice loud and strong despite his age, “I

speak to you today with a heavy heart. I fear that we may all be in danger. My dear friend, Aldan, has just today come to me with troubling news.”

Aldan took a step forward on the podium. Everyone quieted to hear what he had to say. “Friends, last night I had a dream,” the Medicham said. His voice was quiet and shaky. “In the dream, I was visited by our Great Lord, Arceus.” At the mention of that name, a murmur ran through the crowd. Aldan was speaking of the great god who had created the entire Universe, including Dialga, the patron deity of Fleur. “Our Lord is angry with us, and I am afraid that his anger may spell trouble for all of us in times to come.”

“But why?” a voice called from the crowd. “Why is our Lord so angry?”

“That I cannot tell you,” Aldan said. “I am afraid my dream was fleeting, and I awoke before our Lord could reveal that answer to me.”

The villagers broke into worried conversation with each other. Kayla turned to Xiu Juan.

“Can you believe it?” she hissed. “Lord Arceus, appearing to Elder Aldan in a dream. What will Lord Arceus do if he stays angry with us?”

“Hmm...,” Xiu Juan said, frowning.

Gerasim waved his hands, bringing everyone’s attention back to him and Aldan. “Please, villagers, listen to us. After spending the afternoon discussing the dream and what it may mean, Aldan and I have made a decision about what we should do.”

“We have decided,” Aldan said, “to halt the construction of the statue of Lord Dialga.” At an outbreak of noise from the crowd, Aldan held a hand up. “Only temporarily. We feel that it is in the best interests of the village to try to placate our Lord.”

“For the next eight days, we are declaring a period of prayer and offering to the Great Lord,” Gerasim said. “Everyone will not work, except for those whose work is absolutely necessary, the doctors and those who provide food. Devote yourselves to rest and to reflection and prayer. We must do what we can to calm the spirit of Arceus.” He bowed his head. “We thank you for your attention, and may Dialga watch over us in this time of great need. Go in peace.”

Slowly, the crowd began to disperse, going back to what they had been doing

before the summons had come. Siran excused herself and headed off in the direction of the tavern. Kayla and Xiu Juan began walking home together.

“This is incredible,” Kayla said to herself. “Lord Arceus, angry with our village. What could we have done to make our Lord so angry?” She looked over at Xiu Juan. “What do you think?”

Xiu Juan was a moment in answering. “I don’t believe it,” she finally said.

“You don’t?” Kayla said, incredulous. “You think Elders Aldan and Gerasim were lying?”

“No, I think they believe what they said. But I don’t believe in Arceus, or Dialga, or any of the gods. I think they’re fairy tales that children learn about because it helps the world make sense.”

“Ah…” Kayla didn’t quite know what to think about that. “You know, you’re the first pokémon I’ve ever met who doesn’t believe in the gods.”

Xiu Juan gave a small snort of laughter. “Well, perhaps I’m the only pokémon you’ve met that has any sense.” She waved off any response from Kayla. “Let’s not talk about it. It’s a touchy subject.” Xiu Juan’s house was closer to the village center, and so they came upon it before Kayla’s. The Lucario gestured to the door. “Would you like to come in and sit down for a bit? We were walking around for an awfully long time.”

Kayla felt a twinge of pain from her feet as she thought about just how long they had been out. “Actually, I would.” Xiu Juan opened the door and they both walked inside. It was the first time that Kayla had been inside her home. The house was decorated sparsely. It was a small house, only two rooms, with the front door leading directly into a living space and a door on the far wall that must lead to Xiu Juan’s bedroom. Inside the living space was a small wooden table. Near one wall, several wooden chairs were arranged in a semi-circle in front of a fireplace. There was a stove near the table, and a larder set into the wall next to the stove. There were no decorations on the walls except for what looked like an old chisel that hung from a peg over the fireplace, and none on the floor apart from a small mat placed just inside the door. “Do you actually live in here?”

“I haven’t really taken the time to personalize outside of my room,” Xiu Juan said sheepishly. “Work, you know.”

“We have to do something about this devotion you have to your job, Xiu,” Kayla said. “What are you going to do with yourself while the mine is closed down?”

