

Chapter 43: Not-So Pleasant Reunion.

Vehicles pass by the many houses and stores, people roaming around the streets of Glory Pride's suburbs. Some of the residents chat with each other while the kids frolic around in a friendly spar. One child flicks their Mystical Projectile at a Fuecoco before the fire gator ducks, almost hitting a woman near the food mart.

"HEY! Watch where you aim that thing!" the woman yells, stroking her groceries while glaring.

The kids laugh in an awkward manner, all scratching the back of their heads while in the street's middle. "Our bad, ma'am!" the Fuecoco says.

As the woman crosses the road, the kids notice some cars heading towards them. They move to the sidewalk, continuing their spars in its open space. The cars drive towards a yellow orb statue in the middle, turning their left or their right path.

Nearing the food mart seven feet away is a fairly large house with fences surrounding it, some windows being next to the front door. The only part the fences haven't surrounded is the garage, a walkway leading towards it. Inside of the house is the living room with three couches: One on the left, one on the right, and the third in the middle.

There's a table in front of the middle sofa, with a picture portrait sitting on it. The picture has a Riolu, Charmeleon, and two teens eyeing forward: The Riolu posing in a determined manner while wearing his black cloak, the Charmeleon flexing his arms while wearing his yellow chain necklace, the mid teen adjusting his glasses while wearing a blue jacket, and the late teen rustling his hair while wearing his lab coat. They're all smiling, with the latter's glasses about to fall off.

Two orange scaly feet sit beside the portrait, a yawn following from the individual himself: A Charizard. The Charizard groans, his head against his hand as he wields a TV remote, his chain necklace hanging around him. Beside him are three Pokémon: A Buizel, Leafeon, and Flareon. All four of them are sitting on the middle sofa, eyeing at the fairly large TV ahead.

The TV has a Dragonite wearing a crystal necklace and a Nidoking wearing black gloves, both charging towards each other with their ultimate moves.

"Fire Ice Punch!" the Dragonite yells, her fist encasing in flaming chill energy.

"Poison Thunder Punch!" the Nidoking yells back, his fist encasing in electrifying toxic energy.

The Charizard rolls his eyes. "Boring as shit." He presses a button.

As the two Pokémon collide their moves, the channel switches to two Prinplups slapping each other with their flippers before an Empoleon smacks them in the head. The Charizard laughs.

"Now THIS is my kind of show," he says, grinning.

The Buizel looks up to him, pouting. "HEY! Change back to Mixturing Moves, NOW!"

The orange dragon looks down at the weasel, glaring. "No."

The weasel whines. "Why!? I was enjoying that show, especially at Episode 5 where things were really heating up!"

"You were???" The dragon blinks before rolling his eyes. "Kid, you literally need to like better shows than this. This feels like someone's attempt at creating an epic, grand story without planning any of it."

The Leafreon beside the Buizel giggles. "Honestly, I agree with Noctis here."

"Shush, Serene! I'm surprised that you're even paying attention to the convo this time around. Cuz you would always be doing your nails nearly everyday!" The weasel huffs, folding his arms.

Serene looks at the Buizel deadpanned. "...I lost my nail file in the flames, remember?"

The Buizel blinks for a moment before looking away, laughing with raspiness. "Ah...My bad for forgetting that."

"It's fine." The tan canine looks down at her toenails, whimpering. "Ugh, they look so... unpolished! I wish I still had my nail file." Tears stream down her cheeks like a waterfall, the Flareon beside her immediately trembling at the sight. Serene looks at him before shaking her head, waving her paws. "NO NO NO! I'm okay, Ethan! No need to worry about me feeling down! I'm just overreacting, that's all! Haha..."

Noctis and the Buizel give Serene perplexing looks before facing each other. "ANYWAYS!" The Buizel squints his eyes. "YOU'RE WRONG!" Pouts. "Like this show is really good, with action scenes making up for some of the hiccups in it. And there's times where this show gets really emotional, too. Such as what happened to Carrie at the end of Episode 4. Genuinely feel so bad for her, dude."

