

Chapter 37: Quintin.

The Aquatic War Arc.

Munch. Munch. CRUNCH!

Quintin rips a fin off from the heart-shaped fish before biting down, the bones snapping. He and Sam are on the right side of his house, sitting inside of the circular formed pebbles. Sam quivers, wincing as multiple sweats drench his forehead despite being underwater.

Quintin looks at Ramon while taking another bite. “Want some?”

Sam shakes his head. “Nope! I’m goo—” his stomach rumbles, the false serpent looking down at it.

“Your stomach is saying the opposite, dude.” He laughs softly.

Ugh...I haven’t eaten anything for a while. Sam whines. “Y-Yeah...” The corpse suddenly lands in front of him, Sam blinking before staring at the Gyarados.

“You can have the rest of it. I was really only in the mood for kelps, anyways.” Quintin smiles, wrapping his tail around a bunch of kelps. “Just thought of getting myself an Alomomola in case the kelps weren’t enough.”

“I...see.” Ramon leans down, sniffing the bitten fish: It has the wretched smell of a long expired food, an aroma so monstrous that even the bravest of noses will be at death’s door. Ramon scrunches his maw up for a moment, squirming.

Oh goodness, it reeks! And then within a flash...Ramon doesn’t smell the foulness. The unbearable aroma has transformed itself into that of a magnificent five star meal, emanating the fresh and exquisite scent that penetrates his nostrils.

Huh...? This was smelling awful not too long ago...and now it’s... The illusion Gyarados’ maw hangs. *Oh that’s...Mmm.*

Ramon salivates, drooling over the pink fish. The Water Gem Gyarados quirks his brow, taking a bite off from his kelps. “Uh?” Within a flash, Ramon sinks his teeth into the Alomomola, ripping off the side before engulfing it. He pants, tongue hanging, eyes sparkling at the fish.

This. Is. So. DELICIOUS! Ramon takes another bite. And then another! And another! He keeps going, some parts of the Alomomola spilling on the sides. Quintin backs up, blinking in astonishment. *Ugh!* Bones crushes from the sheer force of Ramon’s sharp teeth, some hurling their way into his mouth while others float downwards to the ground. He soon finishes his meal, burping out bubbles.

"I—Whoops! Sorry about that!"

Quintin stares for a moment before chuckling. "Oh no problem, man! You were really hungry, and I'd be lying to myself if I said I wouldn't do the same while hungry."

"Haha...Ye-Yeah." Ramon looks away. "That's what being lost in the wild with little food can do to ya."

"Yeppers, man!" Quintin smiles once again, showing off his sharp teeth while closing his eyes.

Sam looks down, gazing at the chips of pink skin. *...That's my first time eating a Pokémon. At least, I think that was a Pokémon.*

It was, Nomar answers. And correction: It's your first time in a long while to eat a living Pokémon. Erm, non-living considering this one is dead. You get what I mean.

Sam whimpers in his head. *I-I didn't mean to. I—*

You were hungry, Ramon. Just like how you and I were during the wilderness. Don't feel down about it, alright?

...Okay.

Ramon lifts his head and looks around Quintin's home, raising his brow in perplexion. The coral structures lack the vibrant brightness of the ones outside, the plain grayness spreading throughout. Not even a single Lanturn is there to light the house up! And lastly, a few hole-windows are placed on the right and left side.

"Say, why does your home look so empty?" Sam asks.

Quintin shakes his head. "Most homes are like this, man." His tail leans against his forehead. "Behemoth doesn't know how to make the palace look nice."

"Huh. That explains why I saw those tires and water bottles all around the palace...Whatever they're called." Sam shrugs.

"Yeppers! Humans drop those things all around the la—"

"Uh, why's that?" Sam asks, raising his brow. He then blinks for a moment before yelping. "Whoops! D-Didn't mean to cut you off there!" *Ugh, why do I DO that sometimes!?*

The Water Gem Gyarados snickers. "It's fine, man." His head shakes. "And beats me on why they drop those things here, dude. Prolly forgot to take them home or somethin'?"

“Weird.”

The Water Gem Gyarados lifts his tail up. “On the plus side, Behemoth do be gatherin’ them stuff up and layin’ them across the palace.”

“He wanted to make the palace look nice?”

