

Team Enterprise Begins

Part 3

The next morning, Ace awoke to an itching, burning sensation in his fur. Groggily rising from his straw bed and looking down at himself to see patches of red, irritated skin showing through his yellow fur, the Pikachu muttered, "Oh crap..."

Pepper let out a deep, loud yawn and stretched her paws, before turning to greet her electric-rodent guest, "Good morning, A-OH MY ARCEUS WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FUR?!"

"Well...I've never really slept on a straw bed before..." Ace replied awkwardly, scratching some of the rashes on his body, "So the need hasn't ever really come up for me to be tested for an allergy to it before now..."

"Don't scratch! You'll just make it worse!" Pepper warned. "I'm going to go to the market and pick up some antihistamine lotion. You just stay right here. I'll be back as soon as I can." With that, the Chikorita hastily bolted out the door, leaving Ace to bide his time alone inside the small wooden abode until she returned.

Pepper approached the local market tended to by two Kecleon clerks, one of which was a shiny. "Can I get some antihistamine lotion for my friend, please?"

"A moment please while I check the storage room. It's not often we get a request for topical ointments here." The green skinned Kecleon slipped away into the back of the shop, clanking and rustling sounds emanating from behind the curtain. A few moments later, he returned with a jar of pinkish cream, "Ah, here we are! Sorry for the wait." He placed small jar of lotion on the counter. "That will be seventy-five Poké, please."

Quickly handing the Kecleon-clerk the specified amount of coins in exchange for the medicine jar, Pepper hurriedly stashed the item into her traveler's bag and darted off back towards her house.

As the Chikorita scurried into the forested-outskirts of town, she failed to notice a pair of orange-red eyes watching her from the bushes. After a moment, the figure murmured to itself in a male, slightly British-accented voice, "Interesting... Perhaps she knows something..."

Back inside the small wooden hut that served as Pepper's house, Ace grumbled in disdain as his newly-found Chikorita companion assisted him in applying the lotion all over his body. "Damn it... This is embarrassing..."

"<I>You</I> think this is embarrassing...? Just how embarrassing do you think this is for ME?!" Pepper rebutted. After completing the awkward task, Pepper asked, "Feeling any better?"

"A little. The itch's definitely gone down quite a bit," Ace nodded. "Anyway, about Ben. Do you know of any place we can start asking around if anyone might have seen him?"

"Well, a small café just opened up a couple weeks ago down by the crossroads. Maybe we could start there."

"Sounds like a plan. Lead the way."

Meanwhile, seeing the pair leave the small hut from behind a nearby shroud of shrubbery, a male Lucario clad in a long brown robe whispered to himself in a mild British accent, "That Aura...is that...?! No, it couldn't be... But still, perhaps I should follow them, just in case..."

Ace and Pepper soon reached the underground café, to see a bustling crowd of various Pokemon-patrons conversing with each-other, and a male Spinda tending the bar at the far corner of the room. As he casually made his way towards the counter, Ace asked the Spinda bartender, "Have you by any chance seen a Lucario around recently? Tall, wears a brown robe, slight accent...?"

"You mean the guy over there who just came in now, shortly after you did?" the Spinda responded dryly, pointing towards the café entrance.</P>

Whipping around on the spot and seeing the familiar Lucario standing at the bottom of the stairwell that lead down into the establishment, Ace greeted with relief, "Ben! There you are! I was wondering where you were at."

"Ace? So, it is you after all..." the Lucario deduced. "I wasn't sure at first because now you're a...um, well, a..."

"I know, I know... I'm still a little confused about it, too... But we can discuss that later," Ace said, cutting off his Lucario comrade. "Anyway, I might as well introduce you to my new friend. Ben, this is Pepper. Pepper, Ben."

"Um...hi..." Pepper greeted, smiling awkwardly.

"While we're here, why don't we get some refreshment?" Ace suggested, changing the subject to ease the tension.

"I don't suppose you have any money on you?" Pepper asked dryly. Seeing the sheepish expression form on the Pikachu's face, she muttered, "...Right. I'll handle the bill."

Taking a seat back down at the bar, Ace turned towards the Spinda bartender again. "I'll have a double double."

"Pardon me, sir, but what is a '<I>double double</I>'?" the Spinda inquired.

"It's a coffee with two creams and two sugars in it," Ace explained, "It's a favourite of mine back where I come from."

As the Spinda began preparing the beverage, an Absol walked up to the bar next to Ace and started slurring at him in a language that the Pikachu noted sounded like Russian; the smell of alcohol strongly evident on his breath.

Two other Pokemon; a Gengar and a Manetric; approached the bar alongside the Absol. Casting the electric-type a hostile glare, the Gengar translated, "He doesn't like you."

"Ask him if he wants a sympathy card," Ace quipped smugly as his coffee was served to him.

"I don't like you, either," the Gengar snarled. "You just watch yourself. We're wanted Pokemon. I have a bounty on my head worth more than this whole joint!"

Ace snorted in amusement, not sure if the drunken hooligans were intentionally making that reference or if it was just a bizarre coincidence.

"Ace, maybe we should just leave..." Pepper suggested nervously.

"Relax, Pepper. I think I can handle this," Ace assured, nonchalantly taking a sip of his drink.

"If you're so tough, why don'tcha put your fists where your mouth is?" the Manectric growled.

Taking this moment to step in, Ben casually addressed the three surly aggressors, joining in on the humorous reference bit, "These little ones aren't worth the effort. Now let me get you something."

Noticing an ominous metallic-glint appearing on the Manectric's claws and the familiar prickle in the back of his neck, Ace suddenly duck-rolled behind the other electric-type with blinding speed and struck him with a now silver-gleaming tail right between the hind legs. As the Manectric howled in agony, curling up into a fetal position on the floor, the Gengar started charging up some form of dark-energy in his paws, only to be abruptly hurled backward and slammed into the far wall by an invisible force with a mere flick-of-the-wrist courtesy of Ben.

Allowing a moment for the commotion in the room to settle down, Ace turned to the last remaining member of the gang; the intoxicated Absol, who was now trembling in fear; and challenged with a cocky, lopsided smirk, "Your move, creep."

After cursing something in Russian, the Absol hastily bolted up the stairs and out of the café.

"Hey, wait up!" the Gengar pleaded as he hastily followed after his accomplice, leaving the Manectric limping closely behind, tail literally between his legs.

As soon as the unruly trio was out sight, the Spinda bartender sighed, "I must apologize about that... Ever since I started my business here, not all of my patrons have been, how you say... <I>friendly</I>..."

"Ah, don't worry about it. This wasn't my first bar fight, and I'm sure it won't be my last," Ace dismissed with a wave of his paw. "And hey, if any more lowlifes like them start bothering you and your customers again, you just come to me and I'll straighten things out."

All-of-a-sudden, Pepper slapped-down a handful of coins for Ace's beverage on the bar counter, casting a menacing glare at her two-new compatriots. "The two of you, back to the house. We need to talk. NOW."