

Passion and Prayers

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Rhythmic clacks and soft claps, interrupted every so often by wooden creaks, sounded out as the loyal devotee made his approach. Wind, laden heavy with moisture, forcefully made its presence known. Whistling wails wafted through the gaps in the tiny temple nestled deep in the heart of Petalburg Forest. The surrounding pine trees swayed violently in the fading sunlight while their evergreen needles rustled against one another. Storm clouds, frothing noiselessly with lightning, billowed forth from beyond the horizon.

The Mightyena swallowed hard. Bowl of freshly plucked apricorns in hand he hurriedly advanced upon the altar that served to justify the structure's very existence. With a tunk, he placed his offering to his goddess upon it and prostrated himself before it. Knees upon the floor, he leaned forward and held his black furred arms out before him. His ears tucked against his head fearfully as the forest's ambience faded away. No shrill chirps from the Shroomish bumbling about the forest floor or lilting singsong chirps from the Taillow flying high above were there to console him.

A flash of light flickered through the gaps that served as the windows. Low but piercing rumbles rattled the very land shortly after.

All that remained... was the thunder.

"Lady Raikou, please accept this humble gift," the canine all but stuttered. His clawed fingers scraped along the dusty planks of wood as he timidly curled his fingers against his padded palms. Discarded Spinarak webs, spanning across rafters and dark corners, tugged at their silken anchors while an ominous wind shook the tiny temple. His rumpled tunic, tucked into the waist of his worn and tattered cotton pants, puffed out as wisps of air coiled through his sleeves and exposed fluffy grey neck. Plips and plops sounded out when the first raindrops slapped against the temple's roof. "Vaulted vanguard of the storm. Your displays of power, great and terrible, serve as a warning to us mortals," he reverently spoke aloud. "Forever are we in your debt."

He tilted his head up slightly, nose scuffing against the wooden planks beneath him, and took in the mural carved upon the altar. Lady Raikou featured prominently on it. Her regal feline form, arms spread apart, sternly gazed upon the Mightyena viewing it. That long hair of hers, crackling with electricity, draped across her fuzzy shoulders and flit against her waist. The surrounding forest reeled from Raikou's very presence. Tree limbs blown back as a storm raged at her command. Behind her, lurking amongst the clouds, an angry avian's visage could be seen. Bolts of lightning rained down from his lofty perch and obliterated the furthest reaches of the forest. While frightful, it served to communicate that Lady Raikou had taken it upon herself to offer up a warning when Lord Zapdos provided none.

Rain pounded against the temple. The steady thrum of water slapping against the roof almost drowned out the thunder that accompanied it. Sighing, the canine lifted himself up into a kneeling position and peered worriedly outside. Clouds, shifting between hues equal parts black and purple, blanketed the sky as sheets of rain poured free. "One would think the gods would spare their own houses of worship..." he nervously reassured himself. Steadying his breathing he struggled to make out

the tree line only some paces away. Wavering lines of white, the very air practically replaced with glimmering water droplets, all but obscured the flailing foliage.

The Mightyena tucked his chin against his chest and bowed his head. "Forgive my trespassing, Lady Raikou. But uhh... if it's alright with you, I think I'll wait this one out." Flashes of light, followed by raucous rumbles, answered his inquiry. As did the soft measured steps that sounded out against the creaking floorboards.

"I'll allow it," a sultry feminine voice teased.

Ears splayed apart, the Mightyena jerked his head to the side and fearfully glanced back at his unexpected guest. A low whine rumbled up from his throat as his head whipped back towards the altar and he took to trembling. His tail curled between his exposed soles while his guest's claw tipped toes clacked against the depressions in the well-worn wood. A presence, one that weighed down upon the Mightyena's shoulder with a warm and heavy intensity, knelt down beside him. The fur along his exposed arms and cheeks stood up on end as static electricity nipped at his furred flesh.

