

Alto the mad maestro whose hymns foretold the trajectory of the sad mortal realm and the fates of the people and pokémon who resided within, prepared himself to shepherd the witless masses towards enlightenment.

Alto, lyrical liberator of souls retrieved his weapon of war from its holy encasings, spinning a dial and clicking the glimmering padlock shut after closing the tall rectangular door of its tomb, a metallic clang ringing through the air of Naranja's hallways.

Alto, immaculate insurgent in a world of cattle and tyrants, made his way up the rooftop (thanks to the efforts of his intrepid enforcer, Juggernaut, wielder of endless agonies, also known as Obstagoon) and prepared to grace the world with his musical majesty.

Alto..... Proceeded to awkwardly hunker down for what was going on 15 minutes now because some rando had decided to intrude on his unsacred ground. A foot clad in a heavy boot betrayed his restlessness, the sound threatening to give away his position on one of several exterior corridors that extended from Naranja academy's center. He wanted nothing more than to settle in the intruder's place, a relatively small clearing, a safe haven in the shade of what he surmised was a wall sitting above the school's courtyard, though it was hard to tell with the barrier being thick enough to block out the sounds of sports clubs and pokémon battles.

".....No like, seriously, who IS she?" He thought aggravatedly. He was going on his 3rd year of attendance now. Most people at the academy knew, or were warned, that this was *his* spot. The student body of Naranja, consequently, avoided it like the plague, seeking to protect their delicate eardrums. Though, female staff and students also did so to preserve the sanctity of their personal bubbles. Even the Flamigo, Corvisquire, and Wattrel knew better than to soar above Naranja during the midday

He continued to study her with an uncharacteristic level of silence, but given how distracted she was, she probably wouldn't have paid him any mind even if he had gotten careless. Alto assessed the situation without hurry. A uniform meant she wasn't faculty, and her frame was petite enough that she almost definitely wasn't his senior. Violet eyes traced over glossy hair done up in a decidedly cutesy manner, but the hairstyle was fraying, strands falling loose from their place giving the mystery student a slightly disheveled look. Girls with glasses had their appeal, sure, but he preferred it when the frames weren't big enough to practically obscure half the face. The weirdly

opaque coke bottle lenses weren't exactly doing her any favors either. Overall, she wasn't the type he'd typically find himself making a mental note of, but there was undeniably something familiar about her, even if he couldn't place it.

His mind raced across possibilities, trying to piece together who the mystery girl could be, where he possibly could have encountered her before. He hadn't asked anyone for money recently so it wasn't that. She wasn't a student council member coming to scold him about uniform regulation; he'd already cut a deal with Clavell about freedom from the evils of dress code in exchange for not staging anymore front gate performances (their loss). Not to mention the fact any wannabe hall-monitors and rules lawyers had eased up on policing regulations since Giacomo had made himself no small amount of enemies for it. Continuing to mull over why he had a surprise guest, Alto also found himself doubting the dainty little thing came here to pick a fight over him accidentally hitting on her girlfriend (at least, he hoped, fisticuffs were for churls, and he was a gentleman, thank you very much, he'd never hit a girl, even if she were ugly.)

Possibilities crossed the crouching teenager's mind until one finally struck like lightning.

After all this time had his efforts finally paid off?

After all this time, could he finally have a *fan*????

He carefully ran a hand through his hair to get rid of any tangles that may have formed, smoothed out his clothes, and quickly adjusted his poor posture. Hot older babe she may not have been, but he wasn't about to disappoint the first person to ever seek him out in his symphonic sanctuary. The boy, nay, young man stood as tall and proud as he could, always careful to maintain an authoritative air, sharp shoulder pads and dark clothes cutting an outlandish figure against the blue sky and lazily drifting clouds. He cleared his throat to garner her attention, the poor thing was probably so preoccupied thinking about where he was she didn't even realize her muse was right behind her. She remained in a world of her own despite the noise.

"*AHEM.*"

Louder this time, and it seemed to do the trick, shoulders clad in their crisp, short sleeved uniform shirt shot up, the younger girl curling up on herself like a Sprigatito trying to shield its vitals

from an angry Houndour. But of course she was startled! Such was to be expected of one suddenly encountering one as resplendent as he.

"Ah ah, fear not fair lady, if you cannot still thy tremors, then let them be borne not of fear of repercussion for your intrusion, but of anticipation!"

The girl's tightly wound body relaxed slightly, as her head cocked to the side inquisitively

"....Anticipation?" She questioned.

"Anticipation!" Alto practically barked, planting his bass against the ground like a knight stabbing a flag into conquered territory.

"For the moment you've waited for is now at hand! I have heard your silent cries and come here to deliver you from your sorrows! Let my vocals and melancholic melodies vanquish your terrors and bring you to a realm free from your mortal turmoils!"

The young girl's head tilts towards his white-and-gold bass guitar, then his face, slowly being drug back down to earth from her reverie to scrutinize. It was almost enough to make him a little nervous, but surely she must just be basking in the moment, asking herself if it was really real.

"Oh..... Are you some kinda band kid?"

.....What?

"B-band kid!? No! Well not yet bu-.....Do you SERIOUSLY not know who I am?"

Because really, if you went to Naranja you'd have heard of Alto. Or heard him, rather.

He watched her size him up behind her glasses, growing more bewildered by the second.

".....Sorry, no clue. I kinda only remember anyone who puts on a good show in battle studies."

Alto pulls a grimace at the mention of the school subject he cared the least for, demonstrated by a subpar grade on what was an otherwise surprisingly good academic record (any punk could play

hooky, he fancied himself a class of his own by doing just that while maintaining his GPA). For all his supposed brain though, he couldn't fathom just what the rust and rose-haired girl came here for, if not for him specifically.

".....What're you even doing all the way up here then?" The aspiring musician asked, shoulders sagging in disappointment, an annoyed bluntness replacing the feigned majesty of his prior tone.

Turning her head away from him and pulling her knees in close she responded in a barely-there mutter.

"I just wanted to be alone. I didn't think anyone else would be up here."

In that moment, she looked even smaller somehow, a twang of pity struck him for a moment..... But just a moment.

"Uh, yeah, nobody comes up here cuz it's kinda *my spot*. If you're not here for a show then beat it."

He stood unflinching as swirly framed glasses turned to face him once more, the girl's pout morphing into a scowl as she delivered an irritated reply.

"Hm. You don't look like your chairwoman Geeta's kid or anythin', so unless I'm wrong I'd say this spot doesn't belong to anyone."

Alto bit back a frustrated growl. 'Breathe, dude. Still plenty of time left before history with Ms. Raifort.'