Xiu Juan’s ears pricked up. “I just believe in a hard day’s work, that’s all.” They went to the fireplace and sat down in two of the chairs. Letting out a weary sigh, Xiu Juan pulled off the top of her gi and tossed it into one of the empty chairs. Underneath, she wore a white wrapping over her upper chest. Kayla felt her heart beat a little bit faster. Like all female Lucario, Xiu Juan did not have the spike on her chest that males of her species had. Instead, the wrappings were covering, and somewhat flattening, her breasts. She tried not to stare too much.

“You know,” Kayla said, “you never answered my question earlier, Xiu.”

“What question?”

“Don’t act dumb,” Kayla prodded, playfully. “Have you taken any interest in any of those millions of males who have been after you?”

Xiu Juan looked a little uncomfortable. “Oh, right. That.” She was quiet for several minutes. Kayla noticed that she had begun to stare at the chisel that hung over the fireplace.

“Xiu Juan?” she asked, tentatively. “I didn’t mean to pry. I was just...”

“I’m sorry, Kayla,” Xiu Juan said, interrupting her. “I haven’t been honest with you when it comes to my past.”

“What do you mean?”

Still staring at the chisel, Xiu Juan took a deep breath. “It wasn’t completely true that I moved here just for work. When I told you that I didn’t have a mate back on Iron Island...that was also a lie.”

“Oh.” Kayla’s heart sank for a moment. “What is his name?”

“What makes you think it’s a he?”

“Well, I...Oh. *Oh.*”

Xiu Juan nodded. “My mate on Iron Island...she was another female Lucario. One who I grew up with.”

“Was?”

“Yes.” Xiu Juan looked down at the floor. Kayla heard her sniff, and was taken aback to see a tear drip down her friend’s nose. “Her name was Jia Li. She died...almost

two years ago now.”

“Xiu...,” Kayla said. She laid a hand on Xiu Juan’s shoulder. “I’m so sorry. What happened?”

Xiu Juan sniffed again. “We were both at work in the iron mines one day. I was up top helping to unload the carts onto barges when the ground began to shake. A few miners came running out of the tunnel yelling that there had been a cave-in deep in the mines. Everyone rushed inside to help dig out the people who had been trapped.” She took a shaky breath. “When I got to where the collapse had happened, I realized it was the place where I had last seen Jia Li. We began digging to rescue whoever we could. Eventually we had everyone out who had been in there, except for one. As we got to the end of the cave-in, I uncovered an arm holding a chisel.” She looked back up at the fireplace. “I knew it was her. I couldn’t continue digging. The other miners had to do it. They finally got her body out from the rubble. She was the only one who had died.” Xiu Juan wiped her face. “The survivors told me later that she was the one who noticed the walls were beginning to collapse. She warned everyone and got them moving before she thought about moving herself. If she hadn’t done that, she probably would have lived... but everyone else would have died.”

Kayla’s gaze fell upon the old tool hanging on the wall. “Was that hers?” she asked.

“Yes,” Xiu Juan said. “It’s all I have to remember her by. Her family never approved of us, and wouldn’t let me have anything of hers as a keepsake. The only reason I have her chisel is because I took it while I was still in the mine.”

“I’m so sorry,” Kayla repeated. “The things I said about mates...I shouldn’t have said those things.”

“You couldn’t have known.” Xiu Juan dried her face with her hands. “Anyway, I’ve tried to put it behind me. I came here partly to get away from the bad memories. I still love Jia Li, and I always will...but it doesn’t hurt anymore.” She sniffed and gave a small laugh. “Well, not much, at least.”

Kayla kept a comforting hand on her friend’s shoulder. “Do you need anything? Can I make you some tea, or something?”

The Lucario shook her head. “No. I feel better just by telling you about it. You’re

the first person I've told since I left Iron Island." They simply sat for a long while after that. Neither of them said anything.

Kayla finally looked out of the window. The sun was completely down now, and the moonlight was streaming in through the window. Xiu Juan's house was dark, except for a small oil lamp that was lit on the table. "I should probably be going back to my own home," Kayla said, starting to rise from her seat.

Xiu Juan stopped her. "Now, wait a minute," she said. "I still have something I want to say."

"What is it?"

Her friend bit her lip uncertainly. "Kayla, this may sound like a stupid question to ask, especially after the story I just told you. But...you're really the only friend I have in Fleur."

"That's not true," Kayla interjected. "There's Siran, and the people you work with in the mines."

