

Chapter 22: Serenity.

Screeching across the ground are Ada's heels, wobbling.

"Whoa!" She falls down, groaning.

Standing beside is Justin, chuckling. He puts his hand in his pocket, holding the other out.

"Clumsy much?" He grins.

Ada frowns before rolling her eyes, grabbing his hand. "At least I got here first, Mister." Stands.

"Who says I was last, Missy?" Justin looks to the side, Ramon and Mesmeren catching up. Ramon reaches the two before Mesmeren does, both panting. Mesmeren puts her hands onto her knees: Exhaling, grunting even. "Looks like you're the rotten egg, Mesmeren."

The Drowzee eyes up, blinking. "H-Huh?" She lowers her lips, eyes descending into misery. "I-Is that what you...think of me?" Whimpers.

"What? No no!" Justin shakes his head and hands. "It's like a joke you make when you race against someone and they come last."

Mesmeren sniffles, holding her hands together, pressing them against her. "R-Really?"

"Yeah, man. I don't *literally* think you're a rotten egg: That's just plain rude if I did."

"Oh..." Mesmeren twirls her finger around her ear, looking up. "Sorry for not getting it..."

Justin lifts his thumb. "You're good."

Ada turns towards the village ahead, her hands on her hips. "With that said, we're here at Serenity, everyone!"

Several buildings and homes spread on the right and left side: Trees surrounding them like a barrier, either beside them or behind. Civilians and Nativus hang around the shops here along with other parts of the village. There's also a road ahead that splits into two, a fountain being in the middle: Having a statue of a man holding his stick, posing in a heroic manner.

"And how would you know that?" Justin asks the girl.

Ada casually points to the sign beside her: '*Serenity: The Peace Within*'.

Justin scratches the back of his head, chuckling. "My bad for not noticing."

The group sighs in relief, moving forward. Everyone gazes at the houses: The clean windows, the smooth texture on its exteriors, and the many Flying types resting on top of the roofs. Some are even relaxing near the fountain, socializing with the local villagers here, including the Pokémon: Intellicates or Nativus.

Ada smiles, admiring the blue sky free of terrorizing clouds. “Justin, doesn’t this remind you of Synchronic Village?” Her hands slip in her pockets. “With the beautiful sky giving us this gorgeous view of Serenity, seeing how alive it is.”

“Yeah. One thing this village is missing though is our friends visiting us,” Justin points out.

Ada nods. “True.” She sighs, staring down. “If I was able to pay a single buck to revive Synchronic, I would.”

Justin sighs along. “Same, fam.” Smiles. “I still remember the time we pranked Merlin by dropping water balloons on his head.” Justin points at one of the houses, an Intellicate Pidgley sleeping on top. “We were sitting on houses like those.”

Ada’s finger wiggles. “Oh no no. That was you and X. You tried to shift the blame on me when Merlin found out about it.”

“Did I?” Justin smirks.

The girl looks at the boy, squinting. “Don’t act like you have amnesia now.”

“U-Um excuse me,” Mesmeren interrupts. “Who’s X and Merlin?”

“They’re childhood friends of ours. X is just as childish as Justin while Merlin is the bookworm of the group.”

“Group?” The Drowzee tilts her head.

Justin sets his hands behind his head. “Yeah. There’s like four we’ve befriended, with two of them being Intellicates.”

“I see...” Mesmeren pokes her lips. “So what happened to them? Why aren’t they with you?”

“Well...It started with Merlin providing us news about the Prospective Institute and...” Justin explains the rest of the Synchronic incident, the tapir looking down.

“Oh...I-I’m sorry for asking. I...” The Drowzee looks away, stroking her arm. The group stops, taking their attention towards her.

"It's fine. You were curious about our friends." Justin smiles. "Hopefully, we'll be able to find them soon."

Mesmeren slowly lifts her lips. "I-I hope so, too."

Silence is in the air for a brief moment: The chatter, the footsteps, and the wind are the only things being heard from the village. The Drowzee then breaks it. "So, um, this is why you two are heading to Serenity?"

