

Chapter 9: The Midnight Killer Part 1.

Everyone seems to be minding their own business after the intense fight. Lucas puts the last piece of the once broken statue together with glue. The sun shines at the Furret intensely, making him sweat and pants in exhaustion.

"Phew. That should do it." He says calmly. Then the whole statue collapses, leading the Delibird to sigh heavily.

"There goes my one million Pokedollar statue. Ruined." He says before tearing up. Ashen goes to cheer the Delibird up as Lucas shrugs and laughs nervously.

"It's okay. Um...I'm...I'm sure that you can get yourself another statue, Mavel." Ashen says with a bead of sweat forming by the side of his face. Ducktian glances at the Linoone.

"Get myself another expensive statue? Like that's possible! Hmph!" The Delibird looks away. "I wish I could charge those intruders right now...Sentence them life in prison, too!" Ashen shifts from the comment. "But anyhow, thanks for at least trying to fix it..." The Delibird sighs once more.

Ashen nods. "No problem."

"Also, thank you and your group for cleaning...up...the place..." Ducktian's brow raises.

"Is something wrong?"

"What's your Furret friend doing?"

Ashen turns to see Lucas somehow tries to tape the statue together. "Lucas? I don't think that'll work." Ashen blinks in a unsure manner. "At all."

Lucas huffs and says, "Well, I'll make it work! Gosh darn it!".

Ducktian puts his face against his hand, shaking his head. "The statue is a goner at this point. No need to tape it up." He says in a depressing tone.

"Heh, who to say that my brother would give up on anything?" Ashen chuckles softly. Ducktian looks at him with a concerning look on his face.

"Wait, that Furret is your brother?" Ducktian asks. Ashen nods calmly. "Ah, I see."

The Linoone smiles at Lucas as the Furret smiles back, laughing adorably. "He's something to cherish. Something to make me happy that I'm alive despite ticking me off at times." *And I'll be sure to keep it that way no matter what.*

. . .

Midnight comes, leaving the village to be surrounded by darkness. The only light in the village is the glow of the moon. Near the port lies a Watchog staring at the moon with awe.

"Wow. What a beautiful looking moon." The Watchog says to himself, smiling softly. "I wonder, if there's someone out there that guards the moon and its beauty?" The Watchog thinks for a moment before chuckling softly. "I'm sure that there is."

"You..." A voice says in a soft, serene tone. The Watchog looks around curiously from the said voice. "Yes...you...Follow me..."

"Who goes there?" The Watchog asks.

"I will guide you to eternal happiness..."

"Eternal...happiness?" The Watchog looks towards the trees that are beside the village, hearing the voice coming from there.

"Yes...You want happiness in your life, don't you? Then follow my voice...I will guide you to a place filled with glee and peace..." The Watchog shrugs, unsure about this.

"Well...life hasn't been easy for me so far...So sure." The Watchog follows the voice to the forest.

"You're almost there..." The voice says, cheering him on. The Watchog walks into an open field surrounded by trees. The view of the sea can be seen from the field thanks to the trees leaving a space. "Stop. You've made it to your location..."

"Alright. Now...where's my eternal happiness?" The Watchog looks around curiously and blinks.

"Right here..."

Suddenly, a katana strikes the Watchog and everything fades to darkness.

. . .

The next morning, a female voice screams in terror, causing the crew to wake up and groan uncomfortably. Iris, Anna, Mark and Natalie sit up from their beds while the others get off the ground.

"The heck?" Jimmy exclaims, rubbing his eyes.

"Something must have happened outside. We should check it out." Cerise suggests, crawling out from underneath Iris' bed as he yawns. Everyone nods and heads out of the bedroom, exiting out of the house except for Cerise as he goes to look out from the window.

The crew sees a crowd of Pokemon staring at something, forming conversations about the phenomenon. "What's with all of the commo--" Iris pauses for a moment, her eyes widening in shock. "What the hell...?" Everyone sees a Watchog with his limbs nailed against a house and a slash mark on his chest. His eyes are wide with horror, blood dripping from him slowly. Natalie gasps from the sight as Mark and the others go to vomit over at the trees. Claire giggles softly at the putrid scenery.

