

Chapter 46: Recovery.

“What kind of Spell are you two guarding?” the Zoroark asks.

Everyone stares at him, Nered and Kellie eyeing each other in suspicion. Nered then glares at the fox. “Why do you want to know about that?”

Ramon leans his head back, gulping. *Oh no*, both he and Nomar think.

What...do I say? Ramon whimpers in his head.

Tell them that you’ve met that Forest guy or whoever his name is! Nomar suggests in a quick tone.

Oh right! “I’ve met a Spell Guardian before who’s tasked to protect the Transmutation Spell. I was curious about it.”

Kellie and Nered look at each other once more, eyebrow raising. Ramon displays his calm composure while simultaneously screaming within.

“Do you know their name?” Kellie asks.

“Forest.”

“Oh.” Kellie lays their hands by their hips, smirking. “That old goofy fella. Always trying to tell any kind of jokes and be as funny as possible. Wonder if he still does that, though.”

Nered frowns. “Wouldn’t surprise me, given the last time we met him.” The Roserade sighs. “*Flowerade* is not a good calembour, or pun, and no one can convince me otherwise.”

X raises his brow. “*Flowerade*’? What.”

Kellie shakes their head, snickering. “It’s one of his better puns, that’s for sure.”

Nered rolls her eyes. “Disagree.”

Kellie turns towards the Zoroark. “As for the Spell I’m tasked to protect: It’s the Revival Spell.” Ramon perks his ears up at the words ‘Revival Spell’, intrigue circulating throughout him. “I’m not alone at protecting it since there’s a ton of Spell Guardians at Gloria Falls, too. Nered even sometimes helps out here and there on it.”

The Roserade bows her head. “Yes, indeed.”

Ramon nods. “I see, then. Can I—”

Don't ask further questions, Nomar states. Let's wait for an opportunity to go there ourselves.

Huh? But why?

Kellie tilts their head. "Can you...what exactly?"

Ramon, do I need to tell you for the umpteenth time about humans not being trustworthy? We've seen examples of their wicked deeds and betrayals. We shouldn't let them know about our intentions, Nomar says, his tone grim.

Ramon frowns. *Then explain Lycus!? He's not a human, and yet my friends and I trusted him. He backstabbed us hard, and now Justin, Ada, Mesmeren, Courtney, Sylock, Roan, and even Coleo are at the Pokémon Center because of him!*

The fact that you still called Justin and Ada your 'friends'... Nomar's voice becomes raspy enough to sound like he's shivering. *Do you even know what they are!?*

I do! I was just mentioning the case for Lycus, who's a Pokémon like you and I! Ugh, are you even listening to the things I'm saying!?

Are you, brother?

Ramon is about to argue with Nomar further until—

Snap.

Ramon blinks at Kellie's fingers. "Hey, can you elaborate further on what you're trying to say?" the individual states, staring with gray curiosity in their eyes.

The Zoroark eyes around, the look of uncertainty spreading across every single person gazing at him. Noctis glances in bewilderment while Delia presses her hand against her lips, perplexed. X walks up to the Zoroark, his paws behind his head.

"Uh, are you alright?" the Buizel asks.

Ramon blinks for a moment before shaking his head. "Sorry. Just, uh, daydreamed for a bit." He looks back at Kellie. "I forgot what I was going to say..." He scratches the back of his head nervously. "Again, sorry."

"Ah, it happens." Kellie stretches their arms out, looking at Ace. "Welp, with that said: I'll go back to my guarding duty. Take it easy, Ace."

"You too, Kellie," Ace says before snapping his fingers. "Wait, would you like to do some gaming at my house tonight?"

"As much as I love to, I'll pass." The curly hair Sorcerous lowers their fists and nods with firmness. "I want to commit towards my Spell Guardian duty all day. Feel like I've been slacking off for some time now, so I'll make up for it now."

"I see."

Nered waves at Ace. "I for one will take up your offer on gaming tonight. Since I'm not binded to protect the Revival Spell like Kellie is," Nered says, looking off to the side and blushing.

Ace smiles. "That's cool to know!"

The Roserade perks up. *H-He says it's cool for moi to hang out with him! Oh how fantastical of an opportunity!* She sighs, smiling back with serenity.

"Alrighty then. Take care!" Kellie concludes, Nered walking close to them. The two walk away as Ace waves.

"See ya!"

As they leave, Delia's phone rings in her pocket, the woman taking it out. The words 'Pokémon Center Customer Service' pop up on her screen, the woman gasping. Noctis looks at her.

"What is it?" he asks.

