

A Pinch of Ginger

<I>{Team leader's log, February 14, year unknown: It's been over three months since Ben and I arrived in this strange new world populated entirely by Pokemon, and joined up with the Chikorita named Pepper to form what is known as an Exploration Team. During this time we have made many new additions to the team, including a Minun engineer named Adam, a Shinx named Dot, a rather troubled Buneary named Bennett, and a Marill doctor aptly named... Merrill. Today I will be heading out with Pepper to Mount Horn; a Mystery Dungeon, as the locals call them; to do some standard search and rescue missions. As routine as this may be for us, I can't help but feel that this day may have much more significance to it than meets the eye...</I>}

"Ace, what are you doing?"

Turning around to see a familiar Chikorita standing in the doorway to his room in the team base, Ace replied, "Oh, Pepper. I didn't see you come in. I was just recording my daily log entry."

"I can see that, but why are you trying to record it into a banana?" Pepper inquired.

Glancing awkwardly down at the yellow-coloured fruit held in his paw, Ace argued, "Hey, cut me some slack, will yah? I've been stuck in a world that's barely invented the wheel for three months with little-to-no hope of ever getting back to my time! I have to do <I>something</I> to make myself feel more at home on this Flintstones-fest planet!"

Pepper frowned. "Look, Ace, if you want a tape recorder, I'll get you a damn tape recorder. Just make sure you're ready for the missions today. I want to get back here before it gets dark, so please don't make us run late again." With that, the Chikorita turned around and walked out of the room.

"Hard-ass..." Ace muttered under his breath as soon as he was sure his teammate was out of earshot.

At Mount Horn...

Stepping out onto the seventh floor of the Mystery Dungeon, Pepper took a quick look at the itinerary notes. "Well, the last mission on our list should be on this floor. Let's find that item and get going. My feet hurt, my vines can barely lift a twig and we've already gone through three Max Elixers." However, seeing a ruffled brow as he stared blankly off into the distance, Pepper questioned, "Ace, is something wrong? You look a little distracted."

Shaking himself back to attention, Ace replied, "I don't know... It may be nothing, but I feel like there's someone close by who might be in danger..."

"Well if there is someone who needs our help, I have no doubt we'll be able to give it to them," Pepper assured. "But we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. For now, let's just focus on the job at hand."

Elsewhere on the floor...

An Eevee with tattered, messy fur slowly staggered through the hallways of the mystery dungeon, head lowered in sadness as she whimpered quietly to herself, "I'm so hungry...and cold...and tired... Why does nobody want to help me...? Why does nobody want to be my friend...? I don't even know why I try anymore..." However, upon suddenly spotting what appeared to be a small Pecha Berry bush growing out of one end of the room up ahead of her, the Eevee's ears perked up. "Oh, boy! Berries!"

The Eevee dashed towards the bush, eyes wide and tongue hanging out in anticipation. Upon reaching her destination, the starving Pokemon wasted no time in stuffing one of the Pecha Berries in her mouth, barely taking the time to chew before swallowing it. After several more big hearty chomps, the Eevee froze in fright as she suddenly heard a chorus of threatening growls from somewhere behind her.

With a telltale alarmed look, Ace's ears perked up as he darted down one of the pathways without so much as a word.

"Ace, wait! Where are you going?!" Pepper rolled her eyes and sighed. "Here we go again..."

The Eevee slowly turned her head to see a pack of six infuriated-looking Houndour surrounding her from all sides. "H-hello... W-what do you nice doggies w-want...?"

One of the Houndour sneered in a gruff male voice, "I see you're enjoying our Pecha Berry bush. Too bad it's not open for public use..."

The Eevee jumped and yelped in fear. "I didn't know this bush was yours, honest! I was just so hungry... Please, don't be mad at me! I'll try to find a way to pay you back, I promise!"

"Too late, runt! The damage is done, and NOBODY crosses our clan and lives to tell about it!" the Houndour barked.

"On the other paw..." another male Houndour in the group snickered with a sinister grin, "None of us have had fresh meat on the table for months, and you're not the only one here who's hungry..."

Gasping in alarm, the Eevee slowly crept back up against the wall of the room, trembling in terror. Seeing no escape as the six Houndour began closing in on her, mouths watering and sneering wickedly, the Eevee curled up into a ball on the floor. "F-fine...j-just get it over with... I don't have anything left to live for, anyway..."

Just as she squinted her eyes tightly shut and braced herself for the end, the Eevee heard loud <i>'THWACK'</i> and a yelp of pain from nearby, followed by a nasally curse, "You broke my nose! Who the hell do you think you are, rat?!"

"The rat who's going to break something else of yours if you don't back off and let that innocent Pokemon go," came the icy yet confident male response.