"What a gruesome death. Haven't seen that in a while." Claire says casually. Iris and Natalie glance at her.

"That's not funny. That's sick! How could you find this hilarious!?" Iris yells, glaring down at the Shinx.

"Yeah." Natalie agrees. Claire puts her paws up innocently.

"Whoa now, relax. I'm used to seeing deaths like these so much to the point where it doesn't surprise me. And besides, his soul should be relaxing in Clarity by now." Claire says, shrugging awkwardly. The two Pokemon blink at the Shinx.

"How would you know that his soul is resting peacefully?" Iris asks. Claire shrugs once more before laughing softly.

"I don't know. I'm just being silly, that's all."

Iris stares at Claire for awhile before Ducktian comes out of his home wearing an eye mask on his forehead, yawning softly. "What's going on here?" He says before looking around to see the Watchog's corpse. His eyes widen immediately as he tries not to hurl. "Oh my Arceus... GUARDS!" About five Watchog guards come by his side from another house.

"Yes, mayor?" One of the guards asks.

"Remove the body from that house immediately!" The guards nod as one of them goes back to the house. While that happens, one of the guards bursts into tears out of nowhere. Ducktian looks at the guard. "Uh...?"

"Tom!" The whimpering guard shouts, tearing up as the other two guards comfort him. Then the other one returns with a ladder, and uses it to get Tom, the corpse, off from the house. While that happens, Ducktian runs back inside of his home. He walks towards his desk that's filled with paperworks and grabs some phone-like technology. After typing on it, he hears a soft siren for a moment then a voice occurs.

"Hello?" The male voice says.

"Hi. This is Mayor Ducktian, also known as Mayor Mavel, of the Verdant Village speaking. I would like the nearest law enforcers to departure here immediately. We have a murder case to address."

"Alright. Help is on the way."

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A few hours later, a group of bipedal yellow wasp-like creatures with large red eyes and black antennae arrive at the Verdant Village: Beedrills. The Beedrills are wearing blue hats as the crowd gazes at them, feeling quite relieve by their presence. Iris frowns, folding her arms before looking at the Delibird.

"Is this seriously the police department you called for?" Iris asks. Ducktian snaps at the Dragonite.

"Well, they're the only nearby police department the government can offer for this village. Not like I have a choice." Ducktian says before sighing.

"Whatever..." Iris rolls her eyes to the reasoning.

Everyone then sees a Beedrill that has a grey cap instead of a blue hat like the rest of the Beedrills. Ducktian walks towards him casually.

"You must be the detective, right?" Ducktian asks. The Beedrill nods in response.

"Most certainzly. Ze name iz Detective Hanzz." The Beedrill says, adjusting his cap. "I'll do my bestzz to solvezz any casezz." Iris sweatdrops at the Beedrill.

The way this guy talks already annoys me. Iris thinks.

"Anywayzz, where'szz ze casezz?"

Ducktian looks at the guards besides him, seeing them carrying a bag. Han goes to unzip the bag, seeing the dead Watchog inside of it. He examines the body as Mark stares in awe. *Wow! A real detective! Can't believe I'm seeing it with my own eyes!* The Riolu thinks, wagging his tail excitedly. The grey cap Beedrill then looks at the Delibird.

"Seemzz like we'll stayzz here for awhile. We can't exactly pinpoint on whozz the killer iz." Han says, staring at the nails on the corpse. "Although, we'll take a look at ze nails. Maybe they'll

give us somezz hintzz.” The blue hat Beedrills take the nails off from the corpse as Ducktian nods.

“Alright then. I’ll give you fellas a nice, comfy home to stay in for the meantime.” Ducktian says, turning towards the Watchog guards. “And guards, take the body to the cemetery so it can properly rest in peace.” The guards nod and take the body to a pathway besides the village. Ducktian then takes his eyes on the crowd. “Alright folks. Everything is settled. You may continue your lovely day.”

The crowd slowly starts to go on with their lives, some continuing to chat about the situation. Iris sighs and stretches her body. “Welp, I’ll be cooking for the night cause I’m in the mood for it...even after witnessing this.” Iris says, sweatdropping while looking at a cart that has two Pokemon around it. One being a bipedal rabbit-like creature with arm-based ears and the fur of his actual paws being colored white: Diggersby. And the second being a long bodied creature with her forehead having a purple spot and possesses a pair of long yellow whiskers that has split ends: Mienshao. The Diggersby seems to be behind the cart as the Mienshao orders something from it.