"It's the Pokémon Center! They must be calling me about my son's injury!" Delia answers the phone, bringing it to her ear. "Hello?" The woman nods, voices emanating from her device. "Mhm...Okay, got it. Thank you for the update *so very much*." She hangs up, turning towards the group. "The nurse from earlier told me that we're allowed to see Justin and Ada along with the others they're with. The extraction process is done, according to them."

X hops up, smiling. "Oh that's awesome!"

Ace lifts his hand. "I'll teleport us over to the center since it has a teleportation statue next to it."

The Buizel pauses his happy-go-lucky jumps, gradually staring at the young man. "Why... couldn't you do that with Justin and Ada earlier?"

The ponytail trainer caresses his nose. "Good question. And I have a good answer." He points towards the weasel. "Lowering my risk of exhaustion." He tilts his head at Merlin. "As you've seen with your friend here, he became too tired to catch up after teleporting all—" Ace counts his fingers. "*Eight* of us, including Merlin himself." He shakes his head, his hands by his hips. "I

don't want to risk that when teleporting more than *eight* people at once. Plus it'll be hectic for the medics to worry about both me and the injured seven at the same time."

"Couldn't one of the medics aid you with the teleportation though?"

"As far as I'm concerned, no. Even if one of them is a Sorcerous, both of us can't teleport at the same time due to deaths being caused by using so much magic from more people teleporting."

X widens his eyes. "Whoa, really!?"

Ace strokes the side of his arm, nodding. "Yeah. There's a reason why whenever a Sorcerous uses the statue, it's always one of them doing the teleporting and not two or more. The high risk of death just to get to, I don't know, a grocery store nearby is not worth it."

X raises his brow. "Jeez...That's so weird. I thought Sorcerous were these very powerful humans all my life." He squints. "Seeing Justin and Ada being immobilized, seeing you getting held down by those crooks earlier, and then hearing about the consequences of having more than one Sorcerous teleporting is just...very surreal, dude."

Ramon strokes his chest, looking down. "I hope Justin and Ada never have to resort to that point."

The Buizel nods. "Same here." He then sighs.

Noctis turns around, glaring at the catastrophic mayhem that is his home, littered with broken fences and windows. Even the roof peels off parts of itself and lands on the ground, the wood breaking in half.

The Charizard grumbles, clenching his chain necklace. "I'll stay here in case anymore of those extreme Anti-Noctis crooks come by to make my day even worse."

"'Anti-Noctis'?" The Buizel snorts. "You're famous or something?"

"Used to." The Charizard glares. "Put it shortly, these guys want my ass in shambles because of my All Star Tournament days. Hence the phrase 'Flaming Vortex'. That was my title."

"Yoo, that's awesome." X forms his fists and jumps in place. "I watched those tournament matches all the time! And then you come out of nowhere to always change the channel into something else." He folds his arms, pouting.

Serene tilts her head. "I wonder why. I was enjoying those matches, too."

Noctis doesn't look at the group: Keeping his gaze directly on his house. "...I have my reasons."

“Weird.” X then blinks. “Also wait, why did you stop participating in the tournament, too?”

Delia perks up. “Yes, I’ve meant to ask you that after those cro—”

“I’ve. Said. That I have my reasons.” Noctis huffs. “Don’t you have a son and some friends to worry about? I’ll tell you after your visit with them. Just...” Noctis forms a fist. “Just not feeling it, right now.”

Delia looks at the orange lizard with blues, watching him pick up a single broken fence and gazing at it. The dark brown woman caresses her bangs, scrunching up before staring back at Ace. “Good point.”

Ramon stares at the Charizard for a moment, walking towards him. “I’ll stay with you in case you need backup.”

Noctis simply blinks in bewilderment, raising his brow at the fox. “I don’t need anyone’s help. I can defend myself just fine.”

“What happened earlier said otherwise.” The Zoroark looks up at the tall lizard, intrigue spreading across. “You’ll need that extra protection on top of someone helping you clean this mess here.”

Noctis grumbles, folding his arms. He huffs, closing his eyes. “Fiiine, you can stay and help.”

X lifts his paw up. “As much as I want to stay here, I really want to come with Delia to see Justin and Ada again.”

Merlin nods. “Same here.”

Serene and Ethan nod along with the teen, the Leafeon pressing her vine against her chest. “I haven’t seen those two in like, *forever*.” She smiles, her brother shielding under her cyan cloak. “It’ll be nice to see them again.”

Delia’s hands sit on her hips, nodding. “That settles it. We’re ready to go, Ace.”