Those red eyes of his briefly swung to the sides of their sockets before sinking to the bottoms of his pale yellow sclera. In turn, the pointed black arrows of fur that lined the undersides of the canine's eyes stretched out when his lips pulled flat. "L-lady Raikou..." he stammered out.

"You know..." the female feline trailed off. Thick saber teeth pressed against her lips and chin while she chewed on her thoughts. "I've always preferred how intimate these hand built temples are where function is emphasized over fashion." She ran a white furred fingertip along the warped floor boards. Her clawed digit traced along the subtle dips within the wood. The layer of dust that collected upon it vanished in a hissing puff of smoke as arcs of electricity briefly lashed out at the cooling air. "Even if your footsteps have been the only ones to tread here as of late. Popularity aside, the prayers offered up here are pure and heartfelt. Playing the messenger, a convincing and persuasive one at that, is a thankless job for the most part."

Lady Raikou turned to face her faithful. Lips curled up into a gentle smile, a streak of blue fur running along her muzzle, patterned after a four-pointed star, folded into warm wrinkles of fuzz. "Those few times that I am graced with gratitude..." She hehed. "It would be disingenuous to say hearing that makes it all worthwhile. But I appreciate it all the same." The feline hummed bemusedly when she felt a fluffy mop of a tail brush against her own. Her pale orange eyes swiveled and settled upon the wiry blue bolt of an appendage capped with crackling puffed out fur. "I came to converse with you not at you. You may speak."

Jaws parting, the canine fumbled for any sense of composure. "I. You." His now beet red cheeks puffed out while he blushed furiously.

The Electric-type arched her brows. Black scrunches of fur, stretching from atop her muzzle to the tips of her ears, rolled along her forehead. "Take your time," her velvet voice, laced with subtle hints of sarcasm, teased out.

"F-forgive me." Fingers clenching at his ragged clothing, dirt stained fabric crumpling between his padded digits, he sighed heavily. After a pronounced pause, he spoke. "Where should I even begin?"

"You mortals are allowed some agency in your lives, you know. The consent of a higher power isn't required for each and every action you take." Reaching up, she brushed back long locks of her straightened hair. The electricity coursing throughout it, which sent streaks of humming blue energy undulating along her snowy white locks, snapped at the air when she did so. Her nostrils flared when she pronouncedly exhaled. "Introductions are a safe start."

Teeth biting into his lower lip, the Dark-type quietly nodded. The long black mane of hair, lining the top of his head and stretching down uninterrupted past the neckline of his tunic, ruffled in response. "Marcius. It is a-an honor, Lady Raikou."

"Such flummoxed formalities," the Raikou smirked. "Some deities may demand as such but I do not. You may call me Juniper." Rain continued to pound against the shingled roof. Streams of water poured down past the windows in sloshing torrents as the moisture laden air dipped in temperature. Thunder continued to thoom in the distance.

"May I-" Marcius cut himself off when he felt a palpable pressure exert itself upon his shoulders. "R-right. Sorry. What umm... what brings you here, Juniper? Aside from serving to warn of Lord Zapdos' approach, I mean." He shot the Raikou, her eyes half-lidded, a nervous smile.

Crossing her yellow furred arms across her petite chest, angular black arrows of fuzz cutting along her forearms, Juniper hmphed. "As I all but elaborated upon earlier, I came here to express my gratitude. The masses fear and are in awe of my lord. With his ruinous displays of power he commands their attention and respect at a moment's notice. Be it out of caution, terror, or deference they worship him all the same. The same cannot be said for me. I am acknowledged and little more." Her mane, puffy purple clouds that molded to the contours of her back akin to a cape, deflated as the Raikou's posture sagged.

Edges of his lips curled down, Marcius clenched his fists. He pleaded, begged even, to find the courage within himself to do... well... anything! Brows furrowed, he ashamedly averted his gaze from his goddess. "Pitiful," he mentally whined to himself. He could face her facsimile carved before him but not the real... wait a minute. Ignoring the static coursing through his legs the Mightyena rose to his feet. "I-I just recalled!" Paws pitter patter across the floor Marcius hurried on over to the altar and retrieved his offering. Hands cupped beneath the clay bowl, he timidly came to stand before Juniper. "Hopefully I'm doing this right. I-I've never presented an offering in person before, heh."