"Y'know if you really wanna emo out, nurse Miriam's-"

"Not gonna help." the girl snapped back at him, making the older student jolt slightly. The outburst struck him dumb, mouth hanging open briefly as his brain tried to make sense of the girl's response. You had to be particularly rebellious or plain crazy for the name of the school's most beloved staff member to trigger such vitriol. 'Just what the hell is her problem? Everyone, their mom, and their starter likes nurse Miriam! She's the angel of the nurse's office!' He thought, utterly bewildered by the odd behavior. Eyes narrowed and his expression hardened further in response to her hostility, trying his best to cover up the fact that some glasses-wearing dweeb made him flinch.

"Usually I'd respect the whole to-heck-with-the-man thing but seriously? Beef with nurse Miriam? You're nuts."

"Didn't see *her* going around trying to figure out the bullying problem, what makes you think she'll fix any of mine?" He notices that she looked like she wanted to spit out more, but bit her tongue.

"Fair enough, but that's also not *her* job, she's just the school nurse. It wasn't like you weren't welcome in her office if you got all beat up over it or whatever. I've spent enough time skipping class recovering from PE injuries in there to know."

"Then why don't you make like an Arboliva and leave. Tell your precious nurse you got a paper cut or something."

He pales slightly thinking of how Nurse Miriam serenely smiled at him amidst the scowling patients of the school infirmary and politely asked him to not "do anything that may cause ear drum ruptures" in her office.

"I'm above distracting her from the care of the ill and injured." He lied.

"But totes fine being a bother to everyone else I see."

Alto couldn't remember that last time a girl had done so much to get on his nerves. Pinching the bridge of his nose, he slowly inhaled and suppressed the urge to grind his teeth. 'An upperclassman should keep their cool.' He repeated to himself silently, doing his utmost to regain his composure before he spoke again.

"Okay, I don't want you here if you're going to harsh my vibe, you don't want *me* here. Let's work something out. What're you even moping about in the first place? Friend drama? Bad breakup? Friend drama caused by bad breakup? I can at least hear you out and lend some advice as the *nice upperclassman* I am." He asked as he leaned down, one hand on his hip while the other rested on his bass for support.

The girl's head turned away from him again as she paused to think up an answer. ".....I got offered an opportunity to transfer to Blueberry academy for a semester."

A thick eyebrow adorned by two silver piercings quirked upwards.

"Uh, you do realize that's a *good* thing if you're into battle studies right? Newsflash pinky, getting to attend one of Unova's best trainer-focused schools is a big opportunity."

"I know it's just...."

"Just what?"

Curling up yet again the girl murmured something inaudible

"....Come again?"

Louder this time, through ground teeth

"The last time I battled someone I ended up getting hurt...."

He blinked as a moment passed and he registered what she'd said, causing his features to crease in mild alarm. Violet eyes scanned the girl, no casts on her person or even a bandaged knee. Trainer getting hurt during a battle was rare, especially during any sort of formal challenge, but not completely impossible. However, the decided lack of tells communicating a particular severe accident triggered his skepticism.

'Well she's at school, how bad could it have been?'

"So what, you think you're not cut out for Blueberry cuz you lost a fight?"

"W-!? I- Y...." She sputtered for a moment, trying to figure out how to answer what Alto figured would've been a simple yes or no question

"I won, technically....."

"So what's the issue then? You got your win and you're still standing. Keep that chin up."

'And then head downstairs and go train in the courtyard or something' he wanted to add, but didn't.

"No you don't get it, it was... I dunno how to explain it. You couldn't understand it even if I did. That wasn't just a battle for a gym badge or bragging rights or records, it was the real deal! A serious fight! This whole time I've been making it through the league without a hitch, you could shake down every senior in the school and

not find anyone doing it better than me! I'm the best of the best! I'm supposed to be the strongest!" Her arms snaked their way around her waist again. "But it didn't matter at all in a serious fight. None of it did. When I'm out on the field, people are supposed to sit back and let me be the hero, but I had to sit back and watch others do everything I was supposed to. I won because I got *lucky*. What if next time.... What if next time...."

And if Alto could use mind reader, he'd have seen white walls give way to grassy fields, the school's staircase, and the sparkling sand of Paldea's beaches, before the scenery was swallowed by a sea of red.

"What if it's always been for nothing? What if next time there's no miracle to pull off...?"

In her turmoil, she failed to notice that the older teen's expression grew increasingly exasperated, eyes threatening to roll back into his head and stay there. The supportive energy he tried to give off crumbled as waves of frustration crashed against him like he were a cliff face on the Secluded Beach.

'Talk about angst and nothing but me, me, me. Not a scratch on her and she's talking like she's going to die. Get a grip, and stop glazing yourself.'

"So.... You're scared because of a close call? You're out here throwing a fit because you weren't as big and bad as you made yourself out to be? Bit off more than you could chew, saw that your actions have consequences, so now you wanna throw in the towel? *Coward*." The insult came off even harsher than he intended, like a blunt shiv having to be thrust with extra force to stick itself between the ribs "You people are all the same, you think you're soooo talented but once you go through one set back it's the end of the world. Miracles," his palm rose skyward before closing in a fist, "come only to people who strive for them! And all that sits before is a whelp afraid of a shadow they themselves cast."

She froze and balked at him but Alto didn't budge, not even when she shot up onto her feet and let out a snarl.

"Take that back!!! What do you know anyways!? Do you have any idea what it's like when it feels like all you've been working for's going down the drain? *There's no way you could!*"

And Alto thinks of every rejection. Of every pair of hands that clasp over people's ears when he opens his mouth. Of every snide remark, shout, veiled and not-so-veiled insult. Of every single time people said "if you'd just focus on being a bassist" "an athlete" "a student".

He glares her down, making no effort to hide his disgust. The feeling is met with equal vitriol.

"I know more than you'd think, I promise."

"But not enough, and that's what *I* promise."

As he practically feels the air pressure around the change, Alto also notices the stark contrast in the girl's demeanor. The wilting fragility on display mere seconds ago replaced by hostility bubbling through to the surface. Battle tactics were not his strong suit, but instruments were, and the brash, honest, and brazen were as easy to play as a fiddle. As anger surrendered and logic reinstated itself as the conductor of his train of thought, pieces slowly clicked into place. So the nice guy thing wasn't going to get him anywhere, but maybe some tough love was. People didn't know what to do with themselves when they were sad, or at least little miss misery here sure didn't. But for better or worse rage turned idle hands into swinging fists. And if he wanted her out of here, what better way than giving her some of that much needed momentum?

Embracing the role of the heel, he meets her response with a scoff.

