

Chapter 35: The Next Disguise.

The Aquatic War Arc.

Ramon gazes out of the window as Aquatus adjusts her necklace, patting her fins. He shakes, his fins quaking. His heart sinks to the bottom of his core, his sanity rising to the tower of vacillate. Ramon grits his teeth, dread and guilt clouding over him. Soon, a simple touch lands on his fin.

"It's okay," Aquatus says, patting. The illusion Wishiwashi pauses in place, eyeing her. "We'll be fine out there. I'll make sure we both survive today's phase...Alright?" She smiles.

Larry gazes, noticing a single tear slipping down from the Solo's left eye. The tear floats upwards, becoming a bubble. *Is she...tearing up?* After a moment of silence, he nods. "Al- Alright then." Aquatus nods back, the two exit the room to dine with Yowa afterwards.

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Virtuous Palace's center is filled with many Wishiwashis and other aquatic creatures, some watching an army of Wishiwashis floating towards the top entrance. Within the rows of armies are Larry and Aquatus, the two swimming at a calm pace. Virtuous is beside the armies, rearranging his King's Rock.

"Next stop to Phase 31, my Wishis!" he exclaims, pointing at the exit. "For there is the continuation of showing how inferior those despicable serpents are!" He slams his fist against his fin's palm. "We will *NOT* let those vermin beat us in this war!" He turns towards the crowd. "Isn't that right, my Wishis?"

"YEAH!" all of the Wishiwashis yell in unison, some bringing their fins in the air while others jolt up and down in ecstatic.

"I've heard him say those phrases whenever we enter a new phase. Does he *not* have any other speeches?" Aquatus says, squinting.

"W-Well, it still w-works on his massive followers. So he likely felt no need to change the speech, haha," Larry responds.

Aquatus shakes her head. "I suppose so." Sighs. "As long as his followers despise those Gyarados, there really isn't any need for him to change his speeches."

Adjacent from Virtuous is Aquatus' family, all waving at the two as her siblings jolt up and down in excitement.

"Good luck, y'all!" Yowa yells, hovering her fins over her maw.

"Kick those Gyara-shits asses!" Fisher exclaims, forming a fist while smirking.

Aquatus and Larry hesitantly wave back before finally leaving, Lanturns guiding the armies through the aquatic darkness. While moving further away from the palace, the Wishiwashis start glowing blue and increasing their size. Larry's eyes widen, shaking with intensity. He looks beside him, Aquatus increasing her height within the blue glow.

R-Right...They change into their School form during the war, the illusion Solo thinks, his lips trembling. The Wishiwashis reach the surface, facing towards the blues bubbling afar. An army of Gyarados emerges, exchanging deadly glances with the Wishiwashis. Larry gulps, pressing his fins against his chest as Aquatus' tail surrounds itself in aquatic energy.

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Justin's eyes: Darken.

Ada's eyes: Darken.

Courtney's: Darken.

Mesmeren's: Darken with dread.

Everyone has dark circles beneath their eyes: Gazing, squinting at the fight between the Gyarados and Wishiwashis. Ada sighs, tapping the window with melancholy.

"Ugh..." Is the only thing Ada can utter out, groaning.

Justin eyes the group, smirking. "Yeah, we're looking mighty ugly, aight."

"Justin..." Ada rubs her head, her elbow leaning against the window's edge. "We stood up all night long, waiting for Ramon's return...Cut us some slack on the puns, please." She pins her arms on the edge and plants her face on them, groaning. Coleo yelps from the sudden movement, hanging onto her.

Mesmeren nods shakily, poking her fingers together. "Y-Yeah..." She starts humming to herself, shifting side to side.

Justin lays his hand behind his head, laughing with uneasiness and somber. "Yeah. You're right." Sighing, he shakes his head. "I was just trynna enlighten the mood a little, that's all. I'm concerned about him, too."

Ada lifts her head, slightly staring at Justin as a small smile forms on her. "...Thanks."

Roan rubs his eyes and grunts, sitting on Justin's head. "Say, I wonder what's taking Lycus so long with his business in the forest."

Coleo shrugs. "I don't know. Not sur' what the lad's business ev'n is."

Ada blinks, looking up at her hair. "Wait, Lycus left? I thought he was with us all night."

"He was. But ended up sleepin' halfway through." Coleo turns around. "Once he woken up, the lad told us he needed to go take care of somethin' in the Windmill Forest and left out of the back window."

The group looks behind them, the back window afar being partially opened. "Huh..." Ada blinks, perplexion swarming throughout. "Guessed I wasn't paying...much...attention." She yawns, her hand nudging her lips. "God, I'm tired."

"Same," Courtney agrees before snapping a glare at the open window. "Also it would've been kind fer Lycus to shut the window afterwards? Seriously, what if some robber or rogue Nativu barges in!?"