Juniper's eyes widened while she took to blinking rapidly. Crackles sounded throughout the air as sparks accumulated upon her cheeks. "...Thank you," the Raikou managed after a palpable pause. Huffing quietly, she extended an arm out towards him. Her cream colored claws came to curl around the leathery shell of one of the colorful apricorns balanced before her. "It's been some time since I've indulged myself like this," she wryly laughed. Juniper held a pointed fingertip against its stem. Smoke wafted up from atop it as her digit, laden with electricity, burned a hole through its protective spherical shell.

Heart pounding in his chest, Marcius bowed his head. Tail wig wagging behind him excitedly his ears flattened against his forehead at the sumptuous sound of her laughter. "Come, sit," Juniper motioned with a pat. Forcing down the lump in his throat with a swallow the Mightyena did as he was

told. Bowl upon his lap, he watched curiously as his goddess procured another fruit. He all but barked in disbelief when she presented one back to him.

“Is the gesture of sharing that alien a concept to you? Take it,” she simply stated after holding her arm aloft for an awkward amount of time.

Marcus proceeded to stammer. His flummoxed fumbling of words tapering off to a whine, he set his bowl beside him and accepted the bright blue apricorn. Red hot embers glowed around the hole drilled into its hard shelled surface. Sloshes could be heard as the fleshy fruit nestled inside slid to and fro.

The Raikou hummed contentedly as she puffed away at the wisps of smoke trailing off of her tasty treat. “I’ve always had a soft spot for apricorns,” she purred in delight. Once more, sparks arced across her cheeks before Juniper turned to face the Mightyena. Brows half-cocked the Electric-type gently knocked her sumptuous snack against his own. A jolt ran through Marcus’ spine when the backs of their fuzzy fingers brushed against one another.

Nodding dutifully, the Mightyena drank of his own offering to his goddess. His cheeks scrunched when the sugary sweetness sloshing between his teeth gave way to a tart and biting aftertaste. Marcus’ ears flattened timidly atop his head when Juniper gasped in delight.

“Delicious! Nothing can ever quite compare to the apricorns of Ecruteak but this is delightful all the same. Again, I thank you.” Juniper tucked her chin against her chest and exhaled. “I’m struggling to recall the last time I shared a moment like this with, well, anyone.” Her lips, pulled flat and taut, came to strain at her white furred cheeks. “Marcus, if I...” The Raikou’s pointed teeth clacked against one another. Her clawed feline fingers scraped along the fruit’s spherical surface. She sighed and straightened out her syntax before continuing. “Why is it that you worship me?”

Stifling a whine, Marcus felt a knotting weight clutching at his chest. “L-lady Raikou... Juniper.” Every word heavily tumbled forth from between his teeth. The sight, the very thought, of his goddess feeling downtrodden made his heart ache. “I... I guess I always thought that. That... Mmph.” Marcus’ fingers curled tightly around his own punctured apricorn. This was far too important a task to shy away from for fear of failure. Jaws parted, the Mightyena fumbled ever forward. “Whenever I’d pass by your temple, whenever I was out gathering berries a-and that’s not important why I was out there is it. Anyway, seeing this place alone and untended, it always made me feel... sad. Every time I saw it I would always think that, feel that. That you warn us, protect us, from Lord Zapdos’ spontaneous and violent displays of power and have nothing to show for it was... well. It struck me as shameful.” Marcus tossed up a pitiful shrug. “One day I suppose I got tired of fussing and feeling bad a-and decided to do something about it. If no one else would worship you... then I would.”