"Big words coming from the latest in Naranja league quitters."

"Quitter!?!?! I'm champion ranked!"

"A champion ranked chump, clearly. Maybe I'll give you that showing you mentioned earlier, it can't be that hard to reach the top if they let you in."

It's hard for him not to laugh at the way her mouth gapes open, so thoroughly shocked and offended she can't find the words for it. Until she does.

"..... I'm gonna strangle you."

Hunched over and glowering at him with her fists balled tightly, he notices that the little tremors she shakes with aren't borne of fear

and anxiety, but are instead the mark of barely restrained violence. It would've been intimidating if he wasn't absolutely certain that even if she stood up to her full height, her head wouldn't even reach his chin. Honestly, he doubted she weighed any more than 100 pounds soaking wet. Having hit his growth spurt, at age 16 he stood at level or above most of the school faculty, so the words the girl seethes out don't inspire much terror.

"Cute, but you aren't tall enough."

"I will be once I drag you and your team down into the dirt" she spat back "6V6, here and now. Falling off the roof counts as a knockout."

"I- How'd you even know I have 6 teammates?"

"You've got 6 pokeballs on your belt and the red popping out against the black and blue is *ugly*. If all you wanted was to look like a bigshot, you would've used luxury balls or something that looks cooler. Not that it'd help the fact that you dress like some has-been from 10 years ago!"

The comment had him bite the inside of his mouth. It was a pain he'd long been accustomed to, but having a girl mock his appearance always stung just a bit, even if she was some random freak. Worse yet, the weirdly astute observation from someone who seemed so spacey annoyed him further. Like somehow the tools on his belt were the only thing about him worth noticing. The idea that she thought she could make such quick work of a full team only rubbed salt in the wound, though his mind quickly worked to shake itself of the feeling.

'Whatever. the apocalyptic artiste's show must go on, come heaven, hell, and pipsqueak league member wannabes.'

"You do realize we've got just over a half hour left on lunch, right? Cut it down to 3v-" Before he can finish the demand, she cuts him off.

"I'm not going to need that long."

And before Alto could respond once more, pink boots angrily squeaked a short distance away. She clicks at one of the heel balls she has around her own waist, and the young musician finds himself sneering at the stickers haphazardly used to decorate it, scratched and peeling off in places, the cheap paper unable to handle the wear and tear of the road. Out from it emerges a tiny little thing, a pokémon

he vaguely recalls from brochures outlining trips to alolan flower fields, and it zips to its trainer's side all while keeping its eyes trained on him.

"Send one out already, since you're so worried about the timer."

Alto, like many students not on a battle studies focused curriculum, obtained a badge or two, but was largely uninterested in pursuing the sport further. He was more than happy to let his Zigagoon work out its zoomies by jumping anything that looked their way when he found quiet meadows to fill with noise, but never once had he experienced that spark so many trainers talked about, that boiling adrenaline under the skin. He had spent the years doing what bare minimums it took to pass battle studies and nothing more. But as his hand clicked Obstagoon's pokeball open, and his longtime companion leapt onto the field with a roar, he bristled with a newfound excitement, the feeling crawling up from his fast beating heart into his throat. Maybe he could afford to go all out just this once, maybe today was the fateful fight that loosed the chains 'round his stilled spirit. Today was, after all, proving to be one of firsts.

Releasing his Galarian friend from its pokeball, a hand with black-painted nails gestured forwards.

"Juggernaut, wielder of endless agonies, g-"

Or maybe not.

A snap rings through the air and Alto feels wind whip violently past him. It had happened faster than a blink, but the small yellow bug approximately 10 yards away summoned some kind of explosive into its twig-thin hands and practically teleported forwards, smashing into Obstagoon, triggering a detonation that sent the monochrome pokémon hurtling backwards straight off the roof. Alto could only shrink in horror as his partner slid backwards so violently it took the grass, dirt, and then concrete underneath its body with it, debris flying into the air. Trembling amethyst irises slowly slid back towards the girl opposite of him, face still glowering and tinted down, glasses falling just short of her eyes.

He remembered now, the revelation hitting like a ton of bricks. It had been a particularly stormy day not more than a few months ago, and in lieu of practical experience, Ms. Dendra had decided to build on students' theoretical knowledge by turning on the projector and pulling up a Porytube video for the class. It had been in the school

paper for weeks and in the mouths of students for twice as long, details on how a first year broke stuco prez Nemona's record, zipping through the league over the span of the last 11 odd months. Bibi the rising star. She'd been the topic of the town for a few weeks, a solid 15 minutes of fame dedicated to eyes burning like coals under fluttering eyelashes and the swaths of flame and fairy dust her pokémon left in her wake.

"クソ"

A single inelegant word graced his mind, colorful language he picked up from whenever his parents, a pair of Johto natives, were particularly irate. Panic stirred as more thoughts flooded in, all more articulate in their grievances.

'Blast those baleful deities who cursed me with misfortune that so resolutely follows my footsteps!' Alto thought as he inched his way over to the ledge, not daring to so much as lift a toe off the ground properly lest he lose footing.

'Forsaken be the angels who rolled weighted dice when casting down fate, filling my life with an unrelenting torrent of calamities!' He lamented, peering over the side, praying to see his friend grasping onto something, waiting to make his way back up to his trainer's side.

'And to heck with the stupid league circuit for making tryhards who don't know when to pull their punches!!!!' His mind screamed as his eyes screwed shut, the red light of the pokeball at his side recalling Obstagoon as Alto confirmed his favored fighter was down and out. He barely registered that his stunned silence had lasted a good bit longer than a few seconds, as the impatient voice of the league's new darling cuts through the air like a knife

"If you don't send out your next pokémon in a few seconds you're going to be the next ring out."

Expletives of Johtonian, Paldean, and other varieties run through his mouth as beads of sweat begin to slowly gather on the back of his neck. The same hands that deftly strum away at his bass awkwardly grasp and fumble for the pokeballs on his waist, as if grace had somehow become a foreign concept.

"Something for bug types something for bug types something for bug types..." Fingers trace over different options as his frazzled mind tries to settle on something, anything, that might clinch out a win.

"Toxtricity!"

His longtime friend, nay, soul brother graced the field, its 3 toed feet thudding against the ground heavily.

"Acid spray, ASAP!!!"