Noctis blinks again, shaking his head. "But like...*why* though!? THAT CARRIE CHARACTER SUCKS, SHE HARDLY DID A THING AND ONLY EXISTS AS DEATH FODDER!"

The weasel leaps up. "H-Hey! She ain't no death fodder! Also, did we watch the same show? Because I could've sworn I saw her fighting those Malamars in Episode 3 and 4!"

"She deadass only appeared in two episodes and then died at the end of the second one. How is that *not* death fodder? Like sure she's a side character and all, but the story didn't give her

character enough time to expand and have us *care* about her before her death TWO episodes in. Hell, I would've taken three or four episodes focusing on Carrie."

The Buizel waves his paw up and down. "Nah, I think the writers did a good job at fleshing her out. Especially during the middle of Episode 4 where she was comforting her little brother despite her injuries."

"Eh, I guessed so." Noctis blinks for a moment before scratching the back of his head. "Although, I will admit that you're right about her fighting those Malamars. But she's still an ass character because of her being a generic protective type." He shrugs.

"Nah, she's not bad. You just have bad tastes!" The Buizel sticks his tongue out playfully.

Noctis squints. "Says the kid who thinks a Malamar casually explaining his evil plans to three randos is good writing."

"Wait, is that not good writing?"

Noctis shakes his head. "No. Why would explaining your secret plans to *RANDOM PEOPLE* be a good idea, X?"

X tilts his head. "I mean, I figured that happens just to let us know them Malamars bad." He poker faces.

"But, I mean—THAT'S JUST BAD WRITING THEN, MY GUY!"

As the two continue their dispute, Serene pats her brother on the back, concerns spreading throughout. Ethan tenses up, his shakiness persists. "Come on, Ethan..." Serene lowers her ears. "I said that I'm fine and was overrea—"

"Th-That's not i-it," Ethan interrupts, his voice being as shaky and quivery as he is, his blue necklace dangling.

"Then what is it? If it's us being in danger, then you don't have to worry. We're safe here in Mr. Noctis' home. Okay?" The Leafreon smiles.

"N-No..." Ethan shakes his head. "M-Mother will be mad..." He stares at Serene, eyes widened. "W-We've been g-gone from her for so, so long." The red canid strokes the sofa, tears wailing up on his claw marked face. "I-I don't want to get pu—"

A hug is met with the Flareon, Ethan gasping as he stares at Serene. The Leafreon rubs the young creature's back, nuzzling him. She closes her eyes. "I know," she says, wrapping her vines around the Flareon. Ethan blinks, sniffing before his shakiness fades, closing his eyes as well.

Behind the four is a kitchen a few feet away, containing two individuals: One being in front of a stove wearing an apron while the other is holding a cookbook flipping through pages. Steam rises from the large pot on the stove, the dark brown woman using her spoon to stir inside. She hums, grabbing a salt nearby to sprinkle.

"This Aspear Soup is looking nice so far," the woman says, sticking her tongue out in concentration.

The teen nods, preventing his hat from falling off. "Yes yes, this recipe looks fantastic, Mrs. Phoenix!" Merlin flips to another page, an Aspear Berry cutting up into pieces displays itself. His eyes jolt at the numbers, words going over the process such as 'add a pitch of apple juices to the pot' and 'sprinkle some salt into it.' The Sorcerous gasps, grasping the book.

"This is information heaven! I can learn so much from all of these words!" He points to the word 'helve'. "I wasn't even aware of this word's existence! I guess 'helve' means handling a tool, presumably very carefully due to the next step of placing the sliced Nanab Berry inside."

Delia quirks her brow. "In other words, cut a Nanab Berry in half and put it inside the pot."

"Erm, yes exactly that."

Delia chuckles. "Well I'm not doing this by myself, so go look in the berry basket for some Nanabs."