“What are you cooking?” Anna asks curiously as Iris looks at her.

“Meat Product...” The Dragonite answers, shrugging. Lucas groans uncomfortably.

“But I wanted some more Fryin’ Ready Berries...or a Berry Steak.” Lucas says. Iris points to the berry trees all around.

“Why not get some berries from the trees then? I can cook them as well, you know.” Iris suggests. Lucas thinks for a moment before realizing what she said.

“Oooh! Didn’t even notice those berries in the first place.”

Iris shakes her head as she gets behind the Mienshao. The Mienshao grabs a jar of food that looks like meat, the Meat Product, from the salesman and walks off. The Dragonite gets in front of the cart afterwards as the Mienshao gazes at the guards taking the body away.

“There goes one life being taking away...More to come from this cruel world.” The Mienshao says, staring dully. Natalie flickers her ear, hearing what the Mienshao said.

“What does that mean?” Natalie asks, tilting her head slightly. The Mienshao looks down at the Zorua before sighing.

“Pokemon should be happy that someone is killed off. Setting them free from this world instead of letting them continue to live in such a wasteland.” The Mienshao then stares at the sky. “It’s like cutting down a decaying tree but everyone finds you heartless for doing so...even though you’re putting it out of its misery. What sense does that make? None...none at all.”

Natalie blinks from the comment. "Well, what if we don't want them to do such a thing? What if we just wanted it to be left alone and wither on its own?" The Mienshao turns around, looking at the exit.

"Then it's your fault for letting it suffer longer."

Natalie stares at her, shocked and speechless by her answer. The Mienshao walks off into the forest, leaving the Zorua to be confused and curious about what the Mienshao said. Claire notices the look on her face and motions to her.

"Is something wrong, mistress?" The Shinx asks. Natalie glances at the exit for a moment before shaking her head.

"Nothing, Claire."

The Dragonite soon returns back to the crew, holding two jars of Meat Product in her hands. "Alright. Let's head inside." Iris says.

"Wait, mate. I think I'll take a look around the village and pick some berries." Lucas says.

"And...I'm thinking about playing outside for a little while." Natalie says. *Just to get this off my mind for now...*

"Me too!" Mark follows along, giving Natalie a noogie as she giggles. "Haven't been out much since Noctis Village, anyway." Claire sees what the Riolu is doing and snarls at him, causing him to raise his paws up. "Whoa there. Not harming Natalie, okay? I was just giving Natalie a friendly noogie, that's all." Claire groans before stop snarling, Jimmy and Ashen chuckle at the cute scenario while Iris forms a bead of sweat by the side of her face.

"Who's going to watch the younglings though?" Iris asks cautiously.

"Hey! I am not young!" Claire exclaims. Iris glares at her.

"You are."

Jimmy smiles before speaking. "I'll watch over them."

"Good. What about you, Anna and Ashen?"

"Eh. I'll stay outside as well. Just wanting to keep an eye out on my bro." Ashen answers, putting his hands behind his head. "Making sure that he doesn't do anything silly."

"I'll be inside...Would love to sleep on that bed some more, honestly." Anna answers as well, giggling to herself. Iris nods firmly at the two as everyone goes off to doing their thing. Mark stares at the Zorua and Shinx, smiling with joy and excitement.

"Hey. Let's play Hide and Seek." Mark suggests. Claire tilts her head slightly.

"What is this 'Hide and Seek'?" She asks in a curious manner. Mark and Natalie look at her shockingly.

"You don't know what Hide and Seek is!?" The two yell. Claire shakes her head.

Natalie shrugs awkwardly. "Well, it's where one person closes their eyes while another goes to hide. They count to whatever number they choose and after they've reached the number, they go to seek out who's hiding. If that person finds the hider and tags them, they'll be the seeker for the next round and the last person that hasn't been tagged wins." The Zorua tilts her head curiously. "How come you've never heard of it?"

"Well...I just haven't been experiencing this youth much, that's all." Claire says, shrugging once more.