"Yes," Ada says, walking forward along with the others. "We're looking for a man named Forest, who most likely knows about them by now."

"Forest?"

Justin shrugs. "Some guy that Clinton knows."

Mesmeren blinks. "Oh..."

"We hope after finding him, he can lead us to our friends and Justin's mother," Ada mentions. "Unfortunately, I cannot say the same for my father. I...hope he's okay." Trembles. "Just the thought of him being gone is..." She shakes her head. "I'd rather not think about it. All I hope is that Justin and I find our friends and family. Eventually."

"I see."

Silence fills the air once again, the group keeping their eyes on the path. Then Mesmeren continues speaking. "So what about Ramon?" She turns towards the Zorua. Ramon blinks before shrugging, staring off.

"They're helping me recover my memories," the fox says.

"Memories?"

"Yep." Justin scratches the side of his head. "And now to explain that to ya, Ramon said he woke up in the Prospective Institute by himself and..." Justin spills the beans on Ramon's amnesia.

The Drowzee widens her eyes. "Wh-Whoa!" She caresses her arm.

"Crazy, right? The only thing he can remember is his name despite all of that." The boy's head tilts.

"I see...That explains why you're helping him."

"You got that right, dude. Or dudette." Justin shrugs.

Mesmeren blushes. "I-I'd rather be called Mesmeren to keep things simple..."

"Justin rarely calls people by their names. He always says 'dude', 'man', or 'fam'. That's his thing," Ada mentions.

"O-Oh."

Justin is about to say something, lifting his hand up, but decides to postpone.

As the four continue, Mesmeren stares at them, poking her fingers together. *These three all have their own goals in mind. Meanwhile, I'm just...tagging along. With no goal of my own...* She sighs, her lips lowering, gazing off to the side.

"Is something wrong?" Ramon asks the Drowzee while Ada spots a familiar yellow statue nearby, running ahead.

Mesmeren shakes her head. "It's nothing."

Ada touches the statue as Ramon walks close to the tapir. "Are you sure?"

Mesmeren nods, walking forward. Ramon gazes at her for a brief moment, perplexion slithering throughout. He follows.

Ada's eyes glow blue, the statue vibrating. Once the glow fades, two individuals walk towards the group. The first is an elderly man with tan skin and blue clothing, carrying a brown cane. The second being a bipedal creature that's covered in white fur, two tufts growing on both his back and chest: Abomasnow. Two scars are on the Pokémon's eyes, and plenty more on his chest.

The group backs away.

"Whoa now. We're not asking for any trouble," Justin says, his hands lifting.

The elder chuckles. "Trouble? I only stopped by to introduce myself. Doesn't look like you're from around here," he replies, his hands resting on his cane.

"Oh." Justin snaps his fingers, showing the elder his finger guns. "Then you'd be right, sir."

Ada squints at the boy. "Did you have to act like a hotshot?"

The elderly man chuckles once more. "It's alright. I enjoy a great sense of humor here and there." Setting his hand behind his back, the man nods. "The name's Forest, and this is my

companion, Mokuri. I'm the chief of this village here, so be my guest to explore it as much as you like."

The trio jumps at the word 'Forest', all looking at each other. Mokuri raises his brow at them, unsure of their motives. "Did I say something wrong?" Forest asks.

The three shake their heads. "Nah, you're good, Chief," Justin responds.

"The name's Ada. To my right is Justin, left's Ramon, and behind me is Mesmeren." Ada moves out of the way, the Drowzee yelping at her exposure and hiding behind Ramon despite her size. Ada poker faces at the tapir's action. "...Anyway, we're here to—"

"Find Justin and Ada's friends," Ramon says.

The teen glances at him, folding her arms. "Wow, Ramon. Didn't expect you of all people to cut me off."

The Zorua lowers his ears and whimpers. "M-My apologies."

Forest tilts his head. "Justin and Ada's friends???"

Justin walks close to the elder. "Yeah. And a friend of yours told us that they're with you, right?"

"A friend of mine? How would you know that? And what is this friend of mine's name? And how would *you* know that *I* know your friends?"