"Yes, but they're really just acquaintances. You're the one person who I'm closest with. So what I want to ask is, are you...attracted to me at all?"

Kayla's heart nearly stopped. "I...what?"

"We spend so much time together, and I know that we both...prefer the company of females. So I just wanted to know."

The question startled Kayla so much that she could not control the words that came out of her mouth next. "No, Xiu. You're my friend, but I don't feel that way about you."

"Oh," Xiu Juan said. Her voice carried no emotion. "I see."

There was an awkward silence. Kayla got up from her chair. "I guess...I'll go home now," she said. "See you later, Xiu Juan." She rushed out of the house and through the streets. She didn't know where she was going. Her mind was a haze. Finally, she stopped behind a butcher shop. She leaned against the side of the building and squeezed her eyes shut until it was painful.

What have I done?

Kayla stayed away from Xiu Juan as much as possible over the next several days.

There were times when it was impossible to avoid her, such as in the baths. Even when they did encounter each other, Xiu Juan showed no indication that she knew she was there.

One morning, Kayla saw her with Siran in the market and tried to speak to her. “Xiu Juan,” she said, walking up to them. The two pokémon were examining the produce being offered by a farmer. The period of prayer had not ended, but of course the food producers had been instructed to continue their work. “I’ve been wanting to talk to you for a few days.”

Instead of turning to her, Xiu Juan spoke to Siran. “I don’t know about these,” she said, picking up a few of the vegetables that were laid out. “The price is better here, but they looked fresher a few stalls down.”

“Hey,” Kayla said. “Xiu! I’m trying to talk to you.”

Xiu Juan looked over her shoulder, her eyes cold. “If you’re too blind to notice, I’m trying to do some shopping here,” she said. “And it would be nice to do that without you chattering away behind me.”

Siran looked more and more uncomfortable every second. Her eyes were flicking between Kayla and Xiu Juan.

Anger erupted within Kayla. “Fine! If you want to be left alone, then I’ll go!” She turned around and started to walk away, but stopped and faced Xiu Juan again. “I can see now why Jia Li died. She obviously didn’t want to put up with you anymore.”

Horror and pain immediately washed over Xiu Juan’s face. She dropped her shopping basket, and her hands balled into fists, trembling.

Kayla put a hand to her mouth. “Xiu Juan, I…” Her throat closed over what she might have said, and she rushed away.

From a few stalls down, Trory witnessed the exchange between Kayla and Xiu Juan. He watched as the Lucario slowly retrieved her basket after the human ran off. She was heading in the direction of the forest.

Here’s an opportunity, Trory said to himself. He gave Kayla a minute’s head start, and then followed after her.

Xiu Juan saw Trory walking away. She returned to her shopping, trying to banish away the thoughts of what had just happened. It was several minutes before she realized that the Machoke had been going in exactly the same direction as Kayla. She looked back. He had already disappeared.

Troubled, she turned to Siran. "I'll catch up to you later."

Stumbling through the forest, Kayla eventually found herself at the spot by the side of the stream where she usually sat with Xiu Juan. She collapsed on the ground and put her head in her hands. She started crying uncontrollably. Her shoulders shook as her body was wracked with sobs.

"Why?" she choked. "Why do I keep messing things up?" For a while she just let the tears flow. After she finally stopped crying, she dried her face and looked up at the trees. "Maybe I should go away. Get away from everything."

From behind her, she heard the sound of a dry twig snapping. She turned around, but there wasn't anyone there. Uneasy, she started to look back to the water, but there was a rustling noise and she turned again. This time, she saw Trory coming out of the trees.

"Hey, Kayla," he said. "I saw what happened with you and Xiu Juan. You look like you could use some cheering up."

Kayla stood up. "Leave me alone, Trory," she said. "I'm in no mood for you."

"I still haven't forgotten what you did to me." Trory advanced on her a few steps. "You don't have your friend to protect you anymore."

"I'm warning you..."

"What are you going to do? Fight me?" The Machoke laughed. "What could you do to me?" He rushed up to her and grabbed her arm roughly.

Kayla screamed and tried to wrench her arm out of his grip, but he was too strong for her. She kicked at him, but he merely absorbed her blows. Trory slowly forced her down to the ground.

"I never had a chance to have your friend," he said. He grinned. "You're just a human, but I guess you'll have to do." Trory tugged at Kayla's shirt. He gradually tore the fabric, exposing her breasts.