Merlin nods. "Right on, Mrs. Phoenix!"

Merlin rushes to his left, the steam leaving the kitchen and heading over to the living room. The aroma climbs up X's nose, the Buizel sandwiching his face with his paws. "OH THAT SMELLS GOOD!" he exclaims, his face going red with enthusiasm.

"AH!" Ethan yelps, Serene patting him within seconds while laughing in a nervous manner.

"Eh-Ex!" Serene stutters, frowning at the weasel.

Delia giggles, smiling. "Just give it a couple more minutes and then it'll be ready."

The Buizel's maw drools, moving himself from side to side while holding his paws. "Ooooooh I'm looking forward to it, Mrs. Phoenix!"

Noctis' belly rumbles, the Charizard staring at it. "...Yeah, I'm getting hungry too."

X then blinks in perplexion. "Um, what?"

Noctis looks down at the Buizel. “What do you mean ‘what’? I gotta eat just like you do, boy.”

“No, not that. I mean...” X glances at the front door. “Feels like I’m...*sensing* something nearby. Two, in fact.”

Everyone looks at him with raised brows, Serene tilting her head. “Really?”

X nods. “Yeah. I don’t think I’ve felt this way before, either. It’s weird.”

The chained necklace dragon waves his hand. “It’s probably nothing to worry about. Could be your mind messing with ya.” Without a warning, X sprints off the couch, ushering towards the door. “What the—Where are you going!?”

“X, wait!” Serene’s about to get up until Noctis lifts his hand, the Leafeon pausing.

“Stay here with Ethan. I’ll go after your friend.”

Serene eyes her brother, the Flareon quivering his lips as his shakiness returns. “Yeah. I will.”

Noctis flaps his wings and flies up before landing behind the sofa. He looks down at his feet, groaning. “Ugggh, I have to ruuuuuun.” He rolls his eyes, dragging his feet against the ground.

The Buizel passes by the kitchen, Delia and Merlin looking to their right in confusion while the latter holds some Nanab Berries.

“Um, X?” Merlin asks before the door opens, closing right after the Buizel leaves.

“Huh. Wonder where he’s going.”

“Yeah...” Merlin sets the berries and cookbook beside the sink on the counter. “I’ll go follow him.”

“Wait, what about—”

Merlin runs off and opens the door, dashing after X. Noctis stops in front of Delia, panting and eyeing her. “Hey watch over my house real quick, alright?”

“But what about—” Noctis leaves, closing the door. “...my soup.”

...

A car drives towards the exit on its right, riding along the bumpy roads. Ramon walks past a double-ended sign: *‘Avalon Forest 2 to Glory Pride City’*.

More vehicles zip by him as he's in the middle of the street. Justin, Ada, and the others are held in the air by his shadow arms, the Zoroark panting while stroking the back of Mesmeren's head.

People on the sidewalks eye the fox in discomfort, some White Flower Florges pinning themselves against a nearby building.

Just...need to ask for help. Dark aura flourishes throughout the fox, his black scleras piercing through the people's dread. "H-Hey, can someone please he—"

"AAAH!" one man screams, running off along with everyone else.

"Let's get away from them!" a Sudowoodo exclaims, holding a woman's hand and tugging her.

"O-Officer! POLICE!" a Forretress yells in a raspy tone, their hat scrambling off from them as they float away.

Ramon grits his teeth, shaking. "W-Wait, no! I just need someone's—"

SCREEECH!

Multiple cars swirl around themselves and drive away from the Zoroark, zooming past the yellow statue up ahead, some even turning to their right. Ramon lowers his ears. "Help..." He sighs. *I don't look that scary, do I?*

"Mm..." Mesmeren whines, twitching a bit within Ramon's grasp.

Ramon looks down at her. "Just hang on, Mesmeren." He eyes his friends afterwards, all remaining still in his shadow hands. "All of you hang on a little longer. Please..." The fox moves forward, grunting.