"...Clinton," Justin states bluntly. "We met him over at Majestic City to the north. Also he told me that two of my friends came here to see you, including my mother who's with them."

Forest taps his head with his cane. "What's your mother's name?"

"Delia Phoenix."

Forest blinks. "Ah, I see!" Smirks. "That's how you know about me. If only the classic fella told me that I'd have visitors, then I would've expected your arrival. Hah!" He shakes his head. "This is the second time he has done that to me."

Justin scratches the back of his head. "Even you call him classic?"

Forest leans against his cane. "It's classy and less offensive than old. Could you blame me?"

"No, I guess?" The boy shrugs.

The elderly man nods. "So you must be Delia Phoenix's son, then."

"I just confirmed that not too long ago, fam."

"Hmm..." Forest caresses his short, gray beard, squinting at the boy. He taps on the ground, humming in silence.

"So...are you going to tell me where she's at?"

The elder raises his finger and points at Justin. "Yes: She left to go see Glory Pride City, along with four individuals that were with her."

Glory Pride City!? both Ramon and Nomar thought, Ramon's eyes widening.

"What the—" Justin sighs, gripping his fist. "Just when I thought I was close to finding her, man..."

Ada's hand rests on Justin's shoulder. "I thought the same, too..."

Ramon blinks for a moment before his brow lifts. "Wait, *four*?" His head tilts. "I thought two of Justin and Ada's friends came here...Who's the other two?"

The teens squint at each other. "...Yeeaah, good question," they say.

Forest strokes his beard again. "I believe they were a Buizel and Flareon, with the latter wearing a necklace."

"X and Ethan!" Ada says.

"You know those two as well?"

Justin nods. "Yeah, they're also our friends."

"I see, then." Forest slams his fist onto his hand. "To recap: Justin's related to Delia and you two know those people, meaning you most likely know—"

"Merlin and Serene? Yes, they do," Ramon concludes. He soon gasps, lowering his ears. "Sorry for the interruption!"

"Ah, it's fine. Makes this understanding go by quickly, really." Forest turns around. "Although, aren't you curious about *why* Delia left?"

Justin caresses his chin before nodding. "Yeah, actually."

"I've told her and your friends about the history of Wizlore. Since then, she wanted to go see the statue of your ancestor there."

Justin raises his brow. "My what?"

"Your ancestor—" Forest looks behind him. "Pauline Phoenix: One of the two historical figures who discovered Magic type in humans, changing the world of Pokémon and ending a deadly 12 year long war."

The teens look at Forest with blank expressions before jumping back. "SHE DID WHAT!?" they yell, Mesmeren and Ramon covering their ears.

"S-So loud..." The Drowzee whimpers.

Forest snickers. "Your mother reacted that way too, Justin. Along with your friends." He tilts his cane forward. "If you want to learn more about it, then I suggest you follow me. All Wizlorians should learn about it, in all honesty." He and Mokuri walk forward, the group looking at each other in uncertainty.

"A 12 year long war...?" Ada says, her hand on her chin.

"Sounds like something you tried to explain to Ramon the other day, but couldn't remember what it was then," Justin states, his hand against his chin as well. "I didn't know it...had something to do with my ancestor, though."

"Yeah..."

"Are you four coming?" Forest asks, catching their attention.

Everyone looks at each other once again before nodding. "We are," Ada says.

Soon, they wander around the village of Serenity, following the elder and his companion Nativu. "First, I'll have to go check on my students," Forest says.

"Students?" the group says, looking at each other.

A large building to the left outshines the other buildings: Containing a brown double door with several windows adjacent from one another. The brick walls spreading throughout are colored red, an ounce of brown applying to them. Everyone walks towards it.

As they walk, Ramon looks at an entrance leading to a forest up ahead. The place looks darker than Avalon Forest, as if less of a life is present there. A couple of men wearing blue clothing patrol the entrance, glaring around the forest. The Zorua glances, suspicion casting onto him like a spell.