Lazy eyes widened as the blue electricity atop its head crackled like a billowing mane, it wasn't often Toxtricity had seen its trainer so frantic. The fact that its partner was opting to skip out on using its "true name" was an even bigger cue that something wasn't right. The pokémon's chest heaved forward as bile and various toxic fluids built up in its throat, and it turned its head, poised and ready to blast the acidic payload onto the fluttering fairy before it. However, just as the toxins fountained out from its mouth, a light overtook its foe, and in its place a feminine figure unfurled from the red light released by a heal ball, pale pinks and blues glimmering under the midday sun, only to be tainted by the acid spray and its oil-like sheen.

Hatterene screeched on contact, but did not retaliate, only lowering itself, the long appendage on its head swinging wildly. The hand-like ending grasped a twisted spoon, which she dug into the dirt underneath her, slashing patterns like a maddened scholar carving runes into a wooden desk. The hit landing square and true gave Alto a cause to gloat, as he moved 1 step closer to victory.

"A-and here I thought you were going to be smart enough to take advantage of type matchups, the purity of faekind corrodes when faced against our venom." He pats himself on the back mentally for only delivering the taunt with a *bit* of a stutter.

"Be grateful we're on a rooftop or I'd be using earthquake. 'Sides, the way things are going you'll need way more than a type advantage to beat me."

She lets out a low whistle and Alto takes that as his cue to try and land a finishing blow.

"Poison jab! She's already weak!"

Despite the urgency in its trainer's voice Toxtricity's speed was sluggish, even when it forced itself forward with all its might. Its opponent made no move however, merely continuing its frantic carving into the roof floor, first into the soft grass beneath them, but then violently lashing in various directions, slicing through concrete. Its cries grow deeper and more distorted over time, further adding to the eeriness of its incantation. With no show of resistance, Toxtricity was free to rear up as he pleased, and thrust a poison coated arm into the taller pokémon, throwing his entire body weight into the blow, and making sure to dig a spiked wrist into soft flesh. With two super effective blows landed in a row, Alto was sure that even with its imposing build, the witch-like pokémon would fall. Which only made the dread that pooled in his stomach all the more blood freezing when Hatterene stood to its full height and eyes blacker than starless nights focused their attention on Toxtricity.

Bibi clapped once and Alto could've sworn lightning struck from the cloudless sky, as a crash like thunder sounded in his ears. Hatterene stood alone on the roof, aglow with psychic energy, and Toxtricity was nowhere to be found. Eyes darted every which way as he looked for his friend, passing by Bibi only to catch sight of her hand raised, a single finger pointing upwards. Alto's gaze followed, revealing that the sound was that of Toxtricity smashed against an invisible wall, or rather, a ceiling of some sort. His eyes flicked back to Bibi just as her finger shifted to point to the floor, Toxtricity following suite. Whatever they had done as Toxtricity put his all into a poison jab, it had somehow enhanced Hatterene's attack speed, and the same psychic force that had sent Toxtricity flying skyward pulled him back to earth like a meteorite drawn in by gravity, sending more bits and pieces of roof flooring flying like shrapnel as cracks splintered out from the crater. Alto's pokeball automatically recalled its occupant, confirming the worst.

Grimacing, the teenager fumbled around with the pokeballs on his waist only to pause, a blink of the eyes revealing Hatterene vanished from its place on the other side of the platform.

"No! Hatty! Quit that! Back to center field!"

A shiver crawls up his spine as his stiff neck turns ever so slightly and he sees the witch behind him, her eyes inky black voids that emanated hatred.

Alto can't help it. He shrieks, the sound blood curdling, startling all present with its shrill tone. At that moment, a choice was made

for him. Light burst forth from a sphere on his black, studded belt, and as the scream from his lips died out, a siren song took its place. Hatterene clicked her tongue, teleporting to where her master ordered her to stand, or perhaps moving so fast his eyes couldn't track it. Without even waiting for an order, the pokémon championing the young musician gave chase to its prey.

"Huh, where'd you even GET a Primarina anyways?"

Abruptly dragged back into reality he watched as Primarina pursued its fellow fairy type, its form gliding along a newly summoned surf, instinctively hunting whatever had threatened its partner. Hatterene effortlessly evades pressurized blasts of sparkling water, its form flickering in and out of existence, Primarina's flurry of water guns each met with thick walls of stone as the 7 foot tall behemoth continued to teleport further back onto its' trainer side of the field, periodically ducking behind architectural flourishes as the platform they stood on tapered off into a thin walkway offered by the triangular rooftop of the classes below. In contrast to the assuredness of Obstagoon and the flustered attitude of Toxtricity, Primarina's fury was tempestuous, a storm over which her trainer himself had little control, and he dared not break her concentration by uttering a command.

'Thank heavens she's on my side...' He thought, in spite of the flood of condemnations targeted at said heavens moments prior.

Errant attacks missed Hatterene but punctured the building around them, debris continuing to pile up across the battle field, scattering to the grounds below. Just as a water gun seemed about to meet its mark as the walkway came to an end, the taller pokémon's arm-like limb grabbed hold of the iron spire behind it and flung itself upwards towards, landing atop the stone loggias that branched out to their left. Contorting its body, it pushed off from its landing and hoisted itself onto one of the taller stone steeples marking the academy's center, a movement only possible due to the supernatural level of agility granted by the twisted dimensions set up prior. Alto would never have noticed if it weren't for the fact that iridescent walls glimmered under the sunlight if you tilted your head at a specific angle.

Giving chase, Primarina poised herself as if to pounce, water coating her downy fur before she launched her body upwards like a missile, jetting towards Hatterene who continued clambering up the pointed tower, moving sideways to avoid attack, only to grunt as its opponent

followed its curving pattern carried by the force of aqua jet and its more efficient serpent-like motion, a shoulder check battering the psychic-type's side. Without so much as a flinch, Hatterene grabbed her opponent by the tail and violently flung her back to center field, into the same crater left by Toxtricity, the force of the throw causing the Alolan pokémon to bounce off the ground. Alto flinched at the sight of the impact and its concussive force.

Primarina found herself barely clinging to consciousness, spite for those who threatened her trainer making a machine out of a body without sound mind to pilot it. On a primal instinct embedded in all her kind, her head tilted skywards, a note as crystal clear as the waters of the great cavern belted out, a sound that would've no doubt lulled prey that were less aware into a sense of false security. Moisture was sucked from the surroundings, forming droplets in the sky which multiplied and coalesced. At the sound of a shrill whistle from her trainer, Hatterene's flickering after images faded from view as the witch positioned itself directly in front of its foe and under the glistening orb of water 3 times its own height. Her lower body folded as if kneeling in prayer, eyes closed in concentration.