Daring to lift one eye open in curiosity, the Eevee watched in wonder as a Houndour with blood dripping from its face roared in fury and leapt towards a nonchalantly standing Pikachu, only to be flipped over onto its back and pinned down to the floor. The Pikachu then began to forcefully bend one of the Houndour's legs backwards until a sickening <i>'CRACK'</i> was heard, causing the dog-Pokemon to let out a blood-curdling shriek.

"Have I made my point perfectly clear yet, or do I have to explain myself some more?" the Pikachu asked warningly.

"Okay...! Okay...! I got it...!" the Houndour wheezed in defeat.

Glancing up towards the other five Houndour, the Pikachu challenged casually, "Anyone else need any explaining?"

Shaking their heads with dumbfounded expressions, the remaining five Houndour scampered off out of the room, panting and yipping all the way.

"Hey...! Guys...! Don't leave me behind with this maniac...!" the wounded Houndour pleaded as he weakly limped away after the rest of his clan.

"Ace, what the hell are you up to n-" a female Chikorita began demanding as she hurried into the room, huffing for breath, only to stop herself upon noticing the blood stains on the Pikachu's paws and the floor. "...Forget I asked..." Just then, noticing the cowering Eevee in the corner of the room, the Chikorita gasped and ran over to her, "Oh my Arceus, are you okay?! You're not hurt, are you?"

"I-I'm okay now, I think..." the Eevee replied meekly, managing a weak smile.

“Glad to hear it!” the Chikorita smiled. “I’m Pepper, by the way. And that over there is my friend, Ace. We’re from Team Enterprise.”

“H-hi, Ace...” the Eevee introduced shyly, a small blush forming on her cheeks. “I-I’m Ginger...”

“A pleasure, ma’am,” the Pikachu, Ace, greeted as he walked up towards her. “Sorry if I...scared you a bit a minute ago...”

“You don’t scare me, Ace...” Ginger reassured, blush growing redder.

Deciding to change the subject, Pepper mentioned, “Well, you don’t look injured to badly, but maybe we should take you back to Treasure Town with us, just to be on the safe side.”

“By the way, you wouldn’t have happened to see an Oran Berry anywhere on this floor, have you?” Ace inquired.

“Was it blue and round and covered in speckles?” Ginger asked innocently.

“That sounds like an Oran Berry, yes,” Ace nodded.

“Sorry... I think I ate it...” Ginger admitted sheepishly.

“That’s okay. Oran Berries are a dime-a-dozen, anyway. We can always just get one out of storage for our client,” Pepper assured with a comforting smile.

“<I>Which begs the question why we didn’t just do that in the first place...</I>” Ace added dryly under his breath.

“Anyway, we should probably head back before it gets dark,” Pepper suggested. Taking out a small, dome-like object with tiny angel-wings on either side of it from the sack draped around her shoulder, the Chikorita exclaimed, “Mission three, complete!”

The trio of Pokemon were enveloped in a bright white glow before disappearing in a flash.

Back in Treasure Town...

After receiving the rewards and gratitude from the three clients inside the Wigglytuff Guild, Pepper turned to Ginger, “Now, to the issue of what to do about you. Do you live anywhere close to here? If it’s not too far, we might be able to take you home tonight. I’m sure your parents must be worried sick about you.”

Lowering her head in sadness, the Eevee whimpered quietly, “I... I don’t have parents anymore... Or a home...”

“You mean you’re an orphan?!” Pepper gasped, “That’s awful! You poor thing...”

“How long have you been on your own?” Ace asked.

“I don’t know... I can’t tell time very well...” Ginger replied sorrowfully, “But I know the weather got really cold and then really hot again a few times since it happened... And all that time nobody wanted to help me or be my friend... At least until you guys came along.”

Glancing at Pepper and exchanging with her an affirming nod, Ace offered, “If you don’t have anywhere to stay, then...why don’t you stay with us?”

“Really? You really mean it? I can stay with you guys?” Ginger chirped, eyes lighting up with glee.

“Of course!” Pepper nodded, “We can sign you up as a member of our exploration team. You’ll have help out with the work load, but you’ll have a place to sleep and good food every day.”

“Yeah,” Ace chuckled, “you’d be surprised just how good of a cook Pepper is.”

“Ooooh...thankyouthankyouthankyouthankyouthankyou!!!” Ginger cheered excitedly, tackling Ace into a tight hug.

Ace gently lifted the energetic Eevee off of him and suggested, “Alright, little lady. Let’s get you cleaned up and ready for dinner back at the base. Then I’ll set up another pillow in my room for you to sleep on tonight.”

As the trio began making their way through Treasure Town towards their team base, Ace gently rubbed the top of Ginger’s head with his paw and assured, “Don’t worry, Ginger. Everything’s going to be alright from now on.”

“I know it will, Ace,” the Eevee agreed softly, letting out a tired yawn, “I just know it will...”