"We're here," Forest says. He pushes the doors open, walking inside along with everyone else.

The inside is littered with gym environments: Training equipment such as punching bags and weightlifters lying on both sides, the clean and solid floor occupied by two brown benches opposite of each other. Few people are training each other: Some striking the bags, others withstanding push-ups.

"Welcome to my dojo, everyone," Forest says, gazing ahead at a large blue carpet in the middle.

"Yo, this place is huge," Justin says, looking around.

"Agreed," Ramon follows, knowing how much bigger the place is to him.

Mesmeren clings to the Zorua, eyeing every corner. "There's quite a lot of people tr-training here," she says, poking her fingers together.

The fox eyes the tapir up, overwhelmed. "U-Um, mind giving me some space, please?"

"Hmm?" Mesmeren blinks for a moment before yelping, moving back. "Eek! Sorry!" She shakes her head, stroking her arm.

After soaking in the dojo, the group eyes ahead at two people fighting: One's a human while the other is a bipedal, bunny creature with pink eyes and brown fur. The Lopunny ducks the girl's fist, pushing her away afterwards. The teen slides across the carpet, clenching her fist before rushing forward.

The rabbit smirks and jumps over her, twirling around. While this happens, a bipedal chicken creature with a V-shaped crest on his head and red skin gazes at the fight, sitting on the bench. His arms rest on his knees: The Blaziken glancing, stroking his hands. Other people are sitting behind him, watching with anticipation.

The Lopunny lands on the ground, tripping the girl. The girl falls, grunting. As she attempts to get up, something pins her down: The Lopunny's foot. The teen sighs, a man in a black and white shirt blowing his whistle afterwards.

He walks towards the Lopunny. "The winner is Courtney!" he shouts, the crowd clapping and cheering.

Ada flinches from the bunny's flexibility, folding her arms. "That was impressive," she says, watching the Pokémon flipping herself backwards.

Courtney aids the teen, smiling. "You did amazingly in that fight. So don't beat yourself over the loss," she says without hesitation.

"Thanks! You did fantastic as well, Tombun!" the girl says.

Courtney gives her a thumbs up before turning towards the Blaziken, who's clapping while standing. He smiles, the bunny embracing the warm weather throughout her. She walks towards him, moving her arm forward. The Blaziken moves his', fistbumping the rabbit.

"I'm getting *one* step closer to the final round, Sylock," Courtney says, enthusiastic. "I'm honestly stoked for this, ya know?"

Sylock moves his hands in place. "*I do, in fact.*" He smiles once more. "*You've been training for days over this. You deserve the medal at the end.*"

"We both deserve it, Sy. You've been working as hard as I was. Probably a little too hard, though." Courtney snickers.

The Blaziken huffs, squinting at her before pointing at himself. "*I didn't see that guy when I was using High Jump Kick on the punching bag, okay?*"

"Suuure you didn't." Courtney pokes Sylock's arm, chuckling some more.

"*Besides, we both know that one of us is going home with that medal.*"

"And that person will be *me*." The Lopunny winks.

Sylock smirks. "*See you in the final round, then.*"

"Courtney. Sylock," Forest says, catching the two's attention. He and the group walk towards them. "How's my two students doing?"

Courtney and Sylock bow down. "We're doing wonderful, sir. After beating this match, I feel myself closer to the 15th round," Courtney elaborates. Sylock nods.

"I see. I'm proud of you two. Dedicating yourselves to training in this facility, even participating in this little tournament of mine."

"I mean, I gotta get strong eventually, right?" Courtney elbows Sylock, the Blaziken chuckling softly. "Gotta show the world I'm tough."

"*And I, uh—*" Sylock shrugs. "*Just wanted to defend myself more...effectively. That's all.*"

“Ah. It’s always good to have a goal in mind when training. Otherwise, all of your efforts will feel meaningless,” Forest explains, resting his cane onto his shoulder.

Sylock nods. “*By the way Sensei, is the next round our last one?*”

Forest smiles. “Why yes indeed. However—” Forest turns towards the crowd and the other students. “We’ll continue the tournament later tonight! For now, we’ll take our break.”