"Stop...it!" Kayla growled through clinched teeth. She was still trying to fight

him off. She swung a leg up and kicked him in the groin.

Trory howled in agony and fury. He drew his hand back and struck Kayla in the side of the head. She made a brief noise of pain before she passed out from the force of his blow.

“YOU SON OF A BITCH!”

Trory brought his head up just in time to catch a spiked fist to the face. He felt his skin part as Xiu Juan hit him as hard as she could. He was beaten back from Kayla by a furious onslaught of blows from the Lucario. Xiu Juan was out of control. She struck randomly and repeatedly at him. Thinking quickly, Trory let her swing at him, and he sidestepped. He grabbed her around the middle from behind, trying to pin her arms to her sides.

“No you don’t!” Xiu Juan roared. She swung her fist behind her in a downward arc and slammed it into Trory’s pelvis. She felt bone give way and heard a snap and a grunt. Trory’s arms loosened their grip as he began to fall to his knees. She wasn’t going to give him that chance. She wrapped her hands around his upper arm and pulled with all her might. There was loud pop and Trory shrieked in intense pain as she flipped him over her back. He landed in the middle of the shallow stream with a huge splash.

Trory sat up in the water. For the first time in his life, he felt absolutely terrified. Xiu Juan was standing at the edge of the water, and she looked about ready to come in after him. He tried to push himself up, but his right arm wouldn’t respond. “You...you broke my arm!” he yelled.

“That’s right,” Xiu Juan said, her voice low and dangerous. “And I’m going to break the other arm, and both of your legs, and your nose, and your jaw, and finally your weak little neck!”

Fearing for his life, Trory began to push his feet along the stream bed, trying to slide away from her. “Please, don’t kill me!” he pleaded. “I’ll...I’ll do whatever you want. Just don’t hurt me anymore.”

Xiu Juan’s eyes flared. “You dare to ask me to spare you? After everything you’ve done?”

“I’m sorry! I won’t bother anyone again. Just...please let me live!”

Xiu Juan looked down at Kayla. Her face was bloody and she wasn’t moving, but

she was breathing normally. She looked back up at Trory. "Leave."

"What?"

"I said leave. Get out of here. Leave Fleur and never come back." She bared her teeth at him. "If I see you in the village ever again, I swear on my life that I will kill you."

Trory scrambled to get up, ignoring the searing pain in his hips and his arm. He crawled to the side of the stream opposite Xiu Juan and climbed up onto the ground. Not looking back, he hobbled away as fast as he could.

Xiu Juan waited until he was out of sight, and then she sank to her knees. Her hands were shaking, and she willed them to stop. She couldn't believe what she had just done. She'd never felt raw anger like that.

Kayla stirred beside her. She mumbled something unintelligible. Xiu Juan went to her side and felt her pulse. It was strong. The human didn't look seriously hurt, but it didn't seem as though she would be coming around any time soon. She picked her up and began walking back to the village.

Warmth slowly nibbled away at the haze clouding Kayla's head. Slowly, she allowed her eyes to drift open. Her vision was blurry, and she had a terrible headache. The taste of blood clung to her mouth. She blinked several times, trying to clear her eyes. As she began to be able to see again, she perceived that she was lying in a bed with a blanket pulled over her. Wherever she was, she did not recognize her surroundings. Her clothes had changed as well. She felt herself. Her normal walking clothes had been replaced with a whitish sleeping garment.

The door to the room opened and Xiu Juan came in, carrying a cup of water. "You're awake," she said, relief evident on her face. "I brought you something to drink."

Kayla sat up quickly, and winced as the blood rushed out of her head, making it throb.

"Careful." Xiu Juan set the glass down on a side table. She sat on the edge of the bed, next to Kayla. "You took quite a beating. Don't push it."

"Where am I?" Kayla asked. "What happened?"

"You're in my bedroom. You don't remember anything?"

As Kayla tried to remember, she felt her head. There was a bump over her left

temple. “The last thing I recall is Trory pushing me down. It goes dark after that.”

“You’re lucky I followed you two out of the market. I got there just in time.” Xiu Juan looked down at her. “He’s not coming back. I saw to that.”

Kayla started to cry. She put her head down, and tears began to drip from her face. She covered her face with her hands, trying to hold it back, but moisture leaked through her fingers.