Alto didn't know what to make of it, lost for a moment, until the oddest of occurrences happened. He felt it, a shifting underneath his foot, and he flung himself backwards in a start, catching a glimpse of what had uprooted him from his spot. Some way, somehow, the smallest of seedlings had sprouted underneath him, an impossibility given that there was no soil to grow in as the rim of the platform he stood on was all concrete. Yet the stubborn plant desperately pushed its way through, piercing it like a needle. Confusion left him, like a flower plucked from its spot, and its place came a bitter understanding. As Primarina reached the apex of her sparkling aria, threatening to wash all 4 of them off of Naranja's roof with a tower sized torrent that would've born down with the force and weight of a small building, the hand-like appendage on Hatterene's head closed into a fist before slamming the ground. Thorny vines met their unassuming brethren, rocketing out of the ground the way Garchomp leapt out of shifting sands to snatch prey, striking Primarina from every possible angle. Grass type energy flowed outwards from Hatterene's vines, sapping the Soloist pokémon's vitality and siphoning it back to their owner. The bubble above the party burst, a concentrated wave now dispersed into harmless droplets, raining down as though a light sunshower was passing through the area. Song turned into screams as Primarina thrashed every which way in an attempt to escape, and then silence as she fell still. Twisted dimensions

shifted back to normal, and the pastel colored monster began another recitation.

It was Alto's 3 versus her 6. All of his heavy hitters had been removed from the equation, leaving Loudred, Misdreavus, and Jigglypuff left to finish the battle. He had backed himself into a corner, and now he was a partnerless Maushold in the grip of a hungry meowscarada. Dread and panic had tied his stomach in knots, and every second he spent trying to think a way out of his predicament just made him feel more and more hopeless. As he calculated his next move, a tired sigh drew his attention.

"It's not exactly fun beating down on wimps y'know. You ready to give up now?"

Give up.

And in that moment, he swore he heard the disgruntled voice of an old man overlay itself onto hers.

"Y'know Alto, I think you should really reconsider rejecting that offer.... Don't you think it's about time you gave it up?"

The guidance counselor's office, second floor of the building, left wing, he'd been here so many times he even figured out a favorite route to it, one that let him catch a glimpse of as many pretty staff members as possible. He'd certainly need it to make staring at the sagging wrinkles and stress lines sat on the man before him more bearable. The young teenager busied himself by glancing at the framed pictures of happy teachers and students adorning the walls, a black-painted fingernail lazily tapping a beat into the metal armrest of his chair, finding himself annoyed when sporadic bursts of frantic typing on the part of the counselor interrupted it. He'd rather sit and watch paint dry than continue this discussion.

"And I think you should reconsider calling me in here every week. I think you see me more often than you see your grandkids."

"And that wouldn't be the case if you weren't so insistent on breaking the rules on a daily basis!" The man ground back, pinching the bridge of his nose to suppress a headache.

"Hear me out, make the uniforms black, heck, anything other than *bright orange*, and I'll give."

"'Hear you out' believe me when I say we 'hear you out' every day, against our will. Besides, we'd have to change our name to zarzamora, so unless you convince the region's board of education to commit to a total rebrand of one of the world's most well regarded educational institution's, a staple of regional identity mind you, you're out of luck kid."

"You people have ABSOLUTELY NOTHING in the way of vision," Alto huffed back, crossing his arms in annoyance "but anyways, back to the whole internship thing, my final answer still stands."

"Even if I say this'll backfire on you like a counter from a Wobuffet? I'm urging you not to be shortsighted here, your whole future's ahead of you, smart watches aren't just luxury goods anymore, it's no silph or devon, but working with Paldea's first poketch office could net you some great recommendation letters for any STEM job you could want going forward. The only area you've ever slipped up in was battle studies, but I'm sure a sample essay could even get you into admin work for the league, so you could end up a speech writer instead. No matter what career path you choose you can always just... pursue music as a hobby."

The greying man at the desk hopes the boy didn't catch how his face almost slipped into a grimace as he paused.

But Alto did.

"Sir, with all due respect, if you even suggest letting someone else hog all the glory for the words I crafted again, I'll put on a concert so loud it blows up every window in this school."

"....Noted. But Alto, you're squandering proven talent, the biggest mark against your record is your truancy, and I take it you picked up this bad habit from your schoolmates."

"One, if I was as big a copycat as you're implying, I'd have already taken up one of your stupid fancy-schmancy offers and gotten out of your hair already because it's what all the normies would do! Two, I know your eyes are giving out old man, but you can practically feel the tension in the halls. It doesn't take a mathematician to put 2 and 2 together, the vibes are bad so people are ditching class."

He wasn't a stranger to the bullying issue that'd been plaguing the school as of late, but for all his eccentricity, he wasn't the

easiest target to go after. The problem was further alleviated due to the fact he was only ever as present as he absolutely needed to be.

"Fine then, no communications jobs, but my general point still stands. You can achieve success anywhere you want, so you'd best spend your time more wisely."

"Anywhere except as a singer huh?"

And while he had pointed the Wobuffet scenario at Alto, it was the counselor's own words ricocheting back at him for the kill.

"Listen, you know I don't get paid to be cruel to you guys right? I'll let you in on a secret of mine if it makes us even. I was like you once."

".....I hope you don't mean that in terms of looks."

"No no, unlike you young man I promise you my hair wasn't nearly as girly." He joked, his dull expression morphing into something fond as he reminisced. "I mean I wanted to be famous. A real theater kid I was, back in the day. They even had me play Puck in my middle school's production of A Midsummer Musharna's Dream!" He claimed, leaning back into his ergonomic chair, eyes looking upwards, as if they could see past the fluorescent lights above and into the boundless sky. In contrast, his young audience's eyes narrowed in confusion over the course of the story.

"So what happened?"

The counselor's eyes closed, eyelids and ambitions pulled down by the weight of gravity. "What happened was that I tried my best, but it just wasn't enough. I attended every rehearsal, spent countless hours memorizing lines, but being the best of your school doesn't mean much when all the budding actors in the region are doing their best to land a spot. I went and scoped out local auditions for independent productions and commercials, and I knew I wasn't cut out for the competition, I was a local talent, not a regional, much less generational one." Murky eyes, so dark and dull a green they seemed almost grey, pointedly stared at Alto "And eventually, that brought me to where I'm sitting right now. I'm here to make sure you don't start behind on your career path like I did."

"So you gave up everything you'd worked for and want me to do the same? Sounds counterintuitive to building up a future if you ask me." The 14 year old bit back.

The older man's shoulders sagged in defeat. "That's not the point I'm trying to make here and you know it. It's the responsibility of us adults to be concerned for your future, I just want you to know you've got options other people are practically growling and fury swiping at each other for. Give it some thought will you?" The man asked, opening a drawer and carefully sifting through its contents, clipping together a number of papers, no doubt another list of offices and specialized educational facilities for Alto to consider applying to in order to railroad him more easily into the workforce.