"Hmm...Well anyways, I'll be the seeker while you two be the hiders." Mark says happily. Natalie nods as the Riolu turns to the crew's home and counts. Natalie giggles and hides behind a tree. Claire follows her closely.

"Claire! Go hide someplace else!" Natalie whispers. Claire shakes her head.

"But I can't leave your side, mistress." Claire says humbly, leading Natalie to sweatdrop.

"We're just playing a game. I'll be fine."

"No!"

"Ready or not, here I come!" Mark shouts in joy.

"Oh nevermind!" Natalie says quietly, sighing afterwards.

. . .

At nighttime, mostly everyone is at the table except for Cerise, who's resting by the window. Mark and Natalie are talking to each other while Claire licks the Pokemon Egg she surrounds with her tail.

"Hey! Try not to *eat* it!" Anna says, glaring at the Shinx. Claire looks at her cutely.

"I'm just keeping it warm, that's all." Claire purrs while nuzzling against the egg. The Ninetales sighs softly.

"Well, I could've done that with my warm body but alright."

Meanwhile, Iris is in the kitchen cooking the Meat Product and some berries that are in a separate pot. Anna looks at the Dragonite.

"I thought you weren't into eating Meat Product, Iris?"

"Well, I would find me a Magikarp and cook that instead...but we're in a public area and if I've done that, I would've been arrested for trying to eat another Pokemon." Iris says, shrugging awkwardly.

"Ah, true..."

Claire blinks and stares at the two. "Wait, it's wrong to eat another Pokemon?" The Shinx asks. Ashen nods firmly.

"Yeah. The O.P. government, AKA the Official Protection government, invented the Meat Product for any carnivorous Pokemon to snack on instead of another Pokemon. It's a crime to eat another Pokemon nowadays." Ashen says, shrugging once more. "While Iris does hunt another Pokemon, she does it safely and when necessary."

Claire processes everything she knows for a moment before sighing. "I suppose that makes sense but...what made the so called government wanting to do such?"

"To prevent any Pokemon species out there from going extinct. The predator and prey thing has gotten out of control to the point where one Pokemon species almost went extinct, from what I've heard. So that's why the Meat Product exist."

Claire nods slowly. "Ah, I understand now."

Jimmy stares at Cerise and speaks. "Hey. Aren't you going to eat?" Cerise looks back at him and shakes his head.

"No thanks. I already received my food thanks to the sun." Cerise says, smiling warmly.

"Huh...You go through photosynthesis or something?"

"I guess so." Cerise shrugs before resting. Jimmy shifts a bit and focus on the others.

Few minutes later, Iris is done cooking as she sighs in relief. She stares at everyone at the table. "Alright. Who here wants the Meat Product or the fried berries? The fried berries being

either Oran or Citrus.” She asks everyone. Anna, Natalie and Claire want the product while Mark, Jimmy, Ashen and Lucas want the fried berries. Iris nods and proceeds to making plates for everyone. Ashen decides to go aid her, grabbing one of the plates that has the cooked product on it. Iris looks at him and smiles warmly. “Thanks Ashen.” Ashen nods and hands the plate to Anna. The Ninetales smiles before putting her paw on the food. Ashen smiles back, grabbing another plate as Lucas chuckles at Anna.

“You like him. I just know it.” Lucas whispers to Anna. Anna snarls, gritting her teeth at Lucas while blushing.

“Keep teasing me and you’ll be the dinner instead.” She whispers back, snapping at him. Lucas’ eyes widens and puts his hands up as if a gun was pointed at him. Ashen glances at Anna about that statement before she sighs and takes a bite on her food. “Sorry, Ashen...”

Soon, plates are passed to everyone and they begin eating. Everyone talks with one another while enjoying their lovely dinner. Ashen turns to Anna, munching on his Citrus berry.

“So Anna...got anything in mind on what to do after this journey with Iris?” Ashen asks softly. Anna stops eating on her food and looks at the Linoone.

“Like what?” The Ninetales asks, blinking into curiosity.

“Well...maybe go on a vacation. You know, we all need a break once in awhile. Maybe some beach island resort. Flowers in your mane, nice king size bed, walking on the shore in the sunset--”

Anna pushes him gently. “Oh hush up, silly.” She blushes.