The Raikou’s gaze drilled into the dusty planks before her as the moisture laden air settled upon them. In concert with a conveniently timed thoom of thunder she snuffed and casually dragged a hand across her muzzle. “I’ve heard of worse reasons to...” she trailed off and sighed. “There are... are...ungh...” with a sigh, the thunderous feline gave up on her attempts to save face. The thrum of rain running along the roof tapered off to plips and plops. A silent drizzle settled upon Petalburg Forest while Juniper slouched forward and allowed her head to dip low.

“Juniper...” Lips curled down, Marcius wistfully regarded his goddess. He scooped his fuzzy rear closer, pants catching upon splinters in the wood, so as to offer her up his presence. The Dark-Type’s heart practically palpitated when her static laden form leaned into him. Her yellow and black furred shoulders, electric tingles and snaps of static coursing along them, pressed against his own. Swallowing hard Marcius could feel his limbs tremble with uncertainty. “Please don’t be mad, please don’t be mad, please don’t be mad!” he furiously thought to himself as he settled upon a course of action. Inhaling sharply, his heart too numbed to so much as pitter patter against his ribs, he curled an arm around the Raikou. He received a strained exhale in response as Juniper nestled into his uneasy embrace.

Those pointed canine teeth of his sank deep into his lips to stifle a relieved sigh. “That was your sadness... your loneliness I felt from the shrine, wasn’t it?” the canine dared to ask after a time. The dark pallor that blanketed the forest began to ease up. Shades of grey lingered upon the canopy and grassy floor.

“Yes,” Juniper quietly and curtly replied. Sounds of life slowly came rustling back from within the woods. The Taillows were the first to chirp to announce their return. She snuffled yet again as the feline came to rest her head against Marcius’ wiry shoulder and wordlessly returned her worshipper’s embrace. Too shy and awkward to shatter the silence, neither Mightyena nor Raikou parted from one another. They remained that way until the waning light of the sun, forcing its way through the cloud cover, began to dim.

Clearing her throat, the Electric-Type timidly scrunched her shoulders. “Well. That was... pleasant.” Her cheeks sparked furiously when she briefly locked eyes with Marcius. The feline and canine bashfully broke line of sight and stared blankly at the grime laden pews that flanked them.

“I-i-it... yeah.” Marcius’ tail puffed out when he felt Juniper’s clawed fingers gently squeeze at his ribs. His fuzzy cheeks burned brighter than a Cheri berry when the Raikou purred in delight as he reciprocated the gesture.

Nostrils flared, Juniper huffed. “I... suppose we should part. I have places to be, as do you.” With great reluctance she slid free from the wonderful warmth of the canine’s embrace and rose to her feet. Arms crossed about her chest, she rubbed her hands up and down along her forearms. Fleeting blue snaps of static arced between them as she did so.

He nodded. “Better home than here, heh,” Marcius grunted. Hands upon his knees he pushed himself up to a standing position. “N-not that I don’t like being here! With you. I. Urf. I just don’t want to get caught out here after sunset with all the Pumpkaboo and Phantumps is all.” Stammering, Marcius barked when he felt himself tugged towards Juniper. Their fluffy forms, both electrically charged from the copious cuddles, magnetically locked together at the shoulders once more.

Juniper’s lips curled up into a stifled smile as her composure faltered. “Understandable,” she acknowledged. Thrumming her fingers along her wrist she dampened the electrical charge flowing throughout them. With a subdued sigh, they separated. “Very well. Before we part though I...” Her puffy purple mane of clouds billowed behind her and betrayed her intentions. Wavering back and forth along her back it forced her long white locks hair to excitedly waver behind her. “I would like to bestow upon you a boon.”

Marcus' arms hung limply at his side. Blinking rapidly, taking note of the curious Spinarak that crawled into and then promptly back out one of the many windows lining the wet wooden structure upon seeing who and what resided inside, his mind reeled at the thought. "A boon? M-me? L-lady Raikou I'm not worthy!"