Xiu Juan put a hand on her knee. “What’s wrong?”

“That th-thing I said in the m-market,” Kayla sobbed. “It was h-horrible. I didn’t mean it. I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, Xiu Juan!”

“Oh, Kayla.” Xiu Juan felt like she was going to cry herself. She hugged her friend tightly. “Don’t even think about it.”

“But it was just so awful, and I had no right to say it, and…”

“Shh. I’ve already forgiven you.” Xiu Juan rubbed her back, calming her. “Just forget about it.”

“I love you!” Kayla blurted out. She felt Xiu Juan stiffen, and her friend let go of her, leaning back from her. Xiu Juan stared at Kayla for a long moment. Their eyes, human and pokémon, locked together for what seemed like an eternity.

As though they were reading each other’s minds, they came together and kissed passionately. Xiu Juan thrust her tongue into Kayla’s mouth. Kayla moaned, her voice full of longing. She wrapped her arms around Xiu Juan and pulled her to her chest, holding her there. If everything that was contained in the depths of the heart could be contained in a single instant, this came closer than anything that either of them had ever experienced. Xiu Juan’s lips had a different flavor from any that Kayla had ever kissed before. She tasted spicy, and brought to mind pleasures that she had not had in far too long. The necessity for air made them break apart.

Xiu Juan cocked her head. “Why didn’t you tell me earlier?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” Kayla breathed. “Before, I didn’t want to drive you away. And after you told me about Jia Li, I didn’t want to intrude on your grief.”

The Lucario shook her head. “Kayla, Jia Li is in my past.” She smiled. “I want to have my present and future now.”

“Xiu…” Kayla leaned forward and kissed her again. She moved her hands to Xiu

Juan's neck, and used them to gently push her gi off of her shoulders. The garment fell open, and Kayla removed the belt, discarding it and setting the top to the side. Xiu Juan's hands came up reflexively to cover her breasts, still enclosed in the white wrapping, but she lowered them almost immediately.

"I haven't...been with anyone since then..." she said, huskily.

"It's been a while for me, too," Kayla admitted. "But I think I remember what to do," she added playfully. She fumbled at the wrappings that encircled Xiu Juan's chest. They were very tight, and her fingers slipped over the cottony material.

"You have to find the end of it," Xiu Juan said. She waited as Kayla continued to search. "Oh, let me." She took the spike on the back of her right hand and cut through the material with a single swipe. It fell to the bed.

Kayla breathed in slowly as Xiu Juan's breasts were revealed to her. She thought they were absolutely perfect. Her frie...lover's chest was covered in a layer of yellowish fur. She brought her hands up and gently caressed Xiu Juan's breasts. They fit her hands just right. Her gesture was rewarded with a soft, low moan of pleasure. Kayla giggled and bent her head down to softly bite at the nipples. A hand on the back of her head told her that she was doing everything right.

Xiu Juan brought Kayla back up from her chest. She reached down and pulled the blanket off of her. Trailing her fingers up Kayla's legs from her knees, she grasped the hem of her borrowed nightgown and lifted it. Kayla put her arms up, allowing Xiu Juan to remove the gown from her body. The Lucario could not take her eyes off of the expanse of pale skin that now stretched before her.

"Kayla, you're beautiful," she said. Kayla shivered and lay back on the bed, beckoning Xiu Juan with her eyes. She answered the summons, lowering herself on top of Kayla so that their breasts flattened against one another. Their lips locked for many long minutes as they reveled in the feel of each other's bodies. Xiu Juan's fur felt soft and exquisite on Kayla's skin. Kayla's skin felt smooth, warm, and wonderful on Xiu Juan's fur.

As they kissed each other, Kayla worked at the top of Xiu Juan's pants, inching them down her legs. Xiu Juan helped her, and they finally succeeded in removing them. Now nothing remained between the pair. Xiu Juan eased a hand under herself and

between Kayla's legs. A cry of passion escaped Kayla's mouth as her lover found her tender flesh and began moving her fingers over it. Her nether lips parted, allowing Xiu Juan to tease a finger inside. She began to slide the finger in and out of Kayla, faster and faster, and she soon added another finger. Moisture collected between her legs and covered Xiu Juan's fingers. Xiu Juan withdrew her hand and sensuously licked it, tasting the liquid that clung to her fur.