Coleo sighs, shaking his head. "He does that, sometimes. Cannot be helped, argh." He then eyes the rabbit. "Also, 'Nativu'? I heard Justin lad mentionin' them before, too. What *is* that?"

Courtney waves her hand around. "Nativus are the kind of Pokémon you see out n' the wild, usually. Sometimes they're captured by trainers to become their companions, like what happened with you." She scratches the side of her cheek. "Well, minus the part you're an Intellicate. But still."

"I see..." Coleo gazes out of the window, eyeing a Gyarados smacking one Wishiwashi with its fin. "There be a lot I don' know about. Intellicates, Nativus—" he presses his setae against his chest. "Never knew there were differences between Pokémon."

"Mhm. Thinkin' about knowin' more?" Courtney asks.

Coleo continues his gaze, the intense downpour rattling across the lake. "Hmm..."

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Pants. Pants. Heavy pants.

Aquatus stands in front of Ramon, glaring at the incoming Aqua Tails. Her mouth hangs open, charging her aquatic energy. She fires her Hydro Pump, pushing three Gyarados away. Ramon squirms, eyeing side to side: Wishiwashis and Gyarados thrash and bash each other, some twacking the other with their fins and tails.

The illusion Wishiwashi is stuck in his own corner, the water rippling and swishing frantically. *Ugh...Can't think of a proper time to escape and transform.*

One Gyarados charges towards him from above, its maw encasing in dark auras. "AH!" Larry yelps, closing his eyes and covering his head. A chomp is heard followed by a grunt, Larry opening his eyes at Aquatus' fin caged by the Gyarados' Bite.

The lady School headbutts the Gyarados before pushing it away with Hydro Pump, colliding it into another serpent. She then glances at Larry, her head turning slightly. "Why aren't you in your School form!?" she yells before white auras engulf her, thrusting her Double-Edge against an incoming Gyarados. She winces afterwards.

"U-Um." Larry whines. "Once again, I-I'm scared to fight!"

Aquatus quirks her brow. "What?" She coats her tail in aquatic energy. "This isn't the right time to be in Solo form, though! Far from it, in fact!" She hops out of the water, slapping a Gyarados with Aqua Tail before crashing back down.

A huge splash pushes Larry back. "Whoa!" Aquatus swims by him in time, stopping his flow. The illusion Wishiwashi sighs. "Thank you."

Aquatus pants, staring down at the sardine. "I can't do this alone, Larry. I need you to change back."

"B-But..."

"I understand that you're afraid to fight. You didn't ask to be in this war. But if you don't change back, then you and I will be in a lot of danger, especially you due to your vulnerable state right now."

"Ugh...this is stressful."

Without warning, a Gyarados slams its Aqua Tail towards the two. Both of them dodge in time, the water splashing up. A huge wave emerges, pushing the two Wishiwashis away. The lady School bumps into another School, grunting. And the illusion Wishiwashi spins himself around, moaning in discomfort.

"Oof..." He shakes his head before realizing he's by himself, staring down. *Alright, now's my chance!* He swims underwater.

"What the—" Aquatus eyes around, the rain mixing in with the recent splash obscures her vision. "Larry? Larry!?" As she looks for him, she yelps from a sheer, chilly force gripping her side. She shivers, glaring at a Gyarados clamping down with Ice Fang. Aquatus winces before slamming the Gyarados against another one with Double-Edge.

After freeing herself, she dashes off, shielding behind a couple of Wishiwashis. Three large rings cast around her, Aquatus panting heavily while eyeing the ongoing conflict.

“Are you alright?” one of the Wishiwashis asks in a low tone, staring at her with concern. Aquatus looks at him, shaking her head.

“Severely hurt and have lost a friend here.” She grunts, the Aqua Ring healing her at a gradual pace.

“Oh no...One of our comrades died?”

Aquatus shakes her head. “More like I lost track of him somewhere in the lake.”

“Oh.” The Wishiwashi fires a Hydro Pump at a Gyarados, shooting it from the sky. “Hopefully he’s doing alright.”

“Same...”

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Ramon dashes as far away as possible, looking around within seconds. “There’s got to be a corner around here somewhere...” Eventually, he lays his eyes on a rocky surface with corals similar to walls, holes painting them. “Ah! That should do.” He swims towards the corner, tugging between it. He closes his eyes, throwing away the sounds around him and focusing on himself: His desire to cast Illusion.

Breathe in. Ramon inhales. *Breathe out.* And then exhales, surrounding himself in magenta auras.

He increases in size, becoming more slender and serpentine. Two barbels form onto his face along with a crest on his forehead. As the transformation continues, a paw appears from behind the corals. Behind them is Lycus, his eyes being blue instead of the usual black.