The boy felt himself flush with anger and indignation as the hand that rested on his thigh balled into a fist, it would've pulled at the fabric of his clothes if the black skinny jeans had enough give to allow it. 'Yeah yeah, just narrow my horizons down to the safest possible option to get me out of your thinning hair' he thought bitterly. Abruptly standing, Alto scowled as he saw the counselor reflexively cover his ears, but nonetheless continued to break into a stride towards the doorway. Black and purple boots thundered against the shiny tiled flooring, as if trying to scuff them. He glanced back over his shoulder, violet irises burning with spite.

"Well if that's all you called me in to say then fine, I've listened to your piece so now you're gonna listen to mine. For all the so-called brains you claim I have you sure do love acting like I'm too dumb to think for myself. You might've convinced yourself that your little obstacleless path and the paltry prize of a 9-5 you hate was for the best. I'm sure you convinced a bunch of other losers of that too. But you're not getting me. I'll shake the flimsy foundation all you quitters stand on."

"You should know better than to just ignore what people with more life experience than you have to say. Giving up on a pipe dream early is the smart thing to do."

"The only thing you ever gave up on was yourself."

As the troubled youth stormed out of the room, his counselor found himself unable to look away from the spine of a book, one of many in a neatly arranged line. Under gathered dust, the faint glimmer of golden letters read "A Midsummer Musharna's Dream."

The book remained there even after the man resigned, alongside the rest of the previous faculty.

The reverie ended as an annoyed voice brought the teenager out of his reminiscence.

"Yoohooo earth to piercings, here's your chance to get off the hook easy! You were the one who wanted a 3 on 3 in the first place. You ready to call it quits? Or are you ready to stop boring me to sleep and actually put up a fight?"

The haughty taunt landed and in that moment, it was like a chain wrapped taught around his heart shattered.

"Hey, what gives, what's so funny!?"

He hadn't even realized he'd begun to chuckle. Here he was trying to win a game he hated, playing by the rules of one of the uncultured masses, and being threatened to give up on someone else's terms. That wasn't Alto-

Nay it wasn't how the malefic melodist did things!

'Let's give 4 eyes some credit, she had me so caught up in all this I forgot what I was trying to do in the first place. Battling? The league? Screw ALL of that! I don't have to beat her, I just have to show her she's *wrong*.' The thought instilled him with the confidence he previously lost enduring the brutalization of his 3 pokémon, and his renewed spirit displayed itself in yet another bout of dramatic and ostentatious posing, punctuated by the soft rain and dazzling sunlight. One arm crossed over himself to rest on his hip as the other brandished yet another pokeball over his head, making sure the light glinted off of it just so.

"What's funny is that you remain blind to the power resting in the palm of my hand! Let the heavens crash down around us and the sun hide itself, put to shame by a star so brilliant! Bearer of the trumpet who screams against heaven! I call upon thee to show these fools the folly of their arrogance!"

Under fingers dramatically flourishing and pressed up against his forehead he takes the briefest second to peek at his audience. The girl's shoulders went from drooping to tense, and his mouth pulled

into a smirk at the sight of an engaged crowd. She might not have come for one, but what he intended to give her was a show!

'You were naught but a little Whismur but weeks prior to this bout! Your new form may yet be diminutive compared to that of your hulking foe-'

"Hey, Hatty's just taller than average, and- and- uh... Big boned!"

He was pretty sure there wasn't even anything solid under the ladylike but gelatinous body of Hatterene, given how she flexibly undulated and twisted herself, but the interruption went unchallenged bar the dry, exasperated look the pokémon in question shot her trainer.

"But still! Your crests herald our inevitable triumph! Go forth with a supersonic blast!"

It was hopeless, a battle decided before it had even begun. If the combined efforts of Obstagoon, Toxtricity, and Primarina had failed to claim him the crown, then there was likely nothing the rest could do. But in showbusiness, you kept things exciting no matter what. Besides, the real fight was what came after no pokémon were left on the field.

The girl responded to his performance with a huff and a clap of her gloved hands "Hmph, nice try but you're not gonna-"

And then, she was left starstruck, crimson eyes wide behind her glasses.

If Hatterene had been a flash, the Loudred was something beyond that, a tachyon particle, threatening to blitz through time. The stocky purple pokémon maneuvered across the roof faster than psychic senses, let alone eyes, could track. The fairy-type pokémon, who had loomed menacingly like an executioner the whole match, recoiled in surprise at the invasion of its space, before wincing in pain as Loudred opened its gaping mouth and let out a screech so powerful both trainers dropped to their knees and covered their ears to protect themselves. Hatterene instinctively lashed out at her foe, though the play rough missed its mark as Loudred shifted and tumbled, its tiny legs somehow finding the strength to propel itself at speeds that would leave fighter planes in the dust. In her confusion, Hatterene's long arm flailed wildly, before smacking herself in the face, only worsening her rage.

The young brunette could only grind her teeth in frustration. "There's no freakin' way...." She muttered under her breath, but her careful thoughts about the next move were interrupted by the excited outcry of the boy across from her.

"Woah, dude, I didn't even know you had that in you!!!... Er I mean, Ha! Behold! The power of evolution has granted this once-Whismur invisible wings! See how effortlessly he waltzes and weaves through all that you throw at him! Weep, for fortune only favors those bold as we, who persevere in the face of adversity!"

"You want adversity!? We'll give you enough to make you lady luck's new favorite!" A screeching whistle sounded in the air but any sign of Hatterene's rampage stilling remained out of sight, causing the girl to growl in annoyance. Thin and finely arched eyebrows furrowed in frustration as the proud champion was forced to watch her pokémon thrash her arm every which way, the knowledge that if she just landed one measly finger on the purple nuisance its deafening cries would fall blissfully silently fueling the rampage. The berserker fury continued even as Loudred readied himself to continue his onslaught.

"Now, let them hear your war cry, give them an echoed voice for the ages!"

As its trainer commanded, Loudred heaved its chest, leaning in as it took in as deep a breath it could muster, finishing its preparation at rapid speeds. The screech it unleashed was deafening, but for all of its newfound mobility, it barely left a dent in the pastel witch's stalwart defenses. Rather, the unending noise seemed to only worsen her already cataclysmic frenzy, which she expressed by slamming a closed three-pronged fist into the roof, sending bits of flooring flying in every direction.

"!!! Owie!"