“Yeppers!” Quintin leans forward, his lips nearing the side of Ramon’s head. “Even though the palace looks more like shit cuz of it.”

Sam snorts before he and Quintin laugh. “I can see that!”

“Don’t tell him that I said it!” Quintin covers his lips, grinning.

The two rest on the ground, staring up. Even the gray ceiling isn’t much to awe about, only having dots sprinkling throughout it.

After a moment of silence, Ramon says, “What’s your thoughts on the war?”

“Hmm?” Quintin looks at him. “Well...It’s dumb, dude.”

“You think so?”

“Mhm. Behemoth’s beef with Virtuous felt uncalled for. He has this thing for wanting to prove Virtuous he’s stronger than him. And Virtuous does the same thing, from what I’ve seen in the previous big phases.” He smacks his lips. “Like man, who cares? Admit the two of y’all are both strong, weak, or agree to disagree, maaaaaaan.”

Sam gives Quintin a slight glance, sighing. “Sounds stressful.”

“Hella. I hate feeling that way, dude.” Quintin rubs his head with his tail, groaning. “Getting a headache from just *thinkin’* about it.” He lays on his belly, bits of sand puffing up. “Their rivalry also led to the growing dislike between the Gyarados and Wishiwashis. Like it grew so, SO much, man. To the point where it be stormy and shit out there.”

Sam grimaces. “Tell me about it...”

“Not gonna lie...Really wish the two groups didn’t hate each other.”

“Because you wanted peace to happen between them, right?”

Quintin flips onto his back, nodding at Sam. “Yeppers! And not only that but uh...um...” He looks to the side.

Sam raises his brow. "Eh?"

"Well..."

Sam leans closer to the serpent. "Well what? Don't leave me hanging, now." Snickers.

"I-It's just, uh—" Quintin blushes deeply. "Those Wishiwashi ladies be smokin' hot, dude."

Sam blinks. "Eh?"

"L-Look! The Gyarados ladies are fine and all. But I'm a Wishiwashi lover at heart, dude." Quintin stands up, his tail nudging his chest. "They're just so blue and uh slim and...Shit, can't think of anything else to say. But like, you get what I mean!" He covers his face.

"D'aww. How cute of you to think that way." Sam smiles.

Imagine finding someone attractive. Can't be me, Nomar says with an annoyed grunt.

I...don't think it's necessary to shame others for having attraction, brother, Ramon thinks.

Eh. Whatevs, I guess.

Quintin scratches the back of his head, chuckling in a nervous manner. "You think so?" Sam nods. "Th-Thanks, man. You...have no idea on how many Gyarados raised their brows and suspicion at me when I admitted this. My brother included."

"Yeesh. Sounds embarrassing."

"It is." Quintin sighs.

"Well this makes me more glad that I let you be happy about yourself here." Sam smiles.

Quintin smiles back, his face reddens further. "O-Once again, thanks man..." He looks out of the right hole-window, gazing at the sparkling corals. "But yeah, I just want everyone between the two groups to relax and like...*vibe*. Like just vibe in complete unison. Life is too diverse to focus on who's strong or weak, you know?"

"...Yeah." Sam looks out of the window. "Besides, there's use for both of them. Both the strong and the weak..."

Silence.

Swishes from the civil Gyarados and other Water types are heard outside, being the only things filling the void of silence. Afterwards, Ramon turns towards Quintin.

“Why doesn’t Behemoth agree to disagree on who’s the strongest?”

Quintin smacks his lips. “The dude is too stubborn and arrogant to think about that.”

“Yeesh. Is their rivalry *that* bad?”

Quintin nods. “We’re in a war between two kinds as we speak, dude. All because of their disagreement, man.”

“I see...”

...

TWACK! SMACK!

A tail coated in blue auras slams against the punching bag, a Gyarados snarling at it in willpower. His King’s Rock shifts from side to side, the fish smacking and slapping the bag multiple times, his Aqua Tail shoving it. Behemoth stops, his lips encasing in icy, light blue energy before dashing towards the punching bag.

His teeth sinks into it, ice building up within seconds. Behemoth shakes the bag, growling before snapping the pathetic rope off and throwing the bag across his room. The icy energy fades, the Gyarados leaning his head back. A yellow-orange beam charges in front of his maw before he flings forward, firing the Hyper Beam.