Once the glow fades, Ramon opens his eyes and stares down, the yellow underbelly running up his newly formed Gyarados body. Lycus’ eyes revert to normal, the weasel smirking and returning his paw. *Bingo.* He encases himself in dark water before Aqua Jetting away.

Ramon blinks and turns to his side, lifting his brow. *Did...someone swam away?* He exits the corner, trails of bubbles fading away from the spot near the corals. The serpent whimpers. *Oh no...Hope it wasn’t any of the Wishiwashis nor Gyarados.* He shakes his head. *Can’t worry about that now. I GOT to find Behemoth and tell him to end the war.*

The Gyarados stares off, thinking about what Coleo told him about Behemoth. ...*Hmm. If Virtuous was hard to convince, then Behemoth...* Gulps. *I-I'll try my best as always.*

Ramon swims around, eyeing the corners of the corals and the rocky features from other spots. He squints. *Now where to find Behe*— he gasps, focusing on a couple of Gyarados leaving their underwater palace below. The outside has coral walls with many holes littered throughout, bright lights emanating from it. *Ah. He should be in there! ...I assume. Maybe.* Ramon sighs before nodding. *I-I got this.*

The serpent swims towards the entrance, passing by the Gyarados soldiers. One of them looks at him, raising his brow. "Um, aren't you supposed to be out fighting in the..." Ramon is gone before the fellow serpent can finish his sentence. He blinks. "Nevermind then."

Once the illusion Gyarados enters the palace, he widens his eyes in astonishment. "Whoa..." It's the only word his deep tone voice can utter, dumbfounded by the palace inner corals sparkling like glitter. Similar to Virtuous Palace, it has many coral structures and homes littered everywhere. Shops on the right side while pathways are on the left, leading to other parts of the palace.

Ramon's amazement soon fades when he spots a few Water types living here, those being the Gyarados and some Relicanths. The shops are even closed, signs either crooking or decaying. Ramon tilts his head.

Why's this palace so much more...barren compared to Virtuous'? he thinks, nudging his tail against his chin. He takes his attention towards the pathways, one of them leading to a castle. *If I know anything from Virtuous' castle, then Behemoth must have one, too...I assume. Maybe.* Without a second thought, he travels along the path.

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Xenia floats above the cabin, staying within the tree's shadows as she gazes at the purple gem. *I'm close...* She smiles widely, dark red and blue energies building above the gem's meter. It pulsates, the energies inching close to the top. *I'm so close to becoming those things. Those... Unmons. My mistress promised me. She promised I'll become one!* Her eyes enlarge, her pants weighing. *All I need to do is fill the Bitter Glory, and I'll finally achieve my lifelong dre—*

Something hops on a tree branch near her, Xenia striking her attention towards it, squinting. Lycus sits on the branch, wiggling his fingers. "Did I interrupt ya on something, pumpkin?"

Xenia blinks. "Yes. Yes you did." She huffs. "I was in the middle of indulging in my fantasy, and you ruined it. Hmph!"

Lycus stretches his arms and legs out, snickering. "It'll *no longer* become a fantasy once this mission is done. So don't worry about your daydream being ruined, Love."

Xenia rolls her eyes, shaking her head. "Still doesn't excuse the interruption, dear."

The Floatzel looks down. "By the way, could you lower me down to the cabin slowly so that the others don't hear me?" The Espeon nods, her eyes glowing light blue while the Floatzel is coated in dark pink auras. She lowers him down with Psychic. "Thanks."

"Did you record Ramon transforming into a Gyarados?"

As Lycus lands, he looks up at Xenia and snaps his fingers, a projector displaying the illusion Wishiwashi turning into a Gyarados. "Right to a T, surprisingly." The display fades, the Floatzel folding his arms. "It was a bit of a pain, though: Having to angle my paw *exactly* towards him while also remaining hidden." His eyes close, sighing in relief. "Glad my gut was correct on Ramon failing to convince Virtuous at ending the war last night. Otherwise, I would've gone underwater for nothing."

"I see." Xenia purrs. "Regardless, you've done an excellent job there, Lycus."

Lycus' cheeks redden, the Floatzel looking off to the side and scratching the back of his head. "Th-Thanks. Anything to achieve a goal for my beloved Espeon."

Xenia turns back to the gem. "It's almost done filling up. The Bitter Glory..."

"Nice." Lycus smiles. "Say hun: Do you believe our mistress' plan will benefit us in the long run?"

The Espeon simply nods. "You'll be able to explore all you want with me. Free of anyone telling you not to go here nor there." She raises her paw, caressing the gem. "All we have to do is wait for the Bitter Glory to finish charging, and our mistress will be very close to reviving *him*."

Lycus claps his hands calmly. "Woo!" He grins. "Looking forward to it."