Lucas giggles, noticing the blush on the Ninetales’ face. “If I could build a ship right now, I’ll name it ‘S.S. Ashna’, for you and Anna, bro.” Lucas says. Ashen stares at the Furret confusedly as Anna blushes even more. She then jumps out of her seat.

“Alright! YOU ASKED FOR IT!” Anna yells and pounces on Lucas’ side of the table. He yelps and runs off from his seat. Everyone looks at the two and laughs at their silliness, enjoying the moment tremendously. Cerise shakes his head at the drama before going back to sleep.

. . .

At midnight, everyone sleeps calmly and soundly except for Natalie, who struggles to sleep after hearing the words from the Mienshao. She eventually wakes up, shaking her head before hopping off the bed she’s in. Then she exits the bedroom and looks out of the window, admiring the stars in the sky. *Wow...this looks so beautiful. I needed to see something like this to ease my mind some...* She thinks.

Seeing something as beautiful as the sky makes me appreciate the world more... Natalie soon receives an image of Carrie pointing at a large cavern with star-shaped lights inside of it. Mark and Natalie were awed at the cavern's view along with the Lucario. *I still remember the time when Carrie took me and Mark to the Star Cavern. That view was so amazing! And that's what these stars are reminding me of right now...* The Zorua snaps her way into the present and lowers her ears, looking down at the ground with a somber look on her face. *I miss you, Carrie...*

After she gazes at the stars for awhile, she notices a Raticate trying to grab an apple from one of the trees. She tilts her head curiously. *Hey, isn't that the Raticate I saw two days ago? What's he doing out here?*

The Raticate grabs the apple and suddenly drops it, heading into the forest. Natalie blinks at the bizarre event for a moment before opening the front door immediately. Claire seems to be exiting out of the bedroom, rubbing her eyes cutely and sees Natalie out of the door.

"Hey, mistress!" Claire shouts quietly before following her. Natalie turns around to see the Shinx, blinking curiously.

"Huh?"

"What are you doing up this late?"

"I saw a Raticate heading through the trees. I wanted to know why."

"I see...I'll come with you then."

Natalie nods and follows the Raticate along with Claire. The two continue through the forest until they see the Raticate getting slashed by a figure in black cloak. The figure takes its katana out of him as he falls to the ground, red liquid forms around the rodent. Natalie and Claire gasp and hide behind a tree instantly.

"Th-That person just killed that Raticate..." Natalie says quietly, shaking in fear. Claire rather admires the axed off Raticate than to be shocked.

"I see...This person has quite a taste for killing others with such an object. Nice." Claire says, giggling softly. Natalie looks at her, raising her brow.

"Are you crazy!? That's what a sick person would think!"

"Hmm...If only you didn't have amnesia, you would've known how I am by now."

Natalie shakes her head in terror as she backs away, seeing the cloaked figure dragging the body away. "I-I need to get out of here..." She trembles and tries to run off but trips over, yelping

during so. The figure hears the yelp and immediately takes its katana from its scabbard, looking around for the noise. “I-I think it heard me. Let’s run.” Natalie whispers. Claire nods and the two begin to run off.

The figure spots the two and chases after them. The two Pokemon continue running and running, panting a bit as the figure almost catches up to them. The two yelp and make it back to the village, immediately entering their home. The figure glances at the house they went in before vanishing through the trees. Natalie pants heavily and closes the door behind her, Claire looking at her while trying to catch her breath as well.

“We should tell Iris and the others about this, mistress.” Claire suggests. Natalie shakes her head.

“I rather tell them tomorrow...Don’t want to ruin their sleep in the middle of the night...” Natalie says. “Sorry...” Claire nods, yawning afterwards.

“Understood...I’ll go to sleep now.”

“Same.”

The two head back to the bedroom and sneak their way to sleep.

. . .

Next morning, another scream is heard. This time, it’s coming from Ducktian as Iris and the others jolt awake from his scream.

“The hell is it now...?” Iris asks, rubbing her eyes. The gang groans and heads outside, except for Cerise who looks out of the window again.