Once he stands in front of the statue, he turns to his right: Three individuals dashing after him. *Maybe they can help me*, Ramon thinks, more vehicles evading him. He then blinks in confusion. *That tingling feeling is back again...*

...

A truck honks at X and Merlin, the Buizel rolling towards the side while the teen jumps after him. Merlin sighs, stroking his chest and staff. "Phew, that was a close one!" He eyes a disappeared Buizel's spot. "X?" He looks ahead, the weasel dashing towards a shadowy figure. Merlin yelps, following.

X stops in front of the figure, eyeing him. "What the hell?"

Merlin stops next to the Buizel. "What is it?" The boy then gasps, his hat tilting.

Noctis soon catches up with them, panting and huffing while his hands are on his knees. "Damn...Note to self: Fly to your location instead of running next time. Please." The Charizard glances at Merlin and X. "What're you two ogling at?" He then looks in front of him before jumping back. "HOLY SHIT!"

The Zoroark stands before them: Red irises gleaming within the darkness shrouding him. Spacey, fuse noises pulsate his shadow arms. His hands take hold of six individuals, waving around. And lastly, a Drowzee lies in the fox's grasp, twitching and quaking at random.

X widens his eyes at two teens encased in those shadows: Justin and Ada, *barely moving*.

Ramon stares at the three, his ears lowered. "Hey, can you please help my fri—"

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING HOLDING MY FRIENDS HOSTAGE!?" X shouts, clenching his teeth.

The fox gasps. "Wh-What!? No no no! I'm not holding your friends hostage!"

Flames form around Noctis' maw as Merlin gets in a posture, purple sparkles forming on his staff's tip. "Your appearance says otherwise," the teen states, frowning.

"It's not what it looks like, I swear!"

Aquatic energy casts around the Buizel as he snarls. "I'm not buying that crap: Let. Them. Go. NOW!"

"But I'm telling you the truth: I'm not holding them hos—" Ramon is shoved by X's Aqua Jet, dropping Mesmeren along with the others. His eyes widen, feeling like everything is at a brief halt as he's being separated from the tapir. He rolls around the ground, flailing over and over. He rams into the bushes near the statue, groaning. "Ugh..."

Everyone hit the ground, Mesmeren whimpering while the others groan. "R-Ra...mon..." That's what the Drowzee can say, tears streaming down her cheeks.

X jumps from the Zoroark, glaring. "I don't know what you did to Justin and Ada, but I'll make sure you regret it!" Six dark tentacles emerge from the weasel's back, X forming orange irises in his eyes while black scleras cast around.

Ramon shuffles out of the bushes, eyeing the pointy tentacles aiming at him. The slender tendrils rush towards the fox, Ramon gasping. He counters them with his shadow arms, getting pushed back before jumping to the side. He soon coughs out black blood, trembling.

Using this Rune is hurting me more often than it should, Ramon thinks. He eyes another tentacle slamming downwards, the Zoroark rolling to the side as it hits the ground.

Dark Tendrils, an unknown raspy voice says in X's mind.

X blinks for a moment before shaking his head. *Could be my mind messing with me there.* He lunges towards Ramon, striking his Dark Tendrils forward while the fox keeps dodging.

Merlin and Noctis hear coughters to their side, seeing seven individuals lying down. Ada strokes the ground, gazing at Justin. The boy's lips shake, his chest moving gradually. "Ju-Justin..." The girl lays her hand on top of his', whimpering. She turns towards the fight, her vision blurring.

"Ada! Justin!" Merlin and Noctis rush towards Ada's side, the wizard hat boy trembling with dread. "Are you okay!?"

Ada slowly turns towards him. "M-Mer...lin?" She lifts her shaky hand, pressing them against Merlin's face. "Is that...you?"

Merlin nods. "Yes, it's me." He scans the girl, eyes expanding. "What's wrong with your voice? Wh...Why do you look so pale?" The boy looks at the others. "Actually, why *are* all of you pale? ...Did the Zoroark do this to you!?"

