

Chapter 32: The Disguise.

The Aquatic War Arc.

Ramon blinks, staring at his paws while outside of the cabin. Roan smiles up at him, his fists beside his face in anticipation. Lycus is with the two, standing besides them. And everyone else looks at them while remaining inside.

“So—” Ramon deadpans. “How exactly *do* I transform into you again?”

Roan forms the same look, tilting his head. “Huh. Good question.” He pokes his face. “I...think it’s more of a conscious decision?”

“What?”

Roan shakes his head. “I mean, those thieving Zoroarks Simon and I faced just...do the transformation. Casting themselves in it...If that makes any sense.”

Ramon’s paw lays on his chin. “How do I execute it, though?”

The Axew shrugs. “No clue.”

The Zoroark sighs heavily, lowering his ears. “Great. If you can’t tell me how to use it, then this whole plan is pointless.”

“Pokémon abilities come from willingly thinking about it to the point of being natural,” Lycus states. “Focus on it: *Believe* that you can use it.”

Ramon glances off to the distance, folding his arms. “...If you say so.”

“Just close your eyes and think about it.” Lycus smiles.

The fox looks at the weasel before nodding, closing his eyes. He takes a deep breath, inhaling whatever air is left to enter his nostrils. He tunes out the heavy rain, entering his inner psyche to focus on what he desires: Activating Illusion. Darkness surrounds him, embracing the void. His heart beats, his arms and legs still.

He opens his eyes wide, staring down at Roan: Nothing happens. “...Well then.”

Roan laughs nervously, lifting his finger. “Try it again.”

Ramon closes his eyes before opening it again: Nothing.

“Again.”

Ramon closes his eyes once more before opening it.

“...Again.”

“You have got to be—” Ramon rolls his eyes, sighing. “Alright then.” He closes his eyes for the utmost times, taking a deep breath. He exhales before opening them. To no one’s surprise: Nothing happens. Ramon presses his paw to his face, stroking his hair. “Why is this so hard!?” he muffles through his paw.

Roan scratches his head, closing his eyes while laughing nervously again. “I wish I was more useful here. My apologies...”

The Floatzel lays his paw on his chin, caressing his elbow. “Hmm...Could be that you’re rushing it.”

The two Pokémon eye the weasel. “How so?” Ramon asks.

Lycus waves his paw. “You were on the right track earlier by closing your eyes and thinking about it. But I guessed you panicked at the last minute, and now you’re rushing your way to use it.”

“Hmm...I see.”

“Yeah! Try breathing in and out again. If what Lycus said is true, then be more calm about using Illusion.” Roan lifts his thumb in pure glee. “You got this, pal!”

The Zoroark stares down at the Axew for a brief moment. “...Alright then.” He sighs softly before closing his eyes, keeping his arms folded. He tunes out the rain, focusing on his desire once again. He inhales the air deeply, raising his brows. He exhales, blowing the small gust of wind.

Ramon opens his eyes as they glow light blue, pink auras surrounding him. Within a flash, a magenta energy cast around him, decreasing his size. Everyone eyes in amazement, Mesmeren being taken back by this the most.

“Wh-Whoa...” Mesmeren says, holding her hands together.

“Yo, that looks pretty.”

“Agreed,” Ada says to Justin before the two look at each other, exchanging glances. The two look away with a simple ‘Hmph’ afterwards.

Ramon's arms become shorter and turn green, his face forming tusks on each side. His legs are short, changing to a green color as well. The magenta fades away along with the aura, the now transformed Axew eyeing himself rapidly. From his head to his tail, his red eyes blink with surprise. "Whoa..." That is the first word uttering out of his new body, losing his deep voice and all.

"Woohoo! Looks like it worked!" Roan exclaims, raising his arms up in glee.

"That's...interesting." Ramon looks at his tail, wagging it. "So cool that I have the ability to do this."

"That's the perk of being a Zorua and a Zoroark! Haha." Roan circles around the illusion Axew before stopping, clapping his hand. "Yep. Looks exactly like me. Even got my voice down to a tea!" He lifts his hand up, shaking it. "Only thing missing is the wristband, honestly."

"I see. Now that I've changed into you..." Ramon shakes some of the rain off despite how little of an effect that will be. "How do I change back?"

Roan stares at the mimic dragon blankly. "...Do the same thing that you did earlier?"