They see a crowd of Pokemon looking at the Raticate pinned to Ducktian’s home. Ducktian’s mouth is open with shock and anger. “First one of my citizens! And now one of my associates, the rent owner!?” The Delibird yells. “Who is this killer!?” Han and the Beedrill cops are at the scene, thinking while the Watchog guards take the Raticate off from the house.

“I believezz that thiszz iz becoming a huge problemzz.” Han says, looking at Ducktian. “Mayor Mavelzz, you don’t mind ze cops and I asking your citizenzz around ze village questionzz, right?” Ducktian thinks for a moment before nodding at the grey cap Beedrill. Han and the blue hat Beedrills go to one Pokemon after another, asking them questions. Then they fly towards Iris and her crew. “Have you seenzz whatzz happen to the Raticate, you eight?”

“Well, no we hav--”

"Yes. Well...me and Claire have." Natalie says, interrupting the Dragonite while shrugging. The crew looks at the Zorua and Shinx confusedly along with Han.

"You have?" Han asks.

"Yes sir. We have...It was someone in a cloak that killed the Raticate with some kind of weapon. It was like a sword but slim-like." Natalie answers.

"Hmm. What color iz ze cloak?"

"It was colored black." Claire answers. Han nods slowly, twiddling his stingers together.

"I see now." Han then looks at the cops. "Alright. I'll head inside and sort the clues we have together. We'll need to watch over ze village for the night, to seezz if this'll happen again." The cops nods. Then Han suddenly looks at Lucas, concerned about his eyepatch. "Isz that an eyepatch you're wearing?"

"U-Um, y-yes?" Lucas answers. "Why did you ask?"

"Just making sure if you're a pirate or not."

Ashen steps in the conversation. "He's not, sir. He's just wearing the eyepatch because he harmed his eye during a severe accident."

"Hmm...I see then." Han says, feeling a bit curious about Lucas. He then heads off towards his home along with the cops.

Lucas sighs in relief. "Thanks for making up that excuse, mate."

Ashen smiles at the Furret. "No problem, brother." The crowd of Pokemon go on with their business as Anna looks at the Zorua and Shinx.

"How did you two know about this?" Anna asks. The crew looks at them, wanting answers as well. Natalie and Claire shrug awkwardly.

"Well, I couldn't sleep last night and when I looked outside, I saw the Raticate wandering off through the trees and decided to go follow him along with Claire. We saw the figure killing the Raticate. Then it chased us down after I tripped...Thankfully, we made it home safely." Natalie says, looking off to the side.

"We were going to tell you about it, but mistress suggested that we shouldn't disturb your sleep." Claire says shyly. The crew seems vexed about this.

"While that's true, you two could've gotten yourselves killed without us knowing about it." Iris states. Natalie and Claire put their heads down.

"Sorry..." The two say. Iris and Anna sigh and go to comfort the two, Iris petting Natalie on the while Anna does the same for Claire.

"It's okay. Just let us know immediately when something like that happens." Iris suggests. Natalie and Claire both nod, purring from the comforts.

Ashen sighs softly. "Speaking of the Raticate, poor fella had his life ending like that." The Linoone says, leading Iris and Anna to look at him.

"Oh right. He's the rent owner, huh? He'll be missed by those who loved him." Anna says.

"It's quite odd that he mentions about surviving in this world...yet, have himself axed off afterwards." Iris mentions. Anna blinks before looking at her.

"Yeah. You're right, now thinking about that coincidence."

As the gang have a conversation with each other, the Mienshao from before appears next to Natalie.

"I guess the killer chose him to die, setting him free from this selfish world. Yet, folks are still shocked and not liking the fact that he's dead." The Mienshao says, gripping her fist. "It irks me on how everyone thinks it's wrong." Natalie glares at the Pokemon as Claire looks at her.

"What's your deal? Why are you so angry on others not okay with another Pokemon dying?" Natalie asks. The Mienshao stares at her as Claire turns to the Mienshao.

"Because it doesn't make sense. We should be happy for them to finally escape from this living nightmare called life."

Natalie shrugs, trying to think of something to say. "W-Well...not in that way!"

"Heh. You're young, anyways. You wouldn't understand me..." The Mienshao slightly smirks. "And by the way, try not to run out in the middle of the night next time."