The bag erupts into pieces, smoke emanating from it along with the many cotton that are floating around the room. Some even exits out of the window, Behemoth turning towards the outside of his castle. He pants, glaring at the shining outdoors.

“Is everything alright up there, sir?” a masculine voice says outside of the castle below.

“YES! EVERYTHING IS FINE!” Behemoth shouts.

“A-Ah...Gotcha, my King!”

Behemoth snarls. “I must do this,” he says, his tone menacing. “I must do this to prove how wrong Virtuous is! ONCE AND FOR ALL!” His tail smacks against a random cup in his room, the cup springing itself out of the window.

BONK!

“OW!” the voice from earlier says.

Behemoth moves forward, grumbling. “Phase 32 *will* be different. It’ll be the phase where I show that know-it-all punk of a fish who’s the strongest!” His tail slams down. “I’mma beat him up so badly, he’ll wish to never doubt my strength ever again!”

Behemoth gazes off to the side, Quintin’s home becoming the spotlight of the show. He groans, the sparkling corals casting their lights onto him.

“*Come on, bro!*” Those voices in his head. His brother’s. “*You used to be so considerate and kind towards others, man. And now you’re just...not.*”

Behemoth shakes his head. “No...” He looks behind him at the deteriorated bag. “You’ve *never* understood why I’m like this, Quintin. Even after telling it to you and the others.”

Behemoth grumbles, striking a gaze at his tail. “I could count a lot of times Virtuous was talkin’ smack about my fighting skills. Always insisting he could ‘help’ me while at the same time shit all over my attempt at getting better! *Especially* after hearing the pokedex’s thoughts on Wishiwashi!” He slams his tail on the ground, a rumble rattling. “Kindness has *zero* place for assclowns like him!” Snarls. “He’s the true reason why our trainer abandoned us: He’s completely full of himself!”

Behemoth glances out of the castle. “Heh...Tomorrow will be the day he’ll regret fucking with me.”

. . .

“...” Sam blinks.

“...” Quintin blinks.

Both stare and gaze at the ceiling, their bodies coiling while on the sandy floor. Silence occupies the house, with the occasional swims and chatters outside. There isn’t much the two said to break the barrier: Keeping their eyes locked at the ceiling, remaining motionless yet alleviated.

Ramon smiles: The serene, calm environment making his worries fade away. At this very moment, the disguised Gyarados has felt tranquility, something he hasn’t felt for a while now.

“Pretty chill here, ain’t it?” Quintin says.

“...Yeah.” Ramon lowers his eyelids. “Feels great to relax after being out in the wild for so long.”

“I can imagine, man. Feel free to relax here whenever you like.”

“You don’t mind?”

“Nah.” Quintin snickers. “I let anyone relax here whenever they need a quick place to chillax.”

“I see.” Soon, Ramon looks down in melancholy. *Ugh...As much as I'd love to relax, I need to return back to the others. They could be worried sick about me!*

Quintin looks at Sam, blinking. “Something’s up?”

Sam sighs and stands, floating towards the exit. “I have to go.”

Quintin raises his brow. “What? Why, though?”

Sam gulps. “Um, I’m thinking about signing up for the war.” *How many more LIES do I have to make!? Can I just go back to being myself already!?* He whimpers in his head.

The Water Gem Gyarados tilts his head. “Didn’t you just get here, dude?”

“Y-Yeah! But maybe if I join the army, Behemoth would be more willing to talk to me!”

“But—” And before Quintin knows it, the illusion Gyarados has left the house, leaving him alone. “...Weird.”

...

Justin pokes. And pokes. And pokes again...the window taking in the assaults from his finger.

Everyone continues staring outside, planting their entire face against the windows out of desperation. “Man...I hate this,” Justin mentions, rubbing his eyes.

“W-We probably should’ve fallen asleep, huh?” Mesmeren pokes her fingers together.

“No kidding!” Courtney yawns, covering her lips. “Feelin’ close to knocking myself out.”

Mesmeren smirks. “Heh...Makes me wish I was born with the Insomnia ability.” She shakes. “Would’ve made it much easier to stay awake.”

“I’d imagine...Then again, wouldn’t you not be able to sleep?”

“Y-Yes.”

“Huh...” Courtney’s hand leans against her chin, Ada raising her brow at the tapir.