Ramon looks at Lycus. "What the kid said," the Floatzel says before shrugging in a blunt manner.

"Okay." The mimic Axew closes his eyes for a brief moment, folding his arms. He then opens them. "...Ugh."

"Don't worry about it," Lycus advises. "Just get a little closer to the lake and change into a Wishiwashi. That way, this plan can truly start." The Floatzel hops on top of the cabin. "I'll be up here watching."

"Wait!" Lycus eyes the transformed Axew. "I forgot to ask this earlier but how would Illusion help me breathe underwater? From the sounds of it, the ability only changes my appearance into another Pokémon and nothing else."

"Actually, it does more than just changing your appearance: It gives you those beings' capabilities. Such as breathing underwater or flying in the air."

Ramon tilts his head. "Is that true?"

Roan taps on Ramon's arm, nodding. "Indeed it is! Like with those thieving Zoroarks I mentioned, that group escaped by transforming into Pidgeots."

"I see..." Ramon sighs. "This will take me awhile to get used to."

Lycus' paws rest behind his head. "You'll use it instinctively in no time. You'll be fine."

Ramon nods slowly. "I guess..." He turns to the lake and walks towards it, closing his eyes before opening them again.

His eyes glow light blue, the dragon shrouding in pink auras. The magenta energy returns, increasing his size into something large and dark blue. His legs disappear, his arms forming into rows of fishes, eyes shaping into a fish-like figure as they become pure white.

The transformed Wishiwashi School floats up, remaining there momentarily before falling. "Oof!" he exclaims, his voice radiating a deep aquatic tone. Roan heads inside of the cabin, everyone staring at the false School. *This...body.* Ramon grunts, lifting himself up as if he's pressed down by multiple trucks. *It feels so awkward and heavy...Ugh.*

After some time, he eventually stays in the air, albeit leaning from side to side. He floats over to the lake, lowering in the grim blues before swimming forward. The Wishiwashi swifts his fins, whimpering softly. His fins fling back and forth, the water coursing through his large mouth.

W-Weird that I tasted nothing from the water. And swimming feels so off in this body! He sighs, looking around. Many Gyarados and Wishiwashis clash and bash each other: Heads colliding, tails smacking. A Gyarados even blasts its Hyper Beam at a Wishiwashi in the air, causing it to fall into the lake, a huge splash ushering out.

Yeesh...I'll try to steer clear from...all of that. Ramon squints. *Now to find a Wishiwashi to chat with.*

"BRRROOOOAR!"

A large stream of water hits beside the transformed School, Ramon yelping.

"H-Huh!?" He gazes at a Gyarados towering over him, the serpentine charging another Hydro Pump. "AH!" The large fish dodges the move again, swimming away as fast as possible. The Gyarados chases after him, a huge purple shock wave swirls around its mouth. The moment it tries to fling its Dragon Rage, it gets smacked in the face by another School's Aqua Tail, crashing into the deep depths.

Ramon stops, turning around at the School. She is wearing a necklace around her, containing a gem that looks like a droplet.

"Are you alright?" she asks the transformed School in a soft tone, her Mystic Water shifting side to side.

"Uh..." Ramon nods immediately. "Yeah, I'm fi-fine. This is my first time being on the battlefield."

"I can tell just by *seeing* you trying to run away." She looks ahead, more Gyarados swimming towards the two. "Let's talk while defending each other. Alright?"

"HUH!? W-Wait just a mo—"

The School gets in front of Ramon, blasting three Gyarados with a stream of water. "Whoa!" The false School gulps. "Um, what's your name, anyways? May as well get to know you since I'll need all the help I can get."

The large fish leaps up and headbutts one of the Gyarados, sending it straight into the blues. "Aquatus. You?" She lands on the water, a big splash occurring.

Ramon yelps, scooting away. "U-Um, Larry," he says on the spot.

Aquatus smacks another Gyarados with her fin, grunting. "Larry, I see." The School fires another Hydro Pump at a group of Gyarados, shoving herself against another one.

Larry leaps and dodges some of the Gyarados after him, whining. "J-Jeez, they're everywhere!"

"Then start attacking." Aquatus jumps over the mimic School, flipping herself forward and slamming the serpentine towards the depths with her tailfin. She floats, staring at Larry. "I assume you know how to use your moves, right?"