Natalie's eyes widen as Claire stares at the Mienshao oddly. "How did you--" She is then interrupted by Iris coming up to the Mienshao.

"Hi. Can I help you with something? You seemed to be occupying with my neighbor's friends here." Iris says, lying to the Mienshao. The Mienshao giggles gently.

"Oh sorry. I was being silly and talking to her about random things. I'll be off now." The Mienshao says, walking off to the Grace Forest. Iris blinks for a moment before looking at Natalie.

"Who was that Mienshao?" Iris asks.

Natalie shrugs. "I...have no idea. Just some random lady, that's all." She answers in a uneasy manner. Iris raises her brow at the Zorua.

"O...kay then..." The Dragonite sighs, turning towards her home. "Anyways, I'm heading back inside...maybe to cook some more or something." Lucas and Jimmy hear Iris' voice mentioning the words 'cook'.

"Did someone say 'cook'?" Jimmy says, him and Lucas eyeing at the Dragonite.

"Oh please do cook, you beautiful Dragonite!" Lucas suggests before he and the Heracross push Iris towards the house eagerly. She growls at the two going against her will to move.

"Hey! No need to push me, dammit!"

Anna, Ashen and Mark laugh at the three before following them. Claire is about to follow along until Natalie stops her.

"Hey Claire, I just thought of something." Natalie says as Claire looks at her.

"Yes, mistress?" Claire replies with a curious look on her face.

"I have a feeling that Mienshao is the one that chased us down last night."

"Excuse me?"

"Think about it, Claire. She knew that we were out last night, was okay with the killer axing off their victims, and complains about how other folks doesn't see that as a good way to die."

Claire thinks, putting her paw against her chin. "Hmm...You do have a point there. In fact, I was feeling a lot of negativity from her."

Natalie tilts her head slightly at Claire. "How can you?"

"Well...Let's just say it's an hidden power that enables me to feel someone's positive or negative presence at my own will." Claire shrugs awkwardly. "Nothing special, really."

"I see. Pretty cool hidden power you got there." Natalie smiles warmly. Claire giggles softly, sticking her tongue out playfully.

"Thanks."

"But anyways, I'll tell you what my plan is." Natalie whispers to Claire about the plan. "Got that?"

"Yes...But mistress, are you certain that this plan will go well?"

"Oh, I'm sure that it will. We know how to run away fast, right? So it shouldn't be a big hassle. And besides, what's the worst that could happen?"

"Hmm...Something tells me that the worst is *bound* to happen." Claire gives Natalie a blank expression. Natalie sighs and walks toward the crew's home.

"Oh it'll be fine."

Claire shrugs uncomfortably before following the Zorua.

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Later on at midnight, everyone is asleep except for some of the Beedrill cops, who're patrolling around the village. Natalie wakes up and immediately goes to wake the Shinx up, tapping her gently.

"It is time." The Zorua says as Claire yawns. The Shinx rubs her eyes cutely before she speaks.

"I suppose..."

Natalie then walks out of the bedroom eagerly as Claire follows along tiredly. Soon, Natalie looks out of the window.

"Looks like those cops are out and about."

Claire blinks as she takes a look. "Ah...Well how are we supposed to get past them?"

Natalie thinks for a moment before forming a determined expression. "Okay. I got it." Natalie heads through the hallway of the house then notices a window at the end of it. "Bingo!" She shouts only to cover her mouth for a moment, making sure that she didn't wake anyone up. Luckily, no one is awake as Claire reaches her location. "I found a window. Maybe we can sneak out this way and follow where the Raticate was killed."

Claire nods calmly. "Cool."

"Alright. Give me a lift...Gonna open this bad boy." Claire nods as Natalie climbs onto her back. The Zorua then stands on her hind legs, making Claire struggle to hold her up. Natalie unlocks the window and tries to lift it. "Ngh. It's tough to lift it up."

Claire's legs start to shake. "Hurry, mistress. I might not hold on much longer."

"Okay. I'll try." Natalie grits her teeth, struggling to lift the window up. Then finally, the window lifts up, causing Natalie to fall. "Whoa!" She thuds onto the ground.

"Are you alright!?" Claire asks cautiously.

