

The town was quiet, more than he had expected. That was what came to mind when Andrew first passed through its gates. There were few souls out and about, although it was perhaps to be expected given the hour that he had arrived.

It was dark, the chill of evening begin to brush in through the trees surrounding the small village. Small enough that it wasn't even marked on the usual trainer oriented map that tended to list the more 'important' specks of civilization through the region of Kalos.

A small, unimportant town. As secluded as it was, evidently, quiet.

Interesting.

Andrew began walking, taking in the sights. 'Not much to look at...' he commented, taking a moment to fiddle with his glasses as he examined the small wooden buildings. There was something about things here... the air was a little... what was the word? Oppressive? Could that be the right way to describe it?

The weight on the town made it feel right, at least. He shook his head and kept walking. He needed to find what he was looking for. Sooner rather than later, preferably, he didn't like sticking out so much. An unfortunate given due to his natural, bright orange hair. Especially in the approaching night, it stuck out from everything around him.

Self consciously a hand scratched at that hair before it paused, his eyes spotting a familiar building. Even in a rather secluded town such as this, Pokemon Centers of some kind were common finds. He stepped passed the glass doors into the building proper, being greeted by a more homely, smaller looking center than one would expect.

That seemed to be the theme around here. Maybe it would have been a bit nicer if... something wasn't up. There were few people in the building; excluding him there were four others around. One was the assigned nurse, standing behind the desk as to be expected from any center, an unchanging factor that was always there. Truly, if she were not there, that would be a sign that something was definitely, inexplicably wrong.

But she was there, and so were three other adults, most likely trainers themselves, for what other purpose would they be lounging in here. One was off reading a magazine on her own, while the other two, rather intimidating men that would certainly be able to crush Andrew he noted, were buried in a conversation between them. From the short glances the brown-eyed youth could get before he walked passed and tried to ignore them, it seemed serious. Not something he'd want to get involved in, he was definitely certain.

The Nurse's smile was welcoming. Too welcoming, that even Andrew couldn't help but smile back, feeling quite embarrassed in the process. Strong-willed was something he surely was not, he chastised himself inwardly. If the Nurse had noticed his inner self-deprecation she did a good

job of hiding it, waiting patiently as Andrew pulled out his Pokeballs and arranged them in the provided tray. He counted to make sure all of them were in and the Nurse was off with all of his traveling companions.

There was nothing he could do now but wait, unfortunately. He had wanted to ask her a few things, most important of which was rooms. This Pokemon Center didn't seem like one of those that also functioned as an inn, sadly. He chanced glancing around; no one else in the room looked particularly friendly. At the very least, not enough that he would want to approach and draw attention to himself.

He nonchalantly, meekly hustled to a free seat in the designated lounging area, keeping his head down; at the very least if they were giving him any stares he wouldn't know. Andrew was not a social Beautifully, definitely not.

Thankfully the two burly guys nearby just carried on with their conversation, as if he weren't there. He looked at the time, a clock hanging off the wall indicating how late it was. Perhaps he should have grabbed a magazine or something, following after the woman's example. Too late now, he mentally chided; he was too comfortable to bother getting up. He'd just have to suffer NOT reading whatever old magazine they threw on the rack to distract people.

Instead of that, he ended up listening in on the conversation between the two nearby. They were speaking in hushed tones, but it was clear enough for him to pick up.

"Are ya sure you're leavin' tomorrow, man?" One man whispered. He sounded... upset, to say the least. As upset as he could be in his 'subtle' tones. "I thought you were plannin' on stayin' here a couple o' days. Not like ya to look so... in a hurry, ya know?"

"Agh, I can't help it" the other guy snorted. Andrew could hear the sound of his seat stretching as he shifted in it, most likely getting comfortable. "This place is freaky. I ain't eager to stick around and get freakin'... whisked off somewhere."

"I thought that was just a rumor or somethin'" the other man interrupted. Now Andrew couldn't help but be interested. What were they talking about? "If somethin' like that were really happenin', someone woulda come to do somethin' about it, right?"

"Feh, ain't no rumor, bud. I been hearin' all about it from people" he muttered in agitation. "3 of em the other day."

That, for some reason, caused the other man to pause. "3?" he repeated quietly. From the following silence, Andrew assumed the first guy gave some sort of quiet confirmation for that one.

They were both silent now. It was starting to get to the young orange-haired trainer. He felt like he should ask them what they were talking about, but was it really a good idea to just spontaneously jump in? Practically admit that he was listening in?

