

Team Enterprise Begins

Part 2

After following his newly found Chikorita companion through a small village of rustic-looking establishments built to resemble various Pokemon, Ace found himself standing before a small wooden hut that appeared to have been constructed out of a large tree stump. After a moment, the Chikorita, Pepper, declared modestly, "Well, here we are. What do you think?"

"Not bad, I suppose. It's... quaint," Ace commented casually, shrugging. "This place kind of reminds me of the Shire."

"The *what*?" Pepper inquired somewhat dryly with a raised eyebrow.

"Never mind. It's not important," Ace dismissed, chuckling and shaking his head slightly.

At that moment, a soft, distant rumble of thunder was suddenly heard, and a few seconds later Ace began to feel a small number of water droplets pelt his fur. Noticing this as well, Pepper urged, "Come on, let's hurry inside before we get soaked."

With that, Ace wasted no time in quickly following the Chikorita inside the small wooden abode. As Ace began glancing around at the innards of the hut, seeing little more than a book shelf, a cabinet with four drawers, a fire place, a small wooden table with two chairs, and a small pile of hay in one corner of the room, Pepper offered courteously, "I'm going to get a fire going. Why don't you have a seat and make yourself at home?"

Upon noticing a small, round, blue-coloured fruit of some kind resting on the table, Ace walked over to it to pick it up, and inquired curiously, "Is this an Oran Berry?"

"Oh, yeah," Pepper affirmed casually, "you can have it if you want." Just then, a realization seeming to dawn on her, the Chikorita slapped her forehead with one of her vines. "Oh, I'm so sorry! It hadn't even occurred to me! You must be starving! Here, why don't I put together something a little more filling for you?"

"I guess I am a little peckish," Ace admitted politely. "What do you have?"

"Well, I could make some Tamato Berry and vegetable soup," Pepper suggested.

"Is it spicy?" Ace asked.

"Well, I can make it spicy, if you like," Pepper replied, "How spicy do you want it?"

"As spicy as you can make it," Ace answered confidently.

"Really...? Are you sure...?" Pepper inquired hesitantly with a raised eyebrow.

"Absolutely." Ace affirmed with a lopsided grin.

“Okay... Just don’t start complaining it’s too hot when you eat it...” Pepper warned reluctantly, as she walked over to the table and began preparing the ingredients for the meal.

A few minutes later, after she served the now fully prepared, steaming hot soup in a ceramic bowl to Ace, who eagerly began to sample it, Pepper asked slightly nervously, “It’s not too hot, is it...? I put a whole Tamato Berry in there...”

“No, no! It’s great!” Ace assured as he continued eating. “Over the years my taste buds have built up a kind of immunity to spicy food. I remember this one time, I downed an entire glass of Spelon Berry juice and barely broke a sweat. Besides, it’s good to loosen up the pores and sinuses every now and then.”

“Well if you’re going to blow your nose, make sure you use a tissue,” Pepper lectured as she passed a tissue box over to the Pikachu.

“Thanks,” Ace replied politely, accepting one of the tissues and blowing into it, before discarding it into a nearby waste bin. “I must admit I don’t often get food this good. Most of my meals over the years have been heavily processed, packaged junk. Where’d you learn how to cook?”

“I taught myself to cook at a very young age. It was kind of expected in my family. I grew up in a farm community, you see,” Pepper explained. “But a few months ago I decided I wanted to move into town to start making a new life for myself. It hasn’t exactly been going as well as I’d hoped, though...”

“How do you mean?”

Letting out a short sigh, Pepper began, “Well, for starters, I’d like to be able to afford a house with actual basic plumbing...”

‘So plumbing does exist in this world. That’s good to know, at least,’

“And on top of that, the whole reason I moved to this town in the first place was to start my new career in the exploration team business, but I just haven’t been able to muster myself up to get started on it yet... I’ve just dug myself into a really deep mess, here...” the Chikorita finished sadly, looking down at the floor.

Walking up to her and giving her a reassuring, lopsided smile, Ace said, “Hey, don’t give up on your goals so easily. Tell you what; tomorrow, if you can help me find my friend I told you about earlier, then just maybe, we can help you get started on whatever new job you’re looking into. Does that sound alright?”

“Thank you, Ace...really... That means a lot to me...” Pepper replied gratefully, before letting out a tired yawn. “It’s getting late. We should probably rest up if we’re going to start searching for your friend tomorrow. I’ll get some more straw out.”

“Straw beds, eh?” Ace remarked, “I suppose you can’t afford mattresses yet, either.”

“Yeah, sorry about that...” Pepper apologized sheepishly. “Treasure Town is a little old fashioned.

Modern luxuries like real beds and running water are a little hard to come by around here. I hope it's not too much of an inconvenience for you..."

"Ah, don't worry about it. I've slept on worse before," Ace assured nonchalantly, as he began assisting Pepper in setting up another pile of straw next to hers.

Later that night, as the thunderstorm outside continued to rage, Ace noticed Pepper staring out one of the hut's windows, cringing slightly after each lightning strike. "Can't sleep?"

"No, not really..." the Chikorita sighed.

"Me neither..." Ace agreed tiredly.

"Worrying about your friend?"

"Yeah..." Ace confessed. "Ben can take care of himself pretty well, though, so I'm sure he's fine. But still..."

After a moment, Pepper reminded, "You know, you never did tell me where you and your friend came from, exactly..."

"It's...a little bit complicated..." Ace chuckled sheepishly. "Pepper...have you ever just stared up at the stars on a clear night, and wondered just what's out there...? You know, whether or not you're really alone in the universe?"

"Sometimes. More so when I was little," Pepper admitted. "I haven't had as much time to think about things like that nowadays, though... But you have to admit, with all the stars out there, it would be an awful waste of space if this was the only world with life on it out there, wouldn't it?"

"It would indeed..." Ace agreed with a knowing smirk.

Letting out a tired sigh, Pepper finally decided to lay down in her straw-made mattress. A few more minutes of silence passed, before the Chikorita bluntly inquired, "Ace? Are you an alien?"

"Well, I guess that depends on what you would consider an 'alien'," Ace simply stated, "If you mean someone who isn't exactly from around these parts, then yes, I suppose you could say I am."

Taking a moment to ponder Ace's words, Pepper yawned tiredly. "Goodnight, Ace..."

"Goodnight, Pepper," Ace greeted in return.

After another few more minutes, the two Pokemon soon drifted off to sleep.