"Um." The large fish looks to the side, his white eyes gleaming with nervousness. *Oh no. I didn't really take this into account! I mean, I guess I could use my moves, but they all seemed...Dark. And two of them are just Magic! I'm not sure if it's normal for Wishiwashi to learn any of those types of moves!*

"RWOAR!" a Gyarados yells, Larry yelping and backing away. It shoots its yellow-orange beam at him, increasing its size. Ramon shields himself, gulping. Aquatus clenches her teeth, quickly getting in front of the large fish before shooting her large stream of water at the Hyper Beam.

The two moves collide, both attempting to overpower one another. Aquatus grunts, squinting her eyes while screaming with intensity. The Hydro Pump increases its size and pushes the beam back, ramming against the large serpentine. The Gyarados flings back, splashing into another part of the lake far from the two fishes.

Aquatus pants heavily, eyeing the incoming group of Gyarados.

"Thanks for sa—"

Aquatus snaps towards the School. "No time for gratitude, Larry!" Glances. "Why aren't you using your moves? Don't you have any!?"

“U-Um. It’s, uh, complicated.”

“How so?” The Gyarados leap into the air.

“Well—” *Think, Ramon! THINK!* He blinks for a moment before widening his eyes as if a light bulb is shown above him. “This is my first time having to defend myself. Ever!” *There we go!*

“Your first? ...You’ve never experienced self-defense or anything?” Larry shakes his head, leading the large fish to ponder off to the side. “Bizarre.”

Ramon stares down at the water, the two fishes shadows expanding itself. “Uh, why do our shadows look bigger?” he points out, Aquatus immediately glaring up.

Four Gyarados coat their tails in liquefied auras, swinging it forward. “Shoot!” Aquatus shoves Larry to the side, the Aqua Tails smacking the spot instead of them, water splashing all over. “Phew...that was close.”

Eventually Aquatus and Larry have their backs against each other, staring at the Gyarados slowly circulating around them.

“...Think it’s a good idea if I go meet Virtuous right now?” Ramon asks.

“Considering the fact we’re in Phase 30 of this war, it’s definitely not a good idea.” Aquatus coats her tail in aquatic blues, squinting at the Gyarados charging their Hyper Beams. “He’s busy partaking in the war just like us.”

“I see.” Larry gulps, shaking at the sight of those yellow charged beams.

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The war continues on in the distance, a projector displaying in front of Lycus: Showing Ramon finishing his transformation before proceeding into the lake. The Floatzel checks over the recording, nodding and lowering his paw. The projector fades, Lycus turning around to head towards the end of the cabin, far enough for the group to not hear him.

He reaches several large trees hovering over the cabin, leaves scattering everywhere. “Got the evidence?” a soft yet sly voice asks, a pink tail hanging below one of the branches.

Lycus looks up at a nearby tree: A pink quadruped creature with a red gem on her forehead rests there. Her purple eyes gaze at him, her blue satchel hanging, her head lying on her paws. Lycus nods before snapping his fingers, his projector returning. The same clip of Ramon transforming into a Wishiwashi pops up, the weasel smirking.

“Excellent, darling.” The Espeon stretches herself out, flicking her tail back and forth. “So happy about the plan going into motion after waiting in these booooooring shadows for so long.”

“I feel you, my love.” Lycus sits on his behind, the projector fading as he sighs heavily. “It’s getting exhausting pretending to be Coleo’s friend *JUST* so our mistress could revive you-know-who.”

“Mmhm.” The Espeon yawns, gazing at the war. “We need to not leave our long, slog-fest mission just yet. We still have to take care of a few things here...”

“Like what, Xenia?”

Xenia jumps off the branch, lowering herself gently with telekinesis. She then taps the Floatzel’s nose with her tail, grinning. “Grabbing one more evidence of that Zoroark transforming into a Gyarados, silly.”

Lycus blushes, scratching the back of his head while chuckling. “I knew that. Was just testing ya.”

“Suuuuure.” Xenia floats in place, crossing her forelegs and lying in the air. “With you recording Ramon turning into a Gyarados, we can wait for the perfect opportunity to show the two sides he’s deceiving them.”

Lycus claps his paws together, low enough for the gang to not hear. “Joy!” He smiles. “When do I start spilling the beans?”