Ace gives the four a thumbs up, smirking. “Gotcha then. Just let me return my Pokémon real quick.” He turns towards his four companions: Taking out his Pokeball and Great Ball to return Ariel and Blackburn inside of them respectively. He then takes out his Ultra and Heal Ball. “I’ll send you two out after I’m done teleporting, okay?” Tress and Jewel nod, the former rubbing his head against Ace’s leg.

After Ace returns them, X and Serene stare in bewilderment.

“I don’t get it,” Serene says. “How could those Pokémon fathom being treated that way?”

The Buizel nods. "Yeah. I know they're Nativus and all, but the thought of being captured and owned is just—" X pauses for a moment, eyes widening before he grits his teeth, looking away. "Gah, it just...doesn't sit right with me."

Ace blinks, setting his Pokeballs around his waist. "Hmm...It's pretty understandable to feel iffy about it. Seeing another Pokémon like yourself being tamed and captured, even though you're a different kind that actually has their own freedom and will."

That's because all Pokémon belong to the wild and not by humans under some weird systematic society! Nomar states in Ramon's head, Ramon staring at the ponytail trainer with concern.

Ace taps his chin. "It's admittedly a gray and touchy topic that I feel no one wins in." He takes one look at his Pokeball devices, sighing. "Sometimes I wonder if I'm even a good person for being these four's trainer. Solely because I'm owning them, feeling like I'm robbing them of their freedom despite their Nativu status."

X glares down. "...Right."

Ace smiles. "What I can say is that my Pokémon are happy to be with me." He looks back at the group. "The feelings of a Pokémon are valid regardless of their Nativu or Intellicate status. Journeying with them, helping them out in any way, and overall treating them with the proper care and love they deserve. In a way, a bond between a trainer and their Nativu is similar to a human and their Intellicate friend."

Ace grabs his Heal Ball, smiling as images of him raising Tress as an Eevee pops into his mind, the two hugging each other with warmth. "We cherish them. Both in heart and soul."

Serene blinks, her paw to her maw. "I...never thought of bonding that way before." Nods. "Interesting perspective." X looks off, remaining quiet.

Hmph. Can't believe she actually bought his nonsense. Nomar groans. *What a fool.* Ramon simply lowers his ears, not having much to say.

Ace nods, returning the ball to his waist. "With that said, I would never intend on owning an Intellicate. Not only because it's illegal: It's just downright immoral regardless of any context, reasoning, or excuses one could come up with." He folds his arms. "I see *zero* good reason for anyone owning an Intellicate."

The Buizel gasps at what Ace said, looking at him a little. *...At least you're one of the good trainers, I guess.* X then lifts his arms up. "Alright alright, we're getting off track at this point. Let's go see my two dope buddies, NOW!" The Buizel glares at the Sorcerous with determination, feeling like lightning is surrounding him while his eyes glow white.

Ace chuckles. "You're right, actually." The man touches Delia and Merlin's shoulders. "Huddle around, you three." X, Serene, and Ethan nod as they join the Sorcerous, all starting to glow blue.

Soon, the six disappear, leaving Ramon and Noctis behind.

"..." Noctis stares at Ramon.

"..." Ramon stares back.

"....."

Ramon trembles a bit, silence whistling across their ears besides a few pedestrians passing by. The Zoroark blinks, so does the Charizard. Their gazes feel as though the two are going through a never-ending loop of awkwardness, not looking away from one another. Noctis leans down to pick up another broken fence, walking towards the front door.

"You gonna keep staring at me or are you going to help me clean this mess up?" the lizard states.

Ramon gasps, shaking his head. "O-Oh! Sorry!" The Zoroark follows the Charizard, picking up some broken materials along the way.

. . .

In. Out. In. Out.

Justin, Ada, Mesmeren, Courtney, Sylock, Roan, and Coleo rest on seven beds retrospectively, breathing at a normal pace: Justin's bed being across from Ada's, Mesmeren's next to Justin, Courtney and Sylock's next to Ada's, and Roan and Coleo's are beside Sylock. A stool lays between Justin and Ada with a counter being right behind it. The plain white room is wide, having one large window on the right and left side along with being behind the seven, the right displaying many buildings afar.

Rows of blue chairs sit across the seven, two double doors displaying in the middle. Pushing the doors is a Pokémon nurse along with Delia and the others, Delia jotting towards the unconscious teen first.

She leans down and hugs the boy, tears flailing on the bed sheets. "Please," she says. "Please be okay."

X, Serene, Ethan, and Merlin walk close to her, all huddling around the teens as well. Serene caresses Delia's back while laying her other vine on top of Ada's forehead, gazing down at the

girl. "I hope they're okay, too." The Leafeon closes her eyes, sighing. Ace, Tress, and Jewel sit on the chairs, the Gym Leader tapping his exposed knees in anticipation.