“On one hand, it would be nice to not require sleep so that you—” Ada yawns midway. “Don’t have to worry about tiredness and...lack of...focus the next day.” Yawns once again. “Ugh, I’m *tired.*”

“Aren’t we all?” Justin states before snickering, Ada and Courtney joining in.

“So yeah, pretty neat to not be forced asleep. But at the cost of never being able to...dream again?” Ada scratches her head. “Sounds more like a curse than a blessing, in all honesty.”

The Drowzee twiddles her fingers. “A-And why’s that?”

Ada lifts her finger. “Dreaming can give someone a lot of inspiration and interpretation, sometimes even being an unexplainable mess that’s a joy to explore.”

“I mean, there are nightmares, fam.”

“Yes, but those are different. They’re not meant to be joyful: They’re meant to be dreadful, hence the name given to them.” Ada folds her arms. “Still, even nightmares can give someone an idea for their future goal! Maybe providing hints on the wrong path they could’ve taken if a certain decision didn’t happen.”

Justin lifts his finger before pausing his opened lips, now gazing off with a finger against his chin. “Huh...That’s a smart way to look at nightmares. Never thought of that, fam.”

“Mhm.” The girl looks down. “So if an Intellicate was born with Insomnia, they...wouldn’t be able to dream and see those inspirations and interpretations. Hell, I’m wondering how they can still have energy the next day?”

“This is even more weird when you consider a Nativu with that ability. Don’t they mind being unable to sleep?” Courtney asks, tilting her head. “Mighty strange ability, I’d say.”

“Yeah...” Ada shudders. “The more I think about it, the more I feel that ability causes a lot of negatives than positives.”

Mesmeren gazes out of the window, a sorrowful smile paints her. “It’s better if I lose my ability to sleep...kn-knowing what I am.”

Everyone looks at her.

“Hmm?” Ada stares with concern. “Why...would you believe so?”

Mesmeren remains silent, her fingers stopping. “...I’m sorry.”

Everyone looks at each other, uncertainty heightening throughout their blood. Before anyone can get a word out, something hops inside of the cabin's back window. Everyone looks behind them within a flash.

"Ramon!?" they shout, with Roan falling off from Justin's head and slamming his face on the wooden floor.

"Oof!"

"Ah shit, my bad, fam." Justin rushes over to Roan's aid, holding his hand out.

Roan groans, feeling as though he's seeing stars around his head. He then grabs Justin's hand. "N-No worries! I, Simon's apprentice, will fight off against the greatest foe of this battle: Headache."

Coleo snickers softly. "This is why I always han' on tight while on someone's head. That happened to me when I was with me trainer."

"N-Noted, then!"

A laugh comes from the back window, grabbing the group's attention. Lycus is there holding two apples, chowing on one in his right paw. He swallows. "That was a funny show to witness."

"Damn, man..." Justin lowers his head, groaning. "Legit thought you were Ramon for a moment."

"Sorry to break your hopes up there." Lycus looks at his apples while walking forward. "Although, I know just the thing that could cheer you up: These apples. They taste soooooo good. The sweetness and juiciness will freshen your body up like no tomorrow!" He holds the left apple forward. "You guys want some? I even have more behind me!"

"Really?" Ada asks. Lycus moves his tails to the side, showing off six more apples. "Oh my. That's a lot."

"Mhm. Wished there were more hanging on the trees though, but at least there were enough for each of us. Figure we could get something to eat in these trying times, you know?"

"Well I'm not really—" Ada's stomach growls, the girl looking down. "...Actually, eating an apple sounds like a good idea right now."

Roan jumps up. "I'll happily take your offer, Lycus!"

"You got it, little man." The Floatzel tosses the Axew his left apple, Roan catching it. He chows down on the red fruit, smiling and humming at its sweetness.

“Mmmm!” Roan swallows. “Thank you very much, Mr. Lycus sir! You certainly have a great taste in food for finding quality apples such as these!”

“Heh. They were literally just hanging from the trees. Fresh and all.”

“Ah, that explains it.” Roan keeps eating the fruit, his face blooming with joy.

The weasel hands the rest of the apples over to the others, Ada being the first to grab one from the tails and gives it to Coleo. She then grabs another one while Courtney and Justin snatch theirs within milliseconds, the rabbit sinking her teeth into the fruit. Mesmeren grabs hers' and nibbles on it, her hands trembling along the way. And Coleo bites down his', holding it with his setae.