Xenia uses her telekinesis to take out a vivid purple gem from her satchel, the two Pokémon eyeing the meter in the middle. Dark red and blue energy forms within the gem, pulsating like a heartbeat. It slowly climbs its way up, reaching the halfway point. She gazes at the gem in marvel.

“Let’s say the moment this gem becomes full of war energy. The longer the war lasts, the stronger it gets.” Xenia then taps on her paw, raising her brow while looking at the sky. “That’s to assume this Ramon guy doesn’t succeed at persuading the two leaders on ending the war.”

“Even then, would exposing Ramon’s Illusion put a halt to the war?” Lycus asks, caressing his chin.

“Not quite.” After putting the gem back, Xenia twirls around, staring at the weasel upside down. “It’ll actually *increase* the war. Because not only will they remain furious at each other, but also to those they thought they could trust. Which is Ramon.” She grins in a mischievous manner.

Lycus blinks, his face reddening with intensity. “Man, you’re a damn genius, Xenia! I love you!”

The Espeon winks. "Thanks, dear. I always aim to please." Before Lycus gets up, he grunts, stroking his head. Xenia tilts her head, waving her legs back and forth. "Hmm?"

The bickers. The yells. The insistence on 'staying home'.

Lycus' memories plague him with his time being with another Floatzel—*that* Floatzel. The two argue with each other in front of a crying Buizel before he snaps back into reality. Lycus caresses his head. "Sorry. Experienced a Capture Projector moment."

"Ended up remembering a past you didn't like?"

"Per usual." Lycus stretches himself out before turning towards the front, looking ahead at the chaotic lake. "The more I think about it, the happier I feel about meeting you, Xenia." He looks behind him, staring at the Espeon sternly. "You are so, SO much better than *her*." He then walks towards the front.

Xenia just keeps her gaze on him, smiling.

. . .

Everyone keeps their eyes to the windows, almost as if they're glued to the lake's violent nature. Courtney taps her arm, Sylock resting against her shoulder.

"How long does this fight go on?" she asks, squinting.

"The battle lasts till the end of the day," Coleo states, eyeing the cloudy sky.

"What time it is, yo?" Justin looks down at the Blipbug, slipping his hands into his pockets.

Coleo turns around, gazing up at a clock above the fireplace. The minute and hour hands are hardly moving, ticking at a sluggish pace, dust falling off. The larva squints. "It migh' be close to that time, lad."

"You can read the clock up there?" Ada asks.

Coleo nods. "I've spent most of me life in this cabin upon findin' it. I wasn't sure what it was at first, but I was determined to understand it."

"I see." Ada then opens the front door, looking up as her hands hover over her lips. "How's things looking so far!?" she shouts. She soon sees what appears to be a thumbs up from Lycus on the roof.

"Ramon made it into the water just fine. The plan should be good to go."

Ada sighs and folds her arms. "I'd like to hope so." She shakes her head. "I really wish there was another way to end the war instead of...*this*."

Mesmeren sits beside the teen, holding her hands together. *Please be safe out there, Ramon...*

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"RWOAR!" a Gyarados yelps as it flings back from Larry and Aquatus, crashing into the lake far from them. Aquatus shoves one Gyarados to the side while firing Hydro Pump at another, blasting back.

Ramon keeps sticking behind the Wishiwashi, shivering. *Jeez, there's so much more of them than I thought!* He yelps to loud, mighty roars, turning around at two Gyarados. The Pokémon are charging their Hyper Beams, leaning their heads back. *PARTICIPATING IN THIS PLAN WAS A MISTAKE!*

Aquatus snarls and zips around Larry, white auras encasing her. The Gyarados fire their yellow beams, hitting the School. She grunts, pushing more and more forward. Eventually, her Double-Edge rams into the two Pokémon's maw, an explosion springing the three away. The Gyarados fly off while Aquatus slams into the water beside Ramon, splashing all over him.

"A-Aquatus!" he shouts with concern. He gazes at the spot for a brief moment, bubbles surfing. Soon Aquatus pokes herself out, panting and groaning.

"Why...aren't you fighting?" she says, grunting.

"I'm, uh..." Larry looks off. "I'm scared to fight. I never once saw myself a-as a fi-fighter."

Aquatus squints. "Then why are you—" she pauses for a moment before slapping her fin against her forehead. "I forgot that Virtuous just randomly selects any Wishiwashis into the war, regardless of their skill." She rolls her eyes, groaning.