"Justin is fine. Along with Ada and the other five with them," the nurse states, walking towards the group. "The medics successfully extracted the Weakener out of their bodies, so they're resting peacefully."

Serene blinks, tilting her head at the nurse. "What's a Weakener?"

Ethan looks as well, flicking his ears. "Y-Yeah."

Ace folds his arms. "From what the Carnivine medic told us earlier..." The pink shirt man explains the process over to Serene and Ethan, both widening their eyes in mortification. Ethan clings onto his sister, trembling as the Leafeon pats his back.

"Wh-Why would anyone create that!?"

Serene snarls. "Agreed. It's horrible to create something so dangerous like that!"

Ace presses his finger underneath his chin. "Like I've told your friends, it could be some sort of power dynamic that criminals use to show they're the most threatening."

The nurse sighs, adjusting the clipboard on her arm. "Regardless, the medics know about the ailment's existence and went through severe training on extracting it."

Merlin nudges his head against his staff. "How so?"

"We use Magic to get rid of the Weakener, surrounding the victim in its energy so that we can withdraw the substance." The nurse stares at Justin and Ada. "Any Sorcerous can do this, but it's best for a PC Sorcerous to do the extraction. Mainly because any wrong move on removing the substance *could* lead to deadly consequences." The nurse glances. "Which includes killing the victim."

Merlin and X look at each other, gulping. "Ah...Understood."

"Yep. I do NOT want to be the one with the Weakener then." X shakes his head.

The nurse waves her hand around. "No need to worry: We make sure to *never* make such a critical mistake here at the Pokémon Center."

"I hope so, dude." X scratches the back of his head, nervousness creeping throughout.

Delia pulls away from the hug, holding her son's hand. "Who did this to him?"

X looks at Delia. "A Floatzel named Lycus did this. They ate some sort of apple with the Weakener inside." He squints at the teens. "That's what Ramon told us."

"I see..."

X presses his paw against his cheek. "Man, I swear that name sounds familiar, but...I'm not sure wh—"

Xav...

X gasps, the masculine voice rings throughout his head, barely saying the name he wishes to not hear. He strokes his chest, grinding his teeth. *Is. Is it really...?*

"Hey, X?" The Buizel looks at the Leafeon, her ears lowering, her paw against her chest. "Are you okay? You...even looked pale, too."

X keeps staring, panting in exhaustion. Concerns spreading from person to person, the weasel feeling as though the staring lasts for an eternity, sweats dripping down his forehead and cheeks.

...Nah, I'm tripping with myself. Sighing, his paw lays against his head as he smiles. "I'm fine." He shakes his head. "Just, uh, had a brief scare over the thought of the Weakener and its effects." This is half true, considering the weasel's disturbance of the status earlier.

Serene nods. "Yeah, I getcha." She squints at the teens. "The fact that it could make *anyone* be in a horrible shape like Justin, Ada, and the others they're with is just...something I don't want to experience."

"M-Me too..." Ethan looks down, lowering his ears.

X folds his arms. "Well, I simply got to not be weak. That way, I won't get the *Weakener*." The Buizel smirks. "Easy."

Serene pouts, hitting the weasel's arm in a playful manner. "I honestly expected Justin to say that, not you!"

Merlin sits on the side of Ada's bed, snickering. "Same here."

X chuckles. "And my mother thinks I will never think of anything clever when hanging around Justin." He sticks his tongue out before grinning. "I still think my Floatzel joke is great. I mean, she was right there. In the lake. *Floating*. How could I NOT make it!?"

Delia snickers. "Now I'm seeing Beckham's point about your brain being consumed by the 'Justinese Language', as she puts it."

The Buizel shrugs. "I don't know, Mrs. Phoenix. Your son is really fun to hang with. Can you blame me?"

Merlin raises his hand up. "I would." He closes his eyes, leaving one finger up. "You haven't been focusing on the art of words."

X glares at him. "Oh shut up, Newspaper Boy."

Everyone laughs, X smiling. Serene and Ethan are smiling too, albeit they're gazing off to the side, ears remaining lowered.

Mother... the two think, Serene even taking a look at her Flareon brother: The faded claw mark on his face. It's still there. The Leafeon lifts her maw, patting the canid's back with her vine. He looks at her, slightly smiling back.

Soon a futuristic, sorcery sound emanates from Ace's hand, the man blinking. As he summons a hologram to the side, Delia sighs in relief, holding Justin's hand again. "I'm glad that he's recovering," she says, smiling. "It gives me hope knowing that he's survived." She turns to the nurse behind her. "Can I stay here for a while longer?"