And it seems a stray piece met its mark, hurtling towards Bibi and digging into her shoulder. The sound of its trainer's pain instantly caused a shift in the Pokémon's demeanor. Hatterene's hunched and feral form righted itself, bow carrying the grace and dignity befitting a fairy of its stature. As if struck by gentle ringing of a heal bell, Hatterene felt an unrivaled calmness, the sweet relief of pain inflicted by her own hand soothing her tormented spirit.

"Miercoles... Okay I'm SO over all this already!" A snap sounded
"Sorry, but there's no getting lucky this time."

"I'd like to see you try with the jets Loudred's been putting on!
He'll see you coming from a mile away-"

Hatterene withdrew her twisted spoon from the cavity in her chest once more, twirling it lazily in her hand. Loudred, who opted to circle her and melted into a haze of afterimages as he did so, found his momentum rudely stopped as psychic force squished him flat. Gravity intensified by magnitudes, he was pressed further and further into the roof, his crater threatening to break through into the school hallways below, until Hatterene finally let out a contented sigh and loosened her grip. Alto found himself rushing to his partner's aid only to find the speedster out cold. Tapping Loudred's pokeball against its forehead he attempted to comfort his fallen friend

"Rest well, prince, the time for us to race through time will come another day."

"Fat chance. I didn't think it was possible, but somehow, your Loudred's even SLOWER than Hatty. The only reason this dragged out so long was cuz of trick room!"

"..... But Loudred wasn't even holding an item?"

"Trick ROOM not trick you- you total *dummy*!!!!"

"Real scathing vocabulary you got there."

"Well congrats! You're literally so bad at this I'm at a loss for words."

"Hm, I do tend to leave the ladies speechless."

"Probably because they don't want to actually talk to you," she jeered, making an exaggerated eyeroll at the audacity that remained obscured by her glasses "sure know I wouldn't once we're done here, so send out pushover #5 already."

"Pushover huh? We'll see if we can't change your tune. Sin delivered in infinite repose! The heavens thunder with applause for you, so claim your rightful place on the stage!"

A round pink form unfurled, like a leaf carried in the breeze it swayed in the air, floating to the floor. Big eyes popped open, an illustrious turquoise, as it spun around to take in its surroundings. Upon catching a glimpse of its opponent, it inhaled deeply, puffing its chest and trying its best to approximate its face into a scowl in hopes of intimidating the hostile team.

"Oh woah, way cute..."

Evidently, it was ineffective. Pressing his hand to his forehead in a sweep that doubled as a means of hiding his mild embarrassment, Alto crowed "Let not sweet appearances deceive! One of the underworld's 6 kings stands before thee and you shall know her might! Cast aside all doubts of your glory with your voice and *sing!*"

Responding quickly to the sudden command, Bibi found herself clapping her hands in an effort to direct Hatterene to use psychic. But once again, she found herself in a situation she could not have accounted for. Her opponent being really, *really*, slow.

Sound waves traveled at speeds amplified by the warped dimensions, the Silent pokémon's go-to strategy backfiring wildly in the face of any expert's truest threat. A foe who had no-clue what they were doing. Drowsiness quickly overtook Hatterene, its head lulling to the side as it dropped the twisted spoon it was readying.

"A performance like a dream! Return my friend, for we don't do encores! It's time for the feature act!"

Paying no mind to his agitated opponent's cries and attempts to rouse Hatterene from its slumber, Alto hurriedly shook loose another pokeball from his belt and recalled Jigglypuff. Flying out into the afternoon light, a specter with red beads fastened around its neck fluttered and took her place, carried by the wind's current. Giggling eerily, it phased in and out of the walls and flooring around it, measuring the destruction with curious glowing eyes.

Bibi clapped once, then again louder, and pinched the bridge of her nose in annoyance as Hatterene showed no signs of emerging from her slumber. But that's all this was. An annoyance.

"Ok! Fine! You might as well give it your best shot right now. Hit us with another of your big lame speeches emo boy, there's nothing you can throw at us we can't take!"

"You'll get that and more. Blood curdling king, heir of the forbidden realm! Perish song!"

Despite the name, the move was less a melody and more an assault on the senses, if you asked any 2 people what a perish song sounded like, the answer always differed with one key similarity: The sound of it was horrific beyond description, alien, carrying an unstoppable, catatonia-inducing sense of impending doom. Both trainers braced themselves, and even Misdreavus crumpled in on itself as its voice withered into a raspy cough on the last note, Hatterene may not have been immune to the effect, but she was at least offered the small mercy of not having to handle the noise.

"Now! While you have the time! Astonish them!"

On cue Misdreavus floated into the floor and behind Hatterene, battering the still-sleeping fighter, who refused to wake. One astonish became two as Hatterene was content to nap, not so much as flinching despite the repeated assault. Its trainer was just as unconcerned about what damage was dealt, simply letting out a long sigh of frustration as another clap went by unanswered. All the while both combatants had their impending doom trudge ever closer. As the trap it sprung slowly closed around both Misdreavus and its opponent, the ghostly figure began to laugh with abandon, the knowledge of death unique to it and its kin letting it find whimsy in the face of danger, though the banshee-like cackle was the nail in its coffin. Without so much as taking the time to rub the sleep from her eyes, Hatterene answered her trainer's commands as her neurons fired off, grabbing the spoon that had clattered to the floor as she slept earlier before waving the object like a wand. Misdreavus fell to the floor as its trainer yelped, failing to phase through the solid object as it was wont to due to the powerful psychic assault. In place of physical trauma, it was as if all of its senses were amplified to the point where even opening its eyes was unbearable. It convulsed, and then fell still, a cue for its trainer to end their performance together, though the knockout blow spared it a certain agony.

This could not be said for Hatterene.

The bespectacled girl behind it winced as the pokémon twisted, heaved, and wretched, the twisted spoon threatened to break entirely as she stabbed it into the floor. Perish song finally took its toll, invisible bells ringing in the fairy-type's ears, inescapable, undeterrable, as if the sound was coming from inside its own head,

which threatened to burst like a balloon. A hand now free dipped into the chest cavity that hosted the smallest, frailest part of its body, found its neck, and squeezed tight, *squeezed tighter*. And then she was free from the noise.

"Good job Hatty..." Its trainer muttered, withdrawing the fainted party member, hugging the heal ball to her chest apologetically, though she jumped as the pokémon's disappearance from the field was accompanied by a whooping cheer from the opposite side of the field, though the boy was quick to cover his relief with his typical dramatic yet detached mannerisms.

"Ahem You fought valiantly enough- despite your brutish propensity to sneak up behind people- but let this defeat teach you not to trifle with the leaders of the infernal parade! For we raise a toast with the warriors of valhalla nightly, nothing but rubble and worshippers follow in our wake, we-" the speech was cut off by a dry tone yet again.