"I want more," she said. She slid down Kayla's body, situating herself so that her head was at waist level. She placed a hand underneath each of her knees, lifting them and parting her legs. Keeping her eyes locked firmly on Kayla's, she dipped her muzzle to Kayla's sex.

"Oh...gods...", Kayla gasped, her eyes squeezing shut. She could feel Xiu Juan touch the tip of her tongue to her lips and slowly draw it upwards. Her mouth closed around Kayla's clitoris, and she sucked gently. It felt as though lightning was arcing its way up and down her body. Xiu Juan's tongue assaulted her sex, licking furiously, occasionally diving inside. "Xiu...that's...so good..." She arched her back and cried out as her orgasm hit. Her legs squeezed together, and Xiu Juan had to keep her hands on Kayla's thighs to keep from becoming trapped.

Xiu Juan came up from between Kayla's legs. She put her lips to Kayla's. Kayla could taste herself on her lover's tongue. It was an indescribable sensation.

"It's your turn," Kayla whispered. She was barely able to make herself understood, so out of breath she was. She sat up, as did Xiu Juan. They moved so that each had a leg over one of the other's. Slowly, they slid together until they connected. As they felt the slick, warm flesh at the apex of each other's thighs touching, a sense of total completeness came over them. They began to move.

Bliss washed over Xiu Juan as she rocked against Kayla. Feelings that had not resided in her body for a long time finally surfaced once more. Pleasure, love, companionship, joy...all emotions and sensations that had been denied to her were now flowing through her as surely as water flows downhill. She surrendered to her feelings. She leaned forward, wrapping her arms around Kayla and kissing her fiercely. A solitary tear dripped down her face. All at once, Xiu Juan felt every muscle in her body seize up as she reached her peak. She moaned loudly into Kayla's mouth at the same instant as

Kayla tensed. They orgasmed together, ecstasy roiling over them like an ocean in turmoil.

Thoroughly exhausted, they sank together onto the bed. In each other's arms, wordlessly, they lay. As fatigue came over them, they fell asleep, clutching one another and allowing darkness to take them.

It was night outside the bedroom window when Kayla awoke. She blinked once, and looked beside her. Xiu Juan's face, peaceful in sleep, was there. Unsure of what had woken her, she peered around the room. The darkness was eerily quiet, even for Fleur. For a reason unknown to her, Kayla found herself afraid. She felt as though an unseen eye was upon her.

Suddenly, brilliant white light illuminated the room. Kayla threw a hand over her eyes to shield them from the searing glow. Startled by her movements, Xiu Juan awoke. They held each other, terrified, as the room around them seemed to grow to nearly five times its original size. A dark spot appeared within the middle of the room, and as the lovers watched, a figure emerged from the center of the spot.

Kayla put a hand to her mouth. "No, it can't be," she moaned, fright evident in her voice. Out of the light stepped a being that was familiar, and yet totally strange to the human. Four legs, an animal-like body, and a rearing head, covered in fur of the purest of whites. A golden halo ringed its body. Arceus, Lord and Creator of the Universe.

Do not be afraid child. The voice of Arceus was soft, calm, and almost soothing, reminding Kayla of the voice of her long-dead grandfather. It issued from no discernible mouth, but seemed to come from the air around them.

"Kayla..." Xiu Juan said, her voice trembling. "What's going on?"

I come to you, although in anger, not as a destroyer, but as a messenger, Arceus said. *I have been watching you for some days now, observing your interactions with one another. I must admit, although I am very powerful, even you have surprised me.*

"My Lord?" Kayla asked.

Arceus seemed not to have heard her. *The world has descended into sin, my children. Humans and pokémon worship the so-called deities rather than giving thanks for the simple gifts that life has to offer. All over the world, they build statues, dedicate temples, and create material things in our honor. And for what? So that rather than*

making a life for themselves, they may attribute everything to my name. The figure shook its head. Such was not my intention when I created the world. I wanted to create a place where beings could be free to live their own lives, rather than binding themselves to me. But humans and pokémon, together, have perverted my creation. It fills me with unspeakable anger.

But you two are different. You have gone beyond the boundaries that other beings have set for you. Through your feelings for one another, you have created a union yourselves that I had intended to one day allow within this world. The figure of Arceus bowed its head. *I regret that I must do this thing.*

“Do what?” Kayla asked, fear tearing at the edges of her voice. “What thing?”