What? At least I don't have to explain why I'm in this war, but also that's...not very smart. "Um, y-yeah."

Another Wishiwashi pops out from under the water. "We need to retreat, everyone!" he shouts, diving back inside.

"Hmm?" Larry looks to his side, many Gyarados going underwater as well. "They're leaving, too?"

"Yes: It's getting late and neither side wants to continue fighting at night." Aquatus grabs onto the large fish's fin. "Let's go back to the palace."

“Huh!?”

Within seconds, Larry is dragged underwater.

He gasps, eyeing at the surface as the light gets further and further away. He holds his breath, closing his eyes. *I don't think I can breathe underwater! This plan was definitely a ba—* he inhales the water just fine, leading the transformed School to open his eyes and blinks. *Oh...But then how—* looks off to the side. *Oh right! Roan and Lycus told me earlier about Illusion allowing me to breathe underwater.*

“Are you alright, Larry?” Aquatus asks, tilting her head.

Ramon blinks for a moment before shaking his head. “Uh, yeah. I’m fine. Was just...processing everything go-going on around me, that’s all.”

“I see. So you’re the uncertain type of guy. I’ll take note of that.” Aquatus keeps swimming.

“Um...thank you???”

The two swim downwards, the light above fading away. Darkness circulates, with only the blues bubbling around. Larry gulps, eyeing his surroundings. Soon, the pitch black dissipates, yellow lights ushering in. The lights come from the many blue anglerfish creatures, some with red eyes while others have yellow ones.

The Lanturns and Chinchous guide the many Wishiwashis into a large, rocky entrance, some swimming by them for extra assistance. The illusion School blinks in bewilderment, three Lanturns floating next to him and Aquatus.

Huh? Didn't Lycus say the Gyarados and Wishiwashi will attack anyone that isn't their kind? He quirks his brow. ...*Bizarre.* They bypass the entrance, Larry’s eyes widening at the sight. “Whoa...”

Yellow lights from the Chinchous and Lanturns spread throughout the underwater area, many Water types swimming by coral structures and talking among each other. Some kids jolt through the holes of coral buildings while two aquatic Pokémon swim in a race, zooming past Ramon and Aquatus. The illusion School backs away a bit, his jaw hanging to the vivid purple corals.

Aquatus eyes the School, smiling. “Virtuous Palace is wonderful, isn’t it?”

Larry blinks before shaking his head, eyeing Aquatus. “Uh, yeah. I-It is.”

“You were looking at it like it was your first time being here.”

“U-Um, I mean, the colors on the corals are really pretty to admire. I-I just can’t stop being in awe of them!”

Aquatus nods. “Understandable. You can thank the Lanturns and Chinchous for letting us view those beautiful corals.”

“I see.” Aquatus then swims forward, with the rest of the Wishiwashi soldiers. Larry follows. *At least I’m telling the truth this time around, thankfully...* After zipping by some pathways, the two make it to the middle, Larry tilting his head. “Huh?”

All of the Wishiwashis no longer look large and blue. Instead, they are small with some blue to the top of their skins. Their eyes resemble that of teardrops, becoming light blue. They’re in rows of each other, staring up at a taller coral structure that’s built like a castle, with holes functioning similarly to windows and doors.

Larry looks to his side at Aquatus, who’s glowing blue before shrinking. After the transformation, Aquatus appears like the other Wishiwashis: In her Solo form, the Mystic Water being more naturally attached to her than before.

The Solo looks at Larry, tilting her head. “You can revert back to your Solo form, now. We’re resting.”

Oh crud! I gotta think of an excuse FAST! Ramon gulps. “U-Um, I’ll r-remain in this form just in case one of those Gyarados tries to intervene.”

“No need. They need as much rest as we do.” Aquatus shakes her head, sighing. “Besides, it’ll seem silly for them to ambush a palace run by their rival species. Alone.”

Ugh, I think she got me there. “W-Well still, we never know in th-these trying times.”

“Salutations, my Wishis,” a humble voice says out loud.

“Hmm?” Larry looks around. “Who said that?”

“Our king, Virtuous,” Aquatus answers. “Look up.”

Larry eyes at the coral castle, a Wishiwashi with a King’s Rock on his head appears behind some coral fences, staring down at the rows of Wishiwashis. He’s in his Solo form just like the others.

“Oh.”