The nurse nods. "You may. Again, we've taken all of the Weakeners out of them. They should be in good shape and will wake up soon."

"Thank you."

Just as the nurse turns around and touches the double doors, the blue robe boy taps his staff. "Say, I have a question to ask you."

The nurse looks at him. "What's the question?"

"What do you medics do with the Weakener?" Everyone else stares at the nurse upon hearing that question.

The nurse looks at her clipboard for a brief moment, contemplating. She then nods. "We get rid of them. Permanently." She smiles, closing her eyes. "So no need to worry about them whenever you come by to the Pokémon Center."

Merlin quirks his brow, his staff against his chin in perplexion. He is about to say something else until Ace speaks, "Hey, I'll be leaving now. Got a challenger waiting for me to battle him at my gym."

X perks up. "Oh that sounds dope! I'd watch, but I wanna stay with my buddies." He looks at the two unconscious teens.

Ace nods. "Understandable. Lucky for you, there's a normal All Star Tournament event coming up tomorrow night. You can watch people of any kind duke it out in a fun match, whether at home or in the stadium itself."

"Ah hell yeah, dude!" The Buizel jumps in joy. "Thanks for telling me that! I'll keep that in mind."

The nurse has left by this time as Ace touches Tress and Jewel, nodding. "You're welcome!" Once the three teleport away, the five keep their gaze onto Justin and Ada, all smiling.

"Man, I'm looking forward to talking to them again. Since I imagine they have *a lot* to tell us." X pokes his cheek, looking at Mesmeren and the other unconscious individuals. "The only person missing from our group is Terran. Because I don't know who these five are."

Delia lifts her finger. "I think you're also missing Li Cheng and your mother, X."

X gasps, pressing his paws against his head. "Ah shoot, you're right! How did I forget about my mom?"

The short-hair woman shakes her head. "What a shame. Looks like I'll tell your mother that her own child has forgotten her." She gives X a neutral face, folding her arms.

The Buizel jumps. "Wh-Wha!? H-Hey, don't actually do that!"

Delia giggles. "I'm just messing with you. Forgetfulness happens sometimes."

"Oh." X sighs heavily. "Don't scare me like that, Mrs. Phoenix. You know how my mom be, man..."

"Oh I'm aware." Delia snickers more.

Serene and Ethan stare at the two, both shivering. *I-I hope mother isn't too angry about our absence...* Ethan whimpers softly. *Please.*

...

Noctis sets a vase on top of the kitchen's counter, tapes clinging all over. The Charizard puts his hands by his hips, smirking. "There. Good as new." The vase crumbles into dust, the tapes latching onto the counter now. "..." Blinks. "Okay: Screw you, too."

The Charizard looks behind him, staring at the Zoroark picking up many smaller pieces on the carpet. Ramon places them in his paw one after another, glancing. His back is then met with a tap, the fox blinking.

“Eh?” He turns around, the tall orange lizard towering over him. “...H-Hi.” Is all he can muster.

“Hey,” Noctis replies back, his tone coming across as uninterested as a waiting line.

Silence emanates between them, eye contacts of discomfort being exchanged. The Charizard looks down at the glasses and dirt on Ramon’s paw.

“Don’t you know how to vacuum or something?”

“...No???” Ramon lifts his brow. “I...don’t even know what that is.”

Now it’s Noctis’ turn to give the fox the eyebrow raise. “What? But how do you—” the Charizard shakes his head. “Nevermind. Just throw that trash away.”

“Oo...kay then?” Ramon walks over to the kitchen’s trash can, placing the pieces inside.

Noctis sits on the middle sofa, sighing with heaviness: The inside and outside of his home still looks like a mess, albeit less messy than before. The Charizard eyes the tilt over portrait on the table, grabbing it. He eyes the yellow chain Charmeleon hanging around with a black cloak Riolu and two teens, frowning at the broken glass exposing the Charmeleon’s face.

Ramon walks to the sofa, seeing a glass piece nearing the portrait. The Zoroark reaches his paw out and—

“So you wanted to say something to me earlier, right?”

Ramon stops, his eyes turning towards the Charizard. “Hmm...?”

Noctis waves his portrait. “We kept looking at each other earlier. Clearly you wanted to say something.” He points to an empty spot besides him. “Sit down with me. Or stand in place.” He shrugs. “I don’t care. We’re having this talk, either way.”

Ramon blinks for a moment, uncertainty and intrigue having a tug-o-war throughout him. Especially with how brutally blunt Noctis is. In the end, the fox sits next to the dragon, his paws on his lap. “Erm...Okay then.”

“So...” Noctis crosses his legs. “What do you want to say?”