“Ah, this should be enough to fill me up,” the Blipbug says, munching on the skin.

“I doubt this apple can fill me up, but it's better than nothing,” Justin says, taking a bite. “Mmf.” He shakes his head, some juices seeping down his lips. “Youve werenve lyinve abouff—”

“My goodness can't you talk without food in your mouth *for once*, Justin?” Ada grumbles. “I thought Mrs. Phoenix taught you better than this.”

Did she just say Phoenix? Lycus thinks, lifting his brow. *If so, these could be the group that wacko-haired guy was talking about. Still, I'll ask them why they're wandering around just to be sure.*

Justin swallows and scratches the back of his head nervously. “Haha, my bad.”

Ada huffs and munches on her apple. “Hmph!”

“Like I was saying: You weren't lying about these being fresh off the trees, Lycus! They're tasting mad good, man!”

“What can I say? I'm a man of my word.” Lycus smiles, showing off his fangs in pure smugness. He looks at Sylock, the Blaziken keeping his gaze onto the Lopunny while folding his arms. Lycus lifts his tails, showing off two apples. “Hey, want some? I'd imagine you could be starving right now.”

Sylock shakes his head.

“Ah come on. I heard that apples can really benefit you in the long run!” Lycus takes a bite off from his apple, his teeth grinding and crushing the flesh. “Mmm, a juicff benefff, no lessff!” He swallows afterwards, Ada shuddering at the sight.

Can ANYONE not talk with their food in their mouth? she thinks, squinting.

Sylock glances at Lycus and sighs, “*Sorry, but I’m not hungry.*” And before he knows it, his stomach rumbles like an earthquake, a blush casting onto him. Courtney nudges him with her elbow.

“Your stomach is speakin’ differently than your mind.” She snickers. “It’s alright. Go ahead and eat up, Sy.”

The Blaziken looks at Courtney for a brief moment, staring into her pink eyes with uncertainty. He then sighs. “*Alright, fine.*” He grabs one of the two apples and takes a bite, only to receive a sudden hug from Courtney mere seconds later.

“There ya go!” She closes her eyes and smiles, leading Sylock to slowly smile back.

Lycus turns towards the teens, wrapping his tail around the last apple. “Ada and Justin, wasn’t it?” He clears his throat. “I meant to ask you two this before, but what brings you around here?”

Ada tilts her head, swallowing a piece of her fruit. “We’re trying to reach Glory Pride City, which is across this lake.”

“And why’s that?”

Ada stares at her bitten apple, gripping it. “...Our friends should be there. The ones Justin and I grew up with in our village...” Sighs. “Before we got separated.”

“How did you two get separated from them?”

The girl looks out of the window, prolonging at the heavy rainfalls and war zone. “Our village got burned down by a terrorist group known as Team Conjure. It’s because of them, we were forced to go our separate ways...”

Justin eyes the girl, tapping his apple before lowering his head. “Yeah...”

Village. Separated. Lycus hides a small smirk. *And CONJURE...Bingo: These are the ones.* He then completely changes his facade into that of pity, his apple clinging against his chest. “Oh...I wasn’t aware of those tragedies. My sincere condolences to your home village, Ada and Justin.”

“Thanks, man.” Justin stands next to Ada, staring out of the window as well. “Once this nasty war is over, we’ll finally leave this lake and *hopefully* reunite with our friends...”

“Agreed: Terran, Merlin, X, and Serene are probably worried sick about us. Along with Ethan, too.” Ada sighs. “Only time will tell on when we get to see them again...”

Lycus raises his brow. "Wait, one of them is named 'X'?"

The teens look behind them at the Floatzel. "Oh right. That's the nickname he chooses to give himself. He doesn't like his real name: Xavier."

Lycus widens his eyes. *XAVIER!?* He stares off, his teeth grinding against the edge of his apple with aggression. *That...mistake of mine is still alive, huh?*

Justin jolts his brow. "Uh, you aight, fam?"

Crap. They're catching onto me. Gotta calm down. He inhales before smiling at the two. "Sorry! Thought I'd forgotten one more apple for Ramon, but thankfully I didn't."