The crowd cheers, leaving the benches. Courtney looks at the main four, raising her brow. “Oh?” She eyes Forest. “Master and Mokuri, do you know these guys?”

Mesmeren looks away from the Intellicates as Ada and Justin hold their hands out. “The name’s Ada,” the teen replies.

“And I’m Justin. A pleasure meeting ya,” Justin follows. Courtney shakes Ada’s hand as Sylock eyes the boy up and down, glancing. Justin glances back, the Blaziken has yet to shake his hand. “Uh...?” He then feels his hand being shaken by Courtney, glee spreading across her.

“Don’t mind Sylock. He’s usually hesitant to shake hands with strangers,” Courtney explains. Justin forms a peculiar look at the chicken.

“Right...”

“Courtney is my name, by the way. A pleasure meeting the two of y’all.”

Ramon walks forward. “The name’s Ramon and behind me is Mesmeren,” he says, eyeing up the Lopunny.

“Sweet.” Courtney looks at Mesmeren, who covers her face as she looks away. “Uh...is she alright?”

Ramon looks at the Drowzee as well, everyone giving her attention now. Mesmeren stares at the ground for a moment, shrugging. She then turns to the group, forming a flushed look. “Huh!? Why’s everyone looking at me!?” She yelps, her arms quaking. “Di-Did I do s-something wrong!?”

Courtney and Sylock squint at each other, eyebrows raising.

“No. We were just curious about you, that’s all.” The Zorua gets on his hind legs, his paws resting on the Drowzee’s arms, staring into her eyes. “Is something on your mind?”

Mesmeren forms the look of wariness, shaking and squirming. She shakes her head. “I-I’m fine.”

Ramon gazes. "Are...you sure?" Mesmeren nods, her smile crooks. The Zorua sighs, getting on all fours before smiling back. "If you insist."

Ada takes her attention towards Courtney. "Say, you're pretty good during that match earlier."

Courtney snickers. "Thanks."

"I'm impressed by your movements and how flexible you are. Reminds me of myself whenever I get into fights."

"Oh really?" Courtney says, folding her arms while smirking.

"Yes." Ada's hand pins against her chest. "Thanks to my father and Justin, I've managed to gain a lot of fighting techniques over the years."

"And you still lose to me, despite all of that." Justin grins. He then receives a punch to the gut, groaning afterwards. "Oof!"

"Yet, you still let me hit you whenever you make those snarky remarks." Ada waves her hand.

Courtney snickers, Justin covering his stomach. "I thought I'd receive a roundhouse kick." He chuckles.

"Eh. I changed my mind."

"Oh. So next time when I make a sly comment, I'll receive a less painful exp—"

"Next time will be a kick to the face," Ada says plainly.

Justin blinks, partially surprised. "Nevermind."

"I'm *definitely* convinced that you two have a thing for each other," Ramon states, the two staring at him within a flash.

"No. We. Don't!" they yell, their faces glowing red with cherry as Courtney and Forest laugh.

"Well as entertaining as this chat is, we better head over to my house." The elder's cane points at Justin. "This boy and his friends want to learn about his distant ancestor. And I'll provide them with that information."

"His distant ancestor?" Courtney gasps. "Wait, does that mean he's Delia's son!?"

"Yes."

Courtney springs towards Justin, shaking his hand. "Bucko, your mother is a very, VERY awesome gal. I even like her crafting skills, too!"

Justin blinks from the sudden handshake, chuckling. "Well this is the first time I've ever heard someone complimenting her skills."

"Really?" The Lopunny shakes her head, folding her arms. "Now that's a crime against the living, right there."

Forest snickers. "I see that we're all getting along just well." He turns towards the exit. "Come along, now." Forest and Mokuri leave the dojo, the group following suit.

Ramon eyes Mesmeren, the Drowzee staring down at the ground while pressing her fingers together. She sighs softly, the fox lowering his ears.

I'm not sure what's going on with you, Mesmeren. But...I hope that you're doing okay, the Zorua thinks.