Noctis scratches the side of his head. "Um. Wanna fill me in on what the fuck is going on???"

Merlin shakes his head. "I-I have no clue myself." He quakes. "Maybe they need to heal. That must be it." The teen presses his hand onto Ada's chest as it glows blue. Ada's face remains in its pale, weakened state, Merlin sighing before he stops. "...Doesn't seem like it worked." Whines. "Why!?"

"R-Ramon..." Ada groans.

"Hmm?" Merlin leans closer.

Ada uses her last ounces of strength to point at the dodging Zoroark. "He...helped u-us." She pants heavily. "He...isn't the cause of...Weaken...er." The girl passes out.

"What?" Merlin shakes the teen. "Ada? Ada!?" He brings his head against her chest, a 'thump' happens every now and then. "...Okay. She's still alive: Good."

Noctis rests his hands by his hips. "Hey um, I'm still confused about what just happened. Like what did she say to you?" He blinks before shaking his head. "Wait hold up, you know her too?"

Merlin nods. "Yes. She's a childhood friend of mine. Her and Justin." He turns towards the Charizard. "The ones we've told you about being separated from."

"Oooh." Noctis grimaces. "Not-so...pleasant reunion it seems, though."

Merlin grimaces as well. "Indeed." He looks at the fight afterwards. "As for what she told me, she said this Ramon guy has helped her and isn't the cause of this 'Weakener'."

"Wow." Noctis holds his hands together, his fingertips resting beneath his head. "I love how I got some answers and yet, I'm STILL confused."

"Sorry." Merlin sighs, shaking his head. "I don't even know what this 'Weakener' is, either!"

"Right." *Although...did she say 'Ramon'?* Noctis squints, eyeing the fight as well.

The Zoroark ducks and dodges, leaping from two tentacles. X encases his arm in dark energy and lunges towards the fox. "Hey, I'm—" Ramon grits his teeth and ducks backwards from Pursuit, leading the Buizel to hit nothing and rolling forward.

X jabs the ground with his tentacles, stopping himself. Ramon's Shadow Arch latches onto the ground before pushing the fox up, backflipping over the weasel.

Ramon lands in front of a large saloon building beside the statue, panting. The people inside eyes them, all trembling and quaking.

"Please listen to me!" Ramon exclaims, X keeping his tentacles active. "I wasn't holding your friends hostage! I was trying to find them some help!" Ramon whines, lowering his ears. "I mean no harm, I promise!"

X enlarges his eyes, his irises twitching in madness. The words 'I promise' rings into his mind, brief images of a Pokémon Trainer saying those exact words popping up in incoherent paces. The Buizel frowns, flaming aquatic auras boost around him.

"You 'promise', huh?" His auras spark, radiating with splashing fiery. The Buizel moves his arms back.

Merlin and Noctis widen their eyes, confusion spreading across. "What...kind of Pokémon move is the kid using!?" Noctis yells.

Merlin shakes his head. "I don't think that's a Pokémon move. I think it's a—"

X pushes his arms forward, the flaming waters jolting towards the Zoroark. "I DON'T BELIEVE YOUR CRAP, YOU MONSTER!"

Ramon gasps, his heart feeling as though it has dropped to the very depths upon hearing 'monster'. The Zoroark looks down at the ground and closes his eyes, retracting his shadow arms. Tears slide down his cheeks as he says,

"I can't blame you..."

The aquatic flames rams him into the building.

Whatever flames that initially catch onto the debris are doused by the water afterwards, giving the civilians a chance to scramble. Ramon rolls around the ground a couple of times before sliding across, crashing against some desks. The wooden structures collapse onto him, clouding bits of his face.

The fox doesn't care: His hands twitching, his legs twitching, and his face...unmoving. Ramon gazes at the ceiling, more tears sliding down.