As punishment for the sins that the world has committed in their practices of blasphemous idolatry, I have decided to separate the races. Arceus stared at them. From this day forward, man and pokémon shall speak not the same language, nor understand the same feelings, nor live the same lives. Until such time as the world is ready for it once again.

Tears collected in Xiu Juan’s eyes. “No...,” she whimpered. “It’s not fair.”

I am sorry, my child, Arceus said. *It pains me to put an end to such a pure love, but the world must atone for its sins.*

“No,” Xiu Juan said. She and Kayla hugged each other tightly. “No.” Arceus retreated back into the light, and the room began to dim, to return to its original shape.

Kayla brushed Xiu Juan’s forehead with her lips. “No matter what happens, Xiu,” she whispered, “never forget that I love you.”

“I won’t forget,” Xiu Juan said. “I love you, too.”

Kayla bolted awake in bed, cold sweat clinging to her brow. She looked around. The light was gone. There was nothing in the room. No Arceus, no brilliant radiance... just darkness and quiet.

She laid her head back on the pillow. “Was it...a dream?” she wondered aloud. She turned her head to the side. Xiu Juan was gone. Fear gripping at her anew, she frantically tore away at the sheets, searching for her love. A frenzied scratching noise drew her eyes to the door. Xiu Juan stood there, her clawed fingers scrabbling at the

wood. “Xiu Juan, what are you doing?” She rose from the bed and made her way over to her. As she approached, however, Xiu Juan turned towards her. Kayla halted, terror clutching at her heart. Xiu Juan’s eyes stared malevolently at her, all recognition gone.

When Kayla made no move to come closer, Xiu Juan returned her attention to the door, attempting to claw her way through. Confused and frightened, Kayla slowly came up behind her and turned the doorknob. The door swung open and Xiu Juan leapt out, dashing across the living room of her house and crashing into the front door. It gave way, and she bolted outside.

“Xiu Juan! Come back!” Kayla quickly found the nightgown that she had first woken up in and ran after her. When she got outside, she gasped in sheer horror.

All around, pokémon were running in every direction. They were squealing in unknown tongues, tearing their clothes off, and disappearing into the night, most running for the forest. Humans also ran, crying in fear and trying to make sense of what was going on. Through all the confusion, Kayla made out the figure of Xiu Juan, running past the half-completed statue in the village center and heading for the mountains. She tore off after her, going as fast as she could through the throngs of beings that swarmed through the village.

Soon she reached the edge of Fleur. Xiu Juan was far ahead of her, and they were now the only creatures in sight. They began to climb into rocky terrain. It became harder for Kayla to keep up with Xiu Juan, but the mountain pokémon scaled the rocks with ease. Several times, Kayla lost sight of her.

Finally, she came around a huge boulder. Atop a cliff, framed by the moon, stood Xiu Juan. Kayla could not see her face, but was sure that they were looking right at one another. Then, slowly, the Lucario turned and ran off, disappearing out of sight.

“Xiu Juan!” Kayla screamed, her anguished voice echoing among the rocks and dissipating into the night air.

Humans continued to live in Fleur. They picked up the pieces from that dreadful night and tried to go on with their lives. The statue was completed on schedule, although now it served as a reminder of the sins of their past, and helped them to remember that they must never again allow themselves to forget that the point of living was simply that:

to live.

Kayla mourned the loss of her lover, but eventually she found a new love. The feelings that she had felt in those brief weeks in which she had known Xiu Juan never left her heart, however, no matter how much time passed. Every year, on the anniversary of the exodus of the pokémon from Fleur, Kayla returned to the spot where she had last seen her lover, and called out her name.

And every year, she believed that she heard a response, faintly, calling to her from beyond the horizon.

“You can shed tears that she has gone,
or you can smile because she has lived.
You can close your eyes and pray that she’ll come back,
or you can open your eyes and see all she’s left.
Your heart can be empty because you can’t see her,
or you can be full of the love you shared.
You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday,
or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.
You can remember her only that she is gone,
or you can cherish her memory and let it live on.
You can cry and close your mind,
be empty and turn your back.
Or you can do what she’d want:
smile, open your eyes, love and go on.”

- David Harkins