"Shh." Natalie's ear twitches, hearing footsteps in the bedroom. "Hide!" She whispers before hiding in a random hallway closet. Claire joins her as someone opens the bedroom door, that someone being Ashen. He looks to his left then his right tiredly, seeing nothing there. He then notices the hallway window is open and closes it without question. Afterwards, he heads back to sleep. Natalie and Claire exit out of the closet and sigh in relief.

"Phew. That was a close on--" Natalie pauses for a moment to see the window closing. Both her and Claire groan quietly in frustration because of such. So they do the same thing again and open the window without making noises. Natalie climbs on the windowsill, almost falling off before she turns towards Claire and holds her arms out. "Okay, grab my paws." Claire nods and jumps towards Natalie, having her paws cling to hers. Then Natalie pulls Claire and falls out of the window, landing flat onto the ground. "Oof!" The two brush themselves off. "Finally, we're outside. Now we can get down to our plan!" Claire nods, panting a bit.

"Indeed..." The Shinx agrees. The two then sneak off through the trees, finding the location the Raticate went afterwards. "We made it!" Claire says cheerfully.

"Now all we gotta do is wait for the killer to show--" Natalie pauses for a moment, only to see the cloaked figure already wielding its katana. "It...self..." After a brief moment, Natalie looks at Claire while trembling in fear. "R-Run and remember the plan!"

Claire nods. "And report to the cops. Got it." The two turn around and is about to yell for help until the katana hits the ground in front of them. The two stop, looking at the figure beside them. Claire tries to use Discharge on the figure but it misses. "Huh? But how?"

The figure gets in front of Natalie and tries to slash her with the katana but Claire tackles it down and bites onto its arm. The figure yelps and slams Claire against the tree, making her let go. Natalie soon shoots a Shadow Ball at the figure. The figure sees the attack and slices the Shadow Ball in half. Natalie's eyes widen, shocked to see that such a tactic can be performed. Then the figure forms some kind of blue-like ball in its hand: Aura Sphere.

The figure shoots it at Natalie before she counters it with Shadow Ball, causing black smoke to form due to the collision. Then the figure appears out of the smoke and kicks Natalie, sending her sprawling all over the ground.

Natalie groans before getting up, seeing the figure rushing towards her. It tries to slash her again but gets tackled down by Claire's Spark. Claire pins the figure down, growling at it. The figure hisses and headbutts her, causing her to get dizzy. It then kicks the Shinx towards a random tree, hard enough for her to whimper in pain.

Natalie snarls angrily, her eyes glowing dark red and her body becomes surrounded by corrupted, reddish black aura. Then she raises her paws up and slams them towards the ground, causing a crimson red forcefield to aim towards the figure: Night Daze. The forcefield hits the figure, knocking it far back with a burst of black smoke. Natalie then pants heavily, her eyes stop glowing along with the aura fading away from her body. "That...should knock the killer out..." The smoke fades away and shows the figure forming a clear shield around it: Protect. Her eyes widen as the figure forms a fist. "Wh-What!?"

The figure then dashes to Natalie and punches her in the stomach. Its fist glows yellow as Natalie feels her energy leaving her: Drain Punch. She screams in pain, wincing at the hard jab along with the draining. Then the figure withdraws its fist, leaving Natalie to fall towards the ground. "U-Ugh..." Natalie looks up to see the figure's red deadly eyes and parts of its face being revealed, thanks to the full moon. The Zorua comes into a realization. "Y-You're the Mienshao from earlier! I knew it!" The Mienshao in cloak laughs softly.

"Not quite." The Mienshao says with a male voice. Natalie blinks, feeling quite confused by the tone. Then a female voice is heard from behind the Zorua.

"I have a feeling that you two would come after my brother." The voice says, revealing herself from one of the trees to be another Mienshao. Natalie looks at the Mienshao then back at the cloaked one.

"C-Called it...Knew that things would get worse..." Claire says weakly. Natalie shakes in fear, seeing the two Mienshaos in front of her.

"Wh-What's going on here!?" Natalie says in a shaky tone. The male Mienshao grins deviously.

"Oh, we won't mind explaining to you at all." The male Mienshao confirms.

To be continued...

End of Chapter 9.