"Stop stalling and send out your Jigglypuff already."

"I hope you have a skin breakout on picture day." Alto seethed out in a quiet grumble as Jigglypuff floated onto the field once again, proudly putting her hands on her hip to see her earlier opponent gone. Looking up, deep violet eyes watched as the trainer across from him crouched down in front of her next fighter, some pokémon he'd never seen before, be it on the field, on tv, or even textbooks. It faced away from him, but what looked like a grey and green capelet made up its upper body, and tall black horns sat atop its head. The girl leaned forwards, affectionately squeezing the sides of a face obscured by the angle it stood at, and what he guessed was some artisanal mask set aside just enough so as to not cover its features entirely. Sensitive ears picked up a conversation.

"Remember that one time I taught you how to play baseball?"

"Poniiii~"

"Then you already know what to do," she exclaimed with a snap of the fingers "batter up!"

Alto hadn't even had the time to order his pokémon to make a move in retaliation before the stout creature's black legs sent it sprinting across the ruined clearing straight toward them. Jigglypuff's balloon-like body took to the air, but her evasive maneuver was slow

and floaty, far too leisurely to move out of the way of the bludgeon her mysterious foe raised high. The masked pokémon's leg kicked up in the approximation of a batter's stance, before spinning wildly and bringing the spiky cudgel careening into pink pokémon's side. It was almost as if she were a bouncy ball, the way she ping-ponged off the wall to their side and then back across the floor, bouncing all the way down another walkway that branched off from the centermost part of the field, until the fainted pokémon crashed into a wall leaving a perfectly circular impression. As the pokémon rolled off the side of the walkway, her body floated in the air, slowing her fall to a Slugma's pace, but Alto still recalled her before she met the ground some hundred feet below.

It was unreal, the way each and every pokémon the girl brought out was just as powerful as the last, battle studies aficionado he was not, but even still, Alto hadn't ever taken part in such a lopsided fight in his life. But this was an outcome he foresaw, and it didn't sting. Rather, relief washed over him now that things were over and done, allowing him to begin the next phase of his plan.... Although there was no small bit of resentment over the fact he'd have to dip into his allowance for all this. Sauntering forward, as if he wasn't just served his whole team's backsides on a platter, he fished out his wallet (a sleek, limited edition brand name piece whose appearance belied the fact that the only things inside were photocards of female celebrities and loose change.)

"While you should consider our presence rewards in and of itself, rejoice, for I'm feeling particularly magnanimous today and have decided to impart some charity unto-"

"Save it guyliner, I want something else."

"Would you QUIT cutting me off, it takes *practice* to just come up wi- wait, you *don't* want the cash?"

"No. So take it *back*."

"I-.... Take what back?"

"All that stuff about me being a 'coward' and a 'quitter!'"

"Oh yeah, I *did* say that didn't I? Ohh, I'm going to love bragging to the rest of the guys about this one, how I knocked out one of our *newest champion's* pokémon in a fight!"

It takes everything not to grin at how her face burns scarlet in embarrassment and anger at the teasing.

"You only got that knockout because I *LET* you have it you *dolt!* I could've called back Hatty, or woken her up, or snapped her out of her confusion, but I knew I didn't need to because *I was going to win no matter what!* Don't get cocky!"

"So let me get this straight, this was you taking it *easy?*"

"*Duh,* you weren't worth wasting a full heal on. We could've beaten you if we were half-dead and blindfolded!"

"That's exactly right, girlie. You were the scary final boss here and we never stood a chance."

He smirked, as she clearly wasn't expecting the switchup. The girl had to stop herself from having another little outburst, a defensive retort dying in her mouth, a confused "bwuh???" noise taking its place.

"I have a couple badges, but everyone at this school does. It's why Miss Katie's gym is practically next door. I'm not an expert at this stuff, but practically nobody in the student body leaves here without a badge to their name. And still, that was probably the hardest I've ever went, *hopefully ever will since this stuff's way too brutish for me,* and what happened after me and the 6 heralds of the apocalypse began our etude? Throwing everything we had at you? Our years worth of bonds and experience? You tore through us like wet paper and gave us a participation prize. You-" the address was punctuated by a sharp poke at the tiny girl's collar "are as much of a menace as people say you are."

Alto waited to see her response, but there was none, just shock as what he was getting at started to process, he could practically hear the gears turning in her head. It wouldn't do for her to leave here too satisfied though. His hand raised from chest to forehead and he flicked her as hard as he could.

"!!!!" Not heeding her startled cry he continued to say his piece.

"So you have absolutely no right to be acting so sorry and wallowing so *pathetically.* You dead set on proving you're not the loser I think you are? Go on to the Director's office to talk about that

scholarship or whatever, and if the Unovan kids don't tear you up into little pieces, *maybe* I'll be convinced you're not a quitter."

Alto grunted a decidedly inelegant noise as her hand shoved him away in retaliation for all the prodding, digging into the softest part of his gut. He caught himself on the wall to their side and transitioned into a lean as coolly as he could manage.

"Fine! *Fine!* You're right. I'm the best trainer at this school and when I come back, I'll have been the best in Blueberry too." With her path, and head, now clear her footsteps thundered with finality and conviction, the dying flame of her heart now a forest fire. "And then you're gonna take. It. Back!" Her words were accompanied by one last look over her shoulder before a rotomphone whipped out of her pocket, turning a lethally high jump into a safe descent to ground level.

The mature, levelheaded upperclassmen part of Alto was proud of himself for preventing the creation of one more killjoy counselor. Every other part of him was really, *really* annoyed about missing out on his usual afternoon jam session. And all of him was dead tired. His lean fell into a slump, before he slid down the rest of the wall, sitting, then falling onto his back, worn out despite the fact the day was only half over. He checked his phone. 10 minutes left on break. Enough to get a song or two out, if only he wasn't exhausted. His "heavenly" vocals were nowhere to be found, as he instead opted to let out a frustrated groan into his hands and they covered his face.

The teenager looked towards the destroyed ground to his left, at where the unwelcome intruders to his safe-haven once stood, rubble and debris robbing him of a comfortable spot to rest his weary legs. Perhaps it was for the best however, as his downcast face took note of what exactly Hatterene had been furiously scratching into the dirt when she had first cast trick room. A crude approximation of a human, like a children's drawing, stood upright, a head with disturbingly familiar shaggy, shoulder-length hair rolling away from it. A shiver like a set of icy fingers crawled up his back.

"....Man, I HATE jocks.....!"

The silence in the streets and the light of the ages
are for you

BONUS