Coleo tilts his head. "But did ye had that Rune power where ye can remember things clea—"

"Speaking of Ramon! Why is he traveling with you two? Or those three, while at it," Lycus says abruptly, pointing at Mesmeren, Courtney, and Sylock. "I assume they're also from the village, right?"

Coleo raises his brow as Ada scratches the back of her head. "Not really. Justin and I found Ramon nearby an abandoned facility, helping him recover his memories from there."

"Abandoned facility?" The Blipbug scratches the side of his head.

Ada looks up. "Yes. It's a building that used to be run by the now defunct company, Prospective Institute. They're known for thinking up new ways to improve society with their experiments." She reaches inside of her jacket's pocket, taking out a journal. "Proof of this is within Dr. Yvonne's journal. He's one of the famous scientists of the institute, who has documented several entries and information here."

"Huh..." Coleo tilts his head. "I see."

The teen puts the journal back. "As for the other three, they have their own reasons for traveling with us. And you already know Roan's."

Roan brings his arms up. "Indeed!"

Courtney raises her finger up. "I wanted to tackle the worldwide tournament taking place in that city!" She forms a fist, smirking. "Proving the world how strong I can be."

Sylock stares at Lycus, nonchalant. "*I'm just tagging along to look after her,*" he signs with one hand before biting his apple.

"Not sure if I understood that, uh..."

“Sylock! And he said he’s just lookin’ after me,” Courtney answers.

“Right.” Lycus nods. “These are some thoughtful goals you all have so far.” He looks down at the Drowzee, who keeps her gaze on the window. “What about you?”

“Hmm?” She turns. “M-Me?”

The Floatzel nods. “Yes, you: Why are you traveling with Ada and Justin?”

The many eyes gaze at Mesmeren, the Drowzee looking away while blushing. “W-Well...I’m lost and don’t have anywhere to go. A-And also wanted to repay Justin, Ada, and Ramon t-too for saving me from those scary C-Conjures!”

“You were caught by those Conjure peeps?”

Mesmeren nods meekly. “M-Mhm...” She then stares out of the window to her right, squeezing her apple.

Lycus puts his paw beneath his chin. *Huh. The failed target is even traveling with these teens. How cute.*

“Hmm?” Mesmeren blinks in perplexion. “Hey um...”

“Somethin’ the matter, lass?” Coleo asks.

The Drowzee points, her face warping in mortification. “Th-There’s a Gyarados heading our way!” *A-And that weird familiar sensation is coming back, too!*

“What!?” All of them shouts, jotting their eyes towards the window.

A Gyarados springs out of the bushes, staring directly at the group. Everyone stands on their guard: Courtney and Sylock grabbing their sword’s hilt, Justin and Ada casting their Magic moves, Coleo touching his dagger’s hilt, Lycus forming icy energy around his fists, all while Mesmeren remains as still as a pumpkin. Completely immobilized.

However, the Gyarados glows magenta before decreasing itself, arms and legs sprouting from it. A long red hair spawns at the top of its head, a snout replacing its big maw. Once the glowing ends, the Gyarados has turned into a familiar Zoroark with bangs. The Zoroark pants heavily, staring at the ground in exhaustion.

Mesmeren gasps. “It’s Ramon!” She’s the first to rush towards the window, opening it immediately. Everyone lowers their guards and follows her, letting the Zoroark inside of the cabin.

Ramon groans, shaking his head. "Ugh, that took longer than it needed to..." He soon yelps from the sudden hug, blushing at Mesmeren, Ada, and even Justin huddling close to him. Coleo clings onto Ada's hair as the apple falls off from her head, the Blipbug staring at it.

There goes me apple, he thinks.

"We missed you so much, fam!" Justin whines. "Thought you were a goner for a moment, not gonna lie."

"Yeah..." Ada follows, tightening the Zoroark's arm.

"I..." Ramon blinks in...uncertainty. From what his brother told him, he has every right to not see this act of kindness as anything but genuine. Especially from humans. And yet, he is surrounded in hugs. Massive ones. The fox can't really put his claw on it. The...many concerns radiating from his friends upon his return. He can't understand it.

Despite his confusion, he gives the group a warm smile. "...Thanks." Is all he can think of saying.

"Ramon lad."

The Zoroark looks at Coleo. "Yes?"

"Were ye able to talk with Virtuous and Behemoth about the war?"

Ramon slowly looks off to the side, twitching his ears while forming a poker face. "Well..."