Thankfully he didn't have to as the other guy began speaking again. "Those things... what do they call 'em? Malamar... they say their cave's off nearby."

Malamar? The name sounded familiar. 'That's... that one dark type, right? Really strong, too...'

"Mm," the man grunted, a tired and almost sad grunt as he sniffed. "No one's gonna do anythin' about 'em, though. Too many to deal with, too dangerous too. Heard someone saw a few o' them enter town. They managed to run away before any o' them freaks could spot 'em, though."

"Psh... so we know where they live, but no one's gonna do anythin', eh?" Andrew could hear the second man curse under his breath. "Maybe I should consider packin' up tonight too."

"S'dangerous at night. Should lock up inside and don't come out for any reason. That's what I'm doin..."

Wise words. Rather, it would have been, if Andrew were still listening. Instead he had retreated to his own little world. He had missed most of the conversation, no doubt about it, but he had gotten the short summary of it; Malamar were causing trouble in a cave nearby.

He wondered what he could do. He wondered if he even COULD do anything. For all he knew, he'd just make things worse, riling them up or something. He didn't want to get caught in the crossfire of such... intimidating Pokemon, at the very least, regardless of how much confidence he had in his own abilities and Pokemon (which is to say, not much).

Andrew shakes his head of those thoughts. Thoughts of going out and fighting a bunch of evil Malamar. Even if he wanted to catch one, he understood that it was far too dangerous to go looking for them. He was the kind of the guy that liked avoiding trouble, not searching for it.

Hopes of catching a cool, powerful dark-psychic type banished from his mind, he waited until he saw the pink head of hair that was the Nurse returning to the desk. He headed up to the counter. "Hey... uh, do you know where the nearest and most affordable inn is?"

The Nurse smiled a sickeningly sweet smile, one that could threaten to burn the poor lad. Or maybe he was being over dramatic, then. "Oh, yes, just go right when you leave that door and go a few buildings down. It should be obvious to find it" she responded with ease. Natural, of course, why wouldn't she know where such a building would be? Especially if this Pokemon Center didn't provide lodging.

Andrew imagined she got that question a lot. He mumbled a thanks. "E-er, I'll be back for my Pokemon tomorrow... good night." He rose a hand up half-hardheartedly before he retreated.

He noted that his footsteps were perhaps a little too quick. He mentally commanded himself to slow down a bit, don't look like you're in such a rush or anything, just blend in and walk like a normal person.

He sighed as he imagined all the eyes that were staring at him as he left the Center. All four sets of them.

The inn was just where the kind Nurse directed, not very hidden at all. The exterior was very... 'inn-like', if Andrew had to put a word to it. Yeah, that sounded right.

The inside looked, thankfully, actually quite cozy and liveable; not what he expected when he asked for 'cheap', but who knows what the rooms would be like. He approached the old- ahem, middle aged man at the desk.

"Excu-" was all he was able to say, before the man jumped up with a look of what the youth could only describe as absolute shock and surprise, his eyes sharp pinpricks and a thick mustache and beard framing his open jaw.

The man took a few deep breaths, before looking at Andrew, who had a look of panic of his own at the sudden scene. He couldn't help but give a chuckle. "Goodness, goodness. Sorry, lad. You just gave me a start, there. I was dozing off for a moment."

"N-no, I should apologize for shocking you." Andrew waved a hand, giving a nervous smile.

"Ahaha, it'd take more than that to get this nut to crack." The man gave a hearty laugh, now, his personality taking a complete 180 from what Andrew would have expected given the situation. "Now, what can I help you with, lad?"

"Um, I'd like to stay for the night," he said promptly and quickly. Perhaps a bit too quick. "If you have a room available."

"Of course, of course. One night? Yes..." the older man scratched his beard as he looked through a small book. Andrew couldn't see its contents with the desk in the way as it was, but he guessed the man was looking at the available rooms. "Hmmm... yes, yes, here we go." The man rose his head and offered a cheeky smile. "Look at that! We do, in fact, have a room available, hahaha!"

Andrew gave a nod, saying nothing else. Whether the old man noticed his rush to get into a room or just ran out of things to say himself was unclear as the young trainer promptly paid for the night and followed the old man's directions to his apparent room.