Ramon!? Nomar yells, wanting the Zoroark's attention: It is null and void. Ramon, please get up! PLEASE! A tentacle wraps around the fox in a slow, steady pace. I DON'T WANT YOU TO DIE! BECAUSE IF YOU DO, THEN I'LL DIE PERMANENTLY, TOO!

...Does Mesmeren have a point? Ramon thinks. About her being unwanted by the world?

RAMON!

The Zoroark is lifted. *Because if so...* The tentacle brings him forward to an aquatically furious Buizel, X bringing his right paw to the side. *I'm also unwanted here...*

"X, stop!" Merlin shouts behind the Buizel, X keeping his menacing gaze. "I think this Ramon guy wasn't holding our friends hostage!" Ramon looks down at Merlin and Noctis, the boy stroking his brown staff in concern.

X's eyes tremble, the weasel shivering. Brief images of the same Pokémon Trainer pop into his mind again, his appearance becoming more clear as a single cap overshadows his eyes.

The dark brown trainer was holding a chain in one hand and a Pokéball in another, yanking X by the neck. "You're going to be my companion!" the trainer said, his tone distorted. "WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT!"

Snapping back to the present, tears rain down X's cheeks. The Buizel snarls, igniting his Azure Cerise on his paw. "No. He definitely held them hostage, harming them in some way or shape. Why else would he come here looking all shadowy and dangerous?"

"I don't know, but I haven't seen him try to fight back, either."

"Tch." X's aquatic flames grow bigger. "Probably just pretending to be harmless so that I won't light his ass on fire right now."

Ramon twitches, tears dripping nonstop. Merlin presses his staff against his chest, gazing at the Zoroark. "That...could be the case, but I don't think so. Look at him, X."

X's raging vision clears, the Buizel eyeing the fox's gloomy state. Ramon hasn't tried to move the tentacle, scratch it, kick it, nor even bite it. All the Zoroark does is staring at the ground, sniffing and tearing up like crazy. X's heart thumps and pumps at a speedy pace, the weasel gritting his teeth.

"...Were you telling the truth the whole time? You're not really harming my friends? You...were really trying to help them?" Ramon keeps tearing up, unable to respond.

"Yes! Ada has told me so," Merlin states.

X looks off to the side, trembling further. He eyes his surroundings: Many broken furniture and desks littering everywhere. "...O-Oh." The Buizel glances back at the Zoroark. "I'm—"

"Jewel, use your Healer ability! Tress, wrap those two with your feelers!" an unknown voice commands in a semi-low tone.

Everyone then gets surrounded in bright pink auras, overriding X's flaming aquatic one. Noctis and Merlin look at themselves in confusion. "Huh??? Where's this coming from?" Noctis asks before seeing four ribbon feelers jolting towards X and Ramon. "WHERE ARE *THOSE* COMING FROM!?"

The feelers touch the two, X's shakiness and Ramon's tears coming to a halt. The Buizel drops the Zoroark, retrieving his tentacles as his flaming water dies down. The feelers lower the Zoroark, placing him on the ground as he coughs. The two Pokémon look at each other, exchanging uncertainties.

"Why am I feeling so calm all of the sudden?" X asks, tilting his head.

The four then turn around: Three individuals stand before them. One is a young man with tan skin, folding his arms while covering parts of the words 'Live and Learn' on his pink shirt. His long, black hair is tied up in a ponytail, blue pants displaying holes around his kneecaps as he has a purple Mega Bracelet on his right wrist. Four Pokéballs of various types are attached to his waist, his white shoes showing themselves.

Standing next to him is a pink quadruped Sylveon and a white biped Audino: The latter on his left, the former on his right. The Audino is in his Mega form, holding his chest's feelers out while closing his eyes.

A couple of officers are behind the three, some preparing their firearms, others simply having their magic sparkling around their hands. The man gazes at the four, his red and blue eyes striking them with intrigue.

“What seems to be the problem here?”