She smirked. "Denying a deity is ill-advised, Marcus." Her clawed toes, each digit lined with thick cream colored nails, scratched against the floor as she padded towards him. Breathing in deeply she proceeded to drag out her exhale. Juniper's hands eased forward and gently clasped the Mightyena's own between them. "Marcus... you have granted me a great many gifts for which I am forever thankful. Please, allow me to reciprocate." Tail arcing behind her, she allowed a warm wide sabertoothed smile to crease her muzzle.

Water noisily dripped and dropped from gaps in the shingles and into the temple's interior. Liquid collected into puddles upon spots of previously warped wood as shadows encroached on the retreating light. Hand in hand, the Mightyena's tail swished side to side behind him. Strong, Majestic, Awe-Inspiring, Beautiful; Such were the words that came to mind when he once thought of his goddess. Now though, as he peered into Juniper's enrapturing orange eyes and a welling warmth filled his cheeks, he could think of little other than how, well, cute she was! "O-okay," he answered. With a squeeze of his fingers he gingerly pulled her closer.

"A portion of my power to remember me by. Let it fill you with might unmatched so that your every stride and strike may hit as hard and fast as thunder itself! I trust you to wield it wisely." Sparks crackled furiously off her feline face as she leaned in towards him. Marcus' facial fuzz puffed out as arcs of energy bounced harmlessly between them. Eyes half-lidded, Juniper pressed her lips against his own. The sensation of the canine's damp, warm, leathery flesh macking and mwahing at her sent shudders down the Raikou's spine. As did the wonderfully warm weight of his trembling arms curling around her arching back.

"Mmmff. Just... just one kiss," Juniper thought to herself. Fluid waves of energy that tickled at her lips flowed out from the Raikou and into the Mightyena. She paid little heed to the violent jolts of electricity lashing out around the kissy couple. "It did just rain after all," she dismissively told herself as pews crumbled and scorch marks snaked along the wooden planks beneath their feet. Eyes closed, she had long since taken to breathing through her nose. "One very long and very passionate kiss at that," she conveniently clarified for herself.

Marcus went knock kneed as Juniper anted up the affection. Arceus above, here he was getting fresh with the goddess of thunder herself! He had always desired nothing more than to please Lady Raikou but... but this was never what he had in mind! The compassionate canine whined when he felt those feline toes twiddle atop his own as Juniper possessively pulled him closer and closer. N-not that he was complaining. A commanding and all-consuming warmth, which threatened to set his cheeks ablaze, seeped out from where their lips locked to all throughout his body. His arms weighed down heavily upon his shoulders as the stringy muscle within them bloated in size and density. With a squeeze of his limbs his now bulging biceps enthusiastically embraced the feline and pressed her firmly into his ever inflating pectorals.

"A-am I doing this right?" the canine feverishly thought to himself when he his crumpled clothes contorted tightly to his now hulking frame. Still she macked and mwahed and still he swelled. "Ju-" his

attempt to inquire into the nature of this boon to be bestowed upon him was silenced with another smooch. The floorboards creaked under the weight of his thickening feet. "J-juni-" he said before being condoned with kitty kisses. A painful pressure clutched at his waist and neck as his clothing constricted painfully tight at his thickening furry form. His tunic, the seams running along its sleeves loudly ripping apart, rose up along his waistline to reveal a hardening set of abdominals. In concert, the Mightyena's form fitting pants struggled to stretch down past his colossal knees. Sausage sized fingers curled around her shoulders, Marcius attempted to gently ease away the Raikou. "Juniper, please!" he pleadingly barked as a hot and heavy weight settled in his gut.

"Right! Yes. Of course." Clenched hand brought up against her muzzle, Juniper loudly ahemed as she sheepishly composed herself. With a flick of her wrist she tossed her crackling white hair behind her shoulders and physically took to patting down the shy and shameful sparks popping noisily off of her fuzzy form. "You'll have to forgive my umm... my... enthusiasm," she nervously rasped in reply.