The glasses-wearing youth couldn't help but notice the look on the old man's face. He didn't seem to realize Andrew was still there, and his chipper attitude seemed to crumble as he stared at the inn's entrance. Was he... waiting for someone? There was a strained look in his eyes as he glanced at a photo, previously hidden behind the desk. It was a lady, at least half his age, from what Andrew could tell.

But Andrew shook his head and quietly moved down the hall and found his door, gripping his key a bit too tightly as he walked in and shut it. 'Really need to stop peeping in on other people's business...' a mutter escaped his lips before he stepped further into the room. A flick of the lightswitch revealed the brown wooden walls and a normal green carpet underneath.

It was a fairly unimpressive room with only the most basic necessities-- bed, a single chair, a small TV, an empty dresser and fridge. Not very surprising considering how cheap it was to stay for the night, but to the boy's mind it was cozy enough, and perfect after the day it took to get here.

With that resolve he kicked off his shoes and flopped on the bed with a resounding 'oomph'. He pushed against the mattress, getting a feel for it before allowing himself to fully relax. Glasses came off and were set to the side as he allowed himself to yawn. It was fairly late, and considering the lack of anything to do proper what with his Pokemon at the center and a lack of interest in the TV Andrew quickly decided it was time for bed.

He went through the normal rituals, spare clothes set aside from his backpack along with everything else he'd need for the bathroom. It was not long after he came out fresh and in his PJs that his body met the bed. This was a pretty nice town, he thought, as he pondered the plan for tomorrow. The things he had heard and seen since coming had gone to the farthest back of his mind, the young lad dozing off without a care.

But it wasn't a peaceful sleep. He dreamt of somewhere cold and dark, a dangerous, foreboding presence threatening to crush him, pull him deeper, consume him. He awoke covered in sweat, a hand moving up to his head and rubbing between his eyes as he looked up at the black ceiling. It was still dark. It had only been a few hours since he first went to sleep. "Mrg... nightmares..." he mumbled tiredly to himself.

Even now he was beginning to doze off again. His eyes felt heavy, he had found a comfy position on the rather firm bed and didn't want to move lest he ruin it. It was when he shut his eyes that he heard it. A noise, distant yet loud. A part of Andrew wanted to ignore it, but it was a persistent sound.

"Who's out there at this hour..." Andrew yawned, sitting up semi-reluctantly. He scratched his head as he listened. The noise was coming from the hall outside. 'The manager? What's he doing...?' he considered, listening on. The noise was... too strange to be regular footsteps. Too

strange to be anything he could recognize period. That got his attention, and he felt significantly less tired as he sneaked towards the door, intent on getting a look.

The noise was a bit louder. Whatever it was, it was definitely close to his door. Would he chance opening it? Should he? Despite looking through the peephole he saw nothing on the other side but wall. Without him even knowing he began to sweat, wondering what was out there, what was waiting for him.

His curiosity proved his undoing as he opened the door and looked out into the hall. He looked to one side, seeing only closed doors and the wall at the other end. He gave a thoughtful hum; of all the things he expected, 'nothing' was certainly near the bottom. He sighed and took a look down the hall towards the entrance.

Or, he would have, if something were not blocking the way, obscuring his vision. A purple wall that, upon closer examination, had a writhing mass of tentacles on its head and a set of dark black eyes with an odd red beak twisted into a grin.

It took Andrew a few seconds of staring to process things. To process just what exactly he was seeing, as well as the fact that it was right in front of him. He stumbled back with a startled yell, tripping over his feet and falling to the floor, leaving the door open wide. "U-urgh...!"

The Malamar, for there was no question what the thing that now stood in his doorway was, watched him with cold yellow eyes, its tentacle-like 'feet' sliding along the floor. It smirked at him and narrowed its eyes, watching him in amusement as he floundered on the floor.

"N-no... get back! Get back!" Andrew cried, recalling all that he had heard about the Malamar in this town. He thought for a moment about getting his Pokemon, but cursed mentally in anguish when he remembered he had left them in the center.

There was no other option left. It was blocking the doorway, he had nowhere to run. He opened his mouth to yell.

But no sound came out. He sat on the ground frozen. He simply stared at the Pokemon before him, who only smirked condescendingly, knowingly, calmly approaching. He let it approach, the will to run or do anything completely gone, his eyes empty and glassy looking as he looked at the Malamar.