"No! It's not that I... it was nice," Marcius reassured her with a blush. "Just that umm. Not that I want to come off as ungrateful or anything but can I maybe have a different boon?" Wincing, the Mightyena's pointed ears came to brush against the rafters while he took to panting. His body, audibly groaning as it swelled and clothed in little more than tatters, lurched up and out in size and stature to try and contain the power of the gods now dwelling within him.

Juniper's eyes went wide as splinters and wood chips rained down from above as Marcius' head all but punctured the roof. Electricity furiously crackled and discharged off the Raikou's petite frame when the massive and increasingly toned Mightyena flopped back onto his ample ass with a rattling thoom. A burst of stale air, saturated with dust and bits of moss, buffeted the interior of the temple. Loud rrrrrrrrrrips sounded the death knell for the canine's clothing as the very embarrassed Dark-Type swished his tail around his waist and clamped it between his thighs.

The Raikou pressed her palms against her eyes. Teeth clenched and lips pinched shut, a muffled and heaving sigh filtered out through her fuzzy cheeks as Marcius' thickening feet and lengthening legs flanked her and raucously scraped aside entire rows of pews. Juniper shuddered when the crunch of wood, accompanied by a pained bark, heralded the crashing collapse of multiple rafters lining the roof of the structure. Her nostrils flared as a musty cloud of dust wafted up from the debris. "Auuuuuuuuuuuuuurceus almighty. Just. I." Fingers clutching at her forehead, hair pinched between her digits, she forced a breath between her pointed saberteeth. "No. No. No. No... No. No cursing in your own house of worship," she bitterly reminded herself aloud.

"Am I gonna quit swelling soon?" Marcius daintily inquired. Fingers curled and hands pulled up against his chest, his cratering octaves rattled Juniper's very bones. Electricity arced wildly off her feline form as she threatened to spontaneously combust in a smoldering puff of flustered embarrassment.

"Goodness I hope so," Juniper mumbled. She shook her head side to side when her bloated behemoth of a crush accidentally scraped away a wall with a scrunch of his toes. "Suicune and Entei will never let me live this down. How hard is it to screw up a boon, really?! To overdo it even! Fwuh, worse yet I'm probably the only deity there is that's gotten rusty at doling them out. And, AND, falling head over heels for a mortal in the span of an afternoon? Gods, I can only imagine the gossip that'll get passed around the pantheon."

Shoulders scrunched together, the Mightyena's plump pectorals pressed up against his chin as he tried to refrain from blowing apart the exterior walls with so much as a bulge of his biceps. "Umm... y-you really mean that? You... like me?" A series of huffs, mrowls, and mews were offered up by the Raikou in response while she choked on her words.

"I... Maybe." She rubbed a hand up and down along an arm. Static noisily popped against her palm when she did so. Eyes swiveling in her sockets, Juniper's shoulders slouched when she caught a glance of Marcius' ears folding down sadly. "Okay yes. I do. I do... find you... Mmph." The Electric-Type tossed her head back and groaned. "I can't possibly hide this from them. Mmff. No. Can't hide this, won't hide this." Stamping a foot against the creaking floorboards, a pale blue glow overtook Juniper's body, prompting her fur to stand on end, as a primordial power welled within her. "I, Lady Raikou, goddess of thunder do solemnly inquire if... if... you might happen to be single and maybe see if you would want to spend some more time together getting to know each other," she shyly tapered off into a mewl as she took to tapping her fingers together.

Toothy smile curled upon his muzzle, Marcius took to wagging his tail excitedly. He oopsed when the crunch of timber proceeded his show of affection. The Mightyena's lips pulled flat as the entrance to the temple collapsed upon his broad back. Ruined chunks of lumber tunked and tonked against his dense musculature before whapping noisily against the damp and grassy ground. Marcius whined and bowed his head in apology.

"The... the offer still stands," Juniper replied. Head turned away and arms crossed about her chest, her puffed out cheeks began to smoke as electricity crackled wildly along them.