"Well." The dark squid-like creature spoke. The yellow markings on its body glowed in a deep light in the darkness of the room. "Well. Well. Well." It repeated as it looked the young man over. Its voice was deep, yet distinctly feminine. He was a scrawny one, even for a human. Weak, cowardly, pathetic. Under her hypnosis she knew all about him, all she needed to, his mind was hers, without so much as a struggle.

“Stand.” She commanded. Andrew lifted himself up off the ground. “Straighten up.” He did so, shoulders and body entirely stiff. She smiled in sadistic glee. A tentacle cupped Andrew’s chin, turning his head this way and that, he made no effort to resist as she toyed with his body. “A shame, you were certainly not who I wanted, but it is me who is at fault. My pride let me become careless,” she sighed wistfully, before chuckling. “Come, human. Such a lucky one, you are...”

She turned, spinning in place to face the door. She looked back towards the human, still entirely trapped in her power and command, grinning before marching out the door. He had made enough noise, she was sure that someone would investigate soon.

They would both be gone by then. The Malamar and Human duo snuck their way out of the inn, and through alleys and buildings until they reached the edge of town where paved pathways ended and thick woods began. It was pitch dark outside, the forest an inky black passed the trees on the border. Of course, the Malamar could see fine, and even if she couldn’t, she knew the way by heart.

With a glance back to the human she sneered. “Come, it’s not too far” she encouraged mockingly as she led him through the bushes and trees. It was chilly, but the Pokemon of course did not show any concern for the man’s condition. It wasn’t like he could particularly protest. Such it was that Andrew was forced to walk barefooted through the forest, eyes fixated on the glowing yellow spots of the Malamar’s body.

They reached a cave and silently entered. The rocks below weren’t any more inviting to the poor man’s feet than the grass before it. Still he said nothing, following silently behind the Malamar. Eyes unfocused as if he were sleepwalking.

If he could control himself, if he could look around the cave he was in, he would surely be stunned by what he could see. It was a vast cave that seemed to go fairly deep, as he walked onward for a least several minutes without seeing any end in sight, the exit only getting farther and farther from his reach behind him.

What was more concerning, however, were the many eyes and yellow spots around him, watching and tracking him, a cold eeriness in the air. No person would willingly remain after seeing what Andrew ‘saw’. The sheer number of Malamar in this one cave. The people back in the Pokemon Center had surely underestimated the problem. And there was no doubt now, that Andrew had become the latest victim of whatever these Malamar were doing to that town.

The Malamar approached, following and circling around him and the one leading him further into the cave. They all sneered and snickered, anticipation running through the many bodies there. They all stopped, then, when they finally reached what appeared to be a dead end. An altar of some kind sat in the middle of the room, and Andrew had no choice but to approach and stand in the center as his captor commanded him so.

“Human, if only you knew how lucky you were...” the Malamar whispered, smirking as it circled around him. “If only, if only.” She sang cruelly, a tentacle caressing Andrew’s face.

Andrew did not respond. He could not. His mind was empty as if he were in a dream.

The Malamar grinned. “You stand in our home, ready to receive our gift to you.” Her tentacles moved to remove the human’s clothes. “You’ll be free from your weak, frail, pathetic body soon, and then you will understand everything.” He had begun to pant, gasping as his body felt hot, even in the cold, drafty air within the cave.

The Malamars all circled around the young entranced man, their bodies glowing in unison, bathing him in their light. “Forfeit all that made you human and become something superior, human!” She commanded, and he listened.

There was a pressure in his chest, a force pushing out from his torso. His body twitched involuntarily as his scrawny body seemed to inflate like a balloon. The features on his chest, blemishes and nipples alike shrank and faded away leaving smooth skin. His slim build became rounder and less defined as bones shifted and shrank within him, leaving the front of his body looking... unnatural.

It began to tint, pale pink skin becoming a deathly blue all over his featureless chest and belly, circling and staining his back in a similar color like someone spilled paint on him, wrapping around in white-ish blue.

The color spread up his shoulders and traveled into his arms. He involuntarily rolled his shoulders, small gasps and groans of discomfort escaping his lips as he felt the bones in his limbs weakening, cracking, disappearing into alien mass. It was, perhaps, a mercy that the hypnosis remained in place, for if he could feel this it would truly be torture, of the mind and body.

The blue spread down his arms, thickening and stretching them, until it reached his elbows. The length of his forearms stiffened as the joints further up his arms had vanished almost completely. He whimpered and moaned as his arms hung limp, the Malamar surrounding him grabbing his hands and lifting them up for all to see as the transformation took hold of what remained. They all watched in twisted fascination and glee as his wrists flattened and fattened with the loss of bone structure, fingers twitching as if a part of him still wanted to fight, before the mass of his now pale blue hands spread and swallowed them up until each individual digit was completely gone, leaving both of arms as nothing but featureless blue tendrils that hung limp in the tentacles of the surrounding Malamar.

That seemed to change however as the tip of his tendrils twitched and flailed, a sharp snow white fin pushing outwards from the tip and down about a fourth of the length of each tendril, an almost scythe-like growth on his new ‘arms’. Further up in his ‘shoulders’ the tendril thickened



more, before turning a dark red on the upper section. The Malamar inspected the tendrils, raising and prodding and running their own slimy limbs over the length, appraising them even as his body transformed.

Strong, thick, powerful, they whispered amongst themselves. Surprise, admiration, a bit of confusion, suspicion, all of these emotions circling in the room as the Malamar began to stir. Regardless they powered on. This had only made them more curious as to see the final result. All eyes were on Andrew, eager to see him become one of them now, for that was no doubt what was becoming of him. The dark secret of the Malamar's cave, their invasion of the town and kidnapping of its population.

It was a shame Andrew would not be able to share it.

His body became thicker, larger. It had become hard for him to stand as his hips seemed to melt, bones cracking and crunching as his bottom and groin melted into the mass that was his smooth, featureless torso. He found himself falling over of his own volition as his legs could no longer support the shifted gravity of his body. He would have met the cold, hard rock floor if the Malamar had not caught him and held him up to stand. This was not in their kindness, of course. They were rough with him as they forced him off the ground, legs dangling uselessly underneath him.

The bottom of his torso pushed downwards, stretching and elongating while his legs were pushed to the side. They hung awkwardly from his body unchanged as the width of his body slimmed down until the bottom ended at a smooth point. His thicker, boneless body limp in the creatures' grasp. He was a bit larger than the Malamar surrounding him, a fact that they had also noticed.

It was then that his previously untouched legs started shifting. The contrast between his human legs and alien body slowly dissolved as a white color began to spread over his thighs and up to his knees, continuing down to his feet and toes until there was no piece left their original skin color. His toes curled and twitched as they lost their texture and shape, nails disappearing as each digit shrank away, his foot flattening, ends sharpening into a floppy tip while the length of each leg shortened. The texture of his legs was unlike the smooth, sleekness of his body or tendrils. Instead they became more like the similarly colored fins on his arms, attached to the lower part of his torso.

He groaned and coughed, his voice deepening, becoming richer. The Malamar all turned their attention to his head, still disgustingly human on his better, almost perfect body. The skin on his neck turned a rich purple that began to spread upward while his neck thickened and fattened, shrinking downwards, skin becoming softer yet rougher, the lack of bones or definition causing his head to struggle to remain upright. Once the purple reached his chin his jaw went numb, the structure of his skull beginning to rearrange. His chin and cheek bones dissolved, merging

seamlessly until there was no way to determine where his head started above the pale blue coloration of the rest of his body, providing a contrast.

His mouth hung open as he grunted and squirmed, the Malamar prodding and shifting his head to watch the changes in morbid curiosity. His nose shrank, melding into purple, squishy flesh leaving no trace of them, not even nostrils, upon the purple surface. His lips cracked and chapped before shriveling and disappearing into the purple as well. His teeth were visible as they began shifting, growing and merging into solid masses as they pushed outward, becoming a deep red color similar to his shoulders. His beak had started to form, round with sharpened, triangular edges pushing out into the center of his face.

He gasped and shuddered, his face going blank as the whites of his eyes turned black, normal brown eyes becoming a pure yellow, his pupils small and cold. His eyes widened as they became rounder and bigger, adjusting position on his face so that they now sat on either side of his beak. Once they had finished changing he squinted, his eyes flickering with life.

But the changes were not finished yet. Their hold on him got stronger as they prodded at his mind more forcefully to keep him down. His hair fell away in clumps, ears receding and disappearing without a trace underneath purple skin much like his nose did as several bumps formed atop his head. The bumps grew longer, pushing outwards more and more, wriggling atop his head as feeling and life filled each one individually. Their undersides turned a more teal color as the bumps pushed outwards into slimmer points. The tentacles on his head stuck upwards as they finished growing in.

A Malamar, the one who had originally brought him here, cupped his face with her tentacles. She stared at the new Malamar, larger and bulkier than her, but she noted he was not yet complete as she looked over his pale blue body. "You are a Malamar." She commanded as fact. She saw Andrew's face twitch with recognition, protest, the stress of his new body pushing against the hypnosis.

"You are one of us. You have always been. Your humanity is meaningless, memories nothing in our scheme." She commanded again. He opened his mouth and groaned. His voice was deep, completely unlike his human one. The front and back of his torso began to turn more purple as opposed to the pale blue of his sides.

"Forget your past. It was but a shell, an egg, holding back the true you, the being more powerful than the old you could ever hope to be!" She snarled, grinning as Andrew's eyes seemed to fill with life, a familiar glint in his eyes, one that reminded her of herself and all the others. Two yellow spots appeared, both on his front and back in a pair.

"You are a Malamar. Loyal to our clan only. The humans are nothing but prey, but creatures waiting to be free!" She stared right into his eyes. "Abandon the weakness of your old mind, and

let the one that should have always been take hold.” Another pair of yellow spots, glowing just as powerfully as the spots on all the others, formed on both sides of his body.

“Grrnnn.” Andrew grunted, hissing, fighting. She smirked with pride as he was beginning to edge into his new form all on his own. It would only take a bit more prodding.

“You are strong, capable, cunning. Perhaps even greater than those around us. You will be of use to us, you will be better. You will be important.” She cooed. He shuddered and shook. More yellow spots.

“You are a Malamar. It has always been, and always will be.” She stated as fact. A tendril rested on one of her own. She smirked at him, as yellow stripes formed on his body. He smirked back.

“Yes, I suppose I am.” Andrew, or rather, the Malamar that had taken Andrew’s place chuckled darkly. The others moved away, giving him space. He looked across all the others of his kind, looking over most of them, his impressive physique much greater than all these others.

They watched him in eagerness and perhaps, no, he could feel it, apprehension. His mind was vast, already putting several plans into motion with the knowledge passed into him through these others. He knew that he was greater, stronger than them, and they knew it too. But they could do little to hide their excitement. It was a good fear. The fear brought by respect.

“Well now, what are you all standing around for? I loathe all this staring and gawking. The night is still young, and we have work to be done.” He chided dismissively. The numerous Malamar murmured and disbanded, yet many eyes were still upon him as he moved.

Such inefficiency, he thought. They were bringing and converting too few humans. It paid to be careful, they thought, but it was a waste of their power. Still, he could afford to play along with these drivelous games if only for a little while as he prepared his own plans.

They’d all know, soon enough, who they should listen to. He stood at the cave’s entrance and looked towards the direction of the town. Something greater than anyone could imagine would descend upon them all soon enough. All those humans would be free of their bindings and join his so-called ‘family’.

But why stop there? Oh, why stop there, the Malamar thought.

Yes, something great would come. And all because of one human who decided to open his door at night.

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Many days had passed. The town had forgotten, or for the most part had not even been aware, of the human name Andrew who had come, stayed for half a night, and disappeared leaving his bags and Pokemon behind. The only ones who perhaps showed even the slightest concern were the Nurse who had taken his Pokemon and did not have anyone to return them to, and the owner of the town inn, who had investigated a noise at night only to find the door to the boy's room wide open and no one inside.

People had begun to leave. At some point enough was enough, they thought, and packed their bags, leaving their homes and precious heirlooms behind, valuing their well-being far greater than staying for one moment longer.

Those who stayed behind, either out of choice or simply having no choice, wished them luck as they left the town's gates.

They could only hope those who left willingly had truly met safe passage. There was, after all, little way to contact them. That hope prevented them from thinking of the worst, of what may be waiting outside the town's borders.

But the astute or pessimistic knew that it was no longer safe. No longer safe to be outside at night, no longer safe to wander alone even in the day. There were always eyes watching, waiting, yellow lights glowing in the edge of their vision.

They learned to be afraid. They learned to wait and barricade their doors and hope they would not be next.

The sun had set, and a Malamar, flanked by two other smaller members of its kind, stood at the town's gates. He smirked as he approached, calmly and patiently, before a tendril motioned forward.

"Same as always. Don't come back until you grab a fresh one." He commanded. The others wordlessly moved forward, going their own separate ways. The Malamar took a deep breath and sighed wistfully before walking forward himself.

Hopefully